

# Former Federal Commissioner Edwin Clark dies at 97

● **Tinubu, Okpebholo, Oborevwo, Afemifere, others mourn**

Renowned statesman and leader of the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Chief Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, passed away at the age of 97.

His death was confirmed by a family representative, Prof. C. C. Clark, on Tuesday.

According to the statement, Clark died on Monday, Febru-

ary 17, 2025. "The Clark-Fuludu Bekederemo family of Kiagbodo Town, Delta State, wishes to announce the passing of Chief (Dr.) Sen. Edwin Kiagbodo Clark OFR, CON.

"The family appreciates your prayers at this time. Other details will be announced later," the statement read.

Clark was a major advocate for regional and national unity, dedicating his life to fighting for the rights of the Niger Delta people and broader issues of federalism in Nigeria.

As a former Federal Commissioner for Information, he played a crucial role in shaping national policies and mediating conflicts.

In October 2024, he set up a reconciliation committee to mediate between Rivers State Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his former political mentor, Nyesom Wike.

The effort, led by former Akwa Ibom Governor Obong Victor Atah, was aimed at fostering peace within the political landscape.

His passing comes just four days after the death of Pa Ayo Adebajo, the leader of the Yoruba socio-cultural group, Afenifere. Both men were instrumental in advocating for Nigeria's political restructuring, pushing for the adoption of the 2014 National Conference report as a solution to the coun-



CLARK

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [g](#) NigerianObserver @Nigerian\_Observer @NigerianObserver www.nigerianobservernews.com

PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 944

WEDNESDAY, 19TH FEBRUARY 2025.

**Edo Assembly okays death penalty for kidnappers**

—Pg 2

# Okpebholo 100 days: 14 road projects near completion

● **As EDSG hosts statewide free medical outreach** ● **Residents celebrate reclamation of gully-erosion devastated areas**

Barely 100 days into his administration, Edo State Governor Monday Okpebholo has made significant progress on 14 road projects spread across the state's three senatorial districts, demonstrating his commitment to infrastructure development.

As he approaches the milestone on Wednesday, February 19, 2025, the governor reaffirmed his determination to transform Edo State, stating that he is in a hurry to deliver lasting progress.

On Tuesday, Okpebholo led an inspection of several ongoing

road projects in Edo South, including those at Temboga, Uteh, Ekiuwa, Orior-Ozolua, and Iguovbiahianmwun communities.

The visit was met with appreciation from residents who commended the governor for fulfilling his campaign's promise to repair roads neglected by the previous administration.

During his electioneering, Okpebholo had assured these communities that his administration would prioritize road infrastructure to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services.

The governor, accompanied

by his team, inspected critical drainage projects at Temboga, Ekiuwa, and Uteh Road in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, as well as in Orior-Ozolua and Iguovbiahianmwun communities in Uhumwode Local Government Area.

The projects are aimed at addressing long-standing flooding and erosion challenges in the area. Residents, elated by the ongoing work, urged the governor to sustain his developmental efforts, pledging their continued support for his administration's success.

Among the major projects visited was the 4.5-kilometer road network at Temboga, connecting Lucky Way and featuring streets such as Boundary Road, Igbaidu Street, and Ehrumwunse Street.

The governor also inspected a critical drainage project along Ewah Road, which begins at Omusi Primary School and extends 1.4 kilometers to channel floodwaters into the Ikpoba River, mitigating erosion risks for residents.

The governor's tour extended to the failed portion of the Ogheghe/Obagie Nevbosa Road off the Sapele Road bypass in Benin City, as well as Upper Ekenwa Road, where he emphasized the importance of contractors delivering high-quality work to

benefit the people of Edo State.

The team also visited the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Road in Ugbiyoko, where a long-abandoned 1.1-kilometer road and drainage project is now being revived.

Residents of these communities described the projects as vital to their socioeconomic well-being, noting that for years they had been deprived of basic infrastructure.

At Temboga, Ekiuwa, and Uteh Road, which connects Lucky Way, residents recalled that the road had been impassable for over 20 years due to erosion, expressing gratitude to the governor for taking action.

The governor's inspection team later proceeded to Obadan Road Junction along the Benin-Auchi Highway, where repairs on a previously dilapidated section have been completed in line with his earlier promise.

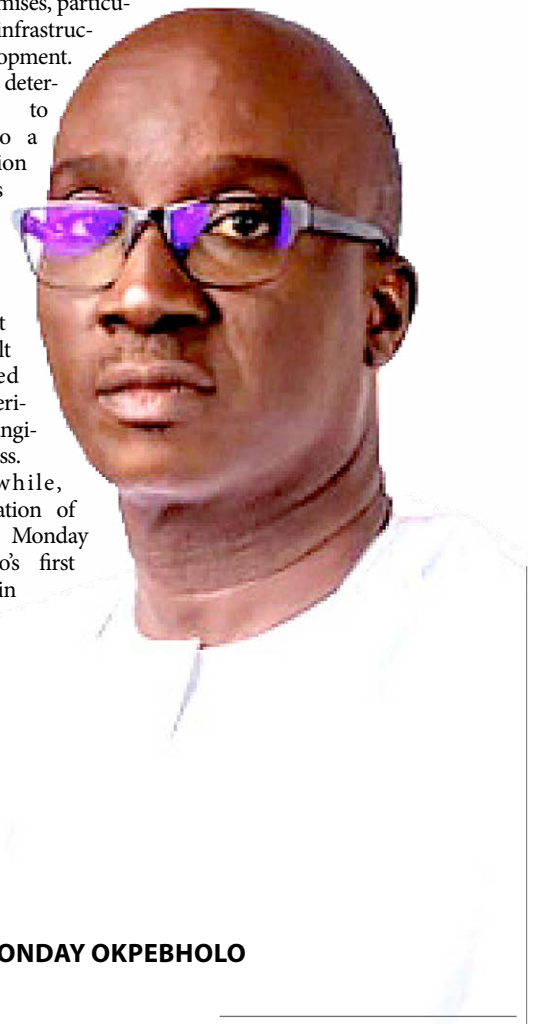
At various public engagements, Okpebholo has reiterated his administration's commitment to reversing years of neglect and ensuring Edo people enjoy better living conditions.

Observers note that within his first 100 days in office, Governor Okpebholo has made remarkable strides in keeping his cam-

paign promises, particularly in infrastructure development.

His determination to make Edo a construction hub has begun to materialize, with communities that once felt abandoned now experiencing tangible progress.

Meanwhile, in celebration of Governor Monday Okpebholo's first 100 days in office, the



GOV. MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>

## Senate amends 2025 budget to correct errors

The Nigerian Senate has amended the 2025 Appropriations Bill to correct errors discovered after its passage by both legislative chambers.

The discrepancies, identified during the final review by the Joint Committee on Appropriations, prompted a motion by Senator Adeola Solomon, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, who called for adjustments during Tuesday's plenary session.

Key amendments include

an increase in Recurrent Non-Debt Expenditure to ₦13.58 trillion, while Capital Expenditure has been revised downward to ₦23.43 trillion.

Despite these changes, the total budget size remains at ₦54.99 trillion, encompassing ₦3.64 trillion for statutory transfers and ₦14.31 trillion for debt servicing. With the necessary corrections implemented and approved following recommitment to the Committee of Supply, the amended bill is now set for transmission to the President for assent.

**Nigeria's Inflation Rate drops to 24.48%**

—Pg 3

**Jonathan faults military deployment for elections, advocates police-led security**

—Pg 4

**Step-by-step guide to check 2024 WASSCE results for private candidates**

—Pg 4

**All passengers survive crash landing as plane flips at Toronto airport**

—Pg 7

# Edo Assembly okays death penalty for kidnappers

## ● Repeals 2022 electricity law

KEN ABU

The Edo State House of Assembly has passed the Edo State Kidnapping Prohibition Law 2025, imposing the death penalty for convicted kidnappers.

The bill, which strengthens the provisions of the existing 2013 law, was considered clause by clause after a motion by Majority Leader Charity Aigubarueghian, seconded by Minority Leader Henry Okaka.

Under the amended law, life imprisonment—previously the maximum penalty—has been replaced with a death sentence, alongside the confiscation of properties used in the commission of the crime.

In addition to the anti-kidnapping law, the Assembly also passed legislation repealing the Edo State Electricity Law 2022 and establishing the Edo State Electricity Market, Regulatory Commission, and Electrification Agency.

Meanwhile, the House confirmed Mrs. Kenny Kentimu Okojie as Chairman of the Governing Board of the Edo State Primary Healthcare Development Agency.

## Okpebholo 100 days: 14 road...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Edo State Government, through the Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDHIC), has announced a one-day free medical outreach across the three senatorial districts.

Scheduled for Wednesday February 19, 2025, this initiative underscores the administration's dedication to providing accessible and affordable healthcare for all Edo residents.

The outreach will offer essential medical services, including general consultations, blood pressure and diabetes screenings, and immediate enrollment into the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme's (EDOHIS) State Equity Plan.

A team of experienced doctors, nurses, and healthcare providers will be on hand to attend to patients, ensuring quality medical care for attendees.

This program aligns with Governor Okpebholo's vision of a healthier Edo State, prioritizing healthcare accessibility, especially for vulnerable communities.

The Edo State Health Insurance Commission is spearheading the initiative in collaboration with the Edo Specialist Hospital, reinforcing the government's commitment to strengthening the healthcare system through strategic partnerships.

Residents are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity to receive free medical care and health insurance enrollment.

The outreach will commence with registration at 9:00 AM, followed by medical services at 10:00 AM.

The designated locations include Edo Specialist Hospital in Benin City for Edo South; Eguare Irrua Modern PHC in Irrua for Edo Central, and the Public Office Building at Up-Garage in Auchi for Edo North.

Meanwhile, residents of gully erosion-ravaged areas in Benin City and its environs are celebrating Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo, for his swift intervention in reclaiming their communities within his first 100 days in office.

Among the worst-hit areas now benefiting from the state government's intervention are Upper Tenboga-Ekiuwa Road in Ikpoba-Okha and Agbonkhi-

na Street, off Ekenwan Road in Egor Local Government Area.

For years, residents of these communities were displaced as massive gully erosion rendered their homes uninhabitable.

Many had abandoned their properties, forced to seek shelter elsewhere.

During his campaign, Governor Okpebholo visited the affected areas and pledged to tackle the erosion crisis within his first 100 days in office. True to his promise, within 24 hours of assuming office, he awarded contracts for the reclamation of these sites under the supervision of the state's Ministry of Works.

During a media tour of the project sites on Monday, ministry officials and supervising engineers praised the governor for prioritizing the reclamation efforts.

Residents, particularly homeowners, also expressed gratitude for the government's intervention.

Edward Ugboyovbi, a landlord on Upper Tenboga-Ekiuwa Road, recounted how many residents were forced to relocate due to the devastating impact of the gully erosion.

"The community was nearly deserted because of the erosion. Many landlords had to become tenants elsewhere. But with the pace of reclamation work, people are returning to their homes," Ugboyovbi said.

Similarly, at Agbonkhina Street, resident Scott Osayi lauded the ongoing efforts, noting that the road had been impassable for years.

He acknowledged that while the previous administration initiated work on the project, it was left incomplete—until Governor Okpebholo took decisive action.

"With the progress being made, this road will boost the local economy. A good road network is essential for development," Osayi noted.

Longtime resident Osagie Aigbekaen, who has lived in the community for 24 years, said they had often resorted to self-help in tackling the erosion problem. However, with the government's intervention, he believes life is returning to the area.

"Now, we see real progress. We pray for God to grant the governor long life and good health to continue his work for the state," Aigbekaen said.

## Edo gov unveils EdoCert 2.0 to digitize educational records

EDWARD OSEGHE

The Edo State Ministry of Education has launched EdoCert 2.0, an advanced digital platform designed to streamline the generation and verification of academic certificates and report cards. As the first state in Nigeria to introduce such an initiative, Edo is taking a major step

toward modernizing education administration and improving accessibility to student records.

The unveiling ceremony, held in Benin City under the theme Edo State Educational Certificate/Report Card Generation and Verification Platform, marked a significant milestone in the government's commitment to leveraging technology for ed-

ucational advancement. The initiative aligns with the five-point agenda of Governor Monday Okpebholo, which prioritizes education as a key driver for enhancing the quality of life in the state.

EdoCert 2.0, developed as part of the DiCert digital public infrastructure platform and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to eliminate manual errors, reduce administrative costs, enhance data accuracy, and prevent certificate fraud. By automating the issuance of academic records, the platform ensures efficiency, security, and instant access to verifiable credentials, allowing students to obtain their certificates from any location.

Speaking at the launch, Edo State Commissioner for Education, Dr. Paddy Emmanuel Iyamu, emphasized the transformative impact of EdoCert 2.0, stating that it would revolutionize service delivery in the education sector. He noted that the platform would not only expedite certificate issuance but also enhance the credibility of Edo State's educational qualifications by ensuring a globally accessible verification process.

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Edith Atomre Ebomoyi, described the initiative as a timely response to global technological advancements, stressing that it would modernize and secure the state's academic records. She reaffirmed the government's commitment to continuous innovation in education management.



ROAD PROJECTS INSPECTION:

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State, inspecting road projects across the state on Tuesday.

## Former-Federal Commissioner Edwin Clark...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

try's governance challenges.

Clark's legacy as a fearless advocate for justice, equity, and the development of the Niger Delta will remain a significant part of Nigeria's history.

President Bola Tinubu has led the tributes for late elder statesman in a condolence message signed by his spokesman Bayo Onanuga said he received the news of Clark's passage with soberness.

"Chief Clark spoke for the Niger Delta. He spoke for the nation. His views and interventions on national issues were distinct and patriotic," he said.

"History will remember him as a man who fought gallantly for the rights of the people of the Niger Delta, unity in diversity, and true federalism," the statement quoted Tinubu as saying.

"I know many generations will remain proud of how his efforts contributed to national prosperity and stability."

Describing Clark as a man of conviction, Tinubu said the educationist "believed in a united Nigeria, and until his last breath, he never stopped reaching out to people from different parts of the country to work together to preserve national unity based on justice and equity.

"As an astute politician, his political opponents never doubted his words' weight, confidence, and conviction when he spoke. Indeed, a patriot has transitioned to the great beyond."

The Nigerian president said the leader of the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) will be remembered as one who "fought gallantly for the rights of the people of the Niger Delta, unity in diversity, and true federalism."

"I know many generations will remain proud of how his efforts contributed to national prosperity and stability," Tinubu added.

On his part, the National Leader of the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural and socio-political organization Afenifere Reuben Fasoranti.

Fasoranti described Clark as a "great man who would be remembered for his fearlessness and the knack to 'say it as he saw it'."

"Since the need to ensure that Nigeria serves the best interests of the vast majority became more pertinent, my brother, Chief Edwin Clark, was a very strong advocate," the Afenifere National Publicity Secretary Jare Ajayi quoted Fasoranti as saying.

"His voice was loud in the agitations for a restructured Nigeria. He always displayed the same strong passion for national issues especially those that affected the South-South."

He condoled "the immediate and extended families of our late patriot, Chief Edwin Clark, the people of Delta State, and the people of the South-South generally on his demise."

'He Stood for Fairness, Equity, and Justice'

Today, I mourn the passing of an elder statesman, Nigerian patriot, and role model. Chief (Dr) Sen. Edwin Kiagbodo Clark,

OFR, OON, an icon whose influence traversed Nigeria's political scene for six decades.

Clark who hailed from Delta State was born on May 25, 1927, in Kiagbodo, Burutu Local Government Area.

Reacting, Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo expressed deep sorrow over the passing of former National Commissioner for Information, Chief Edwin Kiagbodo Clark

The governor described Clark as a towering figure in national affairs whose contributions to Nigeria's political, social, and economic development were invaluable.

Extending his heartfelt condolences to Clark's family and the entire South-South region, Okpebholo emphasized the late statesman's unwavering dedication to education, social justice, and national unity.

He noted that Clark's advocacy for the Niger Delta and his relentless fight for resource control and environmental justice defined him as a fearless leader committed to the well-being of his people.

In his tribute, the governor highlighted Clark's immense influence on public service and his role as a mentor to generations of leaders, policymakers, and young Nigerians.

He stressed that Clark's integrity, visionary leadership, and passion for a better Nigeria had left an indelible mark on the nation's governance and democratic evolution.

Okpebholo described his passing as a great loss to the nation,

noting that Edo State joins the rest of the country in mourning an icon whose legacy will continue to inspire future generations.

While expressing sadness over his demise, the governor reassured that Clark's contributions would never be forgotten.

He stated that Edo State remains grateful for the time, wisdom, and efforts the elder statesman dedicated to the country, adding that his impact will live on through the numerous lives he touched and the causes he championed throughout his lifetime.

The Delta State Governor, Hon. Sheriff Oborewori expressed deep sorrow over the passing of elder statesman, Chief Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, describing his death as the end of a great era.

In a condolence message issued through his Chief Press Secretary, Sir Festus Ahon, Oborewori paid tribute to Clark's enduring legacy and service to the nation. He described the late statesman as a pillar of integrity, a champion of justice, and an unwavering advocate for the rights of the Niger Delta region.

"Today, I mourn the passing of an elder statesman, Nigerian patriot, and role model, Chief (Dr) Senator Edwin Kiagbodo Clark, OFR, OON, an icon whose influence spanned six decades in Nigeria's political landscape. Teacher, educator, public servant, and politician, Chief Clark was a model of integrity, consistency, fidelity to a cause, and patriotic fervor," Oborewori stated.

# Enogie debunks allegations of preventing devt in Oye —Iyanomo community

OUR REPORTER

The Enogie of Oye-Iyanomo in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State, Alfred Erhauyi Osagie has debunked allegations against him that he is obstructing development in the community

The Enogie was reacting to allegations made by Pa Sunday Ohiengbonmwan and Iyayi Eboigbean in an online publication not the Nigeria Observer to the effect that he is obstructing development in the community

The Enogie faulted his accusers' claim, insisting that every

right thinking person strives for the development of his/her community especially when he is the one vested with the authority and responsibility to administer the affairs of Oye-Iyanomo under the Benin native law and customs.

The Enogie noted that those behind the false publication did

so with the intent to deceive unsuspecting developers into buying landed properties under litigation between the village and the Nigerian Army where-in all parties to the suit had been restrained from carrying out further activities in the said land until the matter is fully settled.

"I am not stopping development but only obeying the court procedures because there is litigation to that effect with Suit No /59/2011 at the High Court of Justice Okada"

The Enogie used the opportunity to clarify Issues relating to claims to the effect that Oye-Iyanomo is divided.

"There is no division in Oye-Iyanomo Community. Right from time immemorial we have stayed united and it will remain so for a long time to come following the amicable revolution of all disputes that arose in the past by the great Oba of Benin when the issue was brought before him at the Palace.

The Enogie urged the public to disregard claims by one Iyayi Eboigbe that he is the Okaighele of the Community and those made by Sunday Ohiengbonmwan Eboigbe that he is the acting Odionwere of the Community, describing same as incorrect and false.

The Enogie subsequently revealed that a recent Consent Judgement in Suit No B/357/2015 where the said Sunday Ohiengbonmwan, Iyayi Eboigbe and others were the claimants and their opponents in the suit consented to the judgment by Hon Justice V.O. Eboeime

wherein it was declared and agreed that all parcels of land allocated to persons prior to the settlement should be verified and authenticated for approvals upon the recommendation of a committee to be set up for that purpose with members drawn from both parties in the suit.

According to the Enogie, it was also agreed that no boundary exists between Oye and Iyanomo Community as the community remains one and indivisible, known as Oye-Iyanomo Community

He also pointed out that both parties agreed to stop further development and allocation of parcels of land in the community, pending when the committee to be set up for that purpose turns in its report and recommendations for consideration and approval.

He said he was taken aback when his attention was drawn to the online publication that he is preventing development in Oye-Iyanomo.

He then urged the members of the public to disregard the allegations, as those spreading the falsehood were doing so to cover up their atrocities in the community by allocating parcels of land with restraining orders of court to unsuspecting developers.



INAUGURATION:

L-R: Members of North West Development Commission. Hon. Babatunde Dada, Hon. Aminu Salami, Engr. Ahmed Rufai and Professor Maaji Managing Director/CEO, North West Development Commission, during their inauguration in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## LSHA: APC Chieftain tasks Sanwo-Olu on crises

All Progressives Congress (APC) chieftain, Babatunde Bank-Anthony, has called on Lagos Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu to speak up regarding the leadership tussle in the state's House of Assembly.

Speaking on Channels Television's Sunrise Daily programme on Tuesday, Bank-Anthony stressed the need for the Lagos State governor to address the situation.

"I expect the governor as well to say something to this. He is the number one man in Lagos State. He cannot ignore what happened yesterday because that is the parliament that he reports to, that is the parliament that makes the law

for the state he is governing," Bank-Anthony said.

"The governor should speak up about this issue to the right quarters," he argued.

His comments come hours after the escalation of the Lagos State House of Assembly leadership tussle.

Security officials, including policemen and operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS), had on Monday stormed the Assembly complex, preventing lawmakers from gaining access to the chambers.

They, however, gained access to the chambers after hours of tussling with Speaker Mojisola Meranda later presiding over the plenary session in the Alausa area of Lagos.

While observers have called on President Bola Tinubu to wade into the leadership tussle tearing the Assembly apart, the APC chieftain says the Nigerian leader should walk with caution.

Bank-Anthony said since political hierarchies exist in governance, President Tinubu may be cautious about making a statement about the crisis to avoid being seen as taking sides.

"26 years of democracy in Lagos, Nigeria right? Do you want to keep sucking your mothers breast at this age? Let us leave this man alone, he has a bigger headache," the APC chieftain said, doubling down on the need for Tinubu to focus on addressing pressing national issues.

The crisis in the Lagos Assembly began when the lawmakers removed Mudashiru Obasa as their speaker over fraud allegations. They elected Meranda to replace the long-time lawmaker who represents the Agege I Constituency of the state.

Meanwhile, thirty-six pro-Meranda lawmakers in the 40-member house passed a vote of confidence in the new speaker on Monday.

After hours of stand-off between workers at the Lagos State House of Assembly Complex and security officials who invaded the hallowed chamber, the Speaker of the House, Mojisola Meranda, finally gained access to her office and presided over plenary.

## Nigeria's Inflation Rate drops to 24.48%

Nigeria's headline inflation has dropped to 24.48% year on year in January 2025. This is a sharp decline from the 34.80% headline inflation recorded in December 2024.

This is according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The Statistician-General of the Federation Adeyemi Adeniran announced this on Tuesday.

He said the Consumer Price Index (CPI) – which measures the rate of change in prices of goods and commodities – has declined to 24.48% year on year in January.

Adeniran who was speaking during a briefing in Abuja, explained that urban inflation

stood at 26.09 per cent while rural inflation came to 22.15%.

He said that the general prices of goods and services in the country declined, compared to the 34.80% in December, which used the old template. According to him, the rebasing was to keep up with international standards.

CPI rebasing means updating the reference year used to gauge price levels in the country. This is essentially changing the basket of goods and services used to measure inflation to better reflect current consumer spending patterns and ensure the inflation data reflects the economy's current.

He said that the general price

of goods and services in the country declined, compared to the 34.80% in December, which used the old template. According to him, the rebasing was to keep up with international standards.

CPI rebasing means updating the reference year used to gauge price levels in the country. This is essentially changing the basket of goods and services used to measure inflation to better reflect current consumer spending patterns and ensure the inflation data reflects the economy's current.

According to the CPI figures for the period under review, the rebased food inflation stood at 26.08% year-on-year in January, representing a decline in the

food index when compared with 39.84% year-on-year recorded in the preceding month.

Similarly, the rebased core index which excludes the prices of volatile agricultural produce and energy stood at 22.59% year on year in January.

According to the NBS, the rebased CPI reflects the current inflationary pressure and consumption pattern of people living in the country.

Earlier in the month, the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Yemi Cardoso restated the apex bank's resolve to push down inflation in the country and stabilise the economy.

## Kano High Court stops CBN from withholding LG funds

A high court sitting in Kano has issued a permanent order restraining the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) from withholding funds allocated to the 44 local government areas of the state.

The ruling, delivered by Justice Ibrahim Musa-Muhammad, came after an ex parte motion filed on November 1, 2024 by the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Ibrahim Muhammed, and five others. The motion sought to prevent the respondents from withholding or delaying allocations essential for local governance.

Among the respondents were the accountant-general of the federation (AGF), the CBN, the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), the 44 Kano LGAs, and several commercial banks, including the United Bank for Africa and Access Bank.

In November, the court issued an interim order preventing the CBN and AGF from withholding funds for the 44 LGAs pending the determination of the suit. Delivering his final judgment on Monday, Justice Musa-Muhammad ruled in favor of the applicants, affirming that they had established their case.

"The AGF, CBN, and RMAFC are under a duty to disburse monthly allocations to the 44 LGAs as democratically elected local government councils," the judge declared.

He further emphasized that withholding the allocations would violate the fundamental rights of residents in the 44 local government councils, citing sections of the Nigerian Constitution.

"A declaration that withholding these allocations would amount to a breach of the fundamental rights of the residents, inhabitants in the 44 local government councils, as guaranteed under Sections 33, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)," the ruling stated.

Justice Musa-Muhammad also referenced the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, noting that excluding the 44 LGAs from the federation account distribution contradicts its provisions.

"It would be wrong according to Articles 13, 19, 22, and 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights for the AGF, CBN, and RMAFC to exclude the 44 LGAs in the distribution of funds accruing from the Federation Account, in line with Section 162(3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)," he said.

With this ruling, the court has reinforced the constitutional requirement that local government funds must be distributed without interference, ensuring financial autonomy for Kano's 44 LGAs.

**NEWS**

# Jonathan faults military deployment for elections, advocates police-led security

Former President Goodluck Jonathan has criticised the deployment of military personnel for election duties in Nigeria, saying that it overstretched the military.

Speaking at the public presentation of a book by a former Inspector General of Police, Solomon Arase, in Abuja on Tuesday, Jonathan stated that elections should be primarily managed by the police and the Independent National Electoral Commission.

According to him, in most other countries, the Air Force and Army are used to transport election materials to dangerous areas,

and not providing security at polling units as done in the country.

Jonathan said, "Having been the president of this country before, when you talk about internal security, it's an area that touches my heart. And especially when you talk about election security, again, it's an area that touches my heart. One gets worried when it comes to Nigerian elections.

"In fact, here we overstretch the Army. In most other countries, the military doesn't get involved in the day-to-day management of elections.

"Some countries use them to manage strategic systems, such as transporting election materi-

als to dangerous areas. But manning polling booths and staying around polling stations—military personnel are never used for such duties."

Jonathan cited examples from Botswana and Senegal, where elections are conducted with minimal security interference, allowing the electorate to vote without intimidation.

He noted that in Botswana, police officers manage election security while the military secures government facilities, and in Senegal, polling stations are run by electoral officials with

police stationed outside, intervening only when necessary.

He said, "I just came back from Botswana some months back during the election. It's a very small country with a small population, so almost all the police officers were used for the election.

"What the military does is that those regular duties that the police officers were doing, including securing the police headquarters, the military took over... So the military high command posted military officers to secure government assets and facilities.

"That's what they do. And you

don't hear stories. Go to a country like Senegal, which is a West African country, their election last year.

"We talk about technology, technology, and still, with the technology, we have problems. And I said that they use the simplest form of voting. There was a table there.

"They put the ballot box for every candidate. And you, the voter, you go and you just go and pick. Of course, you must pick from all the candidates. They just put a long table. Every candidate has his ballot papers put there.

"You don't see any police. The electoral management officers, polling agents and so on were just sitting there and watching. The police were outside because they used secondary schools and primary schools as polling stations.

"Then, each of the classrooms has different polling units. So the police stay here. If there is an issue, they will call them in. Otherwise, you don't see police wherever you go. And that is a standard in so many countries. But here, we fully do the wrong thing."

## NLC shuts down IBEDC over sack of 3,000 workers

The Oyo State chapter of the Nigeria Labour Congress brought operations at the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company to a standstill on Tuesday, staging a massive protest over the recent dismissal of over 3,000 employees.

Led by its Chairman, Kayode Martin, the union members barricaded the entrance to the IBEDC office, shutting down the facility and causing traffic disruption in the Challenge to Dugbe area of Ibadan.

The protesters, chanting solidarity songs, demanded the immediate reinstatement of the sacked workers and the payment of the national minimum wage.

Martin condemned the actions of outsourcing agents associated with IBEDC, accusing them of exploiting workers through unpaid minimum wages and unexplained salary deductions.

"We are here today to express our total displeasure over the unjust and inhumane treatment of workers by IBEDC and their outsourcing agents.

"Over 3,000 workers have been thrown into the unemployment market without any justifiable reason. These are people who have dedicated their time

and energy to this company, and they are now being treated like disposable items," Martin said.

The NLC Chairman also highlighted the issue of unpaid minimum wage and the alleged exploitation of workers by outsourcing companies.

"These outsourcing agents are not only refusing to pay the minimum wage, but they are also making arbitrary deductions from the meagre salaries of the workers. This is unacceptable, and we will not stand for it," he asserted.

The union presented a list of seven key demands to the IBEDC management, including: "Implementation of the new minimum wage, prompt payment of Retirement Savings Account (RSA) backlogs, regularization of outsourced staff, an end to the denial of union membership for staff, provision of adequate and standard healthcare services, payment of all outstanding allowances and compensations."

Martin appealed to Oyo State Governor, Seyi Makinde, and other stakeholders to intervene in the matter, warning that the mass dismissal of workers could have serious security implications for the state.

## Edo Muslim, Christian pilgrims boards strengthen ties for greater devt

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musah Muhammad Uduimoh, has pledged to collaborate closely with the Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board to drive unprecedented development under the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo.

In a show of interfaith unity, Mallam Uduimoh extended warm congratulations to Pastor Frank Omobude on his recent appointment as Chairman of the Edo State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board. He emphasized the significance of mutual respect and cooperation between the two religious boards in fostering peace, spiritual growth, and social cohesion in the state.

Mallam Uduimoh also commended Governor Okpebholo for his remarkable achievements within his first 100 days in office, particularly in governance, infrastructure, and social welfare programs. He lauded the governor's inclusive approach, stating that Pastor Omobude's appointment is a testament to the administration's commitment to unity and progress.

"This collaborative spirit between the Muslim and Christian Pilgrims Boards reflects the broader vision of Governor Okpebholo's government—one that prioritizes inclusivity, development, and peaceful coexistence among all communities in Edo State," Mallam Uduimoh remarked.



**INDUCTION:**

A cross section of medical graduates of the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, during their induction by the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria.

## FRSC showcases body cameras, mobile app, future plans at 37th anniversary

The Federal Road Safety Corps on Tuesday marked its 37th anniversary.

In his speech, Corps Marshal, Shehu Mohammed, reflected on the FRSC's growth over the years, noting the expansion from 16 to 37 Sector Commands and from five to 12 Zonal Commands.

Mohammed stressed that these changes have played a role in improving road safety across the country.

"I am honoured to welcome you today to commemorate the 37th anniversary of the Federal

Road Safety Corps.

"Over the years, the Corps has undergone significant transformations, expanding from 16 Sector Commands to 37, and from five Zonal Commands to 12. This growth is a testament to FRSC's commitment to its mission.

"Similarly, in the past 37 years, the FRSC has made significant strides in reducing road crashes and promoting road safety awareness. We have worked tirelessly to educate the public on the importance of road safety, and our efforts have yielded positive results.

"Our statistics show that road crashes have decreased significantly over the years, and we attribute this success to our sustained efforts in enforcing traffic laws, conducting public enlightenment campaigns, and collaborating with stakeholders," he noted.

He added, "However, the Corps is already planning for further developments, aiming to enhance its reach and operational effectiveness in the coming years.

"However, we are not complacent, and we recognise that there is still much work to be done.

"We will continue to work tirelessly to address the challenges facing our roads, including reckless driving, overloading, and poor road condition,"

The corps marshal noted that one of the most notable innovations introduced by the FRSC was the use of body cameras for patrol officers and a mobile app designed to improve emergency response times.

These technological advancements, part of a broader effort to digitise operations, are expected to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and provide more effective services to the public.

## Step-by-step guide to check 2024 WASSCE results for private candidates

The West African Examinations Council, on Sunday, announced the release of the 2024 West African Senior School Certificate Examination results for Private Candidates, Second Series.

This was disclosed in a statement on Sunday by the Acting Head of Public Affairs, Moyo Adesina.

According to Adesina, a total of 65,023 candidates participated in the examination, with 43,923 candidates, representing

67.55%, scoring credit and above in a minimum of five subjects.

Furthermore, 34,878 candidates, accounting for 53.64% of the total candidates, obtained credit and above in five subjects, including English Language and Mathematics.

Adesina noted that the results reflect a promising performance among candidates.

"The performance of candidates in this year's examination is encouraging, with a significant percentage achieving

credit and above in key subjects," she said.

For candidates eager to check their results, WAEC has provided a simple online procedure:

Visit the WAEC official results checker website: [www.waecdirect.org](http://www.waecdirect.org).

Enter your 10-digit WAEC Examination Number in the designated field.

Input the four-digit Examination Year, for example, 2024. Select the Type of Examination



as 'Private Candidate Results.'

Enter the e-PIN Voucher Number.

Provide the Personal Identification Number (PIN) from the e-PIN.

Click 'Submit' and wait for the results window to display your performance.

Candidates who experience any difficulties accessing their results are advised to contact WAEC through its official communication channels for assistance.

					<h2 style="text-align: center;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>														
SIZES	COLOUR		BLACK AND WHITE		BLACK AND WHITE		MULTI NATIONALS												
	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCT		COLOUR		BLACK & WHITE										
			RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)									
FULL PAGE	517,344	556,145	369,500	397,213	325,150	349,536	665,156	715,043	443,440	476,698									
13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266									
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770									
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959									
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148									
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896									
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975									
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276									
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212									
FRONT PAGE POSITIONS					OTHER SIZES														
SIZES	PRODUCTS		PUBLIC NOTICE		SIZES	PUBLIC NOTICE		PRODUCTS											
	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)		RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)										
FP 6X2	89,800	96,535	105,450	113,359	6 X 2	60,640	65,188	49,140	52,826										
FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279										
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980										
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595										
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770										
					2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971										
					CAC	38,000	40,850												
SPECIAL POSITIONS					LOOSE INSERTS														
SIZES	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	RATE	TOTAL (7.5% VAT incl)	<b>LOOSE INSERTS: N40 PER SHEET</b> <b>MINIMUM ORDER: 5000 COPIES</b> <b>HANDLING CHARGES: N40,000 PER 1000 COPIES</b> <b>NEWSPAPER DIMENSION: 14.5" X 10.5"</b>														
STRIP	118,250	127,119	147,800	158,885	<b>CHANGE OF NAME</b>														
STRIP INSIDE	88,600	95,245	118,250	127,119															
SPECIAL PAGES					<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Type</th> <th>Fridays</th> <th>Other Days</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Miss to Mrs.</td> <td>5000</td> <td>7000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Reconciliation/Corrections of name</td> <td>6000</td> <td>8000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>						Type	Fridays	Other Days	Miss to Mrs.	5000	7000	Reconciliation/Corrections of name	6000	8000
Type	Fridays	Other Days																	
Miss to Mrs.	5000	7000																	
Reconciliation/Corrections of name	6000	8000																	
FRONT PAGE	ADD 70% SURCHARGE																		
PAGES 2 & 3	ADD 55% SURCHARGE																		
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE																		
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE																		
PAGES 4 & 5	ADD 40% SURCHARGE																		
BACK PAGE	ADD 60% SURCHARGE																		
<b>NOTE: Booking for Colour Advert should be done 48 hours (i.e 2 days) before Publication.</b>																			
					<b>For advert placement contact:</b> <b>08023457635 or 08137709000</b> Email: nigerianobservernews1@gmail.com														
24 Airport Road, Benin City, Edo State					EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023														

## Foreign

## NEWS

## All passengers survive crash landing as plane flips at Toronto airport

All 80 people on board a plane which crashed and overturned while landing in Toronto have survived, officials said.

The Delta Air Lines flight from Minneapolis skidded along the runway with flames visible and it came to a halt upside down as firefighters came to the rescue.

Survivors said they were sus-

pended upside down in their seats and had to release themselves, dropping on to the ceiling before clambering out on to the snow-covered tarmac.

Eighteen people were injured but only a small number are thought to be seriously hurt, and investigators are looking into what caused the crash.

There were 76 passengers and four crew on board the 16-year-

old CRJ900 aircraft, made by Canada's Bombardier company.

In an evening briefing, Deborah Flint of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority called the response by emergency personnel "textbook" and credited them with helping ensure no loss of life.

The US Federal Aviation Administration said the plane was operated by Delta's subsidiary

Endeavor Air.

Delta said the incident happened at about 14:15 ET (19:15 GMT) on Monday.

Twenty-two passengers were Canadian nationals and the rest were "multinational", Ms Flint said.

The airport was closed after the incident, but flights into and out of Toronto Pearson resumed at about 17:00 local time.

Canada's Transportation

Safety Board (TSB) said it was working to "gather information and assess the occurrence".

Two runways will remain closed for several days for investigation and passengers have been told to expect some delays.

Toronto Pearson Fire Chief Todd Aitken said "the runway was dry and there was no cross-wind conditions".

That contradicted earlier

reports of wind gusts of more than 64km/h (40mph) and a crosswind.

Video footage shared on social media shows people clambering out of the overturned aircraft, with fire crews spraying it with foam.

Passenger John Nelson told CNN that there was no indication of anything unusual before landing.



**DELTA AIR CRASH LANDING:**  
The ill fated plane yesterday

## Israeli troops stay inside south Lebanon after withdrawal deadline

Israel has pulled its forces from southern Lebanon apart from five positions, Lebanon's state news agency says. Israel's withdrawal is a key part of the ceasefire which ended a year-long conflict with Shia militant group Hezbollah.

Israeli ministers said some troops would remain inside Lebanon to protect Israel's northern communities.

UN officials called it a "delay" in the implementation of the ceasefire which was "not what we hoped would happen". Lebanon has also objected.

The ceasefire requires Israel to withdraw and for Lebanon's army to replace all armed groups south of the Litani River, about 30km (20 miles) north of Israel.

Hezbollah was the dominant force in the area for decades, but suffered a major blow in the conflict, the deadliest fought with Israel since the militant group was formed in 1982.

Lebanese authorities say more than 3,960 people - many of them civilians - were killed during the hostilities, and one million others were displaced from areas where Hezbollah had a strong presence.

Israeli authorities say more than 80 Israeli soldiers and 47 civilians were killed. About 60,000 citizens were displaced from northern Israel.

Most of those displaced in Lebanon have returned home, the

UN says, while only a minority of those displaced in Israel have done so, according to reports.

The positions where Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops have been deployed are in mountainous terrain on the edge of the internationally recognised border between Lebanon and Israel.

On Tuesday Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said the IDF was "temporarily remaining in five strategic high points". He added that this was "necessary for our security".

"Once Lebanon fully imple-

ments its side of the deal, there will be no need to hold these points," he told a news conference in Jerusalem.

In response to the announcement, Lebanon said Israel must withdraw completely. It said it would consider "the continued Israeli presence in any inch of Lebanese territory an occupation".

And in a joint statement, the UN special coordinator for Lebanon and the head of UN peacekeeping forces there said a delay to the completion of the ceasefire arrangements was

a violation of the UN Security Council resolution which the ceasefire was based on.

But, it said, "this should not... overshadow the tangible progress that has been made" since the ceasefire came into effect at the end of November.

Lebanese soldiers meanwhile have been moving into areas vacated by Israeli troops and have begun clearing roadblocks and checking for unexploded ordnance, the Associated Press news agency reported on Tuesday.

## Hamas says it will return bodies of four hostages including Bibas family

Hamas says it will hand over the bodies of four hostages on Thursday, including the two youngest people held by the Palestinian armed group.

The group's negotiator Khalil al-Hayya said the bodies to be released would include those of the Bibas family - Shiri and her young children Kfir and Ariel, who were aged nine months and four years when Hamas kidnapped them during the 7 October 2023 attack.

Hamas alleges that the three were killed in Israeli bombardment. Israel has not confirmed this.

The children's father Yarden was released by Hamas earlier this month.

Al-Hayya said Hamas would

also release six living hostages on Saturday - double the number originally planned.

In exchange, Israel will free all women and those under the age of 19 arrested since last October and is allowing some rubble-clearing equipment into Gaza through the border with Egypt.

In a statement, al-Hayya said the group agreed "handing over four bodies of the occupation prisoners on Thursday 20 February, including the bodies of the Bibas family".

Hamas claimed in November 2023 they had been killed in an Israeli air strike, without providing evidence. The Israeli military has not confirmed the report. Israeli officials have

said only that they are gravely concerned for their lives.

An Israeli official told Reuters that deceased hostages would undergo identification in Israel before being named.

In a statement, the Bibas family said it was aware of the Hamas statement.

"In the past few hours, we have been in turmoil following Hamas spokesperson's announcement about the planned return of our Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir this Thursday as part of the hostages' remains release phase," the statement said.

"We want to make it clear that while we are aware of these reports, we have not yet received any official confirmation regarding this matter.

## Villagers killed execution-style in Sudan, activists say

More than 200 unarmed civilians have been killed in a cluster of villages in Sudan over three days by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that is involved in a brutal conflict with the military, a local rights group has said.

The Emergency Lawyers network said the attacks happened in al-Kadaris and al-Khelwat towards the north of White Nile state - areas where the military had no presence.

RSF fighters were guilty of "executions, kidnappings, enforced disappearances and property looting", the network added.

The RSF, which was allied to the military before the civil war broke out in April 2023, has not commented on the allegations.

The two had come to power together in a coup - but fell out over an internationally backed plan to move towards civilian rule.

Some senior RSF leaders are currently in Kenya where they are expected to announce plans to form their own government in areas under their control.

Analysts warn the move could deepen divisions in Sudan.

Humanitarians have been sounding the alarm over Sudan, where the conflict has forced about 12 million people from their homes.

Tens of thousands of civil-

ians have been killed, with both the RSF and army accused of committing atrocities.

At the heart of this conflict is a falling out between Sudan's de facto ruler and army chief Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and his deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagal, who leads the RSF.

The RSF was recently dealt a significant blow when the army regained control of parts of the capital, Khartoum - including its military headquarters.

Beyond the capital, the army has also won near total control of the crucial state of Gezira.

Following the setbacks, the RSF has rebounded with plans to launch a rival government in areas still under its control, which are mainly in Darfur and parts of Kordofan state.

The RSF is meeting allied groups in Nairobi to finalise the adoption of what it calls a "political charter for the Government of Peace and Unity".

Gen Burhan has rejected the move, and has vowed to reclaim the whole of Khartoum.

He is currently based in Port Sudan, having been forced to leave Khartoum months after the civil war broke out when the RSF seized the military headquarters and the presidential palace.

## Argentina's President Milei denies crypto fraud allegations

Argentine President Javier Milei has denied promoting a newly launched cryptocurrency which collapsed shortly after he mentioned it in a social media post on Friday.

The cryptocurrency \$Libra quickly rose in value before nosediving, causing severe losses for the majority of people who had invested in it.

A judge will now determine if the president should face fraud charges over the incident.

On Monday, Milei said he had acted "in good faith" and dismissed investors' complaints, comparing their actions to people who gamble: "If you go to a casino and lose money, what's there to complain about when you knew the risks?"

President Milei spoke about the \$Libra incident in an interview with Argentine TV channel Todo Noticias on Monday, after a weekend during which he had stayed unusually quiet on social media.

He insisted that his post on

X, which contained a link to a site selling \$Libra, did not constitute an endorsement.

"I didn't promote it, I merely shared it," he told Todo Noticias' Jonny Viale.

Milei's post, which he deleted after just a few hours, drew heavy criticism not just from his political rivals in Argentina but also from those who had invested in the cryptocurrency.

Some have argued the \$Libra launch resembled a "rug pull" - where promoters draw in buyers, only to stop trading activity and make off with the money raised from sales.

The presidential office insisted that Milei was in no way involved in the development of \$Libra and announced that the Anti-Corruption Office would determine if the president had acted improperly.

Milei himself defended deleting his post, saying that at the time he did not know "the details of the project and after learning about it, I decided not to continue promoting it".

## Who's who at US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia?

Three Americans and two Russians made up the two teams at the talks in Saudi Arabia that have underscored an end to Western isolation of Moscow.

The men described the meeting as preparing the groundwork for broader "high-level" talks and agreed to reset their countries' diplomatic relations.

Who are they and what significance will they play in the rapprochement between the two powers?

As US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio faced his veteran Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. The pair had already spoken over the phone three days earlier.

Rubio has long sought an end to the war in Ukraine and voted against a \$6bn US mili-

tary aid package in 2024. He sees China as America's biggest adversary and believes Beijing is happy for the US to be "bogged down in Europe".

He has cautioned that "one meeting is not going to solve [the war]", describing the Saudi talks as a first step towards negotiations. And he has made clear that both Ukraine and Europe will have to be involved too.

National security adviser Mike Waltz believes the US deserves "some type of payback" for the billions it has paid out to Ukraine during three years of full-scale war.

Not only does he believe that Europeans have to "own this conflict" in terms of future security guarantees. He also thinks Ukraine should share its

mineral wealth in partnership with the US "in terms of their rare earths, their natural resources, and their oil and gas".

Steve Witkoff is more of an unknown quantity. Although these are the first official talks between Russia and the US for almost two years, Witkoff was the 6 Donald Trump chose to send to Moscow ev last week for talks with Vladimir Putin.

Ostensibly, he's Trump's Middle East envoy, but clear-

ly the president's former golf partner is far more significant than that and he is being seen as the president's loyal and favoured dealmaker.

He was part of talks on forging Israel's ceasefire with Hamas but was then sent to Russia to help with the exchange of US prisoner Marc Fogel for a Russian, Alexander Vinnik, in jail in America.

and know the US well: Putin foreign policy adviser Yuri

Ushakov and Sergei Lavrov, foreign minister since 2004.

They have also helped Putin steer his foreign policy during three years of war.

As former ambassador to the US, 77-year-old Yuri Ushakov has a good idea of how to talk to Washington. Within days of Donald Trump's return to the White House he made clear Russia was ready for talks if the US sent "relevant signals".

Days before the full-scale in-

vasion of Ukraine, he accused the Biden administration of peak "hysteria" in suggesting Russian troops were preparing to go to war.

As Russia's standing with the West plummeted in 2022, it fell to Sergei Lavrov to promote his country on the international stage. He took part in doomed ceasefire talks with Ukraine shortly after the full-scale war began and even denied there had been an invasion.

## Everyone must go': New Zealand's tourism drive draws ire

Depending on how you read it, New Zealand's latest tourism tagline can be a well-meaning plea for people to visit - or a threat to kick Kiwis out.

"Everyone Must Go!" reads a slogan printed across posters of people in New Zealand's majestic landscapes - part of a NZ\$500,000 (\$285,000; £227,000) campaign unveiled on Sunday.

But what was meant as a catchy call to action aimed at Australian tourists has been accused of being tone-deaf, as New Zealand deals with record emigration rates and unemployment.

The government has defended the campaign, with Prime Minister Christopher Luxon saying he "[appreciates] there's lots of chat about whether everyone loves the slogan or not".

"The fact that we're talking about it is a good thing. It's a great thing," he added.

Cushla Tangaere-Manuel, tourism spokesperson for the opposition Labour Party, told local news outlet Radio New Zealand (RNZ) that the new slogan "makes New Zealand sound like we're in a clearance bin at a sale".

"The irony of that messaging is, that's how Aotearoa New Zealanders are feeling right now," she said, pointing to the "many cuts" that residents have experienced.

Job cuts to the public sector over the past year, as part of the

government's austerity push, have affected thousands of people.

Meanwhile, people are moving out of the country in record numbers. Official figures show that there were nearly 130,000 departures last year - though that was offset by the arrival of nearly 160,000 immigrants.

"New Zealanders are voting with their feet, leaving in record high numbers," Labour MP Barbara Edmonds wrote on X on Monday. "Is their real tourism plan 'Everyone Must Go' - for Kiwis?"



**HANG OVER JAPAN:**

The Fukushima disaster continues to hang over Japan, bringing back painful memories

## Japan to increase reliance on nuclear energy in post-Fukushima shift

Japan says it will increase its reliance on nuclear energy in a major policy shift as it seeks to meet growing demand from power-hungry sectors like AI and semiconductors.

An energy plan approved by the cabinet on Tuesday called for "maximising the use of nuclear energy" and dropped reference to "reducing reliance on nuclear energy".

The energy plan, written by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry says that by 2040, nuclear energy should account for 20% of Japan's grid supply in 2040, more than double the 8.5% share in 2023.

It comes as the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster from 14 years ago continues to hang over the country, conjuring painful memories.

In March 2011, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake near Japan's north-east coast spawned a tsunami that killed more than 18,000 people, wiping out entire towns and flooding the reactors of the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

Japan now operates 14 commercial nuclear reactors, compared to 54 before the Fukushima disaster when 30% of the country's energy was from nuclear sources.

The plan still needs approval by parliament, where it will be discussed in the coming months.

The country, which imports 90% of its fuel, needs to look to nuclear sources as part of its plan to cut back on carbon and be self-reliant on energy, said Daishiro Yamagiwa, an MP who was part of a government advisory committee on the energy plan.

"Because of the conflict in Ukraine and the war in the Middle East, even fossil fuels have become difficult to buy," he told the BBC. "Japan is a country without energy resources, so we must use whatever is available in a balanced way."

Yamagiwa added that energy burdens are growing because of demand from AI data processing centres and semiconductor factories around the country.

But experts say increasing reliance on nuclear energy will be both risky and costly.

Japan will need to import uranium, which is expensive and will make the country reliant on other countries, said Professor Kenichi Oshima at the faculty of policy science at Ryukoku University.

## 'Died for stealing chocolate': Pakistan

A couple in north-east Pakistan has been detained on suspicion of murdering a 13-year-old girl who worked for them as a maid, for allegedly stealing chocolates.

The girl who goes only by one name, Iqra, succumbed to multiple injuries in hospital last Wednesday. A preliminary police investigation said she had been tortured.

The case in Rawalpindi has sparked widespread outrage and posts with the hashtag #JusticeforIqra having garnered tens of thousands of views, and reignited a debate over child labour and the mistreatment of domestic workers.

Laws pertaining to child labour can vary across the country, but children under the age of 15 cannot be employed as domestic workers in the province of Punjab.

"I felt completely shattered inside when she died," Iqra's father, Sana Ullah, told the BBC.

He said that he had received a call from the police about Iqra last Wednesday. When he rushed to the hospital, he saw Iqra lying on a bed, unconscious. She died minutes later.

Iqra began working as a maid from the age of eight. Her father, a 45-year-old farmer, said he had sent her to work because he was in debt.

After working for a few em-

ployers, she went to work for the couple two years ago, who have eight children of their own. She was earning about £23 (\$28) per month.

Police said Iqra had been accused of stealing chocolates from her employers, adding that a preliminary investigation showed that Iqra had been tortured.

Police also say there was evidence of frequent abuse. Pictures and videos obtained by the BBC showed multiple fractures in her legs and arms, as well as a serious injury to her head.

An autopsy is being conducted to assess the full extent of her injuries, and the police has told the BBC that they were still awaiting the final medical report.

"My heart cries tears of blood. How many... are subjected to violence in their homes every day for a trivial job of a few thousand?" activist Shehr Bano wrote on X. "How long will the poor continue to lower their daughters into graves in this way?"

Others have pointed out that her murder was allegedly triggered by something so minor.

"She died over chocolate?" asked one Pakistani user on X. "This is not just a crime, it's a reflection of [a] system that enables [the] rich to treat [the] poor as disposable," another said.

## Tensions laid bare as Germans worry about immigration ahead of election

"I was crying," says Alya, when she saw news of last week's Munich attack that left a toddler and her mother dead.

"Why should someone do something like that? Why? I can't understand it!"

An Afghan man's in custody after what was the latest in a series of attacks in German cities where the suspect has been an asylum seeker.

Last Thursday it was a mother and daughter in Munich; last month another child and an adult were killed in Aschaffenburg.

Alya came here a decade ago

from Syria with her baby son. Now 10, he and his mother welcome me into their home.

They were among a record 1.2 million people who applied for asylum in Germany from 2015-16, many of them from Syria but also from countries including Afghanistan and Iraq.

The attacks have put security and migration front and centre of an election campaign, days before Germans vote on their next government on 23 February.

Alya despairs of those who commit violence in a country that, she says, has "given us

everything".

The BBC first heard their story a decade earlier when they were filmed at a refugee centre in the city of Oberhausen.

Rami looks at a photo of himself from 2015. He's tiny, enveloped in a life jacket from when his mother fled war-torn Syria.

"How could I go with him in that boat?" she asks herself, remembering how they crossed the Aegean Sea with 60 others, packed in a small boat.

"I didn't know I'd gone through that," says Rami. It scares him to see it now.

Ten years on, Alya has trained in elderly care and re-married. She is looking for work, while Rami goes to a local school and is a passionate football fan.

They both speak German: Rami has grown up with the language and Alya has studied it.

They're grateful to their adopted country and plan to stay; Rami has dreams of becoming a doctor, policeman or footballer.

Mother and child have, unsurprisingly, changed in the past 10 years.

So has Germany.

# COLUMN

## Addressing truancy in schools

OSEHOB OUFURE VICTOR

Truancy has become a major crisis in Nigerian schools, particularly in Edo State, where the rising number of students skipping classes has forced the government to take action. In response, the Edo State Secondary Education Board (SSEB) recently launched a campaign to curb absenteeism after conducting a tour of selected schools.

Before launching the campaign, the Board attempted to diagnose the root causes of this issue and identified the following factors:

### LACK OF PARENTAL SUPERVISION

Nigeria is a country where many parents are too busy to monitor their children's activities. In many cities, parents leave for work early in the morning while their children are still in bed. It was not always like this. Previously, many parents personally dropped off their children at school. However, due to the skyrocketing cost of fuel, many have abandoned their vehicles, making it difficult to ensure their children actually reach their classrooms. As a result, some children leave home for school but never attend classes.

### PEER PRESSURE

Peer influence is a major factor in truancy. Many students follow friends who enjoy skipping school for leisure activities. Some visit their peers' homes to watch TV and play video games, while others loiter around fast food joints, lounges, hotels, cinemas, and gaming centers instead of attending classes.

### POVERTY

Financial hardship forces many students to skip school to work and support their families. Scholarships are rare in our schools. Some students hawk snacks, food, and water on the streets—ironically, with the government collecting taxes from them. Many have dropped out entirely because their parents cannot afford school fees. In such cases, education takes a back seat to survival.

### INDISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

A lack of discipline within the school system contributes to truancy. Some teachers and school administrators fail to enforce strict attendance policies, and some parents actively resist school discipline. If students know they can skip school without consequences, they will continue to do so.

### LACK OF MOTIVATION

Many students see no immediate benefit in education, especially when they witness school dropouts and unemployed graduates struggling to make ends meet. Meanwhile, they see so-called "Yahoo boys" (internet



*Community involvement is also crucial. Local leaders and organizations should partner with schools to enforce these measures and support struggling students. When students feel valued and supported, they are less likely to skip school. As a trained teacher, I believe truancy is a serious threat to our educational system*

fraudsters) who dropped out and became wealthy, or their female peers engaging in prostitution and making money. With such influences, they begin to question the value of education.

### GOVERNMENT ACTION

Recognizing the severity of this issue, the Edo State government, under Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo's vision for "The Rising of a New Edo," has taken decisive steps to combat truancy. The government has



OKPEBHOLO

adopted the following measures:

- 1. Strict Penalties for Truant Students** – Those caught outside school without permission will face suspension, while repeat offenders may be expelled.
- 2. Accountability for School Principals** – Principals will be held responsible for student absenteeism. Negligent school heads will face dis-

ciplinary measures.

- 3. A Dedicated Task Force** – A special unit will be set up to monitor and enforce compliance across all secondary schools.
- 4. Parental Responsibility** – Parents must educate their children on the dangers of truancy and ensure they attend school regularly.

SSEB Chairman, A. Omozane Eba-

nehita Sonia, recently made it clear: "This is no longer business as usual." She insists that penalties will be strictly enforced to restore discipline in Edo schools.

### THE WAY FORWARD

While the government's measures are necessary, more efforts are required. Schools should introduce mentorship programs to guide students. Teachers should also adopt engaging teaching methods to sustain students' interest in learning. Additionally, vocational training should be encouraged, as some students prefer hands-on skills over traditional academics. Providing alternatives like ICT training can help keep them in school.

Community involvement is also crucial. Local leaders and organizations should partner with schools to enforce these measures and support struggling students. When students feel valued and supported, they are less likely to skip school.

As a trained teacher, I believe truancy is a serious threat to our educational system. It leads to poor academic performance, increased crime, and wasted potential. The Edo State government's crackdown is a step in the right direction, but collective action is needed. Parents, teachers, and society must work together to ensure that education remains a top priority for every child in Edo State.

*Osehobo, a veteran journalist, is the Assistant Publicity Secretary of the Edo State APC. He writes from Benin City.*