

UBTH posts major gains in 180 days despite strikes, N130m monthly power bill —CMD

BENIN CITY

The Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Prof. Idia Nibokun Ize-Iyamu, has said that within her first 180 days in office, the hospital has raised the bar in patient care, training and institutional excellence.

She stated that each milestone recorded within the period reflects, not just institu-

tional progress, but a steadfast commitment to the people and the many lives touched by the hospital's services.

Speaking at a press briefing in Benin City to mark her first 180 days in office, the CMD explained that the landmark achievements were realised despite significant operational challenges, including debts owed to vendors supplying critical medical consumables, oxygen and other essential items

vital to hospital operations.

She disclosed that the hospital contends with a monthly electricity bill exceeding N130 million, in addition to a wage bill for over 2,000 outsourced personnel. According to her, the financial burden underscores operational strain, infrastructural fatigue and an urgent need for stabilisation across the institution.

Ize-Iyamu further revealed that a nationwide strike by the

National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) and the Joint Health Workers Union (JOHE-SU), which began in November 2025, reduced the hospital's operational capacity for four months.

As a result, the hospital was fully functional for only two out of the six months under review.

Despite the daunting challenges, she maintained that measurable and meaningful progress was achieved.

"The progress was steered by

the determination, discipline and strategic focus of management, supported by the resilience and dedication of our staff, who refused to allow temporary constraints to define our trajectory," she said.

Highlighting key achievements, the CMD listed strides in clinical excellence and universal health coverage, capacity building, infrastructure revitalisation, community engagement, revenue generation and partnerships.

She also disclosed that over 400 staff were employed to strengthen the hospital's human resource capacity.

According to her, UBTH not only secured external support, but also continued to provide life-saving interventions through free and subsidised programmes, including cancer care, emergency caesarean sections and dialysis support under the Federal Government's Renewed Hope Agenda for health.

The Nigerian Observer

...that the people may know

Pension funds equity investment hits N3.96trn in 5 yrs —PenOp

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ABUJA/LAGOS

Disu takes over from Egbetokun as IGP

Expert seeks tech-driven police reforms

COMPTROLLER-GENERAL VISITS NYSC:

Director-General of NYSC, Brig.-Gen. Olakunle Nafiu (L), presenting a souvenir to the Comptroller-General of Nigeria Customs Service, Bashir Adewale-Adeniyi, during the visit of Comptroller-General to NYSC Headquarters in Abuja on Tuesday.

S'East Mondays rebound as sit-at-home order fizzles out

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Expert seeks tech-driven police reforms

ABUJA/LAGOS

Nigeria's policing architecture entered a new phase on Tuesday as Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, resigned from office, with Olatunji Disu stepping in as the new head of the Nigeria Police Force amid calls for sweeping reforms.

Egbetokun, whose tenure had been extended in 2025 by Pres-

ident Bola Tinubu, tendered his resignation letter on Tuesday, citing personal family reasons.

Confirming the development, presidential spokesperson, Bayo Onanuga, said the decision was voluntary and clarified that Egbetokun was not sacked.

Appointed as the 22nd Inspector-General of Police on June 19, 2023, Egbetokun's appointment was later confirmed by the Nigeria Police Council

on October 31, 2023.

Although he was due for retirement on September 4, 2024, upon attaining the mandatory retirement age of 60, the National Assembly amended the Police Act, allowing him to serve a full four-year term unless removed by the President.

His departure comes at a time the country continues to grapple with banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime, communal

clashes and the delicate task of post-conflict stabilisation in troubled regions.

Attention has now shifted to Disu, whose appointment has drawn cautious optimism from security stakeholders.

A Lagos-based security expert and Managing Director of Absolute Security and Advance Protocol Ltd, Mr Seyi Babaeko, described the appointment as a strategic and timely move capa-

ble of modernising and reforming the Nigeria Police Force.

According to him, Disu is widely regarded as a seasoned officer with extensive operational experience, strong administrative capacity and exposure to reform-oriented policing.

"His emergence at this critical time in Nigeria's security landscape signals a potential shift toward strengthening internal security through professionalism, intelligence and accountability," Babaeko said.

He noted that Nigeria's complex security challenges require proactive leadership that is both technologically driven and people-centred.

Babaeko urged the new IGP to prioritise immediate operational audits, strategic redeployment of tactical units and intelligence-led crime mapping to boost efficiency and restore public confidence.

He also called for a renewed emphasis on modern polic-

ing — including digital crime tracking, expanded forensic and cybercrime capabilities, upgraded surveillance systems and stronger inter-agency collaboration.

Beyond operational reforms, the expert stressed the need to rebuild trust between the police and the public through community engagement, transparent complaint mechanisms and improved officer conduct.

Professionalism and discipline, he added, must be reinforced through ethical policing, zero tolerance for corruption and enhanced welfare packages covering training, insurance, housing schemes, motivation and improved equipment.

He further argued that post-conflict security efforts should focus on intelligence gathering, civil cooperation and conflict-sensitive strate-

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COMPTROLLER-GENERAL VISITS NYSC: Director-General of NYSC, Brig.-Gen. Olakunle Nafiu (L), presenting a souvenir to the Comptroller-General of Nigeria Customs Service, Bashir Adewale-Adeniyi, during the visit of Comptroller-General to NYSC Headquarters in Abuja on Tuesday.

Nat'l convention: APC extends dates for purchase, submission of forms

ABUJA

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has extended the dates for the purchase and submission of forms for its zonal congresses and national convention.

Mtr Felix Morka, the party's National Publicity Secretary announced this in a statement on Tuesday in Abuja, saying

purchase and submission of forms would now hold from March 12 to 23, 2026.

He added that the adjustment in dates does not affect the previously scheduled dates for the conduct of the Zonal Congress and the National Convention.

Morka said the party's Zonal Congress would hold on March 25

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IUO pushes nat'l AI computing cluster, unveils ethical framework for digital future

EDWARD OSEGHE

OKADA

The Vice-Chancellor, Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), Prof. Lawrence Ezemonye, has

called for the immediate establishment of a National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Computing Cluster to accelerate Nigeria's research, innovation and digital competitiveness.

Delivering a keynote ad-

dress at the AI Summit 2026 held at the university's Library Conference Hall, Prof. Ezemonye proposed a centralised high-performance computing facility that would enable universities across the country to connect remotely and access the computational power required to train indig-

enous AI models.

He explained that such a shared national infrastructure would eliminate the heavy capital burden of individual institutions building and maintaining separate campus server farms, while positioning Nigeria to compete globally in AI research and development.

According to him, the initiative should be funded through a dedicated intervention by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund

(TETFund) and strengthened through strategic partnerships with private-sector technology firms.

"We must incentivise the private sector. Tech giants extracting data from our digital space must be compelled, through policy, to reinvest in our physical layer," he said.

The Vice-Chancellor further canvassed a "Compute-for-Access" policy framework, insisting that global technology firms seek-

ing access to Nigeria's vast market should be required to host part of their computing infrastructure within the country and operate under Nigerian jurisdiction.

In his goodwill message on the summit theme, "AI Dynamics and Ethical Considerations in Higher Education: The Global Shift and the African Reality," Special Guest of Honour and AI strategist, Iroche Sunny, stressed that every global technological shift carries local consequences.

Delta cracks down on School Inspectors demanding illegal enrolment fees

AJUWA VICTOR

ASABA

Delta State Commissioner for Primary Education, Rose Ezewu, has warned Chief Inspectors of Education, urging them to stop imposing unauthorised fees on parents and to strictly adhere to official enrolment guidelines.

Speaking at a meeting in her Asaba office, Mrs Ezewu expressed concern over reports that some inspectors were allegedly demanding ₦10,000 from parents of children under 10, falsely claiming the directive came from her office.

She categorically denied issuing any such instructions.

"Any collection of money in my name, whether in public or private schools, is without my

consent and cannot be justified," the commissioner emphasised.

She stressed that officials are tasked with implementing policy, not creating additional charges.

Mrs Ezewu also cautioned against pressuring parents with claims of enrolment deadlines, noting that no closure has been announced and urging officials to focus on service rather than panic.

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Mrs Okhaku Iniovosa, said the meeting's outcomes would be compiled into a report and assured that any officer found culpable would face appropriate civil service sanctions.

The session, attended by education officials and media representatives, underscores the ministry's commitment to transparency and fairness in school enrolments, giving parents reassurance that the process remains free from abuse.



RUSSIAN ENVOYS VISIT FMIST:

L-R: Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology (FMIST), Mr Philip Ndiomu-Ebiogeh; Russian Trade Commissioner to Nigeria, Mr Max Petrov; Minister FMIST, Dr Kingsley Udeh and Personal Assistant to the Russian Trade Commissioner, Ms Daria Malik, during the visit of the Russian Envoy to accelerate Nigeria's innovation-driven economy, at the Minister's Office in Abuja recently.

Okowa lauds Oborevwo for expanding Delta's higher education access

AJUWA VICTOR

AGBOR

Former Delta State Governor, Senator Ifeanyi Okowa, has lauded Governor Sheriff Oborevwo for sustaining and broadening access to higher education in the state, calling the support for state-owned universities "a strategic investment in the future of Delta youths."

Okowa spoke at the maiden convocation ceremony of the University of Delta (UNIDEL), Agbor, highlighting the graduation of over 1,600 students as a landmark achievement for the institution.

He noted that the universities established in 2021 continue to flourish under Oborevwo's leadership thanks to consistent engagement, funding, and responsive governance.

"The growth of these universities shows a commitment to human capital development and

policy continuity," Okowa said.

He praised UNIDEL's peaceful learning environment and its positive impact on host communities, citing the absence of student unrest over the past five years.

The ceremony also recognised 17 distinguished Nigerians with awards for their contributions to the university's establishment and growth.

Recipients included Governor Oborevwo, Delta State House Speaker, Hon. Emomotimi Guwor, Zenith Bank Chairman Jim Ovia, and NDDC Chairman Chiedu Ebie.

Highlighting academic excellence, 30 graduates earned First Class degrees, reflecting the strength of UNIDEL's teaching, research, and mentorship structures.

The convocation marked both a celebration of academic achievement and the university's rising profile in Nigeria's higher education landscape.

FONWIP disburses 7th batch of interest-free loans to Edo Women

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Chief Barr. Bisi Idaomi, has commended the Forum of Nigeria Women in Politics (FONWIP) for sustaining its economic empowerment drive through interest-free revolving loans for women in the state.

The Commissioner, represented by a Director in the ministry, Mrs Betty Idialu, gave the commendation during the presentation of the seventh batch of loans to beneficiaries in Benin City.

She described FONWIP's intervention as consistent and

compassionate, noting that the revolving loan scheme has significantly uplifted women economically and strengthened household incomes.

"These seven seasons of empowering women through interest-free revolving loans are about giving women the capacity to stand tall and contribute meaningfully to society," she said, urging beneficiaries to nurture the financial support as a seed for sustainable growth.

In her keynote address, Prof. Mrs Margaret Abikwi advised beneficiaries to utilise the funds judiciously and maintain strict financial discipline, stressing that women's empowerment is

about transforming lives rather than dispensing charity.

President and Co-founder of FONWIP, Deaconess Florence Gbinigie congratulated beneficiaries for successfully scaling through the screening process and urged them to intensify efforts in their businesses for improved productivity and profitability.

She cautioned that the loans were strictly for business purposes.

"This money is not free and is not meant for buying clothes or living an extravagant lifestyle. Defaulters will be held liable and prosecuted alongside their guarantors," she warned.

Gbinigie expressed appreciation to the organisation's part-

ners, Kingdom International Ministries, led by Apostle Christopher, Lakeisha Colander and Veronica Colander of the United States, for their sustained support.

She disclosed that the empowerment initiative has been conducted twice yearly over the past six years, targeting poor women, survivors of domestic violence, victims of trafficking and widows.

In a paper titled, "Qualities of a Good Business Woman to Manage a Successful Enterprise," Barr. F.E. Abbe advised beneficiaries to prioritise prompt repayment to ensure continuity of the revolving scheme, warning that failure to repay could attract legal consequences.

Pension funds equity investment hits N3.96trn in 5 yrs —PenOp

LAGOS

The Pension Fund Operators Association of Nigeria (PenOp) says pension fund investment in domestic equities rose to N3.96 trillion as of December 2025.

PenOp in a statement on Tuesday, said this reflected sustained growth and increasing confidence in the capital market.

According to the association, equity investments increased from N915.31 billion in December 2021 and N908.02 billion in December 2022 to N1.57 trillion in December 2023.

PenOp noted that the figure rose further to N2.24 trillion in December 2024 before climbing significantly to N3.96 trillion in 2025.

The association noted that the consistent growth provided strong momentum for the equities market and underscored the role of pension funds in deepening market liquidity.

PenOp said that, with expanded equity allocation limits, pension funds were expected to further increase their participation in the market.

It noted that higher allocations would enhance long-term

capital formation and support the overall development of Nigeria's capital market.

Following the release of the Revised Regulation on Investment of Pension Fund Assets in September 2025, implementation challenges emerged.

This was particularly regarding the new limits for ordinary shares, Federal Government bonds and alternative assets.

The report indicated that a shortage of qualifying alternative investment instruments constrained Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) from fully deploying available funds.

This results in underutilised allocations and excess liquidity in the system.

To address the situation, the National Pension Commission (PenCom) reviewed Section 9 of the regulation, increasing equity investment limits across key Retirement Savings Account (RSA) funds.

Under the revised framework, RSA Fund I was increased from 30 percent to 35 percent; RSA Fund II from 25 percent to 33 percent; RSA Fund III from 10 percent to 15 percent.

RSA Fund VI (Active) rose from 25 percent to 33 percent.

Disu takes over from Egbetokun...

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gies rather than heavy-handed enforcement.

According to Babaeko, Disu's tenure offers a rare opportunity to reposition the Nigeria Police Force as a modern, technology-driven and citizen-focused institution capable of addressing 21st-century security demands.

"If he combines operation-

al decisiveness with structural reforms and accountability, his leadership could mark a transformative phase in Nigeria's internal security framework," he said.

With the baton now passed, Nigerians will be watching closely to see whether the new police chief can translate reform expectations into tangible security gains across the federation.

Forest drug sweep: NDLEA razes cannabis farms, nabs 7 in Edo

BENIN CITY

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Edo Command, has destroyed cannabis farms and seized nearly two tonnes of illicit drugs in co-ordinated raids across forest communities in the state.

The Commander of the NDLEA in Edo, Dr Mitchell Ofoyeju, disclosed this on Tuesday in Benin while brief-

ing journalists on the command's recent operations.

Ofoyeju said operatives, acting on credible intelligence, uncovered three cannabis farms in Etiosa Forest, Owan West Local Government Area, measuring 0.145, 0.203 and 0.158 hectares.

According to him, a total of 1,956.92kg of cannabis was intercepted during the operations, while 0.508 hectares of cultivated farmland with an estimated yield of 1,266.85kg was

destroyed.

The operatives also recovered 23kg of processed cannabis at the site.

Two suspects, a 68-year-old woman, Evelyn Ogenewu, and a 43-year-old man, Friday Iruoje were arrested at the location. Eight kilogrammes of cannabis were allegedly recovered from Iruoje and 15kg from Ogenewu.

"The operation demonstrates our ongoing commitment to eradicating illegal cannabis cultivation and trafficking across the state. We will continue to act on credible intelligence and

take swift action against those involved in drug-related activities," Ofoyeju said.

In a related raid, operatives seized 563.5kg of skunk cannabis at a Yoruba Camp in Olumoye Forest, Ovia North East Local Government Area, arresting five suspects: Murtala Mohammed, 37; Abdulkadir Idris, 29; Ufoma Edefe, 40; Anthony Aghati, 46; and Emmanuel Owalu, 39.

In a separate operation at Otuo Forest in Owan East Local Government Area, officers discovered eight bags and 60 compressed blocks of skunk

cannabis concealed in a cocoa plantation, weighing 103.57kg. No arrests were made at that site, but investigations are ongoing.

The commander urged res-

idents to remain vigilant and support enforcement efforts, assuring that all suspects would be prosecuted in line with the NDLEA Act.

Ministry rallies boys as allies in fight against GBV

ABUJA

The Federal Ministry of Youth Development has intensified advocacy to engage boys and young men as champions in the fight against Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

Speaking at an advocacy workshop in Abuja, the Minister of Youth Development, Ayodele Olawande, represented by Mr Emmanuel Essien, said ending GBV requires a collective societal effort involving families, schools, religious leaders, the media and government institutions.

He said the ministry was committed to promoting youth

inclusion, civic responsibility and social cohesion through policies and community initiatives that encourage mutual respect, gender equity and non-violence.

Olawande stressed the need to guide boys towards positive models of masculinity, noting that empowering young people as agents of change would help reshape societal values for generations.

Stakeholders at the workshop called for stronger enforcement of existing laws, sustained public enlightenment and partnerships to dismantle harmful norms and foster safer communities.

Osun: FIDA demands strict prosecution of rape cases under VAPP Law

OSOGBO

The International Federation of Female Lawyers (FIDA) in Osun has called on defenders of rape victims to ensure that suspects are prosecuted under the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Law.

The state coordinator of FIDA, Mrs Damilola Olabiya, made the call during the quarterly meeting of the Adolescent and Young People's Health and Development Technical Working Group on Tuesday in Osogbo.

She stressed the need for swift and decisive action in rape cases.

Olabiya charged human rights advocates to insist that the police and other law enforcement agencies file rape charges under the VAPP Law rather than the Criminal Procedure Law.

According to her, the Criminal Procedure Law downplays rape by limiting it to vaginal penetration, leaving several

grey areas unaddressed.

"The Criminal Procedure Law limits rape to vaginal penetration."

"The VAPP Law recognises penetration through the vagina, anus, or mouth and also covers the rape of boys," she said.

Olabiya added that acts such as spiking a person's drink to induce sex are also recognised as rape under the VAPP Law.

The activist noted that the VAPP Law is a federal legislation adopted by many states, including Osun in 2021, and can be invoked to ensure justice for victims.

The Adolescents Health Desk Officer at the Primary Healthcare Board, Mrs Roseline Akinlabi, said that the VAPP Law protects everyone, not just women and children.

Akinlabi said that stakeholders had been sensitised to advocate for inclusive programmes that cater to adolescents, including the boy-child, to curb cases of rape and abuse in communities.



LP'S LEADERSHIP MEETING:

L-R: Members of Labour Party (LP) House of Representatives Caucus, Ibe Okwara; Alozie Munachim; Caucus Leader, Ginger Onwusibe; National Chairman of LP, Sen. Nenadi Usman, other members, Obinna Aguocha; Amaobi Ogah and Deputy National Chairman of LP, Prof. Theophilus Ndubuaku, during LP's leadership meeting with the House of Representatives Caucus, at the party National Secretariat in Abuja recently.

S'East Mondays rebound as sit-at-home order fizzles out

UMUAHIA

Economic, commercial and official activities in major cities across Abia and Imo States are gradually rebounding following the cancellation of the Monday sit-at-home order.

The proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) introduced the directive across the South-East in August 2021 to protest the arrest and detention of its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. The enforcement of the order over the years was marked by sporadic violence and widespread economic disruption.

Relief came on Sunday,

February 8, when IPOB spokesman, Emma Powerful, announced the "total cancellation" of the directive, quoting the group's leader.

A survey across markets, motor parks, schools, banks and government offices in Owerri, Umuahia and Aba showed a cautious but steady return to normalcy.

In Owerri, banks reopened and customers were seen using ATMs, although some institutions still operate delayed resumption hours as a precaution. Transport operators reported improved passenger turnout on Monday compared to previous weeks, with interstate travel gradually picking up.

Drivers and transport managers, who lamented heavy losses

during the years of compliance, expressed hope that business would steadily improve. However, traders at Relief and Eke Onunwa markets in Owerri said patronage remained low, attributing it partly to lingering fear and altered shopping habits.

In Umuahia, activity was observed at Ohiya Mechanic Village and parts of Ubani Modern Market, though many shops remained shut. Traders described the cancellation as encouraging but noted that customers from neighbouring communities were yet to fully regain confidence.

In Aba, the commercial hub of Abia, the situation was mixed. While smaller neighbourhood markets opened and recorded brisk activity, major

markets such as Ariaria International Market witnessed only skeletal operations. Most banks, schools and some local government offices remained closed as of Monday morning, reflecting persistent apprehension.

Stakeholders, including business leaders and civil servants, welcomed the cancellation, describing it as a positive step towards restoring investor confidence and reversing years of economic losses.

They, however, called for improved security, sustained public sensitization and coordinated efforts by South-East governors to guarantee safety and rebuild trust, stressing that lasting normalcy would depend on consistent peace and credible communication.

Kaduna pupils get hands-on farm training in skills drive

KADUNA

The Kaduna State Universal Basic Education Board (KADSUBEB) has intensified efforts to equip pupils with practical agricultural skills through a statewide excursion programme.

Under the Agricultural Education Training Programme, organised in collaboration

with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), pupils were taken to the College of Agriculture and Animal Science, Mando, for hands-on learning.

The children toured poultry, hatchery, rabbitry, fishery, dairy, piggery and tractor units, where experts exposed them to modern farming techniques, animal husbandry and

the effective use of agricultural equipment.

Team Lead of the excursion, Mr Ibrahim Sani, said the initiative was designed to complement classroom teaching with real-life agricultural experience and promote self-reliance among pupils.

Six local government areas are participating in the programme, with selected pupils

drawn from each school to ensure effective interaction.

Participants described the experience as inspiring, expressing interest in fish farming and poultry management as potential future ventures.

Officials urged the pupils to share the knowledge gained with classmates and family members to broaden the programme's impact.

Abia achieves 96% measles-rubella vaccination coverage

UMUAHIA

The Abia State Government has said it achieved 96 per cent coverage in the just-concluded Measles-Rubella vaccination campaign, surpassing the 95 per cent benchmark required to attain herd immunity against infectious diseases statewide.

The Commissioner for Information, Okey Kanu, disclosed this while briefing journalists on the outcome of the State Executive Council meeting, in Umuahia.

Kanu said the campaign,

which commenced on Feb. 3, targeted children aged nine months to 14 years in schools, health facilities and other public institutions across the state.

He noted that the exercise surpassed the 95 per cent herd immunity threshold, recording 96 per cent coverage of the target population, and described the outcome as a significant public health success.

Kanu said more than 8,000 vaccination teams were deployed across the state to ensure

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NEWS

NSCDC marks ICDO Day with free medical outreach in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Edo Command, on Tuesday commenced activities for the 2026 International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO) Day with a free medical outreach for residents.

The outreach, preceded by a public awareness rally in Benin City, drew residents and stakeholders into the week-long celebration.

The 2026 theme is "Environmental Risk Management for a Stable and Sustainable Future."

State Commandant, Saidi Akintayo, said the command prioritised humanitarian service, noting that the medical exercise reflected its commitment to community wellbeing alongside security responsibilities.

"Our responsibility goes beyond protecting critical national assets and infrastructure.

"We are equally committed to supporting the wellbeing of the communities we serve," he said.

Akintayo said the theme underscored the need for stronger community awareness on

environmental protection and risk reduction to ensure sustainable development.

He described the International Civil Defence Organisation as a global body dedicated to strengthening civil protection and emergency preparedness among member nations, including Nigeria.

According to him, March 1 is set aside to celebrate civil defence organisations worldwide, while the body traces its origins to 1931, marking the foundation of international civil defence cooperation.

The commandant commended the Commandant-General, Ahmed Audi, for what he termed visionary leadership and sustained support in repositioning the corps.

He reaffirmed the corps' commitment to protecting lives and property, enhancing community collaboration and promoting environmental responsibility across Edo ahead of the March 1 grand finale.

The outreach recorded a large turnout, with medical professionals from a military hospital and volunteer opticians providing consultations and basic health services to residents.

Bayelsa Assembly clears Akpe to replace late Bayelsa deputy governor

YENAGOA

The Bayelsa House of Assembly on Tuesday approved the nomination of Dr Peter Akpe as Deputy

Governor of Bayelsa to replace the late Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo.

The late deputy governor, Ewhrudjakpo, died on Dec. 11 2025 and had since be buried.

According Mr Daniel Alabrah, Chief Press Secretary to the Bayelsa governor who confirmed the development, the approval followed Gov. Douye Diri's nomination of

Akpe, as the state new deputy governor.

Akpe, a former member of Bayelsa House of Assembly was until the nomination, the Chief of Staff to Gov Diri.



CCD VISITS OYO STATE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE:

L-R: Senior State Counsel, Oyo State Ministry of Justice, Mr Fadiga Samuel; Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice Oyo State, Mrs Oluwabunmi Are; Senior programme Officer, Center for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), Mrs Florence Attah, during a visit to Oyo State Ministry of Justice by CCD in Ibadan Oyo State on Tuesday.

Centre seeks adequate legal protection for physically challenged

IBADAN

An NGO, the Centre for Citizens With Disabilities (CCD) has urged the Oyo State Ministry of Justice to provide adequate legal protection for physically challenged people in the state.

The Programme Officer, CCD, Lagos, Ms Christiana Njoku, made the appeal on Tuesday in Ibadan during the team's advocacy visit to the Oyo State Ministry of Justice.

Njoku said that civic space rights was the foundation of inclusive governance, and that without it, the physically challenged in the society would remain voiceless and vulnerable.

"By creating a legal safety net for civic actors with disabilities, the ministry will stand as a true protector of rights and justice in the state.

"We look forward to your positive response and collaboration towards expanding civic space rights for physically challenged persons, and rebuilding a more inclusive justice system in the state, she said.

Njoku urged the ministry to create a dedicated legal support system within the ministry to handle civic rights cases of physically challenged persons in civic activism

She further urged the ministry to provide free and fast legal representation when physically challenged persons were harassed, attacked or unlawfully detained.

The programme officer

called for a formal partnership with the Office of the Public Defender in order to prioritise cases involving physically challenged persons.

"There is need to organise training for justice officials on civic rights and disability inclusion, this will help to drive justice sector policies that protect civic rights of physically challenged people.

"Civic actors with physical challenges face harassments and intimidation, institutional neglect, communication barriers, among others in a daily basis," she said.

Mrs Oluwabunmi Are, the Permanent Secretary, Oyo State Ministry of Justice, said that the state government was committed to protecting the rights and privileges of physically challenged people.

"We have many of them as desk officers in our offices, the government is already supporting them, and they have a voice in the governance of the state.

"However, we shall look at your requests to see areas we can improve on, we shall endeavour to incorporate them," she said.

Speaking on behalf of the physically challenged, Mr Musa Akinsawe, thanked the state government for the 'sense of belonging' accorded them in the scheme of things.

"We are however asking for more support and inclusion in governance and other critical areas," he said.

C'River magistrates suspend strike, give September deadline

CALABAR

Magistrates in Cross River have suspended their strike following the intervention of the Chief Judge, Justice Akon Ikpe.

Mr Godwin Onah, the Chairman, Magistrates Association of Nigeria (MAN), Cross River chapter, disclosed this in an inter-

view with newsmen in Calabar.

Recall that magistrates in Cross River resumed strike on Feb. 8 over alleged welfare issues and the state government's non-fulfilment of promises made in 2023.

Onah said that the strike was only suspended, and not called off, saying, "we took the decision after a long meeting with

the chief judge"

"We have received assurances through the chief judge. We are giving between now and September to address our demands," he said.

Onah said that top on the list of the magistrates' demand is the provision of official vehicles and accommodations for magistrates in the state.

"It will be impracticable to build houses for magistrates in

every local government area, so, we propose payment of housing allowances as an interim measure," he said.

He asserted that the association was equally pressing for the payment of wardrobe allowance.

Onah noted that although no formal Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the government, it is hoped that the intervention of the chief judge would yield positive results.

Anambra Govt. seals 200 shops at Bridgehead Market over sit-at-home

ONITSHA

No fewer than 200 shops at the Bridge Head Market in Onitsha, have been sealed by the Onitsha South Local Government Council.

The shops were sealed for their owners' failing to comply with the state government's directive to discontinue the Monday sit-at-home culture.

Speaking to journalists, on Tuesday, the Onitsha South Local Government Chairman, Mr Emeka Orji, described the

traders' actions as unfortunate and counterproductive.

Orji who led the monitoring exercise on Monday said the affected shops were located across six market lines, and were found under lock and key during a compliance monitoring exercise.

According to him, there are strong indications that the allocations of the affected shops may be revoked and reassigned to other traders, pending the outcome of a full investigation by the authorities.

"It is sad and unfortunate that while the state government is making concerted efforts to revive economic activities in the state, some individuals are bent on sabotaging those efforts.

"Other markets and shops in Onitsha were open for businesses, but traders at the Bridge Head Market chose to shut down their operations.

"This amounts to economic sabotage against the state, and we will no longer tolerate such actions as the affected shops will remain sealed until next

Monday," he said.

The LG boss stressed that if the affected traders fail to comply by reopening for business on Monday, the closure could be extended indefinitely.

On his part, the Secretary of the Council, Mr Paul Onuachalla, said that the traders' actions constituted serious offences, including economic sabotage and related crimes under the law.

Onuachalla further disclosed that the shop allocations of the affected traders may be revoked in line with existing laws.

Abia achieves 96% measles-rubella vaccination...

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smooth implementation, adding that officials were still collating detailed data from the exercise.

He said the achievement underscored the commitment of the current administration to improving healthcare delivery

and making quality medical services affordable and accessible to residents across the state.

Kanu further announced that the governor approved a collaboration between the State Ministry of Health and Quantus Medical Foundation, a United States-based health-

care consultancy, to strengthen service delivery standards.

He said the partnership would focus on training health workers to adopt global best practices, improve patient experience and enhance overall efficiency in public health facilities statewide.

Kanu also disclosed that the

ministry would functionalise 53 fully equipped Primary Health Centres, raising the number of operational centres in the state to about 117 upon completion.

He added that the Abia State Digital Health Pilot Project had commenced in selected hospitals and primary health centres to improve data management and healthcare service delivery.

Campaign billboard: Opposition kicks as Enugu govt imposes N150m advert rate

ENUGU

The opposition political parties in Enugu State have condemned the N150 million advertising fee imposed by the state government for campaign billboards

in the state.

Speaking to newsmen on Tuesday in Enugu, the parties described the fee as not only outrageous but undemocratic.

The state Chairperson of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Mrs Stella Chukwuma

said the policy was a way to shut out the opposition.

"When you say that somebody should pay as much as N150 million to place campaign on a billboard, then one begins to wonder what the government aims to achieve.

"We are not comfortable with it; it is not only a way of stopping the other parties but it's also a way

of stopping individuals that want to contest elections," she said.

According to her, there are youths and people with disabilities who desired to contest election, which is their rights and obligations as citizens.

"But when you place this kind of advert rates for campaigns, it's just a way of telling them that, your ambition is

good but we are not giving you a chance. That is not good; it is unfair and undemocratic.

She said that the ADC would mobilise against the policy and challenge it in line with the law.

"I don't know about other opposition parties but for us we are going to fight it; we are going to contest it; we are going to resist it.

"We will not sit by and allow them block us; this is political robbery," she said.

Similarly, Chief John Nwobodo, Esq, a chieftain of the Accord Party and a constitutional lawyer said the imposition of N150 million advertis-

ing fee for political campaigns was undemocratic.

"It is anachronistic, undemocratic and it is targeted at the opposition parties," he said.

Nwobodo, who is also a human rights activist, explained that political campaigns were not part of advertising because it does not have commercial utility.

"Campaigns don't have economic values; so, the government needs to reconsider its stand.

"Also, the Enugu State Structures and Signage Agency (ESSA), does not have the powers to impose advertising fees for political party campaigns," he said.



2026 ENUGU TECHNOLOGY FESTIVAL:

L-R: Executive Vice Chairman, Nigeria Communications Commission, Dr Aminu Maida; Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State; Sweden Ambassador to Nigeria, Amb. Anna Westerholm and Commissioner for Innovation, Science and Technology, Enugu State, Dr Lawrence Ezech, during the 2026 Enugu Technology Festival in Enugu on Tuesday.

2025 ASUU agreement designed to strengthen university autonomy, stabilise system —FG

ABUJA

The Federal Government says the 2025 agreement signed with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is specifically designed to strengthen autonomy safeguards and ensure long-term stability in Nigeria's tertiary education sector.

The Director-General, Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR), Mr Dasuki Arabi, made the disclosure during a working visit to the Yakubu Gowon University (formerly University of Abuja) in Gwagwalada, Abuja, on Tuesday.

This is contained in a statement issued by Mr Aliyu Umar,

Head, Strategic Communication, BPSR, in Abuja on Tuesday.

Arabi noted that the agreement, which is set to take effect from January 2026, introduces a 40 per cent pay rise, enhanced research funding, and improved severance entitlements for academic staff.

He said that the 2025 FGN-ASUU agreement seeks to strengthen autonomy safeguards, adding that successive administrations have remained committed to addressing structural issues such as funding gaps and governance concerns.

According to him, the government has consistently increased university funding over the years, bolstered by

infrastructural interventions from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and other federal initiatives.

On the issue of educational access, the Director-General highlighted the Student Loan Scheme as a pivotal intervention to remove financial barriers for indigent students.

"The implementation of the Students' Loan Scheme is a significant step towards expanding access to higher education.

"It is structured to ensure that no willing and qualified student is left behind while promoting sustainability in the sector," he said.

Arabi, however, maintained that university autonomy must

coexist with accountability.

He explained that while institutions should manage academic and administrative duties independently to foster innovation, they must operate within defined governance frameworks.

He further noted that the government-approved payroll system was implemented to enhance transparency and verify personnel records across federal institutions.

The BPSR boss added that recent salary adjustments for senior lecturers and professors were reflections of the government's broader reform agenda aimed at repositioning the education sector for national development.

AfCTA is Africa's strategic engine for transformational economic growth —Kalu

ABUJA

Rep. Benjamin Kalu, Deputy Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, and ECOWAS Parliamentarian, says the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is the strategic engine that will catapult Africa's economic development.

He stated this in his contribution at the ECOWAS Parliament's First 2026 Extraordinary Session and Seminar in Abuja.

The seminar is themed: "Deepening Regional Integration through the AfCFTA: Opportunities and Challenges for Expanding Intra-Community Trade."

The regional MP canvassed intra-African and intra-West African trade, stressing that the continent must strive to trade with itself to survive under the AfCFTA dispensation.

He said that while intra-African trade currently stands at 220.3 billion dollars (16 per cent rise), intra-ECOWAS

trade remains at just 11.5 per cent of the region's total trade.

This, he said, was in spite of the ECOWAS sub-region being the second largest contributor to intra-African trade total, and having a 3.4 trillion dollars market potential.

"In today's geopolitical climate, AfCFTA is no longer just a trade agreement; it has become the strategic engine that must power Africa's industrial resilience and survival.

"In a world of fragmenting global supply chains, Africa must trade with itself to thrive.

"We are talking about a 3.4 trillion dollars market potential, yet we still struggle to move a truck from Lagos to Abidjan," Kalu said.

The lawmaker solicited bridging the gap between high-level aspirations and regional reality, calling for a transition from the diplomacy of "paper integration" to the tangible impact of "functional integration."

NCDC flays slow public health funding, calls for stronger civil society support

ABUJA

Dr Jide Idris, Director, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), has raised concerns over slow progress in public health funding.

Idris spoke on Tuesday during a round table meeting with health security-focused civil society organisations (CSOs) and NCDC officials in Abuja.

He noted that budget adjustments remained insufficient to meet the urgent needs of communities across the country, stressing that while some recent budget proposals have been recognised, funding gaps persisted.

He also noted that modern communication strategies were needed alongside budget allocations to ensure resources were translated into awareness campaigns and interventions that reached Nigerians, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

He expressed hope that the legislative review of the health

budget would reflect these urgent priorities

Also speaking, Prof. Emmanuel Alhassan, Nigeria Coordinator for Prevent Epidemics/Immunisation Programmes at GHAI, said, since 2018, the organisation had collaborated with other organisations.

He said these organisations include Nigeria Health Watch, Africa Health Budget Network (AHBN), Vaccine Network for Disease Control, and the Dr Ameyo Stella Adadevoh Health Trust (DRASA).

He said that partnership with these organisations had helped push for budget increases that directly strengthened public health programmes.

Alhassan noted that between 2020 and 2023, NCDC's funding increased by more than 200 per cent due to sustained advocacy efforts, including boosting allocations for Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), which previously received very little.

Experts advise SEC liquidity group on investor quality, education

LAGOS

Capital market stakeholders have commended the inauguration of a capital market liquidity working group by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), urging a focus on investor quality, market depth and risk management.

Recall that on Feb. 20, SEC inaugurated a Capital Market Working Group on market liquidity with a mandate to attract up to 20 million new investors into Nigeria's capital market using technology-driven solutions.

Speaking with news, in Lagos on Tuesday, Mr David Adonri, Vice President of Highcap Securities, advised the group to prioritise investor quality and education in its work.

Adonri said that investor participation remained critical to mobilising capital for the productive economy.

He noted that a safe, liquid and profitable capital market would boost investor confidence and attract diverse categories of investors.

He, however, emphasised that the value of transactions was more important than the

number of participants.

"The capital market is about quality and not quantity. It is a mechanism for pooling and pricing risks and requires proper understanding," he said.

Adonri identified two key components of liquidity as cash liquidity and stock liquidity.

He warned that an imbalance where cash liquidity exceeds stock liquidity, could lead to market overvaluation with adverse consequences.

He also noted that technological advancements had significantly improved transaction volumes and value in Nigeria's

capital market, while also enhancing global investor access.

According to him, the market is currently driven by robust technologies and payment systems, but requires continuous improvement.

He emphasised the need to deepen the market through new listings, diverse product offerings and investment credentials to expand its scope.

He cautioned the working group to consider technology-related risks, noting that Nigeria's dependence on imported technology makes the market vulnerable.

NEWS

Fire at MMIA quickly controlled, no injuries —Fire Service

LAGOS

The Lagos State Fire and Rescue Service (LSFRS) has confirmed that a fire outbreak at Terminal 1 of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA) in Ikeja was swiftly brought under control.

The Contoller General of the LSFRS, Mrs Margaret Adeseye, confirmed this in a statement issued on Monday night in Lagos.

Adeseye said the fire was first reported at 3:52 p.m., and fire crews from the Isolo, Ikeja, Bolade, and Alausa Headquar-

ters fire stations arrived at the scene by 4:05 p.m.

"Preliminary investigations revealed that the blaze originated in the IT Server Room on the third floor of a five-storey building within the E-Wing of the Departure Lounge.

"The fire also affected the adjoining Radio Communication Room.

"Firefighters, in a coordinated effort with other federal and state emergency agencies, contained the fire and prevented it from spreading to other parts of the facility," she said.

The LSFRS boss stated that all 12 personnel present in

the Control Tower were safely evacuated, with no injuries or trapped individuals reported.

She credited the success of the operation to the prompt response and multi-agency col-

laboration, which ensured the safety of lives and property. According to her, the situa-

tion is now under control, and a full investigation into the cause of the fire is ongoing



LAST NEGOTIATION WITH GOVT:

Members of Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN), Kaduna Branch monitoring some Courts in the State in continuation of their indefinitely strike, over noncompliance with agreement reached, during the last negotiation with State government in Kaduna on Tuesday.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, **REV. SYLVANUS OKE ALELE** do hereby bring to the attention of the general public that, the fire incident that gutted my building at **No.18 Edosonmwan Avenue, Ogbe-Ibuya Quarters, Benin City, Edo State, on May 11th, 1999**, led to the destruction of the building, valuable properties and vital **Title Documents** to some landed properties Deeds, School Certificates in addition to **C of O No. BDSR 9703 dated March 12th, 1990** in favour of **Mr Terry Isaac C. Ebinum, Reg as 1/1/ 8139** and assignment dated **24th February, 1997** between **Mr Terry I. C. Ebinum** and **Joy Augusta Alele, Reg. 41/41/892** at the **Land Registry, Benin City**.

Concerned authorities, EDOGIS and the general public take note.

Signed: REV. SYLVANUS OKE ALELE.

PUBLIC NOTICE

OLORI MARY & OMOKOJE FOUNDATION

This is to inform the general public that the above-named has applied to the Corporate Affairs Commission for registration under Part F of the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To provide humanitarian assistance to the less privileged, including the poor, widows, orphans, and other vulnerable persons in society.
2. To support access to quality education through scholarships, provision of learning materials, educational sponsorship, and other academic support programmes for indigent children and youths.
3. To promote health and well-being by providing medical outreach, healthcare support, and assistance to individuals and communities in need.
4. To empower individuals economically through skill acquisition, vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and livelihood support programmes aimed at reducing poverty.
5. To carry out charitable relief programmes, including the distribution of food items, clothing, shelter support, and other relief materials to disadvantaged persons.
6. To promote community development through projects and initiatives that enhance social welfare, improve living conditions, and foster sustainable

development.

7. To collaborate with government agencies, private organizations, and international bodies in furtherance of the Foundation's humanitarian and developmental objectives, provided such collaborations align with the non-profit nature of the Foundation.
8. To encourage volunteerism and social responsibility by mobilizing individuals and groups to participate in charitable activities and community service.
9. To undertake any lawful activities that are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objectives in accordance with the laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

TRUSTEES

Ayoola Olufemi Omokojé — (Chairman)
Omokojé Mary — (Secretary)

Any objection to this registration should be forwarded to the Registrar General, Corporate Affairs Commission Plot 420, Tigris Crescent, off Aguiyi Ironsi Street, Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria. within 28 days of this publication.

SIGNED: CHAIRMAN

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS AKHIGBE GLORY**, now wish to be known and called **MRS. ARASOMWAN GLORY**. All former documents remain valid. General public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly Known and addressed as **MISS MERCY OMORODE SAGAY** now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS. MERCY OMORODE OJAKOVO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I formerly known and addressed as **MISS FALAIYE OSAYAMEN TOYIN** now wish to be known called and addressed as **MRS. EZEANYIM OSAYAMEN TOYIN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please note.

CONFIRMATION OF DATE OF BIRTH

I, **AJOBIWE TAIYE**, hereby bring for the information of the general public that my correct date of birth is **28 September 2000** and not **28 May 1998** as appeared in some of my document. All former document remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please note.

CONFIRMATION OF NAME

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

Classified
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for Sale

Plateau people 'll not succumb to renewed violence aimed at fracturing unity —Group

ABUJA

The people of Plateau will not succumb to renewed violence aimed at fracturing the fragile unity of the state.

Mr Chris Ishaku, Spokesman, of the Plateau Vanguard for Democracy (PVD) made this known while addressing a news conference in Abuja, on Tuesday.

He was reacting to the recent killing of 10 persons in Ratatis community, Dorowa Babuje, Barkin Ladi Local Government Area

The victims were reportedly attacked by armed men around 7:27 p.m. on Sunday in a late evening assault that has once again thrown the troubled locality into mourning.

Three other persons sustained serious injuries and were rushed to nearby hospitals for urgent treatment.

Meanwhile details surrounding the circumstances of the attack have remained sketchy.

Ishaku, who described the attack as a calculated attempt to deepen fear and division among Plateau's diverse communities, said that residents of the state would not be broken.

"The people of Plateau will not be broken. No amount of bloodshed, intimidation or calculated violence will destroy our collective resolve to live together in peace.

"Those behind these attacks seek to fracture our unity, but they will fail," he said.

He noted that the state had endured too much pain over the years to allow itself to be pushed into fresh cycles of hatred and reprisals.

"We have endured too much pain to allow ourselves to be pushed into division. Plateau people are stronger than the forces of

hatred. We will not surrender our land to fear," he added.

Calling for calm, Ishaku urged residents not to retreat into ethnic or religious camps in the wake of the killings.

According to him, this is not the time to retreat into ethnic or religious camps. This is the time to stand shoulder to shoulder as one Plateau family.

"The blood being shed does not ask whether one is Christian or Muslim, Berom, Fulani, Anaguta or Irigwe.

"The strength of Plateau has always been in its diversity. We must not allow agents of division to weaponise our differences. Unity is our greatest weapon against those who profit from instability."

The PVD spokesman also called on residents to offer prayers and support for Gov. Caleb Mutfwang and other leaders in the state as they

grapple with the renewed security challenges.

"Leadership demands wisdom, courage and divine guidance in moments like this. Gov. Mutfwang carries a heavy burden in these trying times.

"We must support him with our prayers and constructive engagement as he works with security agencies to restore calm," he said.

The CAN chairman enjoined all high net worth individuals to show some love to the less privileged and orphans, and give them a sense of belonging.

Ogundiya also commended organisations and philanthropists who have been benevolent to the needy in the society.

He urged all Nigerians, especially Christians to continue to be law abiding and pray for peace, unity and progress in the state and Nigeria at large.

SCI supports 1,052 out-of-school children in Adamawa

YOLA

Save the Children International (SCI) has launched the distribution of learning materials to 1,052 vulnerable out-of-school children in nine communities in Yola-South Local Government Area of Adamawa State.

Speaking at the event on Tuesday, SCI Education Officer, Maryam Neol, said the intervention was implemented under the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) project.

She explained that the initiative aimed to accelerate access to

inclusive and quality education while building a resilient and sustainable learning system for children excluded from formal schooling.

According to her, beneficiaries will undergo a nine-month accelerated learning programme before being integrated into formal schools, while some will receive skills acquisition training.

"The programme is structured to equip the children with foundational literacy and numeracy skills required for a smooth transition into conventional classrooms," she said.

Neol listed benefiting com-

munities as Yelwa, Wuro-Cheki, Namtari, Damare, TC Demonstration, Wuro-Jabbe, Walowol Gugu, Wuroyanka and Ngurore Central.

The Commissioner for Education and Human Capital Development, Garba Pella, commended SCI for supporting efforts to reduce the number of out-of-school children in the state.

Represented by Director Alhaji Bappa Mohammed, Pella said the intervention aligned with government's commitment to expanding access to basic education.

He urged parents and com-

munity leaders to support the accelerated learning programme, emphasizing that they should ensure beneficiaries take full advantage of the opportunity to secure a better future.

Also speaking, Mr Stephen Medugu, Coordinator of the Education in Emergency Working Group, lauded SCI's intervention and encouraged parents to prioritise their children's education.

A community leader in Samunaka, Malam Shuaibu Ali, appreciated SCI and its partners but expressed concern over insecurity affecting schools in the area.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged property fraud: FG withdraws charge against Ozekhome

ABUJA

The Attorney-General of the Federation, Lateef Fagbemi SAN, on Tuesday withdrew the charge filed by the Federal Government against Prof. Mike Ozekhome SAN.

He was dragged before Justice Peter Kekemeke of FCT high court, Maitama, Abuja by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) on a three-count charge bor-

dering on property forgery.

In the earlier sitting, the Director, Public Prosecution of the Federation (DPPF), Rotimi Oyedepo SAN, informed the court that the AGF was taking over the case from ICPC and asked for an adjournment to enable the AGF study the case file.

At the resumed sitting, Oyedepo informed the court that he was instructed by the AGF to withdraw the instant charge against the defendant pursuant to Section 108 of the

Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015.

According to the DPPF, the withdrawal was to enable the AGF to strengthen his review of all the cases by all agencies.

Paul Erokoro SAN, counsel for Ozekhome who led over 15 SANs and other retinue of lawyers, had no objection to the application for withdrawal of the charge.

Based on this development, the court subsequently struck out the instant charge.

The case marked: FCT/HC/

CR/010/26 dated and filed Jan. 16, had Ozekhome as sole defendant.

In the three count charges obtained from ICPC, Count one alleges that Ozekhome, sometime in August 2021 or thereabout in London, within the jurisdiction of the court, directly received House 79, Randall Avenue, London NW2 7SX, purportedly given to him by one Mr Shani Tali.

The act he knew constitutes a felony and thereby committed an offence contrary to

Section 13 and punishable under Section 24 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences, Act, 2000.

In count two, Ozekhome was alleged to have, sometime

in August 2021 or thereabout, while being a legal practitioner and Senior Advocate of Nigeria did make a false document with a Nigeria passport: A07535463, bearing the name of Mr Shani.



INSPECTION OF WEAPONS:

The Commissioner of Police, Kaduna State, CP Rabiuh Mohammed (3rd R), with other officers, during the inspection of weapons and other items recovered from suspected criminals at the Command Headquarters in Kaduna.

Court grants FG's request to prosecute suspects linked to Turji in absentia

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja, on Tuesday, granted an application filed by the Federal Government to prosecute five suspects linked to the notorious terrorist kingpin, Bello Turji, in absentia.

Justice Emeka Nwite made the order after David Kaswe, counsel for the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF), moved the oral application to the effect.

Upon resumed hearing in the matter, Kaswe informed

the court that the matter was scheduled for continuation of trial and that in the last adjourned date, a bench warrant was issued by the court for the arrest of the defendants.

He, however, told the court that neither the defendants nor their lawyers were in court today.

According to him, today makes the third time without the defendants appearing in court.

He said though the order for their arrest had been obtained, "we have been unable to trace the defendants" with a view to

bringing them to court.

Kaswe, citing Section 352(4) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, applied that the defendants be tried in absentia.

"We apply that the court activate Section 352(4) of ACJA, 2015 to try the defendants in absentia," he prayed.

Justice Nwite, who granted the application, adjourned the matter until April 13 for continuation of trial.

The judge had, on Jan. 21, issued a bench warrant for the arrest of the five suspects standing trial, following their

refusal to appear in court.

Justice Nwite made the order after Kaswe, an Assistant Director in the Federal Ministry of Justice, moved the oral application to the effect.

The development followed the absence of the defendants in court to stand their trial.

The judge then adjourned the matter until Feb. 24 for continuation of trial.

The defendants are Musa Mohammed Kamarawa, Abubakar Hashimu, a.k.a. Doctor; Bashir Abdullahi; Samuel Chinedu and Lucky Chukwuma were sued as 1st to 5th defendants.

Court sentences teenager to 21 years imprisonment for rape of minor

SOKOTO

Justice Amina Modi-Yabo of a Sokoto State High Court has sentenced 19-year-old Yasir Muhammad to 21 years imprisonment for raping a 4-year-old girl.

Delivering judgment on Tuesday, Modi-Yabo said that the prosecution had successfully proved the case beyond reasonable doubt as required by law.

The judge said that the convict's mere denial had no substance as witnesses corroborated that on May 16, 2025, the victim was going to school when the convict called her, removed her pants and had carnal knowledge of the girl.

She said that the testimonies of the witnesses were so direct and left no doubt as to the commission of the offence.

Modi-Yabo said that the defence team was unable to

disprove the evidences led by the prosecution that included six witnesses and exhibits tendered which proved having carnal knowledge of the girl.

According to her, the Supreme Court has settled issues of sexual intercourse, for the purpose of rape, incomplete penetration, consent and medical requirements on proving rape case.

Modi-Yabo held that the Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that evidence of bleeding, genital injury, or torn tissue observed shortly after rape strongly corroborates proof of sexual intercourse.

"In the present case, the prosecutrix is a minor child living under the care and protection of her parents, so there is no scintilla of evidence, direct or circumstantial, suggesting the existence of any lawful marriage such claim were mere hypothetically raised.

Court remands scrap seller for allegedly stabbing man to death

LAGOS

An Ikeja Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court, on Tuesday, remanded a 35-year-old scrap seller, Ibrahim Musa, at the Kirikiri Correctional Centre for allegedly killing a 25-year-old man, Auwal Ibrahim.

Musa was arraigned by the Lagos State Government on one-count charge of murder.

The court registrar read the charge to the defendant in English language and interpreted it to him in pidgin.

The defendant, however, pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Justice Abiola Soladoye, thereafter, remanded the de-

fendant at the correctional centre, following his not guilty plea.

Soladoye adjourned the case until March 24, for commencement of trial.

The State Counsel, Ms Olu-funke Alebiosu, had told the court that the defendant allegedly committed the offence on Feb. 22, 2021, at about 8.30 p.m. on P.Z. Plc Area, Odogunyan in Ikorodu, Lagos.

The prosecutor alleged that the defendant killed the deceased by stabbing him.

According to the prosecution, the alleged offence contravenes Section 223 of the Criminal Laws of Lagos State, 2015.

EFCC arraigns former NRC MD over alleged \$385,000, N165.5m laundering

IKEJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Tuesday arraigned a former Managing Director of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), Fidat Edetanle, over alleged money laundering involving \$385,000 and N165.5 million.

Edetanle is standing trial before an Ikeja Special Offences Court on a seven-count charge bordering on abuse of office, money laundering and unlawful

enrichment by a public official.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Leading the prosecution, EFCC counsel, Mr Abba Muhammad (SAN), told the court that in one of the counts, the defendant, while serving as managing director of the corporation between 2016 and 2024 in Lagos, abused his office.

He alleged that Edetanle violated the Public Procurement Act, 2007, in the award of contracts to contractors of the corporation, with the intent of

obtaining undue advantage for himself.

The prosecution further stated that between May 29 and Sept. 11, 2024, in Lagos, the defendant engaged in acts of money laundering while still in office.

It alleged that he transferred a sum of \$205,000 from his domiciliary account maintained with Access Bank Plc.

According to the anti-graft agency, the funds were proceeds of unlawful activities and were transferred to the bank

account of one Mr Ehimen Okhiria, domiciled with ABN AMRO Bank, Netherlands.

The commission also alleged in another count that between Oct. 21 and Nov. 21, 2024, in Lagos, the defendant engaged in further money laundering.

It said he transferred a cumulative sum of \$385,000 and N165.5 million from his domiciliary account with Access Bank Plc to the bank account of Okhiria, also domiciled with ABN AMRO Bank, Netherlands.

JOS

An Area Court in Jos on Tuesday, sentenced one Unity Meju to 36 months imprisonment, for house breaking and stealing of electrical wires and sockets worth N780,000.

The Judge, Irene Pati, sentenced the convict after he pleaded guilty to the offence.

Pati, however, gave the convict an option of N50,000 fine or 12 months imprisonment for house breaking and an option of N70,000 fine for theft.

Earlier, the Prosecutor, Insp

Ibrahim Gokwat, told the court that the case was reported at the "A" Division Police station on Jan. 4, by Mrs Martha John.

He said that the accused person trespassed into the complainant's house and stole electricity wires and sockets worth N780,000.

The prosecutor told the court that during police investigation, the accused person confessed to have committed the offence.

The offence, he said, contravened the Plateau State Penal Code law of Northern Nigeria, 2017.

NEWS

Foreign

Russian soldiers tell *BBC* they saw fellow troops executed on commanders' orders

Four Russian soldiers have exposed the horror and brutality of conditions on their side of the front lines in Ukraine, with two men telling the *BBC* they saw soldiers being executed on the spot for refusing orders.

One man told a documentary team he saw a soldier executed on the order of his commander, who was made a "Hero of Russia" in 2024.

"I see it - just two metres, three metres... click, clack, bang," he said.

Another soldier, from a different unit, says he saw his commander shoot four men himself.

"I knew them," he says of the

soldiers executed. "I remember one of them screaming 'Don't shoot, I'll do anything!'"

One of them also says he saw 20 bodies of fellow soldiers lying in a pit after being "zeroed" by comrades. The term "zero" is Russian military slang for executing your own.

In the documentary, *The Zero Line: Inside Russia's War*, men give detailed accounts about how they were tortured for refusing to take part in assaults they describe as verging on suicide missions. Russian troops call these attacks "meat storms" as waves of men are sent across the front line relentlessly to try and wear down

Ukrainian forces.

For the first time, the *BBC* believes, Russian soldiers from the front line say on the record how they witnessed commanders ordering executions of their own men.

One of the men, whose job was to identify and count dead soldiers, provided detailed lists showing that he is the sole survivor from a group of 79 men he was mobilised with. Because he refused to go to the front line, he says he was tortured and urinated on. Others in his unit who refused would be electrocuted, starved and then forced into meat storms unarmed, he says.

The four men, who are on the run, told of the horrors

they witnessed at an undisclosed location outside Russia.

Almost all public opposition to President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has been stamped out in Russia. Official casualty numbers are not released by Moscow, but the UK's Ministry of Defence says more than 1.2 million Russian troops have been killed or injured since the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022.

The Russian government says its armed forces "operate with utmost restraint, as far as possible under the conditions of a high-intensity conflict, treating their personnel with maximum care".



RUSSIAN SOLDIER:

Ilya, who spoke from an undisclosed location, says he watched as four comrades were shot at point blank by a commander.

Mexico hunts 23 inmates sprung from jail during wave of violence

Police in Mexico are searching a number of inmates sprung from a prison in Puerto Vallarta during a wave of attacks launched by the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) on Sunday.

Puerto Vallarta, a beach resort on Mexico's Pacific coast, was among the towns where the CJNG blockaded roads and torched cars in retaliation for the killing by security forces of their leader, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, known as "El Mencho".

During the unrest, armed men rammed one of the prison gates with a car, paving the way for 23 prisoners to escape, an official said.

More than 70 people - including 25 National Guard members - were killed in the operation to capture El Mencho and the violence which followed.

Juan Pablo Hernández, security secretary for the state of Jalisco, said that his office was working with other states to capture the fugitives.

Officials have not yet released details of the identities of the prisoners who escaped.

Cartel members torched several vehicles across Puerto Vallarta on Sunday.

Tourists and locals were urged to seek shelter and not venture out and footage they recorded showed black plumes of smoke rising above the popular beach resort.

A number of airlines temporarily halted their flights and at least two major cruise liners said their ships would skip planned stops in Puerto Vallarta.

The Mexican government said on Monday that most of the road blocks erected by cartel members had been cleared.

But *El Universal* newspaper reports that in the state of Morelia, where drug lord El Mencho was born, armed men continued to spread fear on Monday, torching cars and vandalising shops and public buildings.

El Mencho was Mexico's most wanted man. Under his

leadership, the CJNG became a powerful transnational criminal organisation which spread from its stronghold in the state of Jalisco into many other Mexican states, where it engages in drug production and trafficking.

It often resorts to extreme violence and has been behind a number of high-profile attacks on the security forces and government officials.

The Trump administration had described El Mencho as a "top target for the Mexican and United States government as one of the top traffickers of fentanyl into

our homeland" and had offered a \$15m (£11.1m) reward for information leading to his capture.

The drug lord was captured by Mexican security forces in the town of Tapalpa, in Jalisco state, on Sunday.

Mexico's defence minister said they were able to locate him by following one of his "romantic partners".

He died shortly after being captured due to injuries in the firefight which broke out between his security guards and Mexico's special forces sent to arrest him.

More than 5,000 flights cancelled as US east coast digs out of record snow

A major storm hit the US east coast on Monday, bringing record-breaking snow that caused disruptions for millions and thousands of flight cancellations.

Parts of Rhode Island and Massachusetts have seen nearly 37in (94cm) of snowfall, with more than 19in in New York City's Central Park, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

Weather warnings stretched from North Carolina to northern Maine, with some in place further north in parts of eastern Canada.

More than 600,000 properties on the US east coast endured power outages, while the Boston Globe - a major US newspaper - said it will not go to print for the first time in its 153-year history due to the storm.

Travel across the region has been severely limited, with some states and cities implementing travel bans during the worst period of the storm.

The so-called "nor'easter" has now moved away from the

US and across coastal parts of eastern Canada - though strong winds are expected to persist, according to the NWS.

Snow accumulations were anticipated to reach 1-2ft (30-61cm) near the north-east coastline, meanwhile.

Rhode Island, the smallest US state, appeared to have received the most snow during the storm. In fact, it has become the worst snowstorm to ever hit the state, according to local media.

Providence, the state capital, received 36in (91cm) of snow, dwarfing the existing record for the single greatest snowstorm: 28.6in (72.6cm) set in February 1978.

"It completely smashed it," Candice Hrencin, an NWS meteorologist in Boston, told the New York Times. "We were just as shocked as everyone else."

A ban on non-essential travel was implemented in Rhode Island and also in neighbouring Connecticut.

Later in the day, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey also imposed a travel ban

French minister moves to block US envoy Kushner from government access

The French foreign ministry says US envoy Charles Kushner should be blocked from access to the government after he failed to explain comments about an alleged "rise" in violence in France.

Kushner, father of Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, had been summoned to meet French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot on Monday evening, but did not attend. Instead, he said he had a prior engagement and sent a deputy from the US embassy.

This prompted an angry response from the ministry, which accused Kushner of an "apparent failure to grasp the basic requirements of the ambassadorial mission" and said Barrot had requested Kushner "no longer be allowed direct access" to government ministers.

The diplomatic row began when the US embassy in France posted comments on social media about the murder of far-right nationalist Quentin Deranque.

The post warned that "violent left-wing extremism is on the rise" in France.

Deranque, a 23-year-old maths student, died in hospital on 14 February - two days after being beaten by a gang of masked

young men in Lyon, in an attack which ministers from France's centre-right government blamed on "far-left" militants.

But the US embassy's comments appear to have angered the French government.

"We reject any use of this tragedy, which has plunged a French family into mourning, for political ends," Barrot said over the weekend.

"We have no lessons to learn, particularly on the issue of violence, from the international reactionary movement."

BBC News has approached the US embassy in France for comment.

Quentin Deranque came under attack near an event by a leading radical left politician in Lyon.

Six men suspected of being involved in the fatal assault have been charged over Deranque's death, while a parliamentary assistant for a deputy from the radical left France Unbowed (LFI) party has also been charged with complicity.

LFI leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is a likely contender in next year's presidential election, has said his party had "nothing to do with this story" and condemned "all forms of violence".

South Sudan: UN Aid Chief sounds alarm on humanitarian situation

United Nations aid chief Tom Fletcher issued a stark warning during a visit to a hospital in South Sudan.

Fletcher denounced what he referred to as the impact of cuts to aid in the war-torn country.

"So we're in Akobo, not far from the fighting. There's been huge amounts of dis-

placement here. And in this hospital, you're seeing the victims of that. Survivors of gunshot wounds, a 70-year-old grandmother, a tiny child Kol who I hope will survive, but who's lost both his parents and his brothers and sisters," Fletcher said.

The majority of the fight-

ing is concentrated in eastern Jonglei state, where, according to the UN, some 280,000 people have been displaced since December.

Doctors say they're overwhelmed with casualties.

Dr Kenneth Ozollo, ICRC surgeon, said, "we've responded to the sudden influx of injured

patients that occurred with the recent increase in the fighting."

The war has largely pitted the two main ethnic groups against one another -- the Dinka, who mostly back with President Kiir, and the Nuer mostly with Riek Machar, the country's former vice president.

Foreign

NEWS

Senior M23 commander killed in Eastern DR Congo drone strike

The military spokesperson for the M23 rebel group, Lieutenant-Colonel Willy Ngoma, was killed early Tuesday in a drone strike near Rubaya in North Kivu province, multiple sources confirmed, dealing a significant blow to the rebel movement amid ongoing ceasefire efforts.

According to a senior M23 official, a regional diplomat, and a Western government adviser cited by Reuters, the strike occurred around 3:00 a.m. near Rubaya—a key coltan-mining town producing approximately 15% of global supply.

Congolese army drones targeted the area, where several rebel officials were reportedly killed.

Ceasefire violations ac-

cused

Hours before Ngoma's death, M23 political spokesperson Lawrence Kanyuka posted on X accusing Kinshasa of violating the ceasefire by "unleashing a total war across all front lines" and conducting "indiscriminate" bombings of Rubaya that "massacred innocent civilians".

The rebel group later issued an obituary condemning the government's "grave acts".

Sanctioned rebel figure

Ngoma had been under European Union sanctions since December 2022 for his role as M23 spokesperson and was designated by the United States in 2023 for alleged involvement in human rights violations, including killings and sexual violence.



M23 REBEL GROUP:

Willy Ngoma, spokesman of the M23, right, shakes hands with Emmanuel Kaputa (EACRF) in the eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo, Friday, Dec. 23, 2022.

Moscow rail hub explosion was suicide bomb, Russian officials say

An explosion outside a major train station in Moscow that killed a traffic police officer and injured two others was a suicide attack, Russian officials say.

Russia's Interior Ministry said the officers had been patrolling at Savoyolovsky Station Square, north of the city centre, when "an unidentified device was detonated" in the early hours of Tuesday.

The Russian Investigative Committee identified the suspect as a 22-year-old man from the country's Udmurt republic, adding that an investigation was under way.

A motive has not yet been established. Russian President Vladimir Putin said the suspect was apparently recruited online.

Putin told a meeting of Russia's domestic spy agency that terror attacks had been increasing, mostly at the hands of Ukrainian intelligence.

However, attacks attributed to Ukraine in Russia have typically not involved suicide bombings.

Putin claimed the suspect in the attack, which occurred just after midnight local time (21:05 GMT on Monday), had been blown up remotely.

Russian Investigative Committee spokeswoman Svetlana Petrenko said the attacker - who she said was a Russian native - had travelled from St Petersburg to Moscow by train on Sunday.

She said the committee was

now looking into a motive for the attack and whether he had any accomplices.

The perpetrator and the police officer both died at the scene, Petrenko added.

Officials have given no additional information regarding the explosive device so far.

The attacker approached officers from the north-eastern district of Moscow, the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

A criminal case has been opened against the perpetrator for the attempt on the life of a law enforcement officer and charges relating to the explosive device.

Law enforcement agencies were working in tandem to "establish all the circumstances", the ministry added.

The two injured officers were taken to hospital "with various injuries" following the explosion.

Medical sources told news agency Tass the officers were in a serious condition.

The ministry identified the officer who was killed as 34-year-old Police Lieutenant Denis Bratushenko, a senior inspector in the traffic police.

He had joined the force in 2019 and is survived by his wife and two children, it said.

"The leadership and personnel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia express their sincere condolences to the family," a statement from Irina Volk, the ministry's spokeswoman, read.

Ghana drops coup leader's name from main airport on putsch anniversary

Ghana's government has removed the name of a coup leader, who helped overthrow founding father Kwame Nkrumah exactly 60 years ago, from the country's main airport.

Kotoka International Airport will now be known as Accra International Airport, its original name. But the move has not been without controversy.

Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka was among a group of officers who deposed Nkrumah in 1966. He himself was killed at the airport the following year during a failed counter-coup attempt.

The military government then renamed it in 1969 in his honour, portraying him as a "liberator" from what they saw as Nkrumah's authoritarian rule. But some argued

his name contradicts Ghana's democratic values.

The transport ministry said the government "considered it appropriate" to restore the earlier name. Critics of the move, including Kotoka's family, said it erased his legacy and service.

Transport Minister Joseph Bukari Nikpe has been quoted in local media as saying that the change was aimed at projecting a neutral national image and reflecting the name of the capital city, Accra.

But some have questioned the cost and asked why issues like unemployment and living conditions are not more of a priority for the government.

In arguing for the move, some civil society groups said that honouring Kotoka fun-

damentally contradicted the country's democratic values and glorified an unconstitutional change of government.

This view has gained traction under current President John Mahama, who returned to power after the December 2024 election, and the debate has intensified over the past month.

Among those who have opposed the name change is parliament's minority leader Alexander Afenyo-Markin, who called it a betrayal of the Volta Region, Kotoka's home.

He argued that the name was one of the few national honours recognising the eastern region.

The discussions have spilled over to social media, with Ghanaians divided over the legal, social and political implications of changing the

airport's name.

But in its statement on Monday, the transport ministry called on the public and international partners to support and co-operate with the relevant authorities to ensure what it described as a "smooth and seamless transition".

The authorities have assured the public that the name change will not affect airport operations, safety standards or international travel.

In the build up to the 1966 coup, Nkrumah had faced criticism that he was becoming increasingly oppressive.

Historians have debated the role the West, particularly the US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), played in unseating Ghana's first president.

Hong Kong lodges 'strong protest' after Panama takes control of canal ports

Hong Kong has formally complained to the government of Panama after it took control of two ports on the Panama Canal. It accused the Panamanian authorities of taking them over by force.

The ports had been run by a Hong Kong-based company, CK Hutchison, for more than two decades.

Last month, Panama's Supreme Court annulled the contracts which allowed the firm to operate the container ports, saying they were "unconstitutional".

The ruling followed claims by US President Donald Trump that China was operating the canal. There is no public evidence to suggest this.

Hong Kong's government

said, in a statement, it was lodging a "strong protest" after Panama's "blatant act" undermined both the "spirit of the contracts" and "international trade rules".

Last year, the Hong Kong-based company agreed to sell most of its stake in the two ports to a group led by the US investment firm BlackRock. The move by the Panamanian government could disrupt the \$22.8bn (£20.75bn) sale, according to the Reuters news agency.

CK Hutchison, founded by Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing, described the move as "unlawful".

President Trump has repeatedly claimed that the Central American canal is under Chinese control.

During his inauguration address last January, he said: "China is operating the Panama Canal and we didn't give it to China. We gave it to Panama and we're taking it back."

The following month, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also demanded that Panama make "immediate changes" to what he called the "influence and control" of China over the canal.

There is no public evidence to suggest China exercises control over the canal, though Chinese companies have a significant presence there.

Up to 14,000 ships use the 51-mile (82km) Panama Canal each year as a shortcut between the Atlantic and Pacific.

The waterway, which handles about 5% of global maritime trade volume, is operated by the Panama Canal Authority, an agency of the Panamanian government.

From October 2023 to September 2024, China accounted for 21.4% of the cargo volume transiting the canal, making it the second-largest user after the US.

Ramaphosa thanks Putin for release of South Africans fighting for Russia

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday thanked his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, for helping to secure the return home of 17 of the country's citizens.

They were allegedly tricked into believing they were going to Russia for bodyguard training, but instead found themselves on the frontline of the

war in Ukraine.

Ramaphosa said 4 of the men are already back in the country and that 11 others would be on their way home soon.

A further two remain in Russia, one of whom is in a hospital in Moscow while the other is undergoing "administrative travel processing".

The group had sent "distress calls" to the South Afri-

can government in November after getting trapped in the epicentre of fighting in Ukraine's Donbas region.

Ramaphosa raised their case with Putin earlier this month.

Investigations into how the men were duped into fighting for Russia are ongoing.

They revolve around allegations of human trafficking, fraud, and violations of a law

prohibiting South Africans from fighting for a foreign country's army without government authorisation.

The president also reiterated his country's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict through negotiation.

His announcement of the men's return comes on the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

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Sports

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Niger Delta Games considering featuring more sports in subsequent edition —Ikpokpo

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Managing consultant of Dunamis Icon Limited, the lead consultant and organizers of annual Niger Delta Games Sir. Malik Itiako Ikpokpo has revealed that they are considering increasing the number of sports in the tournament to 21



SIR. MALIK ITIAKO IKPOKPO

during the next edition, stressing that the organisers are not interested in who wins but talents discovery and development.

Sir Ikpokpo disclosed this while addressing the Press on Tuesday at the Media Centre of Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium.

He noted that the decision to increase the number, depends on

their popularity in the region.

The second Niger Delta Games are presently going on in Benin City, the Edo State capital with 16 sports featuring.

“Our plan is to give opportunity to athletes of all sports to be part of the Games. You will notice that this year, we removed canoeing because the equipments are not in any of the participating states but in Lagos and Abuja. We then brought in Taekwondo. So, we will definitely consider increasing the number of sports but we will also consider how popular that sports is in the Niger Delta region.

Speaking further, Ikpokpo stated that one of the lasting legacies he wants to put in place is to make sure that athletes are comfortable which necessitated the use of Benson Idahosa University as the Games village.

“The idea of the Niger Delta Games is not to win at all cost but to discover hidden talents in the region. We also want to leave a lasting legacy that things can be done right and athletes welfare not to be toiled with.

“It was in view of this that we are using Benson Idahosa University as our Games village. The beauty of this decision is that all the athletes and coaches are camped in one place which brings about good bonding”, he noted.

Ikpokpo also highlighted the importance of going back to school sports and charged the various state governments in the oil-rich Niger Delta region to provide adequate funding for coaches to enable them engage in serious grassroots talent hunt. He added that more should be done in the area of facilities and motivation of sports administrators.



FC BARCELONA/PROSPERITY CUP INTERNATIONAL COACHING

FC Barcelona coaching clinic begins in Yenagoa

The FC Barcelona/Prosperity Cup International Coaching Clinic has commenced in Yenagoa, with a call on football managers to harness the revenue-generating potential of the sport.

Nimibofa Ayawei, Secretary to the Bayelsa Government, made the call at the opening of the clinic on Tuesday, urging football administrators in Bayelsa to pay closer attention to details and explore the business opportunities inherent in football and sports generally.

Ayawei also advised grassroots coaches to be diligent and patient in learning from the FC Barcelona officials, not-

ing that the programme would have a positive impact on them when the competition begins.

In his remarks, the Regional Head of Premium Trust Bank in Yenagoa, Danjuma Omeje, said the bank would continue to prioritise sports development in the state.

Omeje said the bank had collaborated with the organisers of the competition over the past three years, as the bank donated a new coaster bus to Bayelsa Queens last year.

He assured that the bank would sustain its partnership with the organisers of the Prosperity Cup to promote football development in the state.

Stakeholders demand fresh, transparent elections as NBBF board tenure expires

Concerned stakeholders of the Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF) on Tuesday confirmed that the tenure of the federation's board expired on Jan. 31, in line with its constitution.

Musa Kida was re-elected as the President of NBBF on Jan. 31, 2022, in Benin City, amidst a leadership crisis and conflicting elections at the time.

Addressing newsmen in Abuja, retired Col. Sam Ahmedu, a member of the outgoing board, said the 2019 NBBF Constitution clearly stipulates that the board's tenure commenced on Jan. 31, 2022, and ended exactly four years after.

Ahmedu stated that the constitution provides that tenure begins immediately after election and swearing-in, which took place in Benin City on Jan. 31, 2022.

“There is no provision for any separate inauguration to determine when tenure begins. The board became operational from the day it was elected and sworn in,” he said.

He dismissed claims that the tenure runs until October 2026, describing such a position as unconstitutional and misleading.

“The constitution does not recognise inauguration by any ministry as the basis for tenure. Any attempt to shift the date lacks legal foundation,” Ahmedu said.

He noted that the world governing body, FIBA, congratulated the board in March 2022, while national teams participated in competitions

from February 2022 under the same leadership.

According to him, internal communications of the board also acknowledged Jan. 31, 2026, as the terminal date.

On governance issues, Ahmedu alleged that Congress, the supreme organ of the federation, was not convened throughout the board's four-year tenure.

“Article 20.1 makes Congress the highest authority. It must meet at least once yearly, including an elective congress.



IDA to compete as 38th state at 2026 Intermediate Games in Lagos — NSC

The National Sports Commission (NSC) has announced that the “Invited Diaspora Athletes” (IDA) initiative will make its debut at the maiden edition of the National Intermediate Games, scheduled to hold in Lagos later this year.

The announcement was made in a statement by Kola Daniel, Special Adviser in the Office of the Director-General (D-G), NSC, Bukola Olopadé.

Daniel disclosed that the IDA was one of several key reforms introduced by the NSC under the leadership of Shehu Dikko and Olopade.

“IDA is established as part of the Renewed Hope Initiative for Nigeria's Sports Economy (RHINSE),” he said.

Olopade further stated that since the establishment of the Diaspora Discovery Athletes Committee, currently chaired

by Tunde Adelakun, the committee had swung into action.

“Many Nigerians in the diaspora have shown significant interest in competing for Nigeria,” he said.

The D-G maintained that this growing interest was one of the reasons the IDA team would be fully involved in this year's Intermediate Games in Lagos.

“We are very excited about this initiative because of the immediate and futuristic impact it will have on our Sports development.

“At the Intermediate Games in Lagos, we will be having about 50 athletes that will be coming from the Diaspora, competing for IDA’.

“This will surely be another major game changer for Nigerian sports and it will surely upscale the competitive edge of Team Nigeria at major International competitions,” he said.



DIRECTOR-GENERAL (D-G), NSC, BUKOLA OLOPADE

Stakeholders urge structured mental health support in sports

Some sports stakeholders have called for the establishment of structured mental health support systems for athletes, stressing that psychological well-being is critical to performance and long-term career sustainability.

The stakeholders spoke in separate interviews with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) on Tuesday in Abuja.

They expressed concern over what they described as inadequate mental health awareness and institutional support within the country's sports ecosystem.

They also sounded alarm on the state of mental health sup-

port for athletes, emphasising the need for increased awareness and resources.

Bunmi Haruna, a CAF-B licensed coach, said mental health awareness in Nigerian sports remains at a rudimentary stage, particularly at the grassroots level.

“The awareness about mental health in sport in the country is still at its beginning stage. Players and coaches have little or absolutely no support,” he said.

According to him, deliberate psychological preparation for athletes is almost non-existent outside the national teams.



SPORTS

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2026 World Cup: 14 veteran coachess return as team managers

With the countdown to the FIFA World Cup 2026™ gathering pace, FIFA has spotlighted a compelling subplot ahead of the tournament in North America: experience on the touchline.

According to FIFA, fourteen coaches preparing for the global finals have previously led teams at the World Cup — a blend of decorated champions, seasoned tacticians, and returning strategists eager for another shot at glory.

Among them are two World Cup-winning coaches — Didier Deschamps and Lionel Scaloni — while veterans such as Javier Aguirre and Marcelo Bielsa trace their World Cup managerial journeys back to 2002.

EXPERIENCE: ADVANTAGE OR ILLUSION?

FIFA notes that while experience can provide tactical depth and psychological maturity, it does not guarantee success. Nor does a lack of World Cup pedigree eliminate the possibility of a breakthrough.

Scaloni offers a recent example. Entering the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ without prior experience as a head coach at the finals — though he had served as an assistant in 2018 — he guided Argentina to the title in one of the most dramatic tournaments in history.

Still, FIFA observes that returning to the World Cup stage for a second or third campaign brings a different understand-

ing of pressure, preparation, messaging, and tournament rhythm.

Here is a closer look at the re-turning masterminds set to patrol the technical areas in 2026.

DIDIER DESCHAMPS (FRANCE): 2018, 2022, 2026

At 57, Deschamps will oversee one of France's most gifted generations, spearheaded by Kylian Mbappe. Having lifted the trophy as captain in 1998 and as coach in 2018, he came within a whisker of defending the crown in 2022, losing an epic final to Argentina.

A third World Cup campaign places him among the most experienced leaders at the tournament.

MARCELO BIELSA (URUGUAY): 2002, 2010, 2026

Nicknamed "El Loco," Bielsa will uniquely have managed three different nations at the World Cup — Argentina, Chile, and now Uruguay.

His 2002 Argentina side suffered a shock group-stage exit. In 2010, Chile showed flashes of a golden generation before falling to Brazil. Now with Uruguay, he seeks redemption after their disappointing Qatar 2022 campaign.

HERVE RENARD (SAUDI ARABIA): 2018, 2022, 2026

Renard's World Cup résumé includes Morocco in 2018 and Saudi Arabia in 2022, where he masterminded one of the

tournament's greatest upsets — a 2-1 victory over eventual champions Argentina.

He returns to the global stage after a stint with France at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023™.

JAVIER AGUIRRE (MEXICO): 2002, 2010, 2026

"El Vasco" has been a constant presence in Mexico. Twice, he led El Tri past the group stage, only to fall in the Round of 16. Now, on home soil in 2026, Aguirre faces perhaps the most demanding chapter of his World Cup career.

ROBERTO MARTINEZ (PORTUGAL): 2018, 2022, 2026

Martinez enjoyed a high in 2018 when Belgium finished third. Four years later, their golden generation faltered in the group stage. Now leading Portugal as UEFA Nations League champi-

ons, he seeks to channel his experience into another deep run.

ZLATKO DALIC (CROATIA): 2018, 2022, 2026

Dalic steered Croatia to the 2018 final and followed up with a third-place finish in 2022. With a new-look squad emerging, his 2026 challenge begins in a demanding group featuring England, Ghana, and Panama.

LIONEL SCALONI (ARGENTINA): 2022, 2026

From assistant in 2018 to champion in 2022, Scaloni now returns seeking to defend the title. FIFA notes that repeating the feat would place him among the rare managers to lift the trophy twice — a distinction that eluded Argentine icons Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo in successive tournaments.

2nd NDG: Bayelsa, Edo secure semi-final spots as Handball Quarter-Finals take centre stage in Benin



ONGOING EDO 2026 2ND NIGER DELTA GAMES

The knockout phase of the Handball event at the ongoing Edo 2026 2nd Niger Delta Games shifts into top gear on Tuesday as the quarter-final matches take centre stage at the Handball Court of the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City, Edo State.

With tension rising and medals within reach, teams will battle fiercely for the remaining semi-final tickets in what promises to be a thrilling day of action.

As stipulated in the competition's rules and regulations, Bayelsa and Edo States have already secured automatic qualification to the semi-finals after finishing top in the group stage. Bayelsa topped the Men's category with four points and an impressive +36 goal difference, while Edo dominated the Women's category with four points and a remarkable +52 goal difference. Their dominant performances earned them bye slots into the last four.

In the Women's category, Imo State, who finished second in the group with four points and a +22 goal difference, will take on Bayelsa, who placed seventh with one point and a -10 goal difference. The

encounter is slated for 8:00am.

Delta State, third at the end of the group stage, will square up against sixth-placed Cross River at 9:15am in what is expected to be a tightly contested fixture. The final women's quarter-final game will see Ondo battle Abia at 10:30am for a place in the semi-finals.

In the Men's category, Imo State, who finished second with four points and a +13 goal difference, will face Rivers at 11:45am. Despite Rivers failing to pick up a point in the group stage, they progressed by virtue of goals scored and will be eager to upset the odds.

Delta will confront Abia at 1:00pm in another decisive clash, while Edo and Akwa Ibom

will round off the quarter-final fixtures at 2:15pm in what promises to be a thrilling finale to the day's proceedings.

Quarter-Final Fixtures (Knockout Stage)

Women's Category
Edo State – Bye (Qualified for Semi-Finals)

8:00am – Imo vs Bayelsa
9:15am – Delta vs Cross River
10:30am – Ondo vs Abia

Men's Category
Bayelsa State – Bye (Qualified for Semi-Finals)

11:45am – Imo vs Rivers
1:00pm – Delta vs Abia
2:15pm – Edo vs Akwa Ibom



Loyalty, welfare key to Nigeria's olympic revival, says Onyali-Omagbemi

Five-time Olympian Mary Onyali-Omagbemi has reaffirmed her loyalty to Nigeria, revealing she rejected approaches from four countries during her distinguished career.

Speaking to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), the sprint legend said athlete defections were not new and had occurred across generations.

The Atlanta 1996 Olympic 200 metres bronze medallist said nationality decisions were deeply personal and often influenced by individual priorities.

"To represent Nigeria or not is a matter of interest and personal feelings. You prioritise

what matters most to you.

"I was approached while competing for Nigeria. What is happening now is not new. It



has been happening for years.

"It is about whether you can ditch your country. I was approached by four nations, but I

could not do it," she said.

She declined to name the countries, stressing that in spite of challenges, she could not abandon Nigeria for improved treatment elsewhere.

"I will not mention them, but I could not leave my country for anybody. Yes, the treatment could be better," she said.

Onyali-Omagbemi acknowledged longstanding welfare concerns, noting that inadequate support often fuels athletes' decisions to change allegiance.

"I know welfare could be better handled in Nigeria, but I can see hope now," she said.

She pointed to reforms under the National Sports Commission

aimed at addressing performance gaps and welfare shortcomings.

She highlighted the Elite Podium Board, on which she serves, as a structured response to recurring administrative and developmental challenges.

"We are correcting abnormalities in performance and welfare that give rise to defection.

"However, defection lies with the individual. You know why you want to do it and whether you can withstand the repercussions," she said.

She said rebuilding Nigeria's athletics dominance required patience, planning and sustained investment over multiple Olympic cycles.