

Nigeria, UK sign 3 agreements to boost bilateral cooperation

ABUJA

The Federal Government of Nigeria and the United Kingdom have signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

The agreements cover migration partnership, cooperation on organised immigration

crime and border security, and a statement of intent on expanding business visas for UK companies operating in Nigeria.

The Minister of Interior, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, signed two of the MoUs on Wednesday and the third on Thursday on behalf of the Federal Government in the UK.

This was disclosed in a state-

ment issued by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Mr Babatunde Alao, on Thursday in Abuja.

Tunji-Ojo said the agreements reflected Nigeria's commitment to a migration framework that is transparent and aligned with national interests and international obligations.

He said the partnership underscored a shared deter-

mination to build a migration system that is safe, orderly and mutually beneficial.

He added that the focus over the next year would be on achieving measurable progress and effective implementation, expressing hope that the agreements would serve as a model for future bilateral cooperation.

The minister acknowledged

that Nigeria had an existing applaudable working relationship with UK home office in Nigeria.

"This relationship with the UK means a lot to us and you can see the level of commitment that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has put in," Tunji-Ojo said.

He reiterated that Nigeria remained steadfast in its duty

to protect citizens while ensuring that those who abuse legal pathways or engage in criminality are held accountable.

While signing on the expansion of business visas for UK companies, Tunji-Ojo said that, following the bold reforms of President Tinubu, the use of visa serves as a catalyst for socio-eco-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968 VOL. 47, NO. 1,222 FRIDAY 20TH - MONDAY 23RD MARCH, 2026.

Communities must lead anti-terror war, says Defence Chief

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Hajj 2026: Edo allocation crashes to 93 as Saudi quota cut hits Nigeria

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

BENIN CITY

Edo State's allocation for the 2026 Hajj pilgrimage has dropped sharply from 351 to just 93 slots, following a sweeping reduction in pilgrim quotas by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that has affected all participating countries, including Nigeria.

The National Hajj Commis-

sion of Nigeria (NAHCON) explained that the revised allocation was based strictly on funds credited to its account on or before the official Hajj payment deadline of December 5, 2025.

According to NAHCON records, the amount remitted by Edo State before the deadline covered only 82 pilgrims, a figure the commission initially insisted on maintaining in line

with the new guidelines.

The development is part of a broader directive issued by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, which oversees global Hajj operations.

Sources confirmed that Nigeria's initial allocation of 66,000 pilgrims was later reduced to 40,200 slots by Saudi authorities, triggering a ripple effect across all states of the federation.

Following an appeal by the Edo State Government, NAHCON approved an additional 11 slots, raising the state's final allocation from 82 to 93.

However, the marginal increase has done little to cushion the steep decline.

In Edo, the impact has been particularly severe, with the original allocation of 351 pilgrims drastically reduced, affecting all categories of intend-

ing pilgrims.

Investigations revealed that as of January 2, 2026, funds remitted on behalf of Edo pilgrims were only sufficient to secure 82 seats.

The situation was worsened by late payments made after

the stipulated deadline, which not only limited the number of slots secured, but also affected accommodation arrangements in Saudi Arabia.

As a result, more than 100

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GRADUATION OF 69 PUBLIC SERVANTS:

L-R: Professors of Practice, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, Prof. Ciaran Martin (in Management of Public Organisations), and Prof. Emily Jones (Public Policy); Mrs. Ofovwe Aig-Imoukhuede, Executive Vice-Chair, Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation; Mr Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede, Chairman, Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation; Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, Minister of Interior; and Dr Bosun Tijani, Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, at the graduation of 69 public servants from the AIG Public Leaders Programme in Abuja.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

Fani-Kayode hits back at Momodu over Tinubu criticism

ABUJA

Nigeria's ambassador-designate and former Aviation Minister, Femi Fani-Kayode, has launched a sharp rebuttal against veteran journalist and opposition figure, Dele Momodu, over his public criticism of President Bola Tinubu, accusing him of ingratitude despite decades of personal support.

Fani-Kayode issued the statement on Thursday in Abuja following Momodu's interview on Channels Television, in which the publisher likened Tinubu's style of governance to the military dictatorship of former Head of State, Sani Abacha. Momodu also reiterated similar criticisms in a written statement, calling the president's administration authoritarian and warning of democratic backsliding.

Describing the comments as "misguided, uncharitable, and a reflection of a worrisome

level of cognitive dissonance," Fani-Kayode said Momodu's criticisms were both unfair and historically inaccurate.

He accused the media entrepreneur of failing to honour the decades of support and hospitality he received from Tinubu, claiming he had benefited materially and politically from the president's largesse.

"Unlike Dele, I did not benefit from Tinubu for close to 40 years, eat from his plate, and collect handouts from him. I did not stay in his house, claim to be his brother, and yet refuse to support him in achieving his dream of becoming president," Fani-Kayode said.

He described Momodu's response to earlier criticism from him and fellow ambassador-designate, Reno Omokri, as "emotional, unhinged, and devoid of logic," warning him to "stay in his lane" and desist from further personal attacks on the president.

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Okpebholo felicitates with Muslims, urges unity, peace during Eid-el-Fitr

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NFF denies offering Chelle \$100,000 monthly salary

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INEC seeks media partnership to rebuild trust ahead of 2027 polls

CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

The Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Joash Amupitan, has acknowledged a widening trust deficit between the commission and Nigerians, urging the media to play a pivotal role in restoring public confidence ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Amupitan made the appeal in Abuja while receiving members of the INEC Press Corps Executive Committee during a courtesy visit, the first formal engagement since his appointment in late 2025.

He commended the press corps for its professionalism but admitted that scepticism continues to trail Nigeria's electoral process.

According to him, rebuilding trust will require stronger collaboration between INEC and the media, particularly in effectively communicating reforms and electoral procedures to the public.

"Transparency alone is not enough; it must be properly communicated for citizens to understand and trust the process," he said.

Earlier, Chairman of the Press Corps, Segun Ojumu, described elections in Nigeria as a complex logistical exercise

requiring cooperation among key stakeholders, especially the media. He also praised Amupitan's leadership style, describing it as transparent.

Other members of the delegation included Assistant Secretary John Onah and Welfare Director Chux Ukwuatu.

The meeting comes as INEC intensifies preparations for a series of critical elections under the Electoral Act 2026 framework.

The commission has scheduled the presidential and National Assembly elections for January 16, 2027, while gov-

ernorship and State Houses of Assembly elections will hold on February 6, 2027.

Ahead of the general elections, INEC will conduct off-cycle governorship polls in Ekiti State on June 20, 2026, and Osun State on August 8, 2026.

These elections are expected to serve as key tests of the commission's preparedness and credibility.

Amupitan, who succeeded Mahmood Yakubu, has pledged to deliver elections that are free, fair, and inclusive as Nigeria approaches a crucial electoral season.

Hajj 2026: Edo allocation crashes...

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intending pilgrims who had completed their payments were unable to participate in the 2026 Hajj exercise.

NAHCON has since processed refunds for over 100 affected pilgrims in the state.

Officials stressed that the reduction was due to international policy adjustments by Saudi authorities and not a failure on the part of any state government, noting that stricter quotas and deadlines were uniformly enforced across all countries.

In a statement, the Chair-

man of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Malam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, and the Executive Secretary, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkibir, assured affected pilgrims that those who opt to retain their funds with the board for the 2027 Hajj exercise would be given priority consideration.

They appealed for understanding, citing the global constraints surrounding this year's Hajj operations, and reaffirmed the board's commitment to continued engagement with relevant authorities to improve Edo State's allocation in future exercises.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:**

Chief Medical Director of University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Professor Nibokun Ize-Iyamu, delivering her address, during the International Women's Day celebration by LAPO in Benin City yesterday.

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conomic development in Nigeria.

"Regarding visa agreement, personally as the Minister of Interior, I can tell you that I am very happy with this, because for us, this is what we have been looking forward to," he said.

Tunji-Ojo emphasised that in building a trillion dollar worth economy, Nigeria must cut trade barriers such as barriers of irregular migration.

"I want to assure you on behalf of Mr President and the great people of Nigeria, that we are open for endless possibilities of growth and socio-economic development.

"So be rest assured that we will be true to this, we will swing into action and ensure all barriers are removed," he added.

According to the UK Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, Nigeria will always be categorised as number one in successful bilateral relations.

"We are obviously always having bilateral discussions with other countries, however, you will always be number one because you are the first to have gotten such an extensive agreement and we really do appreciate it.

"I think we both understand one another and I think we have a shared vision here for the work that our countries can do together and I really do appreciate it," the home secretary said.

During the signing of the third MoU, UK Trade Envoy, Florence Eshalomi, stated that

the agreement on expansion of business visas for UK companies, had clear benefits for both countries.

Eshalomi attributed the heightened partnership as a bold step, vital for economic growth for Africa's largest and thriving economy, Nigeria.

The MoU on Migration Partnership, establishes a comprehensive framework for promoting safe, orderly and regulated migration between both countries while reaffirming full respect for national laws, international obligations, and human rights.

In addition, the Statement of Intent on Cooperation on Organised Immigration Crime and Border Security establishes a three-year strategic plan between the UK Home Office and Nigeria's Ministry of Interior (Nigeria) to combat criminal networks that profit from irregular migration.

The MoU on the Expansion of Business Visas for UK companies working with Nigeria announces the expansion of the Business Visa Scheme for UK companies seeking to conduct business in Nigeria, mirroring the UK's existing enhanced processes for trusted Nigerian companies.

The scheme will be open to credible UK-domiciled firms with verified business or investment interests in Nigeria and is designed to facilitate easier mobility for legitimate business travellers between the two countries.

IWD 2026: UBTH CMD hails women's resilience at LAPO Leadership Awards

BENIN CITY

The Chief Medical Director of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Prof. Idia Ize-Iyamu joined a broad spectrum of women leaders and professionals to celebrate the LAPO Outstanding Women Leadership Award (LOWLA), held in commemoration of International Women's Day 2026.

The event, which marked the 14th edition of the awards and was themed "Give to Gain," recognised the achievements and contributions of women

across diverse fields.

Chairing the occasion, Prof. Ize-Iyamu urged women to remain disciplined and focused in the pursuit of their goals, stressing that resilience and determination are critical to overcoming challenges and attaining success.

She commended LAPO for sustaining its commitment to women's empowerment through the LOWLA initiative over the past 14 years, describing the award as more than a celebration of excellence.

According to her, the initiative serves as a call to action, under-

scoring the need for individuals to support and uplift one another in building a better society.

Highlighting the role of women in national development, she stated: "As we navigate shifting economic tides, the resilience of our women remains our most stable currency. When a woman rises, a family rises. When women lead, communities prosper. And when women are empowered, nations are transformed.

"I commend LAPO for sustaining this noble vision for fourteen years. This award is more than recognition; it is a call to action and a reminder that a better society is possible when we choose to uplift one another."

Prof. Ize-Iyamu further celebrated women for their vision, value, action and multiplying impact, encouraging them to continue to pursue their aspirations with courage and purpose.

The ceremony featured the presentation of awards to outstanding women in various categories.

The LAPO Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred on the Founding President of the African Women Empowerment Guild, Dr (Mrs) Nosakhare Aladeselu.

Other awardees included Nkechi Promise Ujunwa in the professional category, Mrs Adebukola Esther Taiwo in farming, and Animashaun Aminat Aderayo in the business category.

Wike assures diplomatic community of secure, enabling environment in Abuja

ABUJA

The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, has assured the diplomatic community of a secured and enabling environment to carry

out their businesses in Abuja.

Wike gave the assurance at the European Union Complex, Abuja, during the Saint Patrick's Day Reception and official opening of the new Embassy of Ireland in Abuja.

The minister, in a statement

signed by his Senior Special Assistant on Public Communications and Social Media, Mr Lere Olayinka, on Thursday, said that President Bola Tinubu was transforming Abuja into a competitive capital city.

"We owe you a duty to make

sure that we create the right environment for you to work and thrive. I want to assure you that we want to make Abuja one of the best capital cities in the world." "We will continue to

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Fani-Kayode hits back at Momodu over...

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Fani-Kayode also criticised Momodu's political alliances, describing them as lacking credibility, cohesion, and capacity for serious governance.

He argued that opposition parties, and by extension Momodu, are currently unprepared to challenge the government or

influence Nigeria's political trajectory meaningfully.

"For Bobby Dee, the glory days are over, and I suspect that by 2027, when Tinubu emerges victorious, he will crawl back into the hole he originally came from," Fani-Kayode said, reaffirming his own loyalty to the president.

He also highlighted his active role in Tinubu's 2023 presiden-

tial campaign and his continued support for the administration's reform programmes, which he described as crucial for national stability and prosperity.

"There are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. In my view, it is in Nigeria's interest that Tinubu continues the reforms he initiated after assuming of-

office in 2023," he said.

Fani-Kayode further denounced Momodu's comparison of Tinubu to Abacha, calling it historically inaccurate and misleading.

"If Tinubu were anything like the dictator, Dele claims, both Dele and those he speaks for would either be dead or in jail," he added.

NEWS

Murder trial begins as Bayelsa Court remands 'Pastor Brandy,' 4 others

PHILIP EKE

YENAGOA

Bayelsa State High Court sitting in Yenagoa has ordered the remand of the alleged mastermind behind the killing of estate agent, Richard Ekpebu, alongside four co-defendants, in the Okaka Medium Correctional Centre pending trial.

The prime suspect, George Idumange, popularly known as Pastor Brandy, was arraigned

with Miss Victory Bernard; a correctional personnel attached to the Okaka Medium Correctional Centre with an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP)-equivalent rank, Ekiamene Amaoniye, also known as Cash Money; Ibo Imaremi Gold, alias Police; and Henry Igwe.

They are facing a 12-count charge bordering on conspiracy to murder, murder, illegal possession of firearms, armed robbery, and destruction of ev-

idence, among others.

The charges, filed under suit number BYHC/YHC/CR/19/2026, were read to the defendants, who all pleaded not guilty.

Presiding judge, Justice Raphael Ajuwa, after hearing submissions from the prosecution representing the state and the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP), as well as defence counsel Peretimi Peterside, granted the prosecution's application for the remand of the accused persons pending trial.

However, the sixth defendant, identified as Queen Felix, who is the sister of the prin-

cipal suspect, was absent in court. The DPP informed the court that she had earlier been granted administrative bail on health grounds.

According to the prosecution, Felix is not directly charged with murder, but faces allegations of forgery and may be tried separately.

Justice Ajuwa subsequently adjourned the matter to April 14, 15 and 16, 2026, for trial, following assurances by the prosecution that its 20 witnesses were prepared to testify in batches of three per sitting.

Ekpebu was reportedly murdered in cold blood over a land

transaction dispute, with his body later dumped in a bush along the New Otuoke Road near Bayelsa Palm on July 24, 2025.

A police tactical team under

Operation Puff Adder, led by CSP Chris Nwaogbo, tracked and arrested the suspects after extensive investigations spanning Lagos, Port Harcourt and Yenagoa.

Delta Chief Judge frees ailing inmate, reviews 480 cases in prison decongestion drive

The Chief Judge of Delta State, Justice Theresa Dai, has ordered the release of a 54-year-old inmate, David Urumebo, on compassionate grounds due to ill health, as part of a broader judicial review of 480 warrants across custodial centres in Warri and Sapele.

Urumebo was freed after his case was among 325 matters involving awaiting trial inmates reviewed during the Chief Judge's first-quarter prison visit to the Warri Correctional Centre.

In addition, six other inmates—Cletus Edewor, Nwoba Maduabuchi, Otutu Kelechi, Brunu Brizebe, Ebimobowe Akpogberibo and Mienbi Abai, were discharged and acquitted based on recommendations by the presiding judge of the High Court in Effurun.

Justice Dai and her delegation also visited the Sapele Correctional Centre, where 155 warrants were examined, although no inmates were released at the facility.

The Chief Judge was accompanied on the tour by judges, magistrates, the Chief Registrar, the Director of Public Prosecutions, law officers from the Ministry of Justice, representatives of the Nigeria Police, and the Nigerian Bar Association, among others.

Describing the exercise as routine, Dai explained that the visits were aimed at reviewing cases of inmates awaiting trial to ensure justice, prevent unlawful detention, and guarantee that no individual is held beyond the legally permissible period without proper charges.

She emphasised that the exercise was not intended as a mass release initiative but as a mechanism to ensure fairness, legality in detention, and speedy dispensation of justice.

"We do not want a situation where individuals are detained without charges or held longer than necessary. Once a matter is before the court, the Chief Judge's powers are limited to guiding trial judges and magistrates," she stated.



BENUE STATE NUJ COUNCIL VISIT GEN. BUKOYE:

Commander, 401 Special Forces Brigade, Nigerian Army, Headquarters, Joe Akaahan Barracks, Makurdi, Brigadier General Kolawole Bukoye (right), and Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Benue State Council, Comrade Bemdoo Ugber, during a visit by the leadership of the union to the brigade.

Odior assumes duty at EIRS, targets higher revenue, greater compliance

BERNADETTE IDALU

BENIN CITY

The newly appointed Executive Chairman of the Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), Mr Odior John Osirenimhe, has assumed office with a call on staff, citizens, and residents to support the administration of Bankole-Balogun Governor

Monday Okpebholo in sustaining the state's development drive.

He succeeds Hon. Oladele Bankole-Balogun, whose tenure recorded over N100 billion in Internally Generated Revenue for the state.

As part of his resumption activities, Osirenimhe toured departments and units at the agency's headquarters, pledg-

ing to enhance the work environment for improved productivity.

Speaking during his inaugural meeting with management, Osirenimhe expressed confidence in surpassing existing revenue records through improved expertise and strict adherence to tax laws.

He stressed that taxation remains central to accountability and governance, urging all residents to fulfil their civic obligations.

According to him, increased tax compliance would enable the government to fund infrastructure and deliver more dividends of democracy, noting that taxes are levied on profit, not capital.

The EIRS boss also called for stronger engagement with key stakeholders, including businesses, federal institutions, multinational firms, and religious organisations, urging them to file accurate returns and comply with extant tax laws.

Class of '91 Alumni rebuild Auchi College, set for grand unveiling

AUCHI

A sweeping renovation and modernisation project spearheaded by the Class of '91 alumni of Auchi College is set to be unveiled next month, marking a significant boost to educational infrastructure in Edo State.

The initiative, driven by the Association of Great Achievers, Class of '91, under the leadership of Mr Peter Dunia, has transformed key sections of the institution through extensive reconstruction, upgrades,

and beautification works.

A media team led by Asiwaju Sola Adebayo was granted exclusive access to inspect the landmark developments. Journalists, including Dele Fasan of Galaxy Television and Ben Dunno of The Sun Nigeria, toured the campus and witnessed an array of newly completed, state-of-the-art facilities.

The project features newly built administrative blocks and standard classrooms, a modern sports complex with a synthetic football pitch, and fully

equipped science laboratories.

Other additions include a refurbished sick bay, a newly constructed lodge for corps members, improved perimeter fencing for enhanced security, a high-capacity solar power system, and a multipurpose hall for events and gatherings.

Work on the project commenced in late 2025 and is scheduled for formal commissioning on Monday, April 6, 2026.

Organisers said that the unveiling is expected to attract a high-profile audience, includ-

ing serving and former political office holders in Edo State, as well as notable personalities from across the country.

Described as one of the most impactful alumni-led interventions in the college's recent history, the project highlights the enduring commitment of the Class of '91 to the growth and development of their alma mater.

"We are looking forward to it," a spokesperson for the group said, as preparations intensify ahead of the commissioning.

Community Policing: Delta approves 25 Divisional hqs, SPU at N34bn

VICTOR AJUWA

ASABA

In a decisive move to strengthen internal security, the Delta State Government has approved the construction of 25 state-of-the-art divisional police headquarters across all local government areas, alongside a Special Police Protection Unit (SPU), in anticipation of the Federal Government's state policing policy.

The Commissioner for Works (Rural Roads), Charles Aniagwu, disclosed this while briefing journalists after the State Executive Council meeting presided over by Governor Sheriff Oborevwori.

He said the projects, estimated to cost over N34 billion, align with the administration's MORE Agenda and underscore its commitment to safeguarding lives and property.

According to Aniagwu, the council approved one modern divisional police headquarters for each of the 25 local government areas, forming a key component of efforts to reinforce the state's security architecture.

"The Executive Council meeting, led by the Governor,

approved several people-oriented projects across sectors. However, the most critical decisions centred on the primary responsibility of government—security of lives and property," he said.

"Flowing from this, and ahead of the Federal Government's policy on state policing, approval has been granted for the construction of 25 state-of-the-art divisional police headquarters across the state.

"In addition, the council also approved the establishment of a Special Police Protection Unit. Together, these projects will cost over N34 billion."

Aniagwu noted that although Delta remains one of the safest states in the country, the government is determined to further enhance its security profile.

"With the Federal Government favourably disposed towards state policing, it is imperative for Delta to take proactive steps and stay ahead. That is why these approvals have been granted," he added.

He further disclosed that the Commissioner for Housing has been directed to commence immediate processes for the execution of the projects.

Ending TB is not just aspirational, it's achievable —WHO

NEW YORK

World Health Organisation (WHO) has affirmed that it is possible to get back on track and turn the tide on the Tuberculosis (TB) epidemic, even in a challenging global environment.

According to WHO, with decisive country leadership, increased domestic and international investment, rapid uptake of new WHO recommendations and innovations, accelerated action, and strong multisectoral collaboration, ending TB is not just aspirational, it's achievable.

WHO Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, stated this in his message ahead of the World TB Day, globally celebrated on March 24.

Ghebreyesus said to get to that stage where TB would be eradicated, several actions should be taking several fronts, putting investment in TB care as a smart economic decision on the forefront.

"Every dollar invested in TB generates up to 43 dollars in health and economic returns — through stronger economies, healthier workforces and more resilient societies.

"Second, we must accelerate innovation and scale-up. Breakthrough diagnostics and treatments must be rolled out rapidly and equitably, including near point-of-care tests that can transform early detection.

"Third, we must put people at the centre of the TB response. TB services must be accessible, affordable, stigma-free and community-driven," he said.

The WHO chief said civil society and people affected by TB must be partners, not afterthoughts and that every effort to end TB also strengthened health security.

He assured that WHO would continue to provide global leadership, working with governments, partners and communities to protect hard-won gains and accelerate progress.

Ghebreyesus said the theme of World TB Day 2026, "Yes! We

Can End TB: Led by countries, powered by people" is both a call to action and a message of hope.

"On World Tuberculosis Day, we honour the millions of lives lost to tuberculosis, and we stand in solidarity with the people, families and communities who continue to live with this preventable and curable disease.

"We also pay tribute to

health workers on the front lines, to national TB programmes, civil society, advocates, partners and donors. Your dedication is saving lives and sustaining hope.

"Global efforts to combat tuberculosis have saved an estimated 83 million lives since 2000.

"Progress has been made in

testing, treatment, prevention and research. But progress is not victory," he said.

According to him, every single day, nearly 3,500 people die from TB, and close to 30,000 fall ill.

The WHO chief said TB remained one of the world's deadliest infectious diseases, and a major driver of poverty,

inequality and antimicrobial resistance.

At the UN General Assembly in 2023, he said world leaders adopted bold new targets to end TB.

"Since then, the world has changed dramatically, and funding cuts make it much more difficult to reach those targets.

Shippers' Council calls for dialogue amid freight tariff protests

LAGOS

The Nigerian Shippers' Council (NSC) has appealed to freight forwarders to engage in dialogue rather than industrial action over recent shipping tariff hikes, warning that prolonged disputes could disrupt national trade and economic activities.

Dr Akutah Pius, the Executive Secretary of NSC, made the appeal on Thursday in Lagos while responding to protests by freight forwarders at the offices of the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC).

The protesters rejected earlier attempts at discussion, in-

sisting that the tariff increases be reversed.

They have vowed to continue their protest on Monday, March 23, 2026.

Akutah described dialogue as the most effective and humane dispute resolution mechanism, urging stakeholders to avoid "bottled anger approaches" that could hamper port operations.

He condemned unprofessional conduct by some freight forwarders who blocked regulators from entering MSC premises, stressing that the council remains committed to mediating for fair practices and stability in the maritime sector.

Delta to host S'South Zonal office of Tax Ombud

ASABA

The Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborewori, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to fairness and accountability in tax administration as the state prepares to host the South-South Zonal Headquarters of the Tax Ombud Office.

Oborewori made the remarks on Thursday while receiving Dr John Nwabueze, Tax Ombud/CEO of the Office of the Tax Ombud Nigeria, and his delegation at Government House, Asaba.

The Governor hailed the creation of the independent office under the 2025 tax reforms by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu as a timely intervention to strengthen Nigeria's fiscal framework.

He noted that Delta State is aligning with the National Tax Reform Law of 2025, with plans to harmonise taxes and levies in 2026 to curb multiple taxation and improve ease of doing business.

Oborewori pledged immediate support for the office, including providing accommodation, and highlighted Delta's recent ranking among the top 10 states in Nigeria for governance accountability and transparency.

Dr Nwabueze expressed optimism that the partnership with Delta State would foster a more efficient, transparent, and business-friendly tax environment.

He announced that Delta has been designated as the Zonal Headquarters for the South-South geopolitical zone, covering six states.



CORPS MARSHAL:

Corps Marshal, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Malam Shehu Mohammed.

FRSC begins "Operation safe Kugbo," restricts trucks during peak hours

ABUJA

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has begun a strategic enforcement operation code named "Operation Safe Kugbo," aimed at enhancing traffic flow in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

The operation also aimed at reducing the incidence of Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) involving articulated vehicles along the ever busy Kugbo outbound corridor in Abuja.

The FRSC Corps Marshal, Malam Shehu Mohammed said this in a statement by Acting Corps Public Education Officer (ACPEO), Mrs Felicia Kalu on Thursday in Abuja.

The Corps Marshal had recently constituted a high-level

tactical team to critically assess and address the recurring incidences of RTCs along the AYA-Nyanya-Kugbo axis.

Mohammed said that the ongoing enforcement drive was a direct outcome of that intervention, reflecting the Corps' commitment to translating strategic assessments into impactful actions.

He said that the initiative, driven at the Sector level by the Sector Commander, Corps Commander Felix Theman, was in line with the provisions of the National Road Traffic Regulations (NRTR), particularly Section 223, as well as the FCT Traffic Regulations.

"It also aligns with the Corps' 2026 Corporate Strategic Goal One, which prioritises safer road environments

through proactive and preventive measures.

"The operation focuses on restricting the movement of articulated vehicles and heavy-duty trucks during peak traffic hours to mitigate congestion and associated risks.

"On Day One of the exercise, Wednesday, March 18, the Unit Commander of Nyanya, led a combined enforcement team comprising personnel from FCT command and Unit command in Nyanya.

"The team, made up of eight Officers, 22 Marshals, supported by three patrol vehicles and five motorbikes, successfully restricted a total of 89 articulated vehicles from operating during designated peak periods.

"The operation was conducted seamlessly, with full compliance recorded from

motorists and stakeholders," he said.

The Corps Marshal commended the cooperation of drivers and transport operators, whose understanding and adherence contributed significantly to the hitch-free exercise.

He however, reiterated the FRSC's commitment to deploying data driven and people centered strategies to safeguard lives and property on Nigerian roads.

The FRSC boss urged all road users, particularly operators of heavy duty vehicles, to continue to comply with traffic regulations.

He added that sustained enforcement under Operation Safe Kugbo would remain a critical component of efforts to ensure safer and more efficient movement within the FCT.

Wike assures diplomatic community of secure,...

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provide an enabling environment for you to carry out your duties, especially in terms of security.

"Of course, you will attest to the fact that things have improved in Abuja since Tinubu's administration came on board. We will keep improving everyday," he said.

Wike expressed the FCT

administration's willingness to strengthen partnership with the diplomatic community.

He congratulated the Ambassador of Ireland to Nigeria, Peter Ryan, on the occasion of Saint Patrick's Day and the official opening of the new Embassy building.

The Minister pointed out that he was not speaking for the Federal Government or as a representative of the Minis-

try of Foreign Affairs, but as the FCT Minister and as their landlord.

He advised the embassies to develop the plots of land allocated to them in the FCT to avoid being cornered and developed by land grabbers.

"Of course, you know me very well, the law must take its course. We had to tell them enough is enough.

"My face may not be liked by

many people, I don't care, I will continue to do what is right.

"We have written to the affected embassies to come and collect their lands back and develop them," he said.

He hinted at the possibility of visiting Ireland in honour of Ryan's invitation, adding that the visit might be soon, especially with his kinsman, Onueze Okocha, now Nigeria's Ambassador to Ireland.

NEWS

Child deaths halved globally, but WHO warns progress is slowing

ABUJA

Global child survival has improved significantly over the past two decades, marking a major public health milestone, but progress is now slowing, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned in its latest report on child mortality trends.

Speaking during an online briefing, the WHO Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, said more than 10 million children died before the age of five in 2000, compared to 4.9 million in 2024, according to new estimates.

He attributed the gains to sustained investments in vaccines, skilled birth care, nutri-

tion treatment, and stronger primary healthcare systems, noting that millions of children survived because governments and partners scaled up proven interventions globally.

“Immunisation has been central, rising from five per cent coverage in 1974 to 85 percent today, driven by the Expanded Programme on Immunisation, which has helped save more than 150 million lives,” he said.

Despite the progress, Ghe-

breyesus stressed that 4.9 million deaths remain unacceptably high, with gains slowing since 2015.

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the worst hit, accounting for about 2.8 million under-five deaths, alongside thousands of daily newborn fatalities.

He warned that conflicts, humanitarian crises, and funding pressures are threatening essential health services, urging renewed focus on primary

healthcare, maternal and newborn care, expanded immunisation, and equitable access to nutrition and lifesaving treatments.

Highlighting country-level progress, he cited Sierra Leone, which declared child mortality an emergency, and North Macedonia, where neonatal deaths dropped sharply following ma-

ior improvements in emergency obstetric and newborn care.

The WHO, working with UNICEF and other partners, has also updated vaccine guidance through its advisory group, while calling on governments and donors to prioritise child survival and sustain funding for essential health services worldwide.



COURTESY VISIT:

L-R: Chairman, INEC Press Corps, Segun Ojumu; Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Joash Amupitan; Welfare Officer, INEC Press Corps, Chux Kuwait, and Assistant Secretary, INEC Press Corps, John Onah, during a courtesy visit by the leadership of the INEC Press Corps to the INEC Chairman's office in Abuja yesterday.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

Fuel supply stability key to economic balance, expert tells FG

LAGOS

The Federal Government has been urged to prioritise stable fuel supply over price control as a more sustainable path to economic stability amid global oil market volatility.

An energy economist, Prof. Wumi Iledare, gave the advice in Lagos, warning that geopolitical tensions in the Middle East continue to disrupt global oil markets and trigger price fluctuations.

Iledare, Professor Emeritus of Petroleum Economics at Louisiana State University, cautioned that attempts to ar-

tificially suppress fuel prices could deepen market distortions and worsen long-term economic vulnerabilities.

He said that government must instead, strengthen supply channels through import flexibility, improved foreign exchange liquidity, and clearer regulatory frameworks to reduce uncertainty.

“In times like this, supply security is more critical than price control. Government must ensure access to multiple supply sources while providing clear, consistent regulatory signals that reduce speculation and volatility,” he said.

According to him, initiatives such as crude-for-naira deals and structured fuel imports could offer temporary relief if properly implemented, but must reflect market realities and avoid becoming hidden subsidies.

“These mechanisms can serve as short-term shock absorbers, but must be transparent, time-bound, and efficiently implemented. Most importantly, any cost savings must translate into lower pump prices for Nigerians,” he added.

Iledare stressed that a liberalised market still requires firm government oversight to ensure fairness and protect vulnerable citizens.

“A deregulated market is not

a lawless market. Government must provide credible regulation, enforce competition, and deliver targeted social protection, not blanket subsidies that distort pricing and strain public finances,” he said.

He identified domestic refining as critical to energy resilience, citing the Dangote Refinery and modular refineries as key to reducing dependence on imports, but warned against reliance on a single supply source.

“Local refining is essential, but must operate competitively. Keeping import options open prevents dominance and reduces risks of supply disruption from a single point of failure,” he said.

Lagos taskforce denies ₦250,000 bribery claim, insists no vehicle towed

LAGOS

The Lagos State Environmental and Special Offences Enforcement Unit (Taskforce) has dismissed as false and defamatory an online report alleging that its officials towed a vehicle in Ijesha and demanded ₦250,000 as a bribe for its release.

The agency's spokesperson, Mr Gbadeyan Abdurraheem, said the taskforce did not tow any vehicle from the Ijesha area to its Alausa yard.

He described the report as misleading, malicious, and without factual basis, adding that the vehicle owner had confirmed that it was not in the custody of the taskforce.

“The owner of the vehicle confirmed that it was not in the custody of the taskforce but elsewhere,” he said.

Abdurraheem further alleged that the report formed part of a broader attempt to discredit the agency and pressure it into compromising its enforcement operations, particularly regarding

violations of the ban on commercial motorcycle operations on restricted routes.

He stressed that the taskforce would not be swayed by media campaigns, intimidation, or public sentiment in carrying out its statutory duties under the Lagos State Transport Sector Reform Law of 2018.

According to him, the agency has consistently rejected appeals linked to unofficial arrangements that could undermine enforcement integrity, warning that releasing im-

pounded motorcycles outside due process would set a dangerous precedent.

Reaffirming its commitment to public safety and order, he urged residents to disregard the allegations and encouraged those with genuine complaints to submit verifiable evidence through official channels.

He also called on bloggers and social media influencers to uphold ethical standards by verifying information before publication and supporting the rule of law.

APC chieftain awards scholarships to 40 students, empowers 1,500 in Kogi

ADAVI (KOGI)

chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Dr John Suberu, has awarded scholarships to 40 students and distributed food items to about 1,500 people in Adavi/Okehi Federal Constituency of Kogi State.

Suberu made the distribution during his official declaration to contest for the House of Representatives seat for the constituency at Ege in Adavi.

The aspirant, who serves as Senior Special Assistant to Governor Ahmed Ododo on Road Safety Matters, said his ambition was driven by a desire to improve the welfare of his constituents, particularly youths, women, and vulnerable groups.

He described the intervention as part of efforts to support education and alleviate hardship.

“I humbly ask you to bear with me, because what I am about to share is not just a speech, but a cry from the heart of a son who loves his people and can no longer remain silent while his land suffers,” he said.

Suberu identified poor road infrastructure, insecurity, and limited access to quality education as major challenges facing the constituency, pledging to address them through targeted policies and programmes if elected.

He also promised to create jobs, support entrepreneurship, and implement empowerment initiatives for youths and women.

The APC chieftain com-

mended Governor Ododo and President Bola Tinubu for efforts to tackle insecurity in Kogi and across the country.

Under his foundation, 40 students received scholarships, 100 individuals got financial support, while phones were distributed to selected beneficiaries alongside the food items.

Unveiling the aspirant, the Governor's Special Adviser on Electronic Media, Mr Yusuf Ohiare, described the event as a moment of renewed hope for the constituency.

“Leadership is about uplifting people, creating opportunities and putting smiles on faces. Today's programme is a practical demonstration of that belief,” he said.

The event drew prominent APC stakeholders, including Ward Chairman Alhaji Aliyu Momoh and the Auditor-General for Local Government, Dr Yakubu Adabenege Siyaka.

Leaders of youth and women groups commended Suberu's initiatives and pledged support for his aspiration.

Speaking on behalf of Ege-Iruvochinomi Ward, former Adavi Local Government Council Leader, Mrs Fatimat Abdulmalik, praised his contributions, noting that his scholarship schemes, empowerment programmes, and support for orphans and the less privileged had positively impacted many lives.

“We wholeheartedly pledge our unreserved support for your aspiration to represent us in the House of Representatives,” she said.

Eid-el-Fitr: Mrs Soludo preaches love, sacrifice, tolerance

AWKA

The Wife of the Anambra State Governor, Dr Nonye Soludo, has urged Nigerians to embrace love, sacrifice, and tolerance as essential values for peaceful coexistence, as Muslims celebrate Eid-el-Fitr.

Soludo, founder of the Healthy Living Initiative, said in a goodwill message in Awka that the festival goes beyond celebration and serves as a reminder of compassion, unity, and mutual respect across religious divides.

“Eid-el-Fitr reminds us that love, sacrifice, and tolerance remain the greatest foundation

of harmony and mutual coexistence,” she said.

She urged the Muslim faithful to reflect these values in their daily lives by spreading kindness and fostering genuine happiness within their communities.

“As you celebrate, let love lead; let kindness and oneness define your actions; let someone around you smile because of you,” she added.

Soludo wished the Muslim Ummah a peaceful and joyful celebration, while calling for sustained unity and understanding among residents of Anambra State and Nigerians at large.

Communities must lead anti-terror war, says Defence Chief

ABUJA

The Chief of Defence Staff, Olufemi Oloyede, has declared that communities in Borno and Yobe must take ownership of the fight against terrorism, stressing that local cooperation remains critical to ending insurgency in the North-East.

Speaking on Thursday after a strategic assessment of ongoing counter-terrorism operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP, Oloyede said the Armed Forces of Nigeria had found that the success and sustainability of military efforts were closely tied to the commitment of local populations.

He warned that terrorism could not thrive without local support systems, expressing concern over intelligence indicating that some individuals within affected communities had, knowingly or unknowingly, aided or shielded terrorist elements.

Such actions, he said, undermine military operations and prolong the suffering of innocent citizens.

The defence chief noted that perpetrators of violence were often not strangers but individuals known within communities, including neighbours and relatives.

He urged residents to rise above fear and misplaced loyalties by exposing criminal elements and denying them

sanctuary.

“The fight against terrorism is not the responsibility of the military alone. It is a collective duty,” he said, calling on citizens to provide credible and timely

intelligence to security agencies.

Citing a recent incident, Oloyede revealed that some wounded attackers involved in an assault on Kukawa were discovered within the community

during follow-up operations, suggesting possible complicity.

He reassured Nigerians of the military’s commitment to tackling evolving threats, including the use of drones by

insurgents, and called on traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth groups and civil society organisations to intensify efforts in mobilising communities against extremism.

MMIA fire: NAMA deploys mobile control tower to restore operations

LAGOS

The Nigerian Airspace Management Agency has deployed a Mobile Control Tower at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport following the February 23 fire incident that disrupted operations at the old terminal.

Director of Safety Electronics and Engineering Services, Mrs Terese Ihenacho, described the deployment as a major operational milestone, noting that it ensured continuity of safe and efficient air navigation services.

She said all test runs had been successfully completed, with air traffic controllers ready to commence operations immediately.

Ihenacho revealed that the

tower had been reconfigured to meet local operational demands, incorporating innovations such as a smart strip system alongside traditional manual processes, as well as improved connectivity to Centrex and TRACON systems.

She disclosed plans to deploy a second mobile tower for Runway 18R in collaboration with stakeholders, including the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria and the Nigerian Meteorological Agency.

The deployment, she said, forms part of NAMA’s broader contingency strategy, with additional infrastructure including solar-powered lighting, reinforced structures, backup power systems and CCTV surveillance installed at the site.

Foundation empowers 150 FCT women with skills, starter packs

ABUJA

The Somalisa Okocha Care Foundation has empowered no fewer than 150 indigent women in the Federal Capital Territory with entrepreneurial skills and starter packs to boost economic independence and reduce gender-based violence.

Co-Founder, Ms Lisa Okocha, said the initiative, held in Kpeygeyi community, formed part of activities marking International Women’s Day.

She explained that beneficiaries were trained in soap, bleach and disinfectant production, as well as packaging, marketing and financial literacy.

Participants also received guidance on peanut process-

ing, product registration with NAFDAC and export procedures.

Okocha said the programme aimed to create a ripple effect of empowerment at the grassroots, noting that supporting one woman translates into broader community development.

Beyond skills training, the foundation provided starter packs, food items and clothing, while also offering education on women’s rights, mental health and prevention of gender-based violence.

Beneficiaries, including Mrs Grace Gabriel and Aisha Mohammed, expressed appreciation, noting that the initiative would enable them to support their families and extend the knowledge gained to others within their communities.



A COURTESY VISIT:

Governor Alex Otti of Abia State (right) and the Abia State Postal Manager, Mrs. Winifred Amadi, who paid the Governor a courtesy visit at his office in Nvosi, Isialangwa South Local Government Area of the State.

Umahi orders anti-graft probe of Fed road projects

ABUJA

Minister of Works, David Umahi, has directed a comprehensive anti-corruption review of federal road projects nationwide, reinforcing the Federal Government’s commitment to transparency and accountability in infrastructure delivery.

Umahi disclosed this while receiving the ‘Personality of the Year’ award from Aljazeera Nigeria Newspaper, stating that

both the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission had been invited to independently investigate ongoing projects.

“We wrote to ICPC to investigate all our projects, not just on paper, but through physical verification. We also wrote to EFCC. ICPC has concluded its work, and EFCC is expected to commence after Sallah. Nobody is interfering,” he said.

He explained that the min-

istry operates a transparent costing system that allows for detailed breakdowns of project components, including materials and equipment.

Umahi defended the shift from asphalt to concrete roads, noting that although initially resisted, the change serves the long-term interests of Nigerians due to durability.

He described poor road infrastructure as a major constraint on mobility and economic activity, likening

impassable roads to “imprisoning” affected communities.

Earlier, Aljazeera Nigeria CEO, Williams Bassey, said Umahi’s selection as 2025 Personality of the Year followed rigorous evaluation and peer review, citing his role in advancing infrastructure development under President Bola Tinubu’s Renewed Hope Agenda.

He added that extensive investigations by the organisation found no evidence of corruption in the ministry’s operations.

NHRC raises alarm over abuse, trafficking risks in IDP camp

GOMBE

The National Human Rights Commission has called for urgent protection of displaced women and children in Gombe, warning of rising risks of abuse, trafficking and rights violations in the camp.

The Gombe State Coordinator, Dr Joseph Wanshe, made the appeal following the displacement of over 7,000 per-

sons from Bauchi State communities, including Gwama, Digare, Mansur and Yalo, after bandit attacks. The victims are currently sheltering in Kashere town.

Wanshe disclosed that nearly 4,000 of the displaced persons are children, representing about 57 percent of the camp population, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, sexual abuse, forced labour and malnutrition.

He stressed the need for collective action to safeguard the rights and dignity of displaced persons, noting that poor sanitation, inadequate medical facilities and insufficient feeding further expose them to disease and hardship.

The NHRC official called for improved facilities, especially toilets, to curb open defecation and reduce health risks, as well as separate spaces for women to enhance privacy and secu-

urity.

He said the commission was engaging stakeholders and monitoring conditions at the camp, urging residents and host communities to report human rights violations promptly.

Wanshe commended the governments of Gombe and Bauchi States for their support and also acknowledged interventions by UNICEF in health, education and hygiene services within the camp.

Lawyer advocates limiting Supreme Court jurisdiction to improve judicial efficiency

IBADAN

An Ibadan based legal practitioner, Mr Olakunle Akintola has proposed that the Supreme Court’s appellate jurisdiction be narrowed to focus on constitutional matters and criminal cases.

Akintola, a former secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Oyo chapter, said this on Thursday in an interview with newsmen in Ibadan.

Akintola, while speaking on

ways to improve the judiciary, proposed that the constitution be amended to accommodate judicial reforms such as narrowing the appellate jurisdiction of the supreme court.

He contended that not all appeals from the Court of Appeal should proceed to the Supreme Court.

According to him, this would significantly reduce the Supreme Court’s caseload, as only constitutional and criminal matters should be enter-

tained at that level.

On constitutional amendments, he supported state policing and local government autonomy to ensure even development.

“It will be good if the constitution can be amended to accommodate state policing.

“Also good, if the amendment can ensure the implementation of the grant for full administrative and financial autonomy to the 774 local governments to ensure even devel-

opment,” he said.

The lawyer also called for financial autonomy for state judiciaries, merit-based appointments, and digitalisation of courts, to address challenges like corruption, infrastructure deficits, and lack of public confidence.

“Judiciary can be improved by ensuring that the judiciary is given full financial autonomy. The state judiciaries should be financially independent and not rely on any state governor for survival,” he added

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that BENJAMIN-ODION AMENZE EDITH, IRABOR AMENZE EDITH, BENJAMIN-ISAAC EDITH AMENZE and BENJAMIN-ISAAC EDITH are one and the same person as appeared on some of my documents. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as BENJAMIN-ODION AMENZE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as MISS ICHERE OGECHI NELLY, now wish to be known and address as MRS. OGECHI NELLY BLESSING. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

NEWS

JUDICIARY

APC heads to Tribunal, seeks fresh poll in disputed FCT units

ABUJA

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has approached the Area Council Election Petition Tri-

bunal in Abuja, challenging the outcome of the February 21 Gwagwalada Area Council chairmanship election and seeking fresh polls in affected polling units.

The party's candidate, Yahaya Usman, is contesting the return of Mohammed Kasim of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who was declared winner by INEC after polling 22,165

votes against Usman's 17,788.

In the petition filed by a legal team led by Chris Udeoyibo, alongside Agaptus Obi and Emmanuel Agada, the APC argues that the election failed

to comply substantially with provisions of the Electoral Act, 2026, and was marred by alleged corrupt practices.

Central to the dispute are claims that the declared winner did not secure the majority of lawful votes cast, with the petition highlighting irregularities in 110 polling units across the council area. These include discrepancies between voter accreditation figures and final vote tallies, as well as concerns over the collation process.

Witness statements before the tribunal cited the late arrival of electoral officials and delays in the commencement of voting.

One witness deposed that polling units did not open as

scheduled, while another alleged that announced results did not reflect the number of accredited voters present.

The petitioners are asking the tribunal to nullify the election in affected polling units, void Kasim's declaration, and, alternatively, declare Usman winner on the basis of what they describe as the majority of lawful votes.

The tribunal is expected to examine documentary evidence, including result sheets and voter registers, alongside witness testimonies before delivering judgment.

The outcome could either uphold the current result or alter the leadership of the Gwagwalada Area Council.



CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME:

Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa (R), with the Chief Executive Officer, Nigeria Education Repository and Databank (NERD), Tunji Ariyomo, during a capacity building programme for School representatives organised by NERD in Abuja recently.

Court admits Kogi CoS' statements in alleged N10bn fraud trial

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has admitted into evidence statements made by Ali Bello, Chief of Staff to Kogi State Governor Usman Ododo, in the ongoing alleged N10 billion money laundering trial.

Justice James Omotosho, in a detailed ruling, dismissed objections by Bello and his co-defendant, Dauda Suleiman, who had argued that the extra-judicial statements were obtained

under duress by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The judge held that the anti-graft agency complied with Sections 15(4) and 17(2) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, noting that the statements were made voluntarily and were non-confessional in nature.

Bello and Suleiman, through their counsel, had challenged the admissibility of eight statements made between November and December 2022, alleg-

ing threats and coercion.

However, the prosecution, led by Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, maintained that most of the statements were obtained in the presence of their lawyer, Z.E. Abbas.

In his ruling, Justice Omotosho faulted the defendants for failing to call Abbas as a witness, describing the omission as a fundamental error that raised a presumption of withholding evidence under the Evidence Act.

The court observed that the statements contained phrases such as "I don't know" and "I can't recall," indicating they

were not confessional.

It further held that the absence of video recordings did not invalidate the statements, as the relevant ACJA provisions apply only to confessional statements.

Consequently, the court admitted Bello's six statements as Exhibits R to R5 and Suleiman's two statements as Exhibits S and S1.

The judge adjourned the case to April 21 and 24 for the prosecution to conclude its case, warning that failure by the EFCC to present its remaining witnesses would lead to closure of its case.

2 arraigned over alleged Ajah murder, remanded in custody

IKEJA

Two men, Shafi Fatai and Yusuf Ismaila, have been arraigned before an Ikeja Magistrates' Court over the alleged murder of a man in the Ajah area of Lagos.

The defendants, aged 40 and 35 respectively, are facing a four-count charge bordering on conspiracy, murder, and membership of an unlawful society.

Prosecutor, Supol Josephine Ikhayere told the court that the defendants, alongside one Hammed Akaribi who is still

at large, allegedly killed Sheriff Salami on April 18, 2023, by shooting him in the stomach and striking him on the head with an axe.

The prosecution further alleged that Fatai is a member of the proscribed Black Axe (Aiye) Confraternity, contrary to relevant laws of Lagos State.

The defendants' pleas were not taken.

Magistrate L.A. Owolabi ordered their remand pending legal advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions and adjourned the case to April 7 for mention.

Man docked over alleged N85m fraud, granted N3m bail

IKEJA

A 51-year-old man, John-Kennedy Otagada, has been arraigned before an Ikeja Magistrates' Court over an alleged N85 million fraud involving Gidi Credit Ltd.

Otagada, who is facing charges of stealing and obtaining money under false pretence, pleaded not guilty.

The prosecutor alleged that the defendant fraudulently ob-

tained the sum under the guise of securing credit for himself, a claim he allegedly knew to be false.

Magistrate L.A. Owolabi granted the defendant bail in the sum of N3 million with two sureties in like sum, directing that the sureties must be gainfully employed and have verifiable addresses within the court's jurisdiction.

The case was adjourned until March 26 for mention.

Alleged illegal mining: Court adjourns trial of 8 Chinese nationals

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has adjourned the trial of eight Chinese nationals and two others accused of illegal mining to April 21.

Justice James Omotosho granted the adjournment following an application by de-

fence counsel, Joe Agi, SAN, citing the absence of the first defence witness, who was said to be indisposed and unable to travel from Lagos.

The prosecution, led by Adeola Adedipe, SAN, did not oppose the application.

The defendants are being prosecuted by the Attorney-General of the Federation

on a three-count charge bordering on illegal mining activities.

The Chinese nationals, alongside a Nigerian defendant and a company, are accused of unlawfully conducting quarrying operations within Quarry Lease No. 22284QLS belonging to Jinloys Nigeria Limited between October 2022 and June

2024.

Earlier, the court had dismissed a no-case submission filed by the defendants, ruling that the prosecution had established a prima facie case requiring them to open their defence.

The matter will resume on April 21 for continuation of hearing.

Okpebholo felicitates with Muslims, urges unity, peace during Eid-el-Fitr

BENIN CITY

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has felicitated with Muslim faithful in Edo and across Nigeria on the occasion of Eid-el-Fitr, celebrating the successful conclusion of Ramadan.

In a statement, Governor Okpebholo commended the

Muslim community for their devotion, discipline, and act of charity during the holy month.

He emphasised that the values of sacrifice, compassion, tolerance, and selflessness displayed during Ramadan are crucial for fostering a peaceful, united, and prosperous society.

The Governor urged Muslims to carry these virtues beyond Ramadan, promoting

harmony, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among all citizens, irrespective of religious or ethnic differences.

He also reaffirmed his administration's commitment to inclusive governance, economic development, and the welfare of all Edo residents, noting that unity is key to sustainable growth.

Governor Okpebholo called on all Edo people to use the fes-

tive period to pray for continued peace, stability, and development in the state and the nation.

"Eid-el-Fitr is a time of joy, reflection, and gratitude. Let us celebrate in peace, extend love to one another, and remain steadfast in building a better Edo State," he said.

He wished all Muslim faithful a peaceful and joyous Eid celebration.

IED: NAOWA 4 Brigadeo holds health drive, fitness campaign in Benin

BENIN CITY

The 4 Brigade Chapter of the Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association (NAOWA) has celebrated the 2026 International Women's Day in Benin City, with a programme promoting health, fitness, and women's empowerment.

Zonal Coordinator Mrs Mariam Aina Balogun highlighted this year's theme, "Give to Gain: For All Women and Girls - Rights, Equality and Empowerment," urging women to foster unity, resilience,

and self-development.

Brigadier General Ahmed Balogun, 4 Brigade Commander, commended NAOWA members for their support to families and nation-building.

Special Guest, Mrs Eyitoyosi Shonibare encouraged participants to prioritise physical and mental wellbeing.

The celebration featured a road walk, group fitness exercises, Zumba, drama performances by NAOWA and NASWA members, cultural dances, and a medical awareness session covering first aid, fire safety, and emergency response.

Foreign

NEWS

Former counter-terrorism head investigated by FBI over alleged leaks

The FBI is investigating Donald Trump's former top counter-terrorism official - who resigned from the role earlier this week - over alleged leaks, sources have told CBS News, the BBC's US partner.

Joe Kent is under investigation in connection with alleged leaks of classified information, with sources telling CBS that the probe began before his departure as US National Counterterrorism Center director.

Announcing his resignation on Tuesday, Kent said he could not support the war in Iran "in good conscience" and that the country "posed no imminent threat" to the US - a claim the White House dismissed.

The BBC contacted Kent for comment regarding the leaks allegation. The FBI declined to comment.

Top US counterterrorism official resigns over Iran war, urging Trump to 'reverse course'

The probe is being handled by the FBI's criminal division and has been under way for some time, one source told CBS.

Shortly after Kent resigned, former deputy White House chief of staff Taylor Budowich claimed Kent was "often at the center of national security leaks" - but did not specify what they were.

He also claimed Kent "spent all of his time working to subvert the chain of command and undermine the President of the United States".

In a letter addressed to President Trump announcing his resignation, Kent said it was "clear" the war in Iran was started "due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby".

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a US antisemitism monitor, said in a statement that accusations in Kent's resignation letter "traffic in old-age antisemitic tropes".

Speaking to right-wing podcaster Tucker Carlson on Wednesday evening, Kent repeated the claim that the decision to attack Iran was led by Israel.

He told the former Fox News host there had been "no intelligence" suggesting that Iran would launch a "sneak attack" on the US and that Iran was not on the verge of getting a nuclear weapon.

He also alleged that some of the government's "key decision makers" had limited access to Trump in the lead up to the Iran war and that there had been no "robust debate" ahead of the strikes.

Kent added that he had a "great" conversation with Trump about his resignation and that he believed he and the president had "departed personally on good terms".

Following Kent's resignation, the White House dismissed his letter, saying the president had "compelling evidence" that Iran was going to attack the US first.

Trump later rebutted Kent's claims, saying he was a "nice guy" but that it was a "good thing" he was out of government, adding that he always thought Kent had been "very weak on security".

Kent, a long-time Trump supporter who unsuccessfully ran for Congress twice, was nominated by the president early in his administration and confirmed to his post in July 2025.



FORMER COUNTER-TERRORISM:

Joe Kent is a long-time Trump supporter and decorated veteran of the US military

Japan PM to hold 'difficult' talks with Trump as Iran conflict looms large

Takaichi is meeting Donald Trump in what she expects would be a "very difficult" conversation, just days after the president's calls for allies to help secure the war-stricken Strait of Hormuz largely unanswered.

Takaichi told parliament hours before her departure that she would "do everything to maximise [Japan's] national interest".

The three-day visit to Washington was a chance to talk trade and deepen the US-Japan alliance ahead of Trump's diplomatic trip to China, which has now been postponed because of the war.

But now it is the topic of the war that will likely overshadow the meeting, which is shaping up to be a test of Takaichi's friendship with Trump.

The trip was scheduled back in October, a week after Takaichi

took office, when Tokyo rolled out the red carpet for Trump and the two leaders heaped compliments on each other, heralding a new "golden age" in bilateral ties.

As of a few weeks ago, the upcoming meeting looked set to be a success, with Takaichi "fresh off a dominant election victory and with a new round of investment projects in the US", Emma Chanlett-Avery, director for political and security affairs at the Asia Society Policy Institute, told the BBC.

But while Takaichi "had intended to build on the warmth of her first meeting with Trump and press upon him Japan's concerns about Chinese aggression ahead of Trump's [then scheduled] meeting with Xi", recent events have complicated things, said Chanlett-Avery.

Earlier this week, Trump posted on his Truth Social plat-

form a call for some countries to help secure the vital strait.

He had pointed to Japan's and other Asian economies' dependence on fuel from the Middle East as reason for them to get involved.

"We get less than 1% of our oil from the [Strait of Hormuz] and some countries get much more... We want them to come and help us," he wrote.

But after receiving a lukewarm response, he retracted his request, saying in a later post that the US did "NOT NEED THE HELP OF ANYONE!".

Takaichi had acknowledged the challenges she faced with a trip to the White House at this time.

"I want to engage in substantial discussions based on Japan's point of view and our way of thinking," she told reporters on Wednesday. "The top priority is the early de-escalation of the situation."

What have US allies and

China said about sending ships to the Strait of Hormuz?

What might Trump ask for?

"No one knows, however, what exactly Trump is going to demand, and whether [Takaichi] will really have the guts to decline on the spot," said Koichi Nakano, a political scientist at Tokyo's Sophia University.

Analysts add that it would be difficult for Takaichi to respond with a flat refusal if Trump brought up the issue of assistance in the strait during their meeting, given that nearly 95% of the oil Japan uses flows through the strait.

Another issue with Trump potentially demanding military intervention from Tokyo is that Japan is constrained by the pacifist constitution it adopted after World War Two, which bars the country from using force to resolve conflicts except in cases of self-defence.

Why are gas prices soaring and how could it affect you?

A major gas facility in Qatar has been hit by missile attacks, causing "extensive damage", the country's state-run energy firm has said.

The Iranian strikes follow reports that Israel hit a petrochemical complex in Iran.

The attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan industrial hub has sent gas prices soaring.

What is Ras Laffan and what does it do?

Ras Laffan Industrial City is Qatar's main site for producing liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is used globally for cooking, heating homes and generating electricity.

It produces about a fifth of the world's supply of LNG.

As well as processing LNG, the industrial hub's other facilities include a gas-to-liquids plant, LNG storage and an oil refinery.

It is located 80km (50 miles) north-east of Qatar's capital Doha, and close to the world's largest gas field that the country shares with Iran. The Iranian side is called South Pars; Qatar's side is called North Dome and covers an area of more than 6,000 sq km (2,315 sq miles).

Ras Laffan is run by the state energy company QatarEnergy. Several international energy firms also have operations there, including US giants ExxonMobil and Chevron and the UK's Shell.

Production has been shut down there since early March, shortly after war broke out.

What is happening to gas prices?

QatarEnergy confirmed overnight that Ras Laffan had been subjected to two missile attacks, one that resulted in "extensive damage" to Shell's Pearl gas-to-liquids facility, and one that caused "sizeable fires and extensive further damage" to several of its LNG facilities.

Gas prices, which had already been rising since the start of the conflict, surged.

When trading began on Thursday morning, UK gas prices briefly surged over 30%, and are currently up about 22% at 170p per therm.

European gas prices are also up 20% on Thursday.

Follow live updates on Iran war

A line chart titled 'Gas prices continue to climb in wake of Iran conflict', showing the rolling month-ahead futures price for UK natural gas, in pence per therm. At the end of March 2021, the price was around 47p. That rose to a high of 640p in late August 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, before falling again. It then rose sharply again, from about 78p on 27 February 2026 to 171p on 19 March 2026, after the US and Israel's attacks on Iran. The source is Bloomberg.

Chad warns Sudan it will retaliate after drone strike on mourners kills 17

Chad's president has ordered the military to retaliate against future attacks from Sudan following a drone attack that killed at least 17 people and injured several other people attending a funeral.

Wearing military uniform, President Idris Mahamat Déby convened an emergency security meeting on Wednesday evening, where he ordered the military to be on high alert. He also ordered a "total closure" of the border with Sudan.

He described the attack targeting the border town of Tiné as "outrageous and a blatant aggression" against Chad's territorial integrity.

He said that it had happened despite warnings to the two sides battling each other in Sudan and a previous closure of the border.

Last month, Chad closed its border with Sudan "until further notice" to stop repeated incursions by Sudanese armed groups. It however allowed "exceptional exemptions" on humanitarian grounds, with prior authorisation from relevant authorities.

Residents of Tiné said the victims of Wednesday's attack were mourners, with one quoted by the Reuters news agency as saying they had gathered at a house for a funeral ceremony that involved reading the Koran.

The attack drew condemnation from several quarters, including from the National Assembly and MPs from the ruling party.

"The government bows with deep dismay to the memory of the victims and extends its deepest condolences to the bereaved families," a statement by the government spokesman said.

The spokesman said Chad had now "strengthened the posture of its defence and security forces" and was ready to pursue its rights inside Sudanese territory "in strict compliance with the rules of international law".

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which controls most of the western Darfur region bordering Chad, is suspected of carrying out the attack. It denies any involvement and blames Sudan's army, which has blamed the RSF.

The Sudanese government has often accused Chad of supporting the RSF with weapons and mercenaries, claims which N'Djamena denies.

Sudan has been plagued by a civil war that broke out in April 2023 following a vicious power struggle between its army and the RSF.

The ongoing war has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced more than 13 million people, nearly one million of them to Chad, according to the UN.

NEWS**Foreign**

UK agrees deal to ease migrant returns to Nigeria

The UK government has agreed a deal with Nigeria to make it easier to remove people with no right to be in the UK.

For the first time, the Nigerian government will recognise UK letters - an identification document issued to individuals without a valid passport - so people will no longer have to wait for emergency travel documents to be issued before they can be returned.

The agreement was struck during President Bola Ahmed Tinubu state visit to the UK.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer hailed the president's visit - the first by a leader of a west African nation in 37 years - as "historic".

On Wednesday, the King hosted a spectacular state banquet at Windsor Castle for the president and first lady, praising the strength of the ties between the two nations.

President Tinubu also met the prime minister at No 10.

A Downing Street spokesperson said the two leaders "committed to deepening their long-term partnership on trade, infrastructure and sustainable growth".

They also agreed to work more closely together on defence and security in response

to transnational crime and terrorism, the spokesperson said.

The Home Office said the immigration deal would make it easier to return people who overstay their visas, foreign criminals and failed asylum seekers.

It said annual returns to Nigeria had nearly doubled to 1,150.

The two countries have also agreed to launch joint operations and share information to crack down on criminal gangs abusing visa routes.

A new standardised document-checking system will be introduced to verify the authenticity of applications.

The Home Office said it followed a series of high-profile cases involving fake job sponsorships, sham marriages and forged financial or employment records.

Meanwhile, Nigeria will review its laws to ensure the toughest possible sentences are given to immigration offenders.

Border Security and Asylum Minister Alex Norris said: "Nigeria is a key partner in our work to tackle illegal migration, as the UK's largest African visa market and home to thousands of Nigerians who have built their lives here."

Three Palestinian women killed in beauty salon during Iranian missile attack

At least three Palestinian women have been killed and eight more injured when a beauty salon in the Israeli-occupied West Bank was hit during an Iranian missile attack.

The Israeli military told the BBC the women were killed "by a direct hit from a cluster munition missile". The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) said there was a "direct impact of missile shrapnel".

The incident happened in the town of Beit Awwa, near Hebron, on Wednesday night.

The women are the first Palestinians killed in the West Bank as a result of the Iran war.

At around the same time, a Thai worker was also killed from shrapnel which hit a farming community in Israel, Israeli medics said.

The Israeli military had said it was working to intercept an Iranian missile attack shortly before the strikes.

The salon was in a prefabricated metal structure close to a house. Locals said a bomb or part of a bomb landed yards away and ricocheted into the salon.

A group of women were gathered on steps nearby, waiting to have their nails done ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday when explosion happened. The walls and door were raked with holes, while a large hole in the wall of the building showing where shrapnel blew out in the women's direction. Inside was a scene of destruction.

The official Palestinian news

agency Wafa said fragments from a missile or an intercept reportedly landed in several other locations in the West Bank.

Iran has repeatedly fired missiles with cluster-bomb warheads at Israel. These are munitions which release large numbers of bomblets in mid-flight, scattering them over a wide area.

Wafa identified those killed in the salon as Mais Ghazi Masalmeh, 17, Sahira Rizq Masalmeh, 50, and Amal Sobhi Abdel Karim Matawa' Masalmeh, 36.

The PRCS said response teams, including at least five ambulances rushed to the scene and found "several casualties and injuries".

The bodies of the three women were transported to a local hospital, along with other victims who sustained "critical and moderate" wounds, it said.

The PRCS had previously reported that four women were killed in the incident before revising the death toll to three.

It added that crews faced "significant difficulties" trying to reach the site due to the closure of iron gates leading to the area, which "had a direct and critical impact on the time available to save the injured victims".

In Israel, 30-year-old Thai worker Chaiwat Weaw-nil was killed in Moshav Adanim, about 12 miles (20km) north-east of Tel Aviv. Israel's Magen David Adom emergency service said "metal shrapnel was scattered across the scene" where Chaiwat was found dead.

**PEACE DEAL SIGNING:**

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, left, and Democratic Republic of the Congo President Felix Tshisekedi, at the peace deal signing ceremony with Donald Trump, 4 December 2025.

DR Congo and Rwanda agree to ease tensions after talks in US

The Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda have agreed to take "concrete steps" to ease tensions amid a stalled peace process, after talks hosted by the US in Washington.

Conflict in eastern DR Congo has continued despite the two countries signing a peace deal with US President Donald Trump last year.

The pledge to ease tensions comes after the US earlier this month sanctioned the Rwan-

dan Defence Forces and four senior officials and accused Rwanda of directly supporting the M23 rebel group, blaming it for escalating the conflict.

A joint statement by DR Congo, Rwanda and the US says they have "agreed to a series of coordinated steps to de-escalate tensions and advance progress on the ground".

They pledged to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while Rwanda would disengage its forces and

lift "defensive measures... in defined areas in DR Congo's territory", the statement says.

While DR Congo would intensify "time-bound" efforts to neutralise the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), an armed group that includes some Rwandan ethnic Hutus involved in the 1994 Rwandan genocide and remains active in eastern DR Congo.

Rwanda describes the FDLR as a "genocidal militia" and

says its continued existence in eastern DR Congo threatens its own territory.

It has repeatedly denied supporting M23 despite overwhelming evidence, saying its military presence is a defensive measure against threats against its security by armed groups in DR Congo.

Fighting has persisted in eastern DR Congo despite the US-brokered peace deal in December aimed at ending the long-running conflict.

Days after the signing ceremony, the M23 entered the Congolese city of Uvira near the Burundi border in the biggest escalation of the conflict in months. It later pulled out under US pressure, although it still controls large parts of eastern DR Congo, including the region's two biggest cities, Goma and Bukavu.

Earlier this month, while announcing the Rwandan sanctions, the US said that despite the M23's withdrawal, its continued presence near the Burundian border and Rwandan military support to them carried "the risk of escalating the conflict into a broader regional war".

Rwanda rejected the accusations, saying the sanctions had unfairly targeted one side and "misrepresent the reality and distort the facts of the conflict".

It also accused DR Congo of violating the peace agreement with "indiscriminate drone attacks and ground offensives".

Recent drone strikes have heightened tensions in DR Congo, with a French national working for the UN and two other people killed last week.

The DR Congo army, stationed several hundred kilometres from the city, regularly launches long-range drone strikes on M23 positions, while security sources say the M23 also deploys explosive drones at the front lines.

Sahel accounts for nearly half of all terror-related deaths: report

The Sahel region of Africa, which has become the "global epicentre of terrorism," accounted for nearly half of all terrorism-related deaths for the third consecutive year in 2025, the Global Terrorism Report said Thursday.

The index, compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace think tank, has ranked 163 countries for 13 years according to the impact of "terrorism" based on indicators such as the number of attacks, deaths, injuries and hostages.

It defines terrorism as "the systematic threat or use of violence, by non-state actors, whether for or in opposition to established authority".

In 2024, more than half of the 7,555 deaths due to "terrorism" worldwide were recorded in the Sahel, a semi-arid belt stretching along the Sahara desert's southern rim from the Atlantic to the Red Sea.

The trend remained largely unchanged in 2025, with nearly half of the 5,582 deaths attributed to "terrorists" occurring in the Sahel, although the total number of victims in the region fell, the Australia-based

think tank said.

"The Sahel has suffered a tenfold increase in terrorism fatalities since 2007", when it accounted for only one percent of global terrorism-related deaths.

"The epicentre of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa, into the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa," the report said.

Burkina Faso was the most affected country in the world for two consecutive years but was overtaken in 2025 by Pakistan.

"Deaths from terrorism in Pakistan are now at their highest level since 2013, with the country recording 1,139 terrorism deaths and 1,045 incidents in 2025," the report said.

"This follows a sharp resurgence in terrorist activity driven in part by the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021," the report said, also pointing to rising violence by the Pakistani Taliban movement and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), the most active separatist militant group.

- JNIM and Islamic State group -

Burkina Faso, meanwhile, saw the largest decline in

deaths in 2025, falling 45 percent from the previous year to 846, the report noted.

The reason was mostly an 84-percent reduction in civilian casualties rather than an improvement in security.

The Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, known by its Arabic acronym JNIM, which is the main jihadist group active in Burkina, has shifted its strategy to target soldiers rather than civilians in its attacks.

Niger, listed fifth in 2024, climbed to third place with an increase in "terrorism" incidents in 2025 and surpassed Mali and Syria with 703 deaths, more than half of which were civilians.

Nigeria rose to fourth place on the index, with 750 people killed in 2025, up 46 percent from the previous year.

"This marks the highest death toll since 2020, driven by internal instability as well as ongoing conflict between ISWAP and Boko Haram," the report said.

Mali saw a decline in deaths, now ranked fifth on the index, with 341 killed last year compared to 604 in 2024.

Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

The Edo Art Works: A library in motion

The artistic heritage of the Edo people, which is reflective of its presence around us, centered in the ancient Kingdom of Benin in present-day Nigeria, actually represents one of the most sophisticated and culturally significant traditions in human history. For centuries, the Edo have utilized sculpture, not merely as a form of aesthetic expression, but as a robust medium for historical documentation, spiritual mediation, and the consolidation of political authority. These and more are boldly seen in every book of history written about these unique people.

Through the masterful manipulation of bronze, brass, ivory, folklore, dances, songs and wood, Edo sculptors have been able to create a visual language that narrates the complexity of their world. To study Edo sculpture is to read the biography of a civilization that viewed the art as an indelible bridge between the mortal realm and the divine.

In the Edo worldview, the Oba (King) is the terrestrial representative of the gods, ancestors and the people. Consequently, the vast majority of Edo sculpture was commissioned by the royal court and at various historical periods. This "Court Art" was characterized by its permanence and its proximity to power. The Guild of Bronze Casters (Igun Eronmwon), operating under the direct patronage of the Oba, utilized the lost-wax casting technique, to create classic works of unparalleled precision.

The sculptural process itself was considered a sacred act and however still is till date. When an artisan cast a commemorative head of a deceased Oba, he is not just making a likeness; he is creating a vessel for the king's spirit. These king's heads, often cast in bronze, featured stylized but unique features: large, a symbol of vastness, almond-shaped eyes to denote spiritual alertness, and thick, beaded collars that symbolized the weight of royal responsibility. By placing these sculptures on ancestral altars, the Edo culture and its philosophy ensures that the wisdom and protection of past rulers remained accessible to the living.

Perhaps the most famous manifestation of Edo sculpture is the series of rectangular brass plaques that once adorned the pillars of the Oba's palace in Benin City. You may remember these if you grew up in Benin during the reign of Oba Akenzuwa. The doors to every entrance of an Edo man had carved history of the lineage of that family. This was a carry-over of how pillars door frames, doors, windows and their frames carried history around the palace of the Oba of Benin. These art works were done in bronze and wood. The palace

also had spots for sculpted statues as well. These plaques and artworks serve as a "library in motion", depicting historical events, court ceremonies, and the hierarchy of the Edo state.

The use of hieratic scale—where the most important figure, usually the Oba, is depicted significantly larger than attendants or foreign traders—illustrates the Edo sociopolitical structure and belief systems. Through these sculptures, we see the first encounters with Portuguese explorers in the 15th century, meticulously detailed with their distinct clothing and weaponry. The plaques capture the evolution of Edo military might and the expansion of the empire, proving that sculpture was the primary tool for Edo historiography long before written records were popularized in the region.

In Edo culture, the choice of material in sculpture is never accidental; it carries deep symbolic weight. Take for instance the Bronze and Brass; metals that do not rust or decay. The choice is deliberate as they symbolize the permanence and "everlastingness" of the kingship. The reddish hue of copper was also associated with the "fearsome" power of the Oba.

The Ivory from elephant tusks are not left out, as they were reserved almost exclusively for the Oba. Ivory represents purity, strength, and the cool-headedness required for leadership. It certainly takes an organized leader to be able to have an empire, engage in wars and still maintain peace, order and spirituality in the Edo Kingdom. The famous 16th-century ivory pendant mask of Queen Mother Idia is a testament to this. It depicts her with a crown of stylized mudfish symbolizing her ability to navigate both the human and spirit worlds and Portuguese heads, marking her diplomatic and mystical prowess.

The Wood, used primarily by commoners or for less formal ceremonial objects, were also symbolic in the entirety of the Benin Kingdom. Wood carvings depicted the daily life and folk beliefs of the Edo people, grounding the high art of the court in the lived reality of the populace.

Edo sculpture is rich with zoomorphic symbolism. The leopard is a recurring motif, representing the "King of the Forest" and serving as a direct parallel to the Oba, "the King of the Home."

Sculptures of leopards were often used as water vessels during purification rituals, emphasizing the king's power over life and death.

Similarly, the mudfish appears frequently in Edo carvings. Because the mudfish can live on land and in water, it symbolizes the Oba's dual nature as a human and a

deity. These symbols integrated into sculpture, often allowing even the illiterate observer to understand the complex theological and political ideologies of the state. The art as a form, was a mechanism of education, reminding the citizens of their history and their place within the cosmic order.

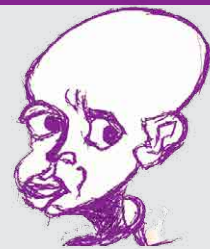
The narrative of Edo sculpture cannot be told without addressing the British Punitive Expedition of 1897. Thousands of bronze and ivory artifacts were looted from Benin City and dispersed across the globe. While this act was a cultural heist and catastrophe for the Edo people, it inadvertently introduced the world to the genius of African art, especially the Edo People of the Benin Empire.

The arrival of these sculptures in Europe challenged the prevailing "primitive" stereotypes of African culture. Western artists like Picasso and Matisse were forced to reckon with a tradition that had mastered complex metallurgical techniques and abstract symbolism centuries before the European Renaissance. Today, the struggle for the restitution of these "Benin Bronzes" remains a central theme in Edo cultural identity, as the sculptures are viewed not as museum pieces, but as the "stolen ancestors" of the Edo people.

Sculpture in Edo culture is not a dead tradition confined to history books. Modern Edo sculptors in Benin City still practice the lost-wax technique, passed down through generations within the same guilds. While contemporary works may incorporate modern themes, they maintain the classical proportions and symbolic integrity of their ancestors. You cannot grow up from childhood under a father who belongs to any of the art guilds and not be a master in it.

Today, sculpture is used to commemorate modern heroes, celebrate festivals like the Igue Festival, and decorate public spaces in Benin City. It remains the most visible badge of Edo identity, a way for the people to assert their presence in a globalized world while remaining rooted in a glorious past. To use sculpture to depict Edo culture is to engage with a medium that is both a mirror and a shield. It mirrors the sophisticated social hierarchy and deep spiritual convictions of the people, as well as shields their history from the erosion of time. From the haunting beauty of the Queen Mother's ivory mask to the imposing strength of the bronze warrior plaques, Edo sculpture stands as a monumental achievement. It is a testament to the fact that for the Edo, art was never for "art's sake", it was for the sake of the soul, the state, and the survival of a legacy.

TATAFO



Folklore as root of wisdom

Na men! dis topic be as e get, but sha, as we na pikin of de soil, pikin wey dem beri him placenta for de same soil, shaking nor de, bicos, na wetin person neva see na him big for him eyes. On dis topic? we don break am down as e take concern Edo pipo and how awa folklore take carry heavy load for inside awa korshora filosofi. De Root of Edo Wisdom de inside him plenti folklores and e get wai.

For Edo State, espeshali for inside Benin Kingdom, tori no be jus for only night time wey grandmama and mamas dem de tell dem pikins jus to make dem sleep. In case you nor no, folklore na de engine room of awa korshor, naim be de book and history of evri record of wetin awa ancestors don do plenti yiars ago. Na inside all dis tori dem we de find de logic, de laws, and de way of life wey awa ancestors pass down to us. Edo filosofi no jus de for only books; e de for de air wey we de breathe, de songs wey we de sing, and de "Ibota" (evening tori) wey awa elders de yan us.

Inside Edo korshor, de tin Oyinbos de call symbolism de evri wia. Nothin de jus happen for nothin. If person yan you tori about "Igho" (kuza) or "Ehi" (person spirit double), dem de try to pass message about how life and de spirit world take de. Awa filosofi belif say de fysical world (Agbon) and de spirit world (Erimwin) de koloba as in work hand-in-hand. De Symbolism of 'Ehi', wey be awa Spiritual Twin na one of de biggest part of Edo filosofi wey be part of awa korshor and wetin awa folklore de always yan us about. Every Edo person bilif say dem get spiritual twin wey de always de with baba stand God (Osanobua) to yan on dia behalf evri day. Oyes, na belif na, abi?

Inside awa folklore, naim you go hia tori about pipo wey jus de use dem pawa de struggle for dis life bicos dem no fit settle wit dia Ehi. De symbol hia be say, person destiny de for him hand, but dem must align wit dia spiritual self. Dis one de teach us say make we no just de run after fysical tins, but make we also get clean heart and spiritual balance. If ya Ehi say 'Yes', no man fit say 'No'. Na so meni of awa folklore yan us, and wen you check meni oyinbo korshor, na so e still be.

If you look Edo art or listen to awa tori dem, you go see say animal symbols full dia yanghanyangan. Leopard for Edo filosofi na king bicos na king e be for inside bush. So, de leopard mean pawa and lidaship. Wen

folklore de yan us about de leopard, e de rim and us say, pawa and lidaship nor be to disturb yard with noise but to de in charge with ogbonge respect. Abi na de popular tortoise? You can fit yan any folklore without de tortoise na. Him na de symbol of wisdom and mago-mago (cunningness). If you luk awa folklore tori wella, you go see say de tortoise de always use him sense to cheat odas and dat na wai de end of him tori de always show say cheating, pride and greed de always lead to fall. De filosofi hia be say: Sense pass power, but wicked sense go always catch up wit you.

For inside awa Edo folklore, de Oba no be jus human being oooo! If you nor no, make you no. De Oba na symbol of de ancestors wey still de gallant and alive. Meni tori de always yan about how past Obas take get supernashora pawas to fit take protect de land and Empire.

Una fit nor grab de yanings, but dis symbolism de very deep. E show say Edo filosofi value Order and Authority. E show say we de awa de with de Oba and de throne so dat awa society no go scatter. De Oba na de link bitwin de pipo and de gods. So dia for, when tori yan about Oba, e dey remind us about who we be and wai we must twale and respect awa roots.

Edo pipo laik meni tribes for Naija and Africa no de use person wey get karacta take play. Dem value am die! Folklore de always yan about symbols like "Iselogbe" (success/celebration) and "Ukhure" (ancestral staff) to show say life na turn-by-turn.

Eni time you hia tori about de "Greedy Hunter" or de "Kind Orphan," de message de always clear for de end bicos goodness get reward, and na so evil also get him own. This one na de foundation of Edo ethics. We no need police to tell us say make we no tif, de fear of de ancestors and de lessons from our folklore dey enough to keep person from all dis yamayama and jibiti. Eni ways, me l no say folklore na de bedrock of de korshora filosofi of evri tribe, for evri village wey make up Naija and Africa. Make we kontinuu to de use folklore to take de teach awa pikins meni tins about moralities so dat wen dem grow dem go get human feelings and com value lives. Na society wey fail to yan morality through folklore to dem pikins wen dem small, de com suffer de bad tins wey cultism plus kidnapping de cause arand us. Who get ear make him take am take hia ooooo!

ArtsWorld with Francis Odupute 08023680030

Black Muse Art Festival: What every art lover should expect...

Benin City, the historic capital of Edo State, is once again preparing to host a significant cultural and empowerment event as the organizers of the prestigious Miss Edo International announce the first audition for the 2026 edition of the pageant.

According to WePromote! Media and Advertising Ltd, media partner for the event, the audition is scheduled to take place on Saturday, March 14, 2026.

Throwback: Angels and Muse proudly presented the inaugural edition of the Black Muse Art Festival, in Benin City, Edo State, from November 8–12, 2025.

Held under the theme “Let the Forest Dance”, the festival borrowed its rhythm and inspiration from Wole Soyinka’s iconic play “A Dance of the Forests.” In reimagining this classic title, the Black Muse Art Festival positions art as a transformative lens to reflect on urgent contemporary questions of conservation and community—values deeply rooted in the traditions of the ancient Benin Kingdom and resonant in indigenous systems across Africa. Through exhibitions, performances, conversations, and communal gatherings, Black Muse Art Festival celebrates the enduring role of art in preserving memory, shaping cultural narratives, and imagining sustainable futures.

LET THE FOREST DANCE!

The inaugural theme reflected both a poetic metaphor and a cultural reawakening. In ancient Benin, sacred groves were revered as spiritual sanctuaries and ecological treasures, shielded from exploitation and destruction. These practices underscore a wisdom that resonates with our present-day urgencies: the need to protect biodiversity and re-centre communal ethos in an age where technological and economic expedience threatens both. By invoking Let the Forest Dance, the festival creates space for reflection and imagination: How can art help us listen to the voices of our environment? How might community—ancient and contemporary—become a living resource for preservation, creativity, and renewal?

The major highlight of the festival was the unveiling of the Black Muse Sculpture Park, a landmark cultural site designed to become a hub for public art, conversation, and gathering. Featured in this park includes a bamboo pavilion, called *Azágbà*, which is an Esan word for compound. This space is a striking architectural centerpiece designed by our commissioned Architect-in-Residence, James Inedu George. The pavilion will also feature stained-glass windows by Victor Ekhkhamenor, infusing a play of light and colour into the pavilion.

COLLABORATIVE AUDIO PERFORMANCE AND INSTALLATION

A lyrical dialogue between sound and space, created by Grammy-nominated singer and songwriter Somi



BLACK MUSE SCULPTURE GARDEN

“Today, Tomorrow, The Moon Will Still Be”, the exhibition interrogates and asks the question, What is sculpture? while exploring materiality in contemporary practice. Featured artists include: Olanrewaju Tejuosho, Osaru Obaseki, Ayobami Ogungbe, Uzor Ugoala, Kelly Omodamwen, Seidougha Linus Eyimiegha (Mr. Danfo) and David Alabo

Kakoma and Prof. Josephine Abbe, Head of Theatre Arts, University of Benin. This work will explore the interconnectedness of African culture as they bring their respective indigenous to foregrounding not only the pavilion but the sculpture park in its entirety.

SCULPTURE EXHIBITION

Curated by Kenyan independent curator Renee Mboya, and under the tentative title “Today, Tomorrow, The Moon Will Still Be”, the exhibition interrogates and asks the question, What is sculpture? while exploring material-

ity in contemporary practice. Featured artists include: Olanrewaju Tejuosho, Osaru Obaseki, Ayobami Ogungbe, Uzor Ugoala, Kelly Omodamwen, Seidougha Linus Eyimiegha (Mr. Danfo) and David Alabo.

THE ÀKÒRÒLÉ RESIDENCY

The festival will inaugurate the Àkòròlé Residency, a program dedicated to mid-career and established art practitioners. Àkòròlé is an Esan expression meaning to plant, gather, and eat, is both prayer and promise—a blessing of harvest, nourishment, and communal sharing. Each

November, four art practitioners across different art practices and disciplines will be hosted at the Àkòròlé House to foster knowledge exchange amongst residents, deepen their practices, engage with local contexts, and contribute to global conversations in contemporary art.

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS

In partnership with the Department of Fine and Applied Art and the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Benin, the festival also seeks to bridge the educational and

professional art ecosystems. Programs will include conversations and panel discussions, plays, readings and live performances, student-led presentations, collaborative screenings and workshops. This partnership affirms the festival’s role as both a site of intergenerational exchange and a bridge between practice and pedagogy.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROGRAM

Beyond its key highlights, the Black Muse Art Festival offers a dynamic range of activities designed to engage diverse audiences, including Film Screenings: Contemporary African cinema and archival rediscoveries; Concerts & Performances: Music, dance, and cross-disciplinary collaborations; Food Tastings & Presentations: Exploring food as memory, archive, and communal practice; Workshops & Masterclasses: Hands-on sessions for young and emerging artists, curators, and cultural practitioners; Community Gatherings: Spaces for dialogue, exchange, and shared celebration.

Friday Sermon

EID-eI-FITR Celebration



IMAMTAJUDEEN IBN IBRAHIM

All praise is eternally due to none, but Allah Alone. Peace and salutations be upon the Noblest of mankind, Muhammad, the son of Abdullah, his household, companions and all those who follow their path till the last day.

I enjoin you all and myself to be conscious of Allah, The Most High. Verily, the fear of Allah is the pathway to salvation.

O servants of Allah with the announcement of the sighting of the crescent of Shawwal, we ask Allah to let it loom above us in peace, faith, safety, strength and victory for the entirety of Muslims, for their delight to be widespread.

O believers, Here we are in the joyous occasion of eid, so give glad tidings to another, wear cheerful looks and bring delight upon others, in obedience to the command of the noble Messenger (peace be upon him when he was asked: "who is the most beloved to Allah amongst people?". He replied: "The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to people.

The most beloved deed to Allah is to make a Muslim happy, or remove one of his troubles, or forgive his debt, or feed his hunger. That I walk with a brother regarding a need is more beloved to me than that I seclude myself in this mosque in Medina for a month"

The day of Eid is a day of showing gratitude to Allah, The Most High for guiding us and granting us success. Among the elements of gratitude on this great day, are : taking proper bath, wearing perfume, beautifying one's self, and giving out zakatul-fitr ; it serves as purification for the fasting person against vain talks and also a means to put smiles on the faces of the needy and downtrodden on the day of Eid. Therefore, anyone gives it before salat-ul-eid, it would be accepted as zakaat, if it however delayed till after eid, it becomes counted as a mere charity.

Allah says in Suratul-A'la verses 14 and 15 : "Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall prosper . And remembers the name of his Lord and performs Salah."

Among the elements of showing gratitude to Allah is remembering Him excessively through glorification, exaltation and appreciation, from the time a servant leaves his house, on his way to the prayer ground and even after prayers, he exchanges pleasantries with others, switches path on his way home while glorifying and exalting Allah's praise.

O believers, verily the day of Eid is the day in which the righteous exude happiness in this life, because of the noble deeds they have carried out in the month of Ramadan, and the happiness will continue to abide with them as long as they continue on the noble path righteousness, just as they

did during the month of Ramadan. If however, they relent and return to sinful acts after Ramadan, their similitude will be that of a person who built a beautiful edifice, then goes ahead to demolish it.



The fasting person has two moments of joy: one when he breaks his fast, and one when he meets his Lord.

ALLAH SAYS IN SURATUL BAQARAH VERSE 226:

"Would any of you wish to have a garden with date palms and vines, with rivers flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruits for him therein, while he is stricken with old age, and his children are weak (not able to look after themselves), then it is struck with a fiery whirlwind, so that it is burnt? Thus does Allah make clear His Ayat to you that you may give thought."

O servants of Allah, continue on the path of your righteous deed, just as you have done during the Blessed month like : purification of the tongue against inappropriate speeches, activeness of your limbs in obedience to Allah, and restraining your souls from evil actions. These and others will lead to the second and everlasting happiness on the day we meet Allah, as the Noble Messenger said : " The fasting person has two moments of joy: one when he breaks his fast, and one when he meets his Lord"

Among the elements of showing gratitude to Allah, fasting 6 days in this month of Shawwal, keeping blood ties, visiting relatives, and being conscious of Allah anywhere you might be, as this is the command from your Lord in Suratul Nisa : 131" And We have instructed those who were given the Scripture before you and yourselves to fear Allah. But if you disbelieve - then to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and what-

ever is on the earth. And ever is Allah Free of need and Praiseworthy."

In addition, bring up your children on the path of the love of Allah, His messenger and Islamic tenets, so you can benefit from their righteous supplications after your departure from this world, in that way your, deeds become endless and non-stop.

O believing women, you are indeed institutions of righteous for your families. With your uprightness, the society gets reformed, therefore leading to the total reformation of the entire Ummah by Allah's will.

O believing men beware of treating women with contempt and disdain, as The Messenger of Allah has instructed that they be respected and honoured. He said: " The best of you is the nicest to his family, and I am the nicest of you to my family."

Verily, if everyone who fasted and engaged in night prayers in faith and devotion, is keen on continuing on the path of righteousness, his joy becomes guaranteed on the day of Eid as Allah says in suratul Yunus verse: 58 : "Tell them (O Prophet!): 'Let them rejoice in Allah's grace and mercy through which this (Book) has come to you. It is better than all the riches that they accumulate."

IMAM TAJUDEEN IBN IBRAHIM
(Grand Chief Imam of Akoko-Edo) Writes from the office of the Grand Imam, Akoko-Edo Local Government Area.

Feature

Gov Okpebholo facilitates free dental screening and procedures for Edo residents



The 2026 World Oral Health Day through the Government House Medical Center collaborated with the Nigerian Dental Association, Edo State Chapter.

RICHARD EWEKA

The Governor Monday Okpebholo led administration has prioritized healthcare services in the State using the SHINE Agenda as a platform to improve the health ecosystem in Edo State knowing that health is wealth.

Prioritizing the healthcare of Edo people, governor okpebholo embarked on people's oriented policies, implementing the same to change the narrative in the healthcare sector ensuring Edo people benefit effective and efficient healthcare services.

This administration has continued to revamp, refurbished and rebuilt health facilities across the three Senatorial Districts of Edo State to attend to the growing health needs of Edo people. The government house clinic has also benefited from the developmental stride of the Okpebholo led administration.

Talking about the Government House Medical Center, before now the facility was poorly maintained, lacks modern equipment, drugs and qualified personnel as government officials refused to get treated in the Clinic but rather preferred health facilities outside the government house to handle their cases.

Governor Okpebholo came and completely changed the narrative, re-write the wrong of the Godwin Obaseki led administration. He renovated, refurbished, and equipped the Clinic with modern equipment, engaged qualified and experienced medical personnel to handle different departments in the clinic.

The Government House Medical Center under Governor Okpebholo has

continued to expand its services, under the direct supervision of his personal physician and Special Adviser on health matters Dr. Precious Ogboru.

The medical center now admits patients, has a laboratory where blood samples are taken and investigated, a pharmacy for dispensing free drugs, an optometrist to attend to eye cases and more.

To celebrate the 2026 World Oral Health Day with the theme, "A Happy Mouth is a Healthy Life," the government house medical center has officially expanded its services to include a Dental Unit or department with modern equipment to handle all dental procedures.

Edo State Government in commemorating the 2026 World Oral Health Day through the Government House Medical Center collaborated with the Nigerian Dental Association, Edo State Chapter to give free dental screening and procedures for staff of Government House, their spouses, appointees and other members of the public.

This year's celebration reminds us that oral health is not just about teeth. It is about enjoying your meals without pain, speaking clearly, smiling freely, and living confidently. Your smile tells a story long before you speak. It shows confidence, comfort, and good health. But behind every bright smile is something many people often overlook; a healthy mouth.

The medical Centre opened its doors for a special dental awareness/outreach programme where over 150 persons benefitted from different dental procedures which includes scaling and polishing, tooth extraction, GIC fillings, composite buildup, denture fabrication and more.

This outreach is more than a medical service. It is an opportunity to learn, prevent, and take charge of your oral health in a friendly and supportive environment.

Speaking at the event, the Deputy Governor, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, who also benefitted from the exercise commended the administration's commitment to the overall well-being of citizens, highlighted ongoing efforts by the administration to strengthen the health sector and ensure access to quality healthcare services across the state.

"Health is the second item on the SHINE Agenda as governor Monday Okpebholo has laid so much emphasis on healthcare services for citizens across the State starting from the Edo State government house.

"This facility, was built by Comrade Adams Oshomohole led administration but the previous government abandoned it and it was not functioning. But this administration under senator Monday Okpebholo equipped it with modern medical equipment to ensure effective and efficient healthcare service delivery.

"Today we are benefiting from the services at the center and a lot of persons including myself have benefited from the free dental services to mark the world health oral day with this programme organized by Government house medical center in collaboration with Nigerian Dental Association Edo State Chapter.

"I encourage all to take care of their oral health and also thank the governor for prioritizing the health of all Edo people".

Coordinator of the exercise who is also the personal physician and Spe-

cial Adviser on Health to Gov. Okpebholo, Dr. Precious Ogboru said the collaboration aims to strengthen the Governor's support for the medical profession in boosting public health and a platform to launch the Dental clinic in Govt. House.

He emphasised on the importance of preventive oral care and sustained public health interventions. He assured Edo people of Gov. Okpebholo's concern for public health.

"Gov Okpebholo supported Nigerian Dental Association Edo State Chapter with a procurement of a dental chair last year which they have use for dental outreaches across the State.

"This year they are here at the government house medical center to collaborate with us to organize this medical outreach. Gov Okpebholo is always concerned about the health and well-being of Edo people.

"Today's event is kick-starting our dental clinic in Government House Medical Center. We have an in-house dentist and you can visit the medical center on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday to see a dentist and have a free procedure done at no cost".

Chairman, Nigerian Dental Association, Edo State Chapter, Prof. Joan Enabulele said the event is to bring oral health awareness to Edo people through the dental check to mark the 2026 world oral health day.

She noted that the treatment is to raise more ambassadors of Oral health and educate residents on proper oral health care.

The Chairman commended the effort of Gov Okpebholo's investment in the healthcare sector in Edo State.

"Gov Okpebholo has been very supportive of the Nigerian Dental Associ-

ation. He has contributed in no small measures to ensure that our outreaches can touch many Edo people and we decided to support him this year.

"We came here today to collaborate with the government house medical center to mark the 2026 World Oral Health Day. We came here to see the governor's staff and also contribute our quota to the development of healthcare services in Edo State".

A Consultant Community Dentistry, Dr. Elohor Okuonghae who delivered a health talk titled "Proper oral hygiene and preventive care" called on beneficiaries to brush twice daily with fluoride containing toothpaste, visit a dentist regularly for early diagnosis of dental ailments and gave other healthy oral hygiene tips.

She encouraged participants to ensure a soft toothbrush for children and toothpaste with fluoride, demonstrated brushing and advised them to see a dentist every six months.

Some of the beneficiaries Temidayo Alofa and Franca Osagie and others commended Gov. Okpebholo for the opportunity to access free oral healthcare, describing the initiative as timely and impactful.

The outreach also featured free medical services, including blood pressure checks, pulse rate monitoring, blood sugar testing, and general health screening for participants.

The governor Monday Okpebholo led administration has continued to champion policies and programmes that will have direct positive impact on Edo people, improving healthcare facilities across the three Senatorial Districts, ensuring that under his watch Edo people enjoyed improved healthcare services.

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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279		
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FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595		
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Sports

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Algeria Football Federation set to drag Nigeria to appeal Committee, CAS

The Algerian Football Federation (FAF) is preparing to escalate its dispute with the Confederation of African Football over the controversial sanctions stemming from

the Algeria-Nigeria clash at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations.

The Algerian football authority is considering filing a formal complaint against CAF's disciplinary committee, citing

the body's failure to respond to its appeal concerning the sanctions imposed after the encounter involving the Algeria national football team and the Nigeria national football team.

According to reports, the FAF has sent multiple reminders and followed due process, but has received no official response for nearly two months, prompting frustration within the federation.

As a result, the FAF is now weighing further action, including taking the matter to CAF's Executive Committee or General Assembly. The federation is also not ruling out escalating the dispute to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

The Algerian body is specifically demanding the annulment of the sanctions, arguing that its right to a fair hearing has been violated in the handling of the case



SUPER EAGLES OF NIGERIA

Morocco FA hails CAF ruling as 'victory for rules' after AFCON verdict

The Royal Moroccan Football Federation has welcomed the decision by the Confederation of African Football to award Morocco the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations title, describing it as a victory for the integrity of the rules governing the game.

In its first official response following the appeal verdict, the federation said the ruling reinforces "respect for the rules and the stability necessary for the proper conduct of international competitions".

CAF's appeal panel ruled that Senegal forfeited the final under its regulations after their players walked off the pitch during the closing stages of the match.

The FRMF stressed that its legal challenge was not about contesting the result on the pitch, but about ensuring the correct application of competition rules.

"The approach was never intended to contest the sporting performance of the teams, but solely to demand respect for the rules," the federation said.

The appeal body applied relevant regulations to reclassify Senegal's actions as an unauthorised refusal to continue play an offence that results in automatic forfeiture.

The final in Rabat was overshadowed by controversy after Senegal's players left the field in protest following a VAR-awarded penalty for Morocco.

Although the match later resumed, Moroccan officials

argued that the disruption had already compromised the sporting integrity of the contest.

The appeal ruling overturned an earlier disciplinary decision and awarded Morocco a 3-0 victory, officially crowning them African champions.

The Moroccan federation said the verdict establishes an important precedent for handling similar incidents in future competitions.

It warned that failing to enforce such rules could encourage teams to disrupt matches without consequence.



FOUZI LEKJAA,

No confusion in Nigerian Boxing – NBBofC reasserts authority over professional boxing

The Nigerian Boxing Board of Control (NBBofC) has firmly stated that there is no confusion regarding the governance of professional boxing in Nigeria, reaffirming its position as the sole regulatory body responsible for the sport.

In an official statement released

on Wednesday, the Board dismissed claims suggesting that the Nigeria Boxing Federation intends to assume control over professional boxing. The NBBofC described such insinuations as unfounded and misleading, urging stakeholders to disregard them.

"We wish to categorically

state that such claims are unfounded and should be disregarded," the statement read.

The Board clarified that the Nigeria Boxing Federation, formerly known as the Nigeria Amateur Boxing Association (NABA), is strictly responsible for amateur boxing, in line with global sporting structures, and has no jurisdiction over professional boxing.

Speaking on the matter, NBBofC President Rafiu Ladipo warned that any attempt by another body to take over professional boxing operations could lead to serious consequences.

He noted that such actions could create administrative conflicts, weaken regulatory standards, and expose athletes to risks due to inadequate oversight and lack of proper structures.



Galatasaray coach gives update on Osimhen injury

Galatasaray manager Okan Buruk has provided an update on the condition of Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen following his injury setback.

Osimhen sustained the injury during the second leg of the UEFA Champions League clash against Liverpool. The Turkish giants suffered a heavy 4-0 defeat on the night, crashing out of the competition 4-1 on aggregate.

Providing an update after the game, Buruk revealed that the striker struggled with pain early in the encounter and could not continue beyond the first half.

"Osimhen is also in pain. It happened at the beginning of the game; we tried to keep him on the pitch, but his pain increased, so we

had to substitute him at halftime," he told the club's official website.

The Galatasaray boss also voiced his frustration with the officiating, particularly regarding challenges involving Liverpool defender Ibrahima Konaté.

"Looking at Osimhen's position, we saw that Konaté was able to commit these fouls very easily, he could easily apply any kind of foul.

While we were expecting the best referee in the world, perhaps one of the worst referees officiated the game," Buruk added.

The extent of Osimhen's injury is yet to be fully determined, with further medical assessments expected to clarify how long the Nigerian international could be sidelined.



VICTOR OSIMHEN

NFF denies offering Chelle \$100,000 monthly salary

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) says it's not true that head coach of the senior national team of Nigeria Eric Chelle has been offered a whopping \$100,000 monthly salary to remain as coach of the Super Eagles.

Reports in recent days say the NFF have offered the coach fresh terms to keep him at his job for a further two years, with one year left to run on his present deal.

Chelle is demanding \$150,000 a month, and reports went viral during the week that the NFF through the National

Sports Commission (NSC) has proposed a salary of \$100,000 a month to the Malian, who has a new agent.

A source at the NFF said those reports were wide off the mark as the NFF and the NSC have not discussed on the next move, after receiving the contract demand of Chelle.

He however said a meeting is expected to happen before the upcoming four team tournament in Turkey, or better still in June when they will be involved in a series of friendly games.



ERIC CHELLE

Igali Inspects 4th Governor Diri National Wrestling Classics Games Village

The Bayelsa State Commissioner for Sports Development, Honourable Daniel Igali, on Wednesday, carried out unscheduled inspection on the

proposed games village of 4th Governor Douye Diri National Wrestling Classics in Yenagoa

The games village facility is the Nigeria Customs personnel quar-

ters, as part of support from the Nigeria Customs Service through the magnanimous gesture of the Comptroller General of Customs, Bashir Adewale Adeniyi MFR

Arrival for the Classics is slated for 23rd March 2026 while Technical meeting will take place 24th and bouts begin 25th March to 1st April 2026.

Motsepe backs disciplinary and appeal committee, vows to respect CAS decision

The president of the Confederation of African Football, Patrice Motsepe, has thrown his support behind the body's Disciplinary and Appeals Committees following their contrasting rulings on the controversial Africa Cup of Nations final involving Morocco and Senegal.

CAF's Appeals Committee

on Tuesday overturned the earlier decision of the Disciplinary Committee and awarded the 2025 AFCON final to Morocco, a ruling that has further intensified debate across the continent.

Reacting to the development, Motsepe expressed disappointment over the events surrounding the final but re-

affirmed confidence in CAF's judicial structures.

"I have been informed of the CAF Appeals Committee's decision regarding the appeal submitted by Morocco concerning the Africa Cup of Nations final. I have already expressed my deep disappointment regarding the events that occurred during that final match," Motsepe said.

He noted that the incident undermines years of effort by CAF to strengthen integrity, ethics, and credibility in African football.

"The important point is that what happened in that match undermines the good work that CAF has done for many years to ensure integrity, respect, ethics, good governance, and the credibility of our

match results," he added.

Motsepe also highlighted ongoing concerns about trust and transparency within African football administration, describing them as "legacy issues" the current leadership continues to address.

"When I became president, one of my main concerns was the impartiality, independence, and respect for referees and match officials. Much good work has been done, but there is still persistent doubt because it is a long-standing issue," he explained.

The CAF boss further defended the independence of the organization's judicial bodies, noting that their composition reflects a diverse selection of respected legal professionals from across the continent.



PATRICE MOTSEPE

Weah blasts CAF as 'travesty' after Senegal stripped, Morocco handed title

African football has been plunged into fresh controversy after Confederation of African Football (CAF) sensationally withdrew the 2025 AFCON title from Senegal and awarded it to Morocco, a decision that has now triggered a fierce backlash led by football icon George Weah.

In a strongly-worded statement on Wednesday, Weah tore into CAF's ruling, branding it a dangerous assault on the very foundations of the game and warning of a "slippery slope" that could see football decided in boardrooms rather than on the pitch.

At the heart of the storm is CAF's post-match intervention in a chaotic AFCON final, where Senegal reportedly walked off at some point but crucially, the referee allowed play to continue.

The game was completed, went through extra time, and produced a result on the field.

For Weah, that should have been the end of it.

Citing the globally binding FIFA Laws of the Game, specifically Law 5, he stressed that the referee's authority during a match is absolute, and decisions on the field are final.

"Football must be decided on the pitch, not re-decided after the final whistle," Weah de-

clared, in a stinging rebuke of CAF's disciplinary committee.

The former Ballon d'Or winner argued that the referee's report itself only cited a stoppage not a forfeiture and recommended sanctions, not annulment.

That, he insists, makes CAF's retrospective verdict not just questionable, but fundamentally flawed.

The implications, he warned, are severe.

If CAF's decision stands, Weah believes it could open the floodgates for endless post-match reversals, where penal-

ties, red cards, and even final scores are subject to committee

review long after the whistle has gone.



GEORGE WEAH

Fresh leadership for Nigeria's athletics coaches as Adebote emerges President

Olaekan Adebote has been elected president of the Athletics Coaches Association of Nigeria (ACAN) following a close-

ly contested virtual election involving coaches from across the country.

Adebote, widely known as D'Victors, secured 51 votes to

defeat Michael Monyei, who garnered 31 votes.

In the vice-presidential election, United States-based coach Pat Itanyi emerged unopposed, receiving 76 affirmative votes, with six respondents voting against her candidacy.

Adebote succeeds Solomon Aliyu, a board member of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria and current national team coach, whose tenure has concluded.

In his acceptance speech, Adebote expressed appreciation to members of the association and emphasised the need for unity among coaches nationwide.



OLALEKAN ADEBOTE

8 Days to Go: Para-Table Tennis set for thrilling showdown in 18 medal events at 3rd National Para Games

With just 8 days to the commencement of the 3rd National Para Games Abuja 2026, excitement is building around Para Table Tennis, one of the most dynamic and fast-paced events of the Games.

Para Table Tennis will feature 18 medal events, bringing together athletes competing in both wheelchair and standing classifications. The sport is

widely regarded for its speed, precision, and tactical depth, making it a fan-favorite across major para-sport competitions.

The competition will showcase a diverse range of athletes competing across multiple classes, ensuring fairness and inclusivity while highlighting the technical brilliance and resilience of participants.

Matches are expected to deliver intense rallies, quick reflex ex-

changes, and strategic gameplay that underline the high level of preparation among athletes.

Para Table Tennis has continued to grow in prominence in Nigeria, producing world-class athletes who have excelled at continental and global competitions. The event at Abuja 2026 will serve as a key platform for talent discovery and development, while also offer-

ing athletes the opportunity to position themselves for future international championships.

The 3rd National Para Games Abuja 2026, scheduled to hold from March 26 to April 3, 2026, will bring together over 3,000 athletes from the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, competing across 15 para sports in a celebration of resilience, inclusion, and excellence.



RENA WAKAMA

FIBA World Cup: Wakama reveals areas D'Tigress must improve on

Nigeria's D'Tigress head coach Rena Wakama has outlined key areas her team must improve ahead of the FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup 2026.

The Nigerian side endured a mixed outing at the recently concluded qualifying tournament, managing just two wins from five matches, raising concerns about their readiness for the global showpiece.

Speaking after the tournament, Wakama stressed the importance of stronger starts and better decision-making during crucial moments of games.

"We have to start better. We have to start games better, make better decisions in critical moments, and continue to

improve," she said.

The D'Tigress coach also highlighted lapses in execution, noting that the team struggled in areas they had previously worked on.

"We had a lot of breakdowns in this tournament, especially in areas we have already worked on. We just need to be more focused at the start of games and bring the right energy, that is the main thing," Wakama added.

The 2026 FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup is scheduled to take place in Berlin from September 4 to 13.

The draw for the competition will be held on April 21 at Kraftwerk Berlin, alongside the FIBA Hall of Fame Class of 2026 enshrinement ceremony

Senegal Coach threatens CAF over AFCON decision

Head coach of the Teranga Lions of Senegal, Pape Thiaw, has issued a strong warning to the Confederation of African Football (CAF), threatening that the country could withdraw from the continental football body following the controversial Africa Cup of Nations ruling.

The development comes in the wake of CAF's Appeal Committee decision to strip Senegal of the AFCON title and award it to Morocco, a move that has sparked outrage within Senegalese football circles.

Reacting to the verdict, Thiaw firmly rejected the decision and insisted that his team rightfully earned the title on the pitch.

"We will not return the cup

and we will not hand it over to Morocco, and even the winning bonuses are our legitimate right," Thiaw said.

"We worked hard for them and we won them deservedly. If they force us to do that, it will cost us our withdrawal from this continent."

The comments further escalate tensions between Senegal and CAF, with the situation threatening to deepen the ongoing crisis surrounding the tournament's outcome.

Football stakeholders across Africa are now closely monitoring the situation, as any potential withdrawal by Senegal could have significant implications for competitions organized by CAF.



PAPE THIAW

Sports



NFF moves to retain Super Eagles coach with double of current salary despite missed targets



SUPER EAGLES COACH AND THE PLAYERS

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) is preparing an improved contract offer for Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle in a bid to secure his long-term future, despite the team's recent failure to meet key performance targets.

According to reports, the federation has proposed doubling Chelle's monthly salary to \$100,000 as part of renewed contract negotiations. However, the offer falls short of the \$130,000 reportedly requested by the coach through his representatives.

Chelle is understood to have sought a significant pay increase to offset the cost of maintaining his backroom staff, many of whom were personally selected and are paid

directly under his arrangement.

The 48-year-old tactician is currently under contract until January 2027, with an option for a one-year extension. The NFF's move to improve his terms signals continued confidence in his leadership, even after a mixed run of results.

In his first year in charge, Chelle fell short of two major objectives set by the federation: securing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and reaching the final of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). Nigeria failed to progress to the World Cup, while a third-place finish at the AFCON in Morocco, though respectable, did not meet the federation's expectations.

Despite these setbacks,

Chelle's stock appears to have risen internationally. His performance at the continental tournament has reportedly attracted interest from clubs and national teams across Africa and Europe, placing additional pressure on the NFF to secure his services.

The Super Eagles remain one of Africa's most high-profile national teams, and stability in the coaching position is seen as critical as the federation begins preparations for upcoming international competitions, including the next AFCON cycle and World Cup qualifiers.

Negotiations between both parties are ongoing, with financial terms and technical control among the key issues yet to be fully resolved.

Super Eagles vs DR Congo: Former NFF chief urges government to stop Nigeria's appeal

Former General Secretary of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Ahmed Sani Toro, has strongly criticised Nigeria's protest against the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afrik-Foot reports.

Offering his opinion following FIFA's decision to throw out the NFF's protest, Toro agrees that Nigeria have no case and should not continue with its appeal.

The dispute began after Nigeria's Super Eagles lost 4-3 on penalties to DR Congo in the final of the CAF World Cup play-off in Morocco, following a 1-1 draw. After the match, the NFF submitted a petition to FIFA, claiming that some Congolese players were not properly cleared as citizens and that FIFA had been misled during their registration.

However, FIFA later confirmed DR Congo as Africa's representative for the FIFA intercontinental playoff, effectively dismissing Nigeria's complaint.

Despite that, the NFF has decided to challenge the decision. But Toro believes that move is pointless and has urged the Federal Government to step in and stop the process.

The NFF should stop playing on our intelligence.

Toro explained that issues of citizenship are not decided by football bodies like FIFA, but by national governments.

"In this case, it is the government of a country that determines who is a citizen, not FIFA or any other body

He also warned that expecting FIFA to reverse its earlier decision is unrealistic.

"It is a waste of time and energy. You cannot expect FIFA to admit it made a mistake in clearing those players in the first place. There is no way Nigeria can get a favourable

verdict. From the outset, it has been a lost battle

Despite the strong criticism, the Nigeria Football Federation has made it clear that it will not back down.

NFF has already started the process of appealing FIFA's decision, after its original petition was dismissed by the FIFA Disciplinary Committee.

The federation had argued that there were irregularities in how some DR Congo players obtained their passports, suggesting that fraudulent processes may have been involved.



AHMED SANI TORO

NWFL: Rivers Angels go top in Group A as Super Six race heats up after matchday 11

● Top three positions remain unchanged in Group B

MATCHDAY 11 TABLE									
GROUP A									
	Pld	W	D	L	Gf	Ga	Gd	Pts	
1	RIVERS ANGELS	9	8	0	1	18	5	13	24
2	EDO QUEENS	10	8	0	2	19	8	11	24
3	BAYELSA QUEENS	9	7	0	2	22	11	11	21
4	ADAMAWA QUEENS	10	5	1	4	11	14	-3	16
5	IBOM ANGELS	10	3	2	5	9	11	-2	11
6	HEARTLAND QUEENS	10	3	2	5	10	15	-5	11
7	EKITI QUEENS	10	3	1	6	10	12	-2	10
8	PACESETTERS QUEENS	10	1	2	7	5	13	-8	5
9	NAIJA RATELS	10	1	2	7	4	19	-15	5

MATCHDAY 11 TABLE									
GROUP B									
	Pld	W	D	L	Gf	Ga	Gd	Pts	
1	FC ROBO QUEENS	11	8	1	2	22	7	15	25
2	NASARAWA AMAZONS	11	6	4	1	14	6	8	22
3	REMO STARS LADIES	11	5	4	2	13	4	9	19
4	ABIA ANGELS	11	5	3	3	15	9	6	18
5	DELTA QUEENS	11	3	4	4	9	12	-3	13
6	SUNSHINE QUEENS	11	2	6	3	4	5	-1	12
7	AHUDYANNEM QUEENS	11	3	2	6	13	14	-1	11
8	CONFLUENCE QUEENS	11	2	4	5	11	20	-9	10
9	DANNAZ LADIES	11	3	1	7	7	21	-14	10
10	OSUN BABES	11	2	3	6	5	15	-10	9

The race for Super Six qualification in the NWFL Premiership took another dramatic turn after Matchday 11, with crucial results across both groups reshaping the standings and intensifying the battle for playoff spots.

In Group A, Rivers Angels seized the moment to climb to the summit after a convincing 2-0 away victory over Naija

Ratels. With Bayelsa Queens on a bye, the Port Harcourt side made full use of the opportunity to overtake their rivals and take control at the top.

Edo Queens remain firmly in the hunt, keeping pace with the leaders following a hard-fought win against Heartland Queens.

The result ensures that the race for the top three spots in

the group remains tightly contested heading into the next round of fixtures.

Over in Group B, the top three positions remain unchanged despite a series of closely fought encounters.

FC Robo Queens continue to lead the standings, although their grip loosened slightly after being held to a draw by Confluence Queens on the road.

NFF moves to retain Chelle with double of current salary despite missed targets

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) is preparing an improved contract offer for Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle in a bid to secure his long-term future, despite the team's recent failure to meet key performance targets.

According to reports, the federation has proposed doubling Chelle's monthly salary to \$100,000 as part of renewed contract negotiations. However, the offer falls short of the \$130,000 reportedly requested by the coach through his representatives.

Chelle is understood to have sought a significant pay increase to offset the cost of maintaining his backroom staff, many of whom were personally selected and are paid directly under his arrangement.

The 48-year-old tactician is currently under contract until January 2027, with an option for a one-year extension. The NFF's move to improve his terms signals continued confidence in his leadership, even after a mixed run of results.

In his first year in charge, Chelle fell short of two major objectives set by the federa-

tion: securing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and reaching the final of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). Nigeria failed to progress to the World Cup, while a third-place finish at the AFCON in Morocco, though respectable, did not meet the federation's expectations.

Despite these setbacks, Chelle's stock appears to have risen internationally. His performance at the continental tournament has reportedly attracted interest from clubs and national teams across Africa and Europe, placing additional pressure on the NFF to secure his services.

The Super Eagles remain one of Africa's most high-profile national teams, and stability in the coaching position is seen as critical as the federation begins preparations for upcoming international competitions, including the next AFCON cycle and World Cup qualifiers.

Negotiations between both parties are ongoing, with financial terms and technical control among the key issues yet to be fully resolved.



ERIC CHELLE



Prof. Ize-Iyamu, reforms and federal intervention at UBTH

Leadership, particularly in public institutions, is rarely a stroll through a garden of roses. More often than not, it resembles the weary climb of a steep hill where every step forward invites scrutiny, suspicion, and sometimes outright hostility.

In societies where public trust in institutions has been eroded by years of mismanagement and broken promises, even the most well-intentioned reforms can be misinterpreted or deliberately distorted. Thus, anyone who occupies a position of authority in such an environment must possess not only competence but also resilience, patience, and the courage to withstand the stones that inevitably accompany leadership.

Being in a position of authority, therefore, can be tasking and energy-sapping. The occupant of such an office often becomes like an African Cherry tree, constantly pelted with stones by every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Some throw stones out of ignorance; others do so out of mischief; and a few are simply uncomfortable with change. Yet the fruit-bearing tree must continue to stand firm, offering nourishment even to those who throw the stones.

This metaphor aptly captures the experience of the Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Prof. Idia Nibokun Ize-Iyamu, whose tenure has recently been subjected to unwarranted criticism by a handful of individuals who appear either oblivious to the realities of institutional reform or deliberately inclined to misrepresent them.

Their allegations, which sought to portray her reform-driven initiatives as profiteering and anti-people, represent a classic example of how genuine efforts at progress can be misconstrued by those who either do not understand the complexities of leadership or who choose to ignore them.

In my previous article on the matter, I sought to place the controversy within its proper context. I argued that meaningful reform in public institutions, especially in Nigeria's healthcare sector, often requires difficult decisions that may not immediately please everyone. Institutional decay, after all, does not occur overnight, and its reversal cannot be achieved without structural adjustments, policy recalibration, and administrative courage. These processes sometimes disrupt entrenched interests and comfortable routines, thereby provoking resistance from those who prefer the old order.

A teaching hospital such as UBTH occupies a strategic place in Nigeria's healthcare architecture. Beyond providing medical care to thousands of patients, it also functions as a training ground for doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals who will eventually serve across the country and beyond. Consequently, the quality of leadership in such an institution directly affects not only patient outcomes but also the



PROF. IZE-IYAMU

broader future of medical education and healthcare delivery.

To lead such an institution effectively requires more than administrative routine; it demands vision, resourcefulness, and the ability to mobilise support from multiple stakeholders, including government, development partners, and the wider community. In other words, a Chief Executive Officer in a public healthcare institution must be both a manager and an advocate.

One of the key responsibilities of a CMD is to influence and lobby government agencies to attract projects, infrastructure, and essential medical equipment needed for the growth and modernisation of the hospital. In the absence of such proactive engagement, many public institutions would simply stagnate, trapped in the inertia of bureaucratic processes.

Sequel to her focused and purpose-driven agenda, Prof. Ize-Iyamu's frantic effort is already beginning to yield tangible fruits. The latest manifestation is the recent supply of healthcare equipment to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), facilitated by the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) through the National Primary Health Care Development Agency. Remarkably, this marks the first time in the hospital's 53-year history that it has received such a significant consignment of medical equipment through this channel. Yes, first time in 53 years UBTH received such a consignment!

It is precisely within this framework that the recent development at UBTH must be appreciated. The hospital recently received a significant consignment of materials and working tools from the Federal Government—items intended to enhance service delivery and strengthen the hospital's operational capacity. Such support does not

materialise in a vacuum. It is usually the result of sustained advocacy, strategic engagement, and the credibility of leadership.

Those familiar with the workings of public institutions understand that attracting federal support requires persistence, networking, and the ability to convincingly articulate the needs of the institution. The arrival of this consignment therefore reflects not merely administrative routine but the outcome of deliberate effort.

Indeed, it bears the unmistakable imprint of what many Nigerians colloquially describe as "connection" not in the pejorative sense of favouritism or backdoor dealings, but in the positive sense of effective representation and influence. When a leader successfully leverages professional networks and institutional goodwill to bring development to an organisation, such effort should be celebrated rather than vilified.

In the case of UBTH, the credit for this achievement must reasonably go to the amiable and indefatigable Chief Medical Director, Prof. Idia Nibokun Ize-Iyamu, whose proactive engagement with the relevant authorities appears to have facilitated the intervention.

Yet the long-term benefits of reform invariably outweigh the temporary discomfort it may cause. Hospitals function best when there is clarity of procedure, effective management of resources, and a commitment to professional standards. Without these elements, even the most well-equipped facility can become ineffective.

Prof. Ize-Iyamu's efforts appear to be directed precisely at strengthening these institutional foundations. By pursuing improvements in infrastructure, attracting federal interventions, and promoting administrative order, she is laying the groundwork for a

However, criticism must be rooted in facts rather than speculation, and it should aim to improve institutions rather than to undermine them

more efficient and responsive healthcare institution.

It is also important to recognise that leadership in the health sector carries a profound ethical dimension. Every decision taken within a teaching hospital ultimately affects human lives. Equipment procured, facilities upgraded, and policies implemented can determine whether patients receive timely and effective treatment.

The arrival of the recent consignment of materials and tools at UBTH should therefore be viewed through this humanitarian lens. Each item delivered represents a potential improvement in patient care, a strengthening of medical training, and an enhancement of the hospital's ability to fulfil its mandate.

Constructive criticism is, of course, an essential component of democratic engagement. Leaders must remain accountable to the people they serve. However, criticism must be rooted in facts rather than speculation, and it should aim to improve institutions rather than to undermine them.

In my earlier article, I cautioned against the tendency to hastily interpret reform measures as evidence of ulterior motives. Nigeria's healthcare system desperately needs courageous leadership capable of initiating change. If every attempt at reform is met with suspicion and hostility, competent professionals may become reluctant to assume leadership roles in public institutions.

That would be a tragic outcome for a country already grappling with the challenges of medical brain drain, inadequate funding, and growing healthcare demands.

From all available indications, Prof. Ize-Iyamu's leadership at UBTH reflects a determination to reposition the hospital for greater efficiency and relevance. The successful attraction of federal support in the form of essential materials and working tools demonstrates a proactive approach to leadership—one that recognises the importance of engaging with government structures to secure development for the institution. Such achievements should inspire confidence rather than cynicism.

Leadership, after all, is not merely about occupying an office; it is about producing tangible results that improve the lives of people. When a hospital acquires new equipment, en-

hances its facilities, or strengthens its operational capacity, the entire community stands to benefit.

The University of Benin Teaching Hospital occupies a proud place in Nigeria's medical landscape. For decades, it has served as a centre of excellence in clinical care, medical education, and research. Preserving and enhancing this legacy requires leadership that is both visionary and pragmatic.

Prof. Ize-Iyamu's tenure appears to reflect precisely these qualities. Her efforts to attract resources, implement reforms, and strengthen the institution should be seen as part of a broader commitment to safeguarding the hospital's future.

Naturally, not everyone will agree with every decision taken by any leader. That is the nature of public service. But disagreement should not descend into unwarranted character attacks or attempts to discredit genuine efforts at progress.

If anything, the recent developments at UBTH provide an opportunity for the public to recognise the often unseen labour that goes into institutional leadership. Behind every successful intervention or infrastructural upgrade lies countless hours of negotiation, advocacy, and administrative coordination.

These are efforts that rarely attract headlines but are essential to the survival and growth of public institutions.

Ultimately, the measure of leadership lies not in the noise of controversy but in the enduring impact of one's actions. If the reforms initiated under Professor Ize-Iyamu lead to improved healthcare delivery, better training for medical professionals, and enhanced institutional capacity, history will judge her tenure kindly.

In the meantime, fairness demands that she be allowed the space to carry out her responsibilities without the burden of unwarranted suspicion.

The African Cherry tree may indeed attract stones, but it continues to bear fruit regardless. In much the same way, leaders who are genuinely committed to progress must remain steadfast even in the face of criticism.

For the sake of UBTH, its staff, its students, and the countless patients who rely on its services, one can only hope that the reform journey continues, supported by constructive engagement rather than distracted by needless controversy.

If the recent federal intervention is any indication, the efforts of Prof. Idia Nibokun Ize-Iyamu are already yielding visible results. And for any institution striving for excellence in a challenging environment, that is surely a development worthy of recognition and encouragement.

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