

Nigeria makes strides in recovering looted funds — ANEEJ

ABUJA

Nigeria has recorded significant progress in the recovery of looted public assets, but experts say the impact will only be felt if recovered funds are transparently deployed to improve citizens' lives.

The Executive Director of the African Network for Envi-

ronment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), Mr David Ugolor, made this observation on Thursday during the opening of a two-day town hall meeting in Abuja on the utilisation of recovered assets and presentation of accountability reports.

Ugolor commended the Federal Government and anti-corruption agencies for sustained efforts in recovering stolen funds

both locally and internationally. "To make greater impact, the government must prioritise transparency and accountability in the utilisation of the recovered looted funds," he said.

Highlighting Nigeria's growing recognition on the global stage for its asset recovery processes, he praised the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent

Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Federal Ministry of Justice. "In global discussions on asset recovery, Nigeria is regarded as meeting good standards," Ugolor said.

However, he stressed that recovery alone was insufficient, noting that citizens are more concerned about how recovered funds translate into

tangible benefits. He cited ANEEJ's monitoring of assets linked to Bayelsa State and the Galactica restitution.

"Our baseline survey across Bayelsa's eight local government areas assessed the condition of primary healthcare centres earmarked for support from recovered funds. The findings show what needs to be done to bring these centres to acceptable

standards," Ugolor explained.

On the Galactica asset linked to former Petroleum Minister Dieziani Alison-Madueke, he said \$50 million set aside for rural electrification projects has yet to be deployed more than a year after agreements were signed, raising concerns over delays largely attributed to pro-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Kwara flags off mass immunisation March 29 amid fresh outbreak

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8,453 delegates to participate in APC Nat'l Convention

● **Offices zoned on Fed character basis – Masari**

ABUJA

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has confirmed that 8,453 delegates from across Nigeria's 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) will converge in Abuja for the party's 2026 National Convention, underscoring the scale and significance of the event.

The announcement was

made on Thursday by Alhaji Mohammed Idris, Co-chairman of the convention's Media and Publicity Committee and Minister of Information and National Orientation, at a press briefing in the nation's capital.

He assured Nigerians that the convention would be conducted to the highest standard, reflecting the APC's organisational discipline and commitment to democratic practice.

Scheduled for March 27 and 28 at the iconic Eagle Square, the convention will host delegates for policy deliberations, leadership elections, and the formal transition to a new set of party executives. Idris said the gathering also represents a moment for reflection, consolidation, and direction-setting for the next phase of the party's journey.

"All arrangements have been concluded to ensure a smooth,

transparent, and credible convention," he said.

"Operational systems are in place to coordinate all committees and ensure efficiency, order, and accountability throughout the event."

The convention, themed, "Unity in Progress, Consolidating the Renewed Hope Agenda," is designed not only to set the party's internal course but also to align with the country's

broader governance goals.

Idris stressed that the event will highlight APC's achievements under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, while reinforcing the party's unity, cohesion, and commitment to inclusive governance.

"The 8,453 delegates are a true reflection of the party's national reach, diversity, and capacity for collective decision-making. Their par-

ticipation signals the APC's readiness to lead, engage constructively, and maintain democratic norms at home and abroad," he said.

Idris also paid tribute to President Tinubu for his pivotal role in strengthening the party and promoting a sense of belonging among all members.

He described the convention

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FOSTERING THE FUTURE TOGETHER SUMMIT:

Nigeria's First lady, Sen Oluremi Tinubu; Wife of the U.S President, Melania Trump and other First Ladies from 44 nations, during the Fostering the Future Together Summit, hosted by Wife of the US President, Mrs Trump at the White House, Washington DC.

Okpebholo vows zero tolerance for discrimination against autistic children

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to protecting children living with autism, declaring that no form of discrimination against them will be tolerated in the state.

The assurance was conveyed by the Commissioner for Information and Communication, Kassim Afegbua, during a reception held at the Sir Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub in honour of autistic artist and cyclist, Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke, who is on a long-distance awareness ride from Enugu to Lagos.

Addressing students, parents, government officials, cycling coaches and other dignitaries, Afegbua said that the governor remains deeply passionate about the welfare of autistic children and is committed to policies that will enable

them to overcome the challenges associated with the neurodevelopmental condition.

He described Kanyeyachukwu's journey as a powerful testament to resilience and determination, noting that the young cyclist embodies the Edo spirit of striving for excellence against all odds.

According to him, the athlete, who previously earned global recognition for producing one of the largest paintings, is once again breaking barriers by undertaking the endurance ride to raise awareness about autism.

Afegbua urged individuals facing challenges not to give up, but to persevere, drawing inspiration from Kanyeyachukwu's achievements.

He highlighted the demanding nature of the journey, citing the seven-hour cycling stretch from Asaba to Benin

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— Poju Oyemade tells graduates —Pg 4

Oduah cleared as court accepts plea bargain, convicts firms in N2.5bn fraud case —Pg 7

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Okpebholo targets durable roads, assures timely delivery across Edo

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its resolve to deliver durable, standard-compliant road projects across the state, with a firm assurance that ongoing works will be completed within stipulated timelines.

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Projects Monitoring and Implementation, Engr. Phoebe Williams-Bello, gave the assurance during a three-day inspection tour of ongoing road projects in Edo Central and Edo North Senatorial Districts.

Addressing journalists in Edo Central, Williams-Bello expressed satisfaction with

both the pace and quality of work observed on various project sites, while urging contractors to sustain the momentum.

She commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for prioritising infrastructure development and ensuring prompt payment to contractors, a move she said has enhanced efficiency and delivery.

"As you can see, we have covered about five kilometres at the binder level, and the wearing course will follow. We want to thank my principal, Senator Monday Okpebholo, because contractors are not being owed, and that is why you can see them actively on site delivering the work," she said.

One of the contractors, Engr. Michel Haddad, expressed confidence in meeting project timelines, particularly on the 11.5-kilometre dualisation project linking Ewu, Uromi, Igueben and Ekpoma, assuring that the work would be delivered on schedule.

On the third day of the tour in Edo North, Williams-Bello inspected ongoing palliative interventions on failed sections

of the Auchi-Igarra-Aiyetoro-Unemu-Nekhwa-Aiyegunle-Ekpesa-Ibillo-Ekor road in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area. She reassured residents of the government's commitment to restoring motorability and delivering projects promptly.

"I am very sure that within this timeframe, His Excellency will deliver major roads across Edo North, Central and South. I urge Edo people to

be patient. We are addressing road deficiencies, and by God's grace, we will achieve significant milestones in the coming months," she added.

During the inspection of the 9.6-kilometre Ibillo-Igarra road, the Special Adviser acknowledged the level of progress made but charged contractors to intensify efforts to accelerate completion.

The contractor handling the

project, Engr. Bajwa Mohd, assured that quality would not be compromised, noting that the work had already recorded significant progress.

"You can see the project is progressing well, and very soon we will achieve over 50 per cent completion. We are committed to delivering quality and standard work that will last for years," he said.

8,453 delegates to participate in...

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as a milestone in APC's journey, demonstrating both continuity of leadership and renewal of institutional structures.

With all logistical, security, and operational arrangements finalised, Idris said Nigerians and the international community can expect a well-coordinated, orderly, and historic gathering, cementing the APC's status as a mature political force.

Meanwhile, the party has assigned its national convention offices to the six geopolitical zones in strict adherence to federal character principles, the party said on Thursday.

Speaking at a news briefing, Alhaji Bello Masari, Chairman of the APC National Convention Central Coordination Committee and former Speaker of the House of Representatives, said the zoning formula ensures fairness and prevents disgruntled elements from creating confusion during the convention.

"APC is a responsible, Nigerian party. All offices are zoned in line with federal character. If an office is zoned to one region, aspirants from other zones should not attempt to contest, otherwise it risks cre-

ating confusion," Masari said.

He dismissed claims that some aspirants were denied nomination forms as deliberate attempts to destabilise the party, stressing that APC operates a structured, zonal framework, with all working committees also distributed according to geopolitical zones.

Masari added that the party had not been served with any court processes regarding aggrieved aspirants and remained confident that its processes were transparent and credible.

"The central coordinating committee started its work about three weeks ago, supported by 25 subcommittees covering all areas. Preparations began months ago with ward, local government, and state congresses. So far, we are satisfied with all that has been done," he said.

Masari reaffirmed that the APC was ready to set the pace for a more durable and reliable democratic process in Nigeria and across Africa.

"We are the leaders of what we have started, and the convention will reflect the party's commitment to democracy, unity, and proper governance," he said.

Nigeria makes strides in recovering...

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urement and institutional processes. ANEEJ is working with the Rural Electrification Agency and Ministry of Justice to ensure proper implementation, while civil society groups independently monitor progress.

Ugolor also identified challenges such as access to data and prolonged administrative procedures, emphasising the importance of collaboration with government institutions. "It is not always about accusing officials; sometimes they face genuine capacity and institutional challenges. Civil society can support them technically to ensure projects succeed," he said.

He highlighted ANEEJ's internationally recognised "MANTRA" model, a citizen-led monitoring approach that strengthens transparency and accountability in asset utilisation. Commenting on EFCC's recent recovery of \$30

million, Ugolor described it as a "huge resource" that should be prioritised for healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

Dr Matthew Ayibakuro, Governance Adviser at the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), said recovered assets are "justice returned to citizens" and must be transparently managed. He commended ANEEJ for convening stakeholders across government, civil society, academia, the media, and development partners to ensure recovered funds translate into meaningful improvements in Nigerians' lives.

"Effective asset recovery requires collective action. When law enforcement, judiciary, civil society, and oversight bodies work together, we see stronger systems, better coordination, and outcomes that centre on citizens," Ayibakuro said, reaffirming the UK's commitment to supporting Nigeria's asset recovery efforts.



GIABA DELEGATION'S VISIT TO NAN:

Acting Principal Officer, Communication and Advocacy, Tim Melaye (L) presenting a souvenir to the Managing Director, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Malam Ali Muhammad Ali, during GIABA delegation's visit to headquarters News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Abuja.

Igbinedion University mobilises stakeholders to combat deforestation

EDWARD OSEGHE

OKADA

The Vice-Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), Prof. Lawrence Ezemonye, has called on governments, institutions and individuals across the globe to renew their commitment to forest stewardship, reaffirming the university's dedication to environmental sustainability as a core institutional value.

Prof. Ezemonye made the call on Thursday during activities marking the 2026 International Day of Forests at the University

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IGP hands over State Police framework to Senate

ABUJA

In a move aimed at decentralising policing in Nigeria, the Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Olatunji Disu, on Thursday submitted a comprehensive framework for the establishment of State Police to the Deputy Senate President, Jibrin Barau.

The submission was made in Barau's office at the National Assembly.

The 75-page document, entitled, "A Comprehensive Framework for the Establishment, Governance and Coordination of Federal and State Police," was presented on behalf of the IGP

by Prof. Olu Ogunsakin, Chairman of a seven-man committee set up by Disu to examine the modalities for state policing across the country.

According to a statement by Barau's Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Ismail Mudashir, the framework outlines the proposed operational structure, governance mechanisms, and coordination between federal and state police forces.

It also reflects insights from extensive consultations with security experts and stakeholders.

"The report captures the considered views, professional insights, and strategic recom-

mendations of the Nigeria Police Force. It was derived from a careful assessment of the operational, legal, and administrative implications of instituting state police in Nigeria," the IGP said.

"We expect it to meaningfully contribute to ongoing deliberations and assist in shaping informed, balanced, and pragmatic decisions on this critical aspect of national security architecture."

Barau commended the IGP for his proactive approach, noting that the submission aligns with President Bola Tinubu's agenda to strengthen security nationwide.

He added that the Senate Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution would study the framework alongside other submissions as part of the broader constitutional review process, emphasizing that the input from the Nigeria Police Force would be key to informed legislative decisions.

The development comes amid ongoing national debates over the creation of state policing structures, with proponents arguing that decentralisation could improve local law enforcement and enhance security, while critics caution against potential legal and operational challenges.

Okpebholo vows zero tolerance for discrimination against...

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City as evidence of remarkable endurance and strength.

The commissioner also commended the team of cyclists and coaches accompanying the rider, stressing that sustained advocacy is essential to open opportunities for other autistic children to realise their potential.

He particularly praised the parents of the cyclist for their dedication and perseverance in nurturing a child with special needs to global prominence.

Reaffirming the government's strides in education, Afegbua disclosed that within one and a half years, the state had con-

structed, renovated, rehabilitated and remodelled 73 schools, all of which have been fully furnished to create a conducive and secure learning environment.

Also speaking, the Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Oshiomhole, congratulated Kanyechukwu on his achievements and emphasised the need for greater public awareness and collaboration in addressing autism-related challenges.

He stressed that autistic individuals are not afflicted by curses or spiritual causes, but are unique individuals who require understanding, care and support.

Oshiomhole noted that the

event served, both as a celebration of achievement and a platform for education and enlightenment, urging the public to embrace and nurture the talents inherent in autistic children.

He reiterated the state government's commitment to ensuring adequate care and support systems for them.

In his remarks, the cyclist's father explained that the awareness ride spans multiple states, Enugu, Anambra, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Ogun, before terminating in Lagos.

He disclosed that the initiative is supported by the Cycling Federation of Nigeria, with 22 international cyclists partici-

pating in the effort.

He added that the team conducts diagnostic outreach at various stopovers, supported by medical professionals, to identify children with autism and provide guidance.

He emphasised that autism is not a disease, but a developmental disorder, calling on the public to show empathy and support, rather than ridicule.

The event drew a large crowd, with the hall of the Sir Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub filled to capacity by students from schools across the state, who gathered to receive and celebrate the cyclist during his stopover in Edo on his journey to Lagos.

NEWS

EFCC thwarts contractor from installing fake power lines —Olukoyede

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has revealed how it prevented a major national disaster by stopping a contractor from installing substandard transmission lines in 2024.

EFCC Chairman Ola Olukoyede disclosed this during

a courtesy visit by Olusegun Adesayo, Managing Director of the Nigerian Electricity Management Services Agency (MEMSA), at the commission's headquarters in Abuja, according to a statement by EFCC Spokesperson Dele Oyewale.

Olukoyede said investigations revealed that the contractor, mobilised by the Ministry of Power, had imported fake

transmission lines that could have endangered lives, disrupted the national grid, and caused massive economic losses.

The EFCC intervened, wrote to the ministry, and recommended blacklisting the contractor.

"This intervention by the EFCC saved the nation's potential disaster and loss of valuables," Olukoyede said, emphasising that the commission's mandate extends beyond financial crimes to economic sabotage.

He further assured MEMSA

that the EFCC was ready to collaborate on monitoring procurement practices, ensuring contract compliance, and curbing corruption in the power sector.

Adesayo said the visit aimed to strengthen collaboration with EFCC to enforce safety standards, enhance transparency, and promote accountability in power infrastructure projects. He requested EFCC support in intelligence sharing, investigating substandard materials, addressing contract abuses, and building internal capacity.

"This partnership is crucial to safeguard public infrastructure and ensure that electricity delivery meets national safety and quality standards," Adesayo said.

He also affirmed that MEMSA had initiated internal reforms to align with the federal government's anti-corruption agenda.

CBN Gov highlights need for credible policy, stakeholder cooperation for stability

ABUJA

Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor Olayemi Cardoso has emphasised that credible monetary policy and coordinated stakeholder engagement are critical to sustaining macroeconomic stability.

He made the remarks during the CBN Monetary Policy Forum on Thursday, themed "Strengthening Nigeria's Macroeconomic Stability Through Effective Monetary Policy: The Role of Critical Stakeholders."

Cardoso recalled that when he assumed office in 2023, the Nigerian economy faced high inflation at 29.9%, a fragmented foreign exchange market, and excessive Ways and Means financing that reached N26.95 trillion by May 2023.

He noted that external reserves dropped to \$3.99 billion at the end of 2023, undermining investor confidence.

To restore stability, the CBN

implemented fiscal and monetary reforms, including reducing Ways and Means financing to N2.84 trillion by January 2026 and enforcing a data-driven tightening cycle that raised interest rates cumulatively by 875 basis points in 2024.

Policy rates were later reduced cautiously to 26.5% by February 2026 as inflationary pressures eased.

Cardoso said the reforms were necessary to restore credibility, normalise policy conduct, rebuild confidence, and safeguard long-term prosperity.

"The most challenging phase of macroeconomic adjustment is now behind us, and we have laid solid foundations for sustained stability," he said.

Finance Minister Wale Edun reinforced the need for ongoing collaboration, stating that the government and Economic Management Team were monitoring global risks to shield Nigeria's economy, sustain disinflation, and preserve macroeconomic stability.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:

F-R: Chairman, Nigerian Bar Association, Lagos Branch, Uchenna Akingbade; Keynote Speaker, Justice Helen Ogunwumiju of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and Chairman, Mentoring Committee, Chinenye Oragwu, during the International Women's Day commemoration in Lagos.

Nigeria, Gates Foundation to deepen partnership on health, Agric, digital transformation

ABUJA

Vice-President Kashim Shettima has pledged to elevate Nigeria's partnership with the Gates Foundation, particularly in nutrition, agriculture, health, and digital innovation, describing the foundation as a "strategic partner in the Nigeria Project."

Shettima made the pledge during a meeting with a delegation from the foundation led

by Hari Menon, President of the Global Growth and Opportunity division, on Thursday in Abuja.

He commended the foundation for its sustained investment in human capital development, nutrition programmes, agricultural innovations, and the health sector. "Nigeria is a sleeping giant of Africa," Shettima said, referencing Napoleon Bonaparte's description of China, adding that the country has vast potential to surpass major global economies if strategic inter-

ventions are implemented.

Highlighting agriculture as a key driver of growth, Shettima stressed modernising farming through high-yield seeds, climate-resilient crops, precision farming, irrigation systems, and optimised input use. "We have talked about agriculture for decades, but now is the time to significantly increase productivity," he said.

Menon said the foundation seeks to deepen collaboration to

support ongoing reforms by the Tinubu administration, noting that Nigeria is undergoing "a remarkable period of economic and social transformation."

He emphasised that the foundation's engagement aims to work with both government and private sector innovators to achieve long-term development and economic growth.

The meeting also addressed digital transformation initiatives, emphasising the need to harness technology to enhance healthcare delivery, nutrition monitoring, and agricultural productivity.

NDPC, CloD urge directors to prioritise data governance, digital trust

LAGOS

Directors in Nigeria's corporate sector have been urged to prioritise data governance and digital trust to maintain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

The call came from Dr Vincent Olatunji, CEO of the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC), and Adetunji Oyeibanji, President of the Chartered Institute of Directors (CIoD), at the CIoD Members Evening themed "Beyond

Oversight: Directors as Stewards of Technology, Data, and Trust in the Imagination Era" on Thursday.

Olatunji described the current phase of global development as the "Imagination Era," marked by rapid technological innovation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation, and a data explosion that amplifies human creativity.

He warned that this era also brings critical vulnerabilities around data privacy and cybersecurity, stressing that digital trust has become a

measurable strategic asset vital for maintaining brand equity, investor confidence, and compliance with the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023.

He urged boards to shift from traditional oversight to active stewardship, embedding data privacy and cybersecurity responsibilities into corporate governance structures and creating clear accountability frameworks for digital outcomes.

Oyeibanji said rapid advances in AI, data analytics, and cybersecurity make governance more critical than ever.

"Directors must move from asking 'Are we compliant?' to asking 'Are we responsible?' and from reviewing reports to shaping outcomes," he said.

He added that robust digital governance ensures that organisations remain competitive, ethical, and resilient amid global technological disruption.

The event also featured the unveiling of the 37th issue of the CIoD Directors' Magazine, focusing on best practices in digital oversight and governance.

NBC DG calls on content owners to embrace digital switchover

ABUJA/LAGOS

The Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Mr Charles Ebuebu, has urged content owners to seize the opportunities of Nigeria's Digital Switchover (DSO), saying it promises unprecedented visibility, revenue growth, and collaboration in the broadcasting industry.

Speaking as Special Guest of Honour at the induction ceremony of the Electronic Media Content Owners Association of Nigeria (EMCOAN) in Lagos on March 25, 2026, Ebuebu stressed that the success of the DSO depends on active engagement by content creators.

"Without engaging content to populate the channels, the DSO's success could be incomplete. We urge content owners to collaborate with NBC to ensure Nigeria's digital future is rich, diverse, and sustainable," he said.

The DG highlighted that the upcoming FreeTV Direct-to-Home (DTH) platform and its companion mobile applications will provide nationwide reach, advanced analytics, and opportunities for brand partnerships.

Nigeria's DSO, managed by NBC using Nigcomsat satellite

infrastructure, marks the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting.

The programme aims to deliver more than 100 channels across the country, including remote areas, with hybrid decoders that overcome long-standing funding and infrastructure challenges.

After delays since 2012, the project is now backed by strong government support and is scheduled for launch in April 2026.

Ebuebu commended EMCOAN members for strengthening Nigeria's creative economy and encouraged them to embrace the DSO's opportunities.

"We are committed to building a platform where Nigerian stories, culture, and creativity thrive both locally and globally," he said.

During the induction, EMCOAN honoured distinguished members such as Wale Adenuga (Grand Patron) and Mr Yinka Adebayo (Patron). Notable broadcast personalities in attendance included Opa Williams, Agatha Amata, Jibe Ologeh, High Chief Eme-ka Ossai, Debbie Odetayo, Amina Mohammed, and Frank Elaboya.

Police nab armed robbery suspect, recover guns in Warri

WARRI (DELTA)

Operatives of the Delta State Police Command have arrested a 38-year-old suspected armed robber in Warri, recovering firearms and ammunition dur-

ing the operation.

The command's spokesman, SP Bright Edefe, disclosed this on Thursday in Warri, stating that the suspect was apprehended on March 9 by operatives attached to the "A" Division.

Edefe said the suspect was

arrested while attempting to rob a private residence in Egbo-kodo Community, Warri South Local Government Area.

According to him, the arrest followed a distress call from residents, prompting a swift response by police operatives in collaboration with members of

the community.

"Acting promptly on a distress call received from Egbo-kodo Community, operatives mobilised to the scene and cordoned off the area.

"During the operation, one male suspect was apprehended within the premises," he said.

He added that a thorough search of the vicinity led to the recovery of a bag containing two double-barrel cut-to-size guns and five live cartridges.

Edefe said the suspect remains in police custody while investigations continue.

He commended the operatives

for their professionalism and swift response, and urged members of the public to continue providing timely and credible information to aid crime-fighting efforts.

The spokesman reassured residents of the command's resolve to rid the state of criminal elements.

'Your certificates are licences to innovate' — Poju Oyemade tells graduates

LAGOS

Founder and Senior Pastor of The Covenant Nation, Pastor Poju Oyemade, has urged Nigerian graduates to view their academic certificates as licences to innovate, stressing that creativity and adaptability are critical to survival in today's global economy.

Oyemade made the call during the Fourth Convocation Lecture of Trinity University, Yaba, Lagos, he delivered on Thursday.

Represented by Associate Pastor, Dr Yemi Oshinaike, he spoke on the theme, "Innovation: Key to the Future."

He said innovation arises from the convergence of knowledge, imagination, courage and action to create practical solutions, adding that it remains a defining force in human development.

"Wherever you go in the world, your innovative capacity will be tested as a survival skill," he said.

He noted that the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by artificial intelligence, robotics and interconnected systems, is

reshaping industries and redefining workforce demands.

Oyemade cautioned against viewing artificial intelligence solely as a threat to jobs, urging a shift in perspective.

"The greatest fear today is that artificial intelligence will displace labour, whereas it should be seen as a positive creator of opportunities," he said.

He added that employers now prioritise adaptable problem-solvers equipped with critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and digital literacy skills.

The cleric highlighted collaboration as a vital but often underestimated driver of innovation, stressing the need for diverse perspectives in solving complex challenges.

"Innovation frequently emerges from the interaction of the analytical mind, the collaborative mindset and the entrepreneurial mind," he said.

In his remarks, Chairman of the occasion and Editorial Board Chairman of The Nation newspaper, Mr Sam Omatseye, urged graduating students to remain focused, purposeful and optimistic, stressing that education should not be taken for granted.

Soludo cracks down on absenteeism, orders suspension of late workers

AWKA

Governor Chukwuma Soludo of Anambra State has ordered the immediate suspension of civil servants absent from duty as at 10:00 a.m., following a surprise inspection of the state secretariat in Awka.

The governor issued the directive on Thursday after conducting an on-the-spot assessment of workers' punctuality, conduct and commitment across ministries and departments.

Addressing journalists after the exercise, Soludo said any worker not found at their duty post by 10 a.m. should be suspended without pay.

"I walked into offices and found a significant number of workers not yet at work as at past 10 a.m. This is unacceptable," he said.

He warned that indiscipline and poor work ethic would no longer be tolerated, adding that "bad eggs" in the civil service would be flushed out.

The governor described his

findings as a mix of "the good, the bad and the ugly," commending diligent workers while expressing dissatisfaction with widespread absenteeism.

He reiterated his administration's commitment to building a disciplined, efficient and results-driven civil service, noting that reforms would be strictly enforced.

Soludo also pointed out that the government had invested heavily in improving infrastructure and working conditions at the secretariat, urging workers to reciprocate with dedication and productivity.



GOV. SOLUDO



EQUIPMENT HANDING OVER:

Representative of the Director-General, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Chief Emeka Mgbemena (M); with the Director, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Liaison Office, Abuja, Mrs Mary Nwaeke (L), during the handing over of equipment procured by NDDC to the NYSC Media Department in Abuja.

Troops rescue abducted woman, arrest 2 suspects in Benue crackdown

MAKURDI

Troops of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS) have rescued a 28-year-old kidnapped woman and arrested two suspects during separate operations in Benue State.

The Acting Media Information Officer of OPWS, Lt. Ahmad Zubairu, confirmed the development in a statement issued on Thursday in Makurdi.

Zubairu said the troops, on March 24, responded to reports of kidnapping activities

at Tse-Ubena village in Yooyo Council Ward of Katsina-Ala Local Government Area.

He explained that troops deployed from Tor-Donga, in collaboration with operatives of the Benue State Civil Protection Guard, carried out a coordinated raid on a suspected hideout.

"During the operation, one kidnapped victim, Mrs Member Ityavber, aged 28, was successfully rescued," he said.

He added that the victim has since received medical attention, been debriefed and reu-

nited with her family, while efforts are ongoing to track down other members of the criminal syndicate.

In a related operation on the same day, Zubairu said troops acted on credible intelligence regarding the activities of suspected armed herders in Mbapa and Mbabuande communities in Gwer West Local Government Area.

Troops of Sector 1, deployed from Bilawa-Jor and Naka, conducted a search of the area and discovered an abandoned

criminal hideout.

"Further clearance operations across River Akpako led to the arrest of two suspects, who are currently in custody undergoing investigation," he said.

The Force Commander, Joint Task Force OPWS, Maj. Gen. Moses Gara, commended the troops for their professionalism and swift response.

He reaffirmed the task force's commitment to securing communities, particularly as residents prepare for the farming season.

Igbinedion University mobilises stakeholders to combat...

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in Okada, Edo State.

He stressed that sustainability at IUO goes beyond academic discourse, describing it as a "living principle" embedded in the institution's operations.

Highlighting the global importance of forests, the Vice-Chancellor noted that they cover about 31 percent of the earth's land surface and harbour over 80 percent of terrestrial biodiversity.

Despite their critical role, he warned that forests are facing unprecedented threats.

According to him, an estimated 10 million hectares of forests are lost annually to de-

forestation and degradation.

He added that Nigeria remains one of the countries with the highest deforestation rates in Africa, as consistently reported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

Prof. Ezemonye cautioned that the consequences of forest loss are severe, ranging from increased flooding and desertification to ecosystem collapse, community displacement and accelerated climate change.

"This commemoration is not merely ceremonial; it is a clarion call to action," he said.

He urged stakeholders within and outside the university to intensify solution-driv-

en research, adopt sustainable practices, engage local communities, and collaborate with government, civil society and international partners to bridge the gap between knowledge and action.

Earlier, the Director of the Centre for Climate Change and Sustainable Development Goals, IUO, Prof. Spencer Nwangwu, underscored the global forest crisis, attributing ongoing deforestation to agricultural expansion, urbanization, illegal logging and unsustainable consumption patterns.

He emphasised that the observance should inspire concrete action rather than remain symbolic.

In a keynote address titled, "Forests as Climate Assets," the Edo State Commissioner for Environment and Sustainability, Barr. Nosa Adams, represented by the Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Enodolomwanyi Otamere, described forest protection as vital to human survival. He noted that the state government has taken steps to preserve forest resources, including the establishment of the Edo State Forestry Commission.

The International Day of Forests is observed annually on March 21, following its proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.

NEWS

Polio alert: Kwara flags off mass immunisation March 29 amid fresh outbreak

ILORIN

The Kwara State Government will on March 29 commence a statewide poliomyelitis immunisation campaign targeting children under five, as authorities move urgently to halt the transmission of the virus following confirmed outbreaks.

The Social Mobilisation Officer of the Kwara State Primary Healthcare Develop-

ment Agency, Dr Dupe Shittu, disclosed this on Thursday in Ilorin during a media stakeholders' meeting on the March 2026 polio outbreak.

Speaking on the epidemiology of poliomyelitis, Shittu revealed that two confirmed cases of Circulating Variant Poliovirus Type 2 (cVDPV2) were recorded in December 2025 in Kiama Local Government Area, with an additional case reported in January 2026.

She explained that the vaccination exercise was an outbreak response strategy aimed at boosting immunity among children and curbing further spread.

According to her, high-risk local government areas include Kiama, Moro, Ifelodun, Ilorin East and Ilorin West, where intensive immunisation efforts will be concentrated.

"The immunisation exercise will run from Sunday to Wednesday, followed by two to three days of mop-up operations," she said.

She added that the campaign would target children aged zero to 59 months through house-to-house visits, fixed vaccination posts, and temporary centres located in markets and religious centres.

Shittu urged parents and caregivers to present their children for vaccination, assuring that the vaccines are safe and effective.

Also speaking, UNICEF representative in Kwara, Dr Usman Danlami, disclosed that the state accounted for 11 percent of polio isolates

recorded in 2025, noting that Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Bauchi states are also battling confirmed cases.

He said there are currently nine confirmed polio cases nationwide and warned that the disease has no cure apart from vaccination.

Danlami called on stakeholders to support the cam-

paign in order to achieve a polio-free Nigeria.

Similarly, the State Programme Officer of the Chigari Foundation, Mr Ademola Enikanoselu, appealed to the media, religious organisations, market women, traditional leaders and caregivers to help improve vaccine acceptance and counter misinformation.

FRSC targets 10% drop in road fatalities with driver health intervention in Ondo

OWO (ONDO)

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Owo Unit Command, has set a target of reducing road traffic fatalities and injuries by 10 per cent through a comprehensive health intervention for commercial drivers.

Assistant Corps Commander of the unit, Mr Joseph Ajayi, disclosed this on Thursday during a medical outreach programme held at Ijebu-Owo Motor Park.

He said the initiative was part of a proactive, data-driven strategy aimed at improving the health and alertness of drivers, a critical factor in road safety.

The outreach featured health education sessions as well as free blood pressure and blood sugar screenings for drivers.

According to Ajayi, the programme is designed to tackle key risk factors such as fatigue, underlying health conditions and reduced mental alertness.

"The health of the driver is as important as the condition of the vehicle. By helping drivers manage blood pressure and

sugar levels, we reduce the risk of sudden medical emergencies behind the wheel," he said.

He reaffirmed the corps' commitment to enhancing road safety through public enlightenment, community engagement and professional service delivery in line with its 2026 mandate.

The programme was flagged off by the Acting Chairman of Owo Local Government Area, Mr Ibrahim Hamed, represented by Mr Aminu O. Rasaq, who commended FRSC for integrating public health into road safety initiatives.

Chairman of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Ijebu-Owo Branch, Comrade Ojo Ogudu, described the intervention as timely and life-saving.

Religious leaders, including the Bishop of Owo Anglican Diocese, Right Rev. Stephen Fagbemi, represented by Ven. Benson Ola Ajayi and Rev. Oluwafemi Oyebo, as well as the Chief Imam of Owo, Sheikh Yunus Anoola, also endorsed the initiative and pledged their support.



3-DAY TECHNICAL CONSULTATION MEETING:

Director-General, National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW), Saleh Abubakar (6th R); Senegalese counterpart, Sekou Diatta (7th R) and some Director Generals from other Africa Agency for Great Green Wall, during the 3-day technical consultation meeting on the new African Union Great Green Wall Strategy and 10-year Implementation Framework (2024-2034) in Dakar, Senegal

Cassava crisis: Farmers warn of declining output, losses

IBADAN

Cassava farmers in Oyo State have raised alarm over a steady decline in production nationwide, warning that the trend is costing Nigeria millions of naira annually and threatening food security.

The farmers, who spoke in separate interviews, attributed the decline to poor pest control systems, inadequate managerial capacity, limited access to field training, and worsening climate-related challenges.

They noted that several other

constraints have forced many farmers to abandon their farms.

The concerns came to the fore during a large-scale training programme for 6,000 cassava farmers drawn from seven local government areas of the state.

The programme, organised by the Africa Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) in collaboration with the National Crops Research Institute (NCRI), also featured a facility tour of the Fashola Agribusiness Hub in Oyo.

Stakeholders at the event

observed that the losses could have been significantly reduced through strict adherence to government agricultural policies, stressing the need for stronger collaboration with the organised private sector to improve yields.

Some farmers, including Mrs Funmilayo Aderoju, Mr Olusegun Adewuyi and Mr Ogundare Aliu, called for increased government support in the form of soft loans and provision of herbicides to enhance productivity.

The Programme Coordinator for Agricultural Mechanisation at AATF, Mr Samuel Ogunleye, explained that the initiative, which began in 2023, was de-

signed to equip 6,000 cassava farmers with knowledge of best agricultural practices.

He described the turnout for the week-long training as impressive and expressed confidence that participants would apply the knowledge gained to improve output.

"We believe the farmers are returning to their farms better equipped, with improved understanding of cassava cultivation and management," he said.

Also, a Director at NCRI, Dr Adeyemi Olojede, called for increased funding for agricultural research to drive innovation, improve farming practices and boost yields

Poor policy execution stalling Nigeria's economic potential —NACCIMA

LAGOS

The Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) has warned that weak policy execution and poor accountability frameworks remain major obstacles to unlocking Nigeria's vast economic potential.

NACCIMA President, Dr Jani Ibrahim, made the assertion on Thursday at the World-stage Nigeria Macroeconomic Outlook 2026 presentation in Lagos, themed "Nigeria's Econ-

omy: Getting it Right?"

Represented by the association's Research Manager, Dr Praise Abina, Ibrahim stressed that Nigeria must adopt a new economic model driven by discipline, diversification, digital transformation and decentralisation.

He noted that while Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product is approaching 350 billion dollars and growth projections remain positive, potential alone cannot guarantee development.

"Potential does not build nations. It is execution, consistency and collective commit-

ment that transform promise into performance," he said.

He described the current period as critical, warning that failure to implement reforms effectively could lead to a cycle of "reforms without results."

Ibrahim, however, expressed optimism that with disciplined execution, Nigeria could emerge as a hub of industrial strength, economic resilience and inclusive growth.

He urged stakeholders to move beyond policy formulations to performance-driven governance, insisting that sus-

tainable development requires collective responsibility.

Earlier, President of World-Stage Ltd., Mr Segun Adeleye, called for urgent interventions to strengthen Nigeria's struggling media sector, describing it as vital to economic growth and national development.

He noted that although President Bola Tinubu had proposed tariff reductions on key media inputs such as newsprint, printing plates, chemicals and broadcast equipment, the impact may be limited due to the industry's growing shift to digital platforms.

NEPC moves to curb aflatoxin contamination in export-bound food products

OWERRI

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) has intensified efforts to tackle the prevalence of aflatoxins in locally processed food products destined for export markets.

The Executive Director of NEPC, Mrs Nonye Ayeni, disclosed this on Thursday at a one-day training on "Minimising Aflatoxin Contamination in Agricultural Produce" held in Owerri.

Represented by the council's Imo State Coordinator, Mr Anthony Ajuruchi, Ayeni advised farmers and food processors to pay closer attention to post-harvest handling, where contamination often occurs.

She explained that aflatoxins are highly toxic and carcinogenic substances produced by fungi such as *Aspergillus flavus* and *Aspergillus parasiticus*, which

commonly contaminate crops.

"We must care for the soil the way we care for ourselves because plants derive most of their nutrients from it. We must detoxify not only harvested produce but also the soil," she said.

Guest Speaker, Prof. Clifford Owuamanam of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), warned that aflatoxins can cause severe damage to the liver, kidneys and other vital organs.

He stressed that contamination could be reduced through prompt drying of produce after harvest, proper storage, regular monitoring, and the application of biological and chemical pest control methods.

Also speaking, the Head of Produce Department in the Imo State Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Investment, Mr Canice Nze, said the state government's task force would continue to enforce quality standards for goods entering and leaving the state.

Employ best brains, not political favourites, Don urges Universities

IYAMHO (EDO STATE)

A university don, Prof. Christopher Ogbogbo, has called on relevant authorities responsible for academic recruitment in Nigerian universities to prioritise merit by employing qualified intellectuals, rather than allowing political interference to dictate appointments.

Prof. Ogbogbo, who is the Vice-Chancellor of Admiralty University of Nigeria, Ibusa, Delta State, made the call while delivering the 10th Founder's

Day Lecture of Edo State University, Iyamho.

The lecture, titled "Reinventing Academic Traditions in Nigerian Universities," highlighted the declining morale within the nation's academic community despite recent adjustments in conditions of service.

The professor of History at the University of Ibadan lamented that following the last nationwide ASUU strike, many academics had become "battered, bruised and crestfallen," noting that hope ap-

pears to be fading within the university system.

He warned that Nigerian universities urgently require revitalisation or risk losing their relevance.

According to him, Founder's Day celebrations offer an opportunity to reassess institutional values and recommit to the founding ideals of universities.

He stressed that public lectures, once a vital component of academic tradition, are gradually disappearing from university culture.

Ogbogbo observed that

universities often reflect the condition of the wider society, adding that the decay, frustration and erosion of excellence evident in the country are now mirrored within academic in-

Reps demand urgent funding boost for power sector as FG inaugurates NELMCO hq

ABUJA

The House of Representatives has called for increased and timely funding of Nigeria's power sector, warning that inadequate financing continues to hinder economic growth, even as the Federal Government inaugurated the new headquarters of the Nigerian Electricity Liability Management Company (NELMCO).

Chairman of the House Committee on Power, Rep. Victor Nwokolo (APC-Delta), made the call on Thursday at the inauguration ceremony in Abuja.

He said the appeal followed a review of the 2025 budget performance of the Ministry of Power and its agencies presented to the National Assembly.

Nwokolo described the power sector as a critical driver of the economy, stressing that delayed or insufficient funding undermines project completion and overall sector performance.

"Without adequate funding, the power sector cannot deliver. Even if trillions are invested, leaving projects incomplete renders the effort ineffective," he said.

He urged the Federal Government to prioritise prompt release of funds to enable the completion of ongoing projects and stimulate economic activities, particularly for small and medium-scale enterprises that depend on stable electricity supply.

Also speaking, Chairman of

the Senate Committee on Power, Sen. Enyinnaya Abaribe (ADC-Anambra), represented by his deputy, Sen. Ashiru Yisa (APC-Kwara), said the new NELMCO headquarters would enhance operational efficiency and reduce expenditure on rented office space.

He noted that the development reflects the commitment of President Bola Tinubu's administration to institutional efficiency.

Abaribe explained that NELMCO plays a strategic role in managing legacy liabilities and facilitating investment in the power sector, thereby promoting a more competitive electricity market.

He added that under the Electricity Act 2023, NELMCO remains the successor to the defunct Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), with responsibility for managing assets, investments and liabilities.

Managing Director of NELMCO, Mrs Mojuyinoluwa Dekalu-Thomas, disclosed that the company inherited over N2.3 trillion in liabilities but has successfully settled more than N2.16 trillion through verification, reconciliation and negotiations.

She said the settlements include over N100 billion in direct payments, negotiated savings of N700 billion, transfer of N1.3 trillion to other government agencies and the write-off of nearly N1 billion.



IGP'S VISITS NIGERIAN ARMY HQ:

IGP Olatunji Disu (L), receiving a souvenir from the Chief of Army Staff, Lt-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, during the IGP's visits to the Nigerian Army Headquarters in Abuja recently.

BOI disburses N825m clean energy fund to boost industrial growth, cut costs

ABUJA

The Bank of Industry (BOI) has disbursed N825 million under a clean energy financing window to support Nigerian enterprises, in a move aimed at boosting industrial productivity while advancing environmental sustainability.

The funding forms part of a \$600,000 Global Environment Facility-United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (GEF-UNIDO) Industrial Energy Efficiency (IEE) and Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production (RECP) project, with \$550,000 channelled to BOI for on-lending to eligible industries.

The financing supports in-

vestments in energy efficiency, renewable energy solutions, cleaner production technologies, recycling infrastructure and resource-efficient production systems across multiple sectors.

Executive Director, Risk Management and ITD, GEF-UNIDO IEE and RECP, Mrs Ifeoma Uz'Okpala, disclosed this on Thursday in Abuja during the presentation of the programme's results to national stakeholders and financial institutions.

She said the initiative demonstrated how targeted financing could unlock industrial growth while promoting environmental sustainability.

According to her, the programme enabled companies to adopt energy-efficient machin-

ery, reduce production costs and improve environmental performance.

Uz'Okpala explained that the project, implemented with support from the Global Environment Facility and UNIDO, was executed in collaboration with the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) to deepen industrial participation.

She added that both large and small enterprises benefited, with small businesses accessing grants and financing for equipment upgrades and cleaner technologies across manufacturing, agro-processing, hospitality, logistics and other value chains.

Also speaking, the National Programme Officer of UNIDO, Dr Reuben Bamidele, said the initiative aligns with Nigeria's Programme for Country Part-

nership framework and holds strong potential for scaling up cleaner production practices nationwide.

He called for expansion of the financing model to reach more industries and accelerate Nigeria's transition to green manufacturing, stressing the importance of sustained collaboration among government, financial institutions and development partners.

Chairman of the Investment Committee and Director-General of MAN, Mr Segun Ajayi-Kadir, noted that the programme deployed risk-sharing mechanisms to encourage investment in innovative technologies.

"The first-loss guarantee structure helped reduce lender risks while attracting private sector participation," he said.

Media central to anti-corruption fight —Minister

ABUJA

The Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, has underscored the critical role of the media in shaping public perception and driving citizen participation in the fight against corruption.

Idris made this known on Thursday at a one-day workshop organised by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in collaboration with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Abuja.

The workshop, themed "Re-invigorating the National Anti-Corruption Strategy," brought together media lead-

ers and stakeholders from across the country.

Represented by the Director-General of Voice of Nigeria (VON), Mr Jibrin Ndace, the minister said modern governance requires strategic engagement with the media to promote transparency and accountability.

He described journalists as vital partners in national development, noting that their professionalism helps counter misinformation and strengthen democratic discourse.

"In the 21st century, no modern leader can afford to lead without partnering with the media," he said.

He warned against the growing spread of fake news and disinformation, urging jour-

nalists to uphold ethical standards and verify information before publication.

"We are in an age of noise, misinformation and disinformation, but professional journalists remain the buffers that ensure credible information prevails," he added.

Idris outlined the ministry's five-pillar communication agenda, which focuses on restoring public trust, amplifying government policies, reorienting national values, modernising technology and fostering innovation within the media space.

In his remarks, ICPC Chairman, Dr Musa Aliyu (SAN), called for stronger collaboration between anti-corruption agencies and the media, describing

journalists as critical to accountability and transparency.

He said the workshop builds on previous engagements, including a similar meeting held in October 2024, and aims to deepen institutional cooperation ahead of the next phase of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy.

"The media are not merely observers; they are watchdogs, agenda-setters and catalysts for reform," he said.

Also speaking, the Managing Director of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Malam Ali Mohammad Ali, represented by Mr Ephraim Sheyin, highlighted challenges facing journalists, including weak whistle-blower protection, threats to personal safety and limited access to information.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **EWEMADE IVERSON OSASENAGA OLUWASEUN**, now wish to be known and address as **EWEMADE-EZEANYIM IVERSON OSASENAGA OLUWASEUN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS EGBARAN LOVETH AGBONS**, now wish to be known and address as **MRS. LOVETH AGBONS ORHUE-ODOBO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS RITA EDOYEMWEN OGAMIEN**, now wish to be known and address as **MRS. OGAMIEN-EGBON RITA EDOYEMWEN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS AGBATA BLESSING ONOSHOLENOGHIA OSHIOLENOGHIA**, now wish to be known and address as **MRS. MOCHI BLESSING OSHIOLENOGHIA**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

NEWS

JUDICIARY

Oduah cleared as court accepts plea bargain, convicts firms in N2.5bn fraud case

ABUJA

An Abuja High Court has discharged former Aviation Minister, Stella Oduah, and her former aide, Gloria Odita, from a N2.5 billion fraud charge following a plea bargain reached with the prosecution.

Justice Hamza Muazu ordered their discharge after the prosecution formally discontinued the case against them, having secured a plea agree-

ment with parties involved.

However, the court proceeded to convict two companies linked to the former minister—Sobora International Limited and Global Offshore and Marine Limited on amended charges.

The prosecution, led by Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, informed the court that an amended two-count charge had been filed against the firms in line with the plea bargain arrangement. Proceedings were briefly

stood down earlier in the day to allow parties address issues surrounding legal representation for the companies.

Under the amended charges, Sobora International Limited was accused of unlawful possession of N838 million, while Global Offshore and Marine Limited was alleged to have possessed N1.629 billion unlawfully.

Upon the companies' guilty plea, Oyedepo urged the court to convict them, order their winding up, and direct that N1.2 billion paid as restitution be forfeited to the Federal Government.

He further requested that an

additional N780 million recovered during investigation be similarly forfeited.

Defence counsel, Onyechi Ikpeazu, SAN, and Wale Balogun, SAN, did not oppose the application.

In his ruling, Justice Muazu convicted the companies, ordered their winding up, and directed that both the N1.2 billion restitution and the N780 million recovered be forfeited to the Federal Government.

The court also struck out the earlier charge dated October 13, 2025, which had included Oduah and Odita, thereby formally discharging them.

Oduah had been arraigned in December 2025 alongside Odita by the Office of the Attorney-General of the Federation on a five-count charge bordering on alleged fraud, obtaining by false pretence, and criminal breach of trust. The prosecution had alleged that

the defendants conspired in January 2014 to obtain about N2.4 billion from the Federal Ministry of Aviation through Broad Waters Resources Nigeria Ltd and Global Offshore Marine Ltd under false claims. Both had pleaded not guilty prior to the plea bargain.

Court issues arrest warrant for PDP factional chairman Turaki

ABUJA

An Abuja High Court has issued a bench warrant for the arrest of Senator Tanimu Turaki, factional National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), over his failure to appear for arraignment.

Justice Peter Kekemeke granted the order after the defendant failed to attend court despite being duly served with the charge and hearing notice.

Turaki is facing a charge filed by the Inspector-General of Police for allegedly providing false information to law enforcement authorities.

Prosecution counsel, Usman Rabi, urged the court to issue

a warrant pursuant to Section 396(2) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015, arguing that the defendant's absence was unjustified.

Defence counsel, Abdulaziz Ibrahim, SAN, had sought additional time to file motions challenging the charge, contending that his client's presence was not required until those applications were determined.

However, Justice Kekemeke held that a defendant must first enter a plea before challenging the validity of a charge. He ruled that Turaki's absence, despite proper service, warranted the issuance of a bench warrant.

The court adjourned the matter until April 22 for arraignment.

Court jails youth 3yrs for JAMB impersonation

KATSINA

A Federal High Court sitting in Katsina has sentenced a young man, Ibrahim Abdulaziz, to three years imprisonment for impersonation during the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).

Justice Hussaini Dadan-Garba convicted Abdulaziz and imposed the sentence without an option of fine, stating that the punishment would serve as a deterrent against examination malpractice.

The court, however, discharged and acquitted the candidate he impersonated, Bolanwu Emmanuel.

According to the prosecution,

led by A.D. Saleh of the Katsina Police Command, the offence occurred on April 30, 2025, at Zee Alpha Academy, Funtua, where Abdulaziz fraudulently presented himself as Emmanuel during the examination conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board.

The prosecution presented three witnesses and tendered the examination slip as evidence. Although the defence objected to its admissibility, the court overruled the objection and admitted the document as exhibit.

Abdulaziz had denied the allegation and claimed to be a legitimate candidate but failed to substantiate his claim before the court.

A'lbom youths picket oil palm firm over alleged marginalization, job denial

ESIT EKET (A'IBOM)

Youths from six host communities have staged a protest at the entrance of Dakkada Global Oil Palm Limited, alleging marginalisation and exclusion from employment opportunities.

The protesters, drawn from Etebi Idung Assan, Ntak Inyang, Orukin, Unyenghe, Udu ng Ukpo and Akwata communities, carried placards with inscriptions such as "No single employment of indigene during this administration" and "Don't harvest our palm fruits for sales

to your community again."

Spokesman for the group, Mr Anietie Matthew, who is also President of the Etebi Idung Assan Youth Association, accused the company of poor management and neglect of host community welfare.

He alleged that the firm was primarily focused on extracting resources without providing commensurate benefits to the communities.

Matthew further claimed that company officials collected money from local women for the sale of palm fruits but failed to deliver the products.



EXCURSION TO THE NIGERIAN OBSERVER:

Students and teachers of Real Time Academy, Benin City, with staff of *The Nigerian Observer*, during an excursion to the newspaper's office in Benin City.

Court orders final forfeiture of N400m linked to ex-Air Force chief

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has ordered the final forfeiture of N400 million linked to Air Vice Marshal Mikail Abdulraheem to the Federal Government.

Justice Emeka Nwite granted the order after counsel to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Abba Muhammed, SAN, successfully moved the motion, which the court held to be meritorious.

In the ruling delivered on

March 17, the court declared that the sum paid at the instance of Abdulraheem to Cosgrove Investment Limited was reasonably suspected to be proceeds of unlawful activities.

The court noted that it had earlier issued an interim forfeiture order on December 31, 2025, which was subsequently published in a national newspaper.

No objections were filed to challenge the interim forfeiture.

The EFCC, in its application marked FHC/ABJ/

CS/2710/2025, relied on provisions of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006, arguing that the funds were linked to illicit transactions.

An affidavit deposed to by EFCC investigator Abubakar Kwaido revealed that the commission received intelligence on the acquisition of luxury properties through unlicensed bureau de change operators by public officials and private individuals.

Investigations traced the funds to a six-bedroom mansion located at House No. CC13, Chateaux Estate, Wuse II, Abuja, valued at N400 mil-

lion and developed by Cosgrove Investment Limited in collaboration with Aeronautical Engineering & Technical Services Limited (AETSL).

Kwaido disclosed that AETSL—an entity linked to the Nigerian Air Force—transferred N122 million in two tranches to a company associated with Abdulraheem, Mofaza-Mafoz Nigeria Limited, during his tenure with the firm between 2012 and 2014.

He further alleged that Abdulraheem is a director in multiple companies, including Mofaza-Mafoz Nigeria Limited and Mafaza Technologies Nigeria Limited.

Court orders INEC to reopen portal for GRIP registration

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has directed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to reopen its registration portal to enable the Grass-root Initiative Party (GRIP) complete its registration as a political party.

Justice Binta Nyako ordered that the portal be reopened for 27 days beginning March

26, ruling that INEC's earlier closure of the portal just three days after granting access violated its own 2022 Regulations and Guidelines for Political Parties.

The court held that INEC acted contrary to its rules by denying GRIP the full 30-day window stipulated for completion of registration after issuing an access code.

Justice Nyako also dismissed INEC's argument that the suit

was statute-barred, noting that the commission failed to provide evidence that it formally notified the plaintiffs of the portal's closure.

The plaintiffs, Nze Kanayo Chukwumezie and Mohammed Abas Kuti had sued INEC, arguing that the premature shutdown of the portal on October 19, 2025, deprived them of 27 remaining days to complete registration requirements despite payment of the N2 mil-

lion administrative fee.

The court consequently ordered INEC to restore access and allow the party complete its registration process within the remaining period.

In related rulings, Justice Nyako dismissed suits filed by the Green Future Party (GFP) and the Liberation People's Party (LPP), citing failure to meet constitutional requirements and procedural shortcomings.

Foreign

NEWS

Rationing power and diluting petrol - how African countries are coping with effects of Iran war

South Sudan and Mauritius have both announced measures restricting electricity consumption due to the fuel crisis triggered by the US and Israel's war in Iran, which is also affecting other countries across Africa.

South Sudan has begun rationing electricity in the capital, Juba, while Mauritius has imposed restrictions to reduce wastage especially in high-power consumption areas.

On Wednesday, Juba's main electricity distributor, Jedco, said parts of the city would start experiencing daily power cuts on a rotational basis.

"Due to the ongoing Iran-US conflict... Jedco must proactively manage its available energy reserves... we are prioritising a strategic rationing of power," it said.

The island nation of Mauritius is heavily dependent on oil im-

ports for generating its electricity, with a shortage reportedly triggering an energy emergency.

According to the government, a shipment of oil that had been due to arrive over the weekend did not materialise, leaving the country with only 21 days of stock.

Energy Minister Patrick Assirvaden said on Monday that the government had obtained alternative fuel supplies from Singapore that were due to arrive on 1 April and more later in the month, but at a higher cost.

South Sudan has some of East Africa's largest oil reserves, but the majority is exported, while it imports the refined product needed for fuel. According to the International Energy Agency, South Sudan generates 96% of its electricity from oil.

The power rationing comes on top of the intermittent cuts that have been ongoing since

May last year due to maintenance operations.

Ereneo Mogga, an electric engineer who lives in one of the worst affected parts of Juba, told the BBC that power often goes off at 16:00 and doesn't come back on until 04:00 the next day.

"This paralyses most businesses," he said, adding that some of those who can afford it are switching to solar power.

"It is very expensive though, but it costs less in terms of consumption."

With governments scrambling to find alternative sources of fuel, Zimbabwe has said it will increase the amount of ethanol it uses in its petrol, from 5% to 20%.

It has also announced plans to scrap some taxes on fuel imports to reduce fuel prices, which have risen 40% in less than a month.

One street vendor in the capital, Harare said the prices of everything had shot up since

the war in Iran began.

Nicole Mazarura, who sells soft drinks from a push cart, told the BBC she can't raise the price of the drinks so she has to bear the loss, while her transport costs had doubled, depending on the time of day and where she orders her products from.

"If transport costs go back to where they were, I can survive," she said.

Many ports in South Africa have seen an increase in vessels diverted from the Strait of Hormuz.

In Ethiopia, authorities have ordered fuel supply companies to prioritise security institutions, major government projects, key industries and the manufacture of essential goods.

The Ethiopian Oil and Energy Authority's measures announced last week saw petrol stations prioritising public transport, as well as restrictions to conserve fuel.

French court hands Islam scholar Tariq Ramadan 18-year jail term for rape

A court in Paris has sentenced prominent Islam scholar Tariq Ramadan to 18 years in jail for raping three women, two years after he was given a jail term for a separate rape offence in Switzerland.

The French rape case unfolded in 2017, when two of the three women came forward during the Me Too campaign against sexual abuse and harassment.

Ramadan, a 63-year-old former professor of Islamic studies at St Antony's College in Oxford, did not attend the trial in Paris, although he has always denied the charges.

His lawyers said he was being treated in the Swiss city of Geneva for multiple sclerosis and condemned the trial as a farce.

Judge Corinne Goetzmann told the court that a warrant had been issued for Ramadan's arrest, however Switzerland does not have an extradition treaty with its neighbour.

Ramadan is also facing a permanent ban from French territory.

The court ruled that the 18-year jail term was justified by the "extreme seriousness of the acts", "Consenting to sex does not imply consenting to any sexual act whatsoever," the judge said.

Leaving court, one of the three women involved in the case, Henda Ayari, told reporters that the judges had believed her, and she spoke of "nine years of suffering and struggle" since she had first come forward to make a complaint.

Writer Henda Ayari was the first woman to accuse Tariq Ramadan of rape

In 2017 she told French TV that the scholar had "literally pounced on me like a wild animal" in a hotel room in 2012.

She told reporters on Wednesday that she had been thinking about all the other victims: "of the victims who had the courage to file a complaint like me, but also of those who could not summon up the strength, and those who had withdrawn their complaint because of threats and reprisals."

The second woman to come forward in France accused Ramadan of raping her in a hotel in Lyon in 2009, whereas the Swiss case involved a woman who said he had raped her in a Geneva hotel in 2008.

Meanwhile, Tariq Ramadan has himself reacted to the sentence, calling for a "new trial, a trial with both parties present".

"I will not let this decision stand," he told Le Parisien newspaper. Insisting that it was his health that had stopped him from coming to Paris, Ramadan said if he had not wanted to attend, he would have not have assembled a legal team.

Tariq Ramadan is the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood. He has long said the allegations against him are part of a campaign of slander. He told Le Parisien that he was the victim of a political bid "to remove a Muslim intellectual".

It is difficult to see how a second trial could take place without him agreeing to pre-trial detention in France, seeing that he is now subject to an arrest warrant.



FUEL SUPPLIES:

Zimbabwe has increased the amount of ethanol in petrol to make its fuel supplies go further.

Orban's Hungarian government accused of mass voter intimidation ahead of election

Viktor Orban's Fidesz government in Hungary stands accused of mass voter intimidation in a film released on Thursday ahead of 12 April parliamentary elections, in which the ruling party is trailing in the opinion polls.

The Price of the Vote documentary film, which aired on Thursday evening at a Budapest cinema and on YouTube, presents the results of a six-month investigation by independent filmmakers and reporters.

In the film, voters, mayors, former election officials and a police officer claim that large sums of money and even illegal drugs are being offered to pressure people to vote for Fidesz.

Fifty-three of Hungary's 106 individual constituencies and up to 600,000 voters are target-

ed, the film alleges - potentially 10% of the expected turnout of six million.

After 16 years of Fidesz rule under Orban, most recent polls indicate that the party is trailing Peter Magyar's centre-right opposition party Tisza by at least that margin.

Peter Magyar's Tisza party is bidding to oust Fidesz from power

All the constituencies involved are rural or small-town communities, increasingly dominated by Fidesz since 2010.

The film portrays a rural Hungary made up of a patchwork of poor villages, home especially to the country's large Roma minority.

Local mayors exercise an iron grip over daily lives, providing work, firewood, transport to

polling stations and, in one case, even access to medicine, in exchange for the "correct" vote on election day, according to claims made in the film.

The BBC has reached out to individual government ministers, and the communications offices of the government, the interior ministry, and the national police for a reaction.

The only response so far has been from Minister for Public Administration and Regional Development Tibor Navracsics, who is seen as a moderate.

"If there is any wrongdoing just let the ministry of interior do its job," Navracsics replied. He declined to comment on specific allegations in the film.

It was in January that Viktor Orban addressed a large gathering of local mayors and village

and town councillors in Budapest: "Mayors, ladies and gentlemen, the situation is the following: this election must be won by you."

"The 2026 election will be decided by whether you get involved. If you do, we'll win; if you don't, we won't."

Outside a polling station in the village of Tiszabura, which saw a mayoral election rerun repeatedly last autumn

In the film, Orban's words are juxtaposed with interviews with around 20 figures across 14 of Hungary's 19 counties, from the south to the north-east.

The sheer extent of the practice, and the similarity of the stories in villages tens or hundreds of kilometres apart led the filmmakers to conclude that the action is planned by senior Fidesz officials.

Zimbabwe says 15 nationals killed after being lured to fight for Russia

Hundreds of Africans have been lured to fight for Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war

Zimbabwe says that 15 of its nationals have been killed after being recruited to fight for Russia in its ongoing war with Ukraine, with more than 60 still trapped on the frontlines.

Information Minister Zhemu Soda said the Zimbabweans had been lured by shadowy agencies promising lucrative jobs abroad using "social media platforms as their primary hunting ground".

"It is a sophisticated scheme of deception, exploitation, and human trafficking that has already resulted in the loss of Zimbabwean lives," he said.

The Zimbabwe government says it is in talks with the Russian authorities to ensure the bodies are repatriated and those still alive return home safely.

It is the first time the country has acknowledged that dozens of its nationals are in military service to Russia.

Soda warned Zimbabweans to exercise caution regarding overseas job offers, urging them to verify opportunities

through official channels.

He warned that the recruiters often disappear once a recruit is injured, captured, or killed, leaving relatives with no financial support or information.

The Zimbabwean case reflects a wider pattern seen across other African countries including Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, whose citizens have been enticed to join the war.

A Ukrainian intelligence assessment has estimated that more than 1,700 people from 36 countries in Africa have been recruited to fight for Russia.

Kenya estimates that 252 citizens have been illegally conscripted in Russia, and last week Foreign Minister Musalia Mudavadi visited Moscow to address the matter.

He said an agreement had been reached to stop deploying Kenyan nationals to fight in the war.

Last month Ghana said that 55 of its citizens had been killed in the conflict, with about 272 believed to have been lured to fight since the war started in 2022.

The same month, South Africa secured the return of 17 South Africans who were allegedly tricked into joining the war.

NEWS**Foreign****Israel says it has killed Iran's navy chief overseeing Strait of Hormuz blockade**

Israel says it has killed the Iranian navy chief overseeing what is a near-total blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

Alireza Tangsiri, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) navy, was "directly responsible for the terrorist act of bombing and blocking the Strait of Hormuz", and has been "blown up", according to Israel's defence minister Israel Katz.

He added that a number of other "senior Navy command officials" have also been killed. Iran has not yet commented.

Since the start of the war on 28 February, Israel has assassinated several top Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and security chief Ali Larjani.

Effectively blockading the Strait of Hormuz - the thin waterway between Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, through which around 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes - has been a key pillar of Iran's strategy in the war.

Trump's Iran strategy is to pursue two off-ramps at once

Iran's foreign minister says there are no negotiations with US. As of last week, daily traffic through the strait was down about 95%.

Oil prices have consequently shot up, placing a direct price of the war on consumers in not only the US and Israel but

across the world.

In recent weeks, an X account attributed to Tangsiri and cited by Iranian media has posted frequently about the Hormuz blockade, writing that "no vessel associated with the aggressors against Iran has the right to pass through".

Tangsiri was appointed as the commander of the Navy in 2018, having previously served as deputy commander since 2010. In 2019, he was sanctioned by the US Treasury along with other IRGC commanders after Iran shot down a US surveillance drone near the strait.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Tangsiri as an individual with "a great deal of blood on his hands" and said his assassination was "yet another example of the co-operation between us and our friend, the United States, toward the common goal of achieving the objectives of the war".

US Central Command said in a statement Tangsiri's death "makes the region safer" and that the IRGC's navy "is on an irreversible decline". It also called on serving members of the IRGC to abandon their posts and return home "to avoid further risk of unnecessary injury or death".

Israel's military said in a statement posted on X that the head of the IRGC Navy's intelligence directorate, Behnam Rezaei, was also "eliminated".

South Africa says France has disinvited it from G7 gathering in June

As France prepares to host the G7 Leaders' Summit in June in the town of Évian-les-Bains, South Africa said on Thursday that it has been disinvited from the gathering.

The spokesperson for President Cyril Ramaphosa said they have learned that Paris has had to withdraw its invitation due to sustained pressure from the United States.

Vincent Magwenya said they have been told that the Americans threatened to boycott the G7 if South Africa was invited.

French President Emmanuel Macron personally asked Ramaphosa to take part in the G7 during the G20 summit in South Africa in November.

South Africa's relations with the US have deteriorated dramati-

cally since Donald Trump's return to the White House last year.

He has made discredited claims of a "white genocide", boycotted the G20 summit in Johannesburg, and has rejected the country's Black economic empowerment policies.

In addition, the Trump administration has clashed with Pretoria over its genocide case against US ally Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Magwenya said Paris' decision will not impact "the strength and close nature" of its bilateral relationship with France.

He said the country also remains committed to engaging constructively with the US, adding that relations between the two countries will "outlive the current White House term of office".

**COURTESY VISITS:**

Ukraine's President Zelensky is touting Ukraine's expertise in drone technology.

Zelensky visits Saudi Arabia after offering Ukraine's drone expertise

Ukraine's President Zelensky is touting Ukraine's expertise in drone technology

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in Saudi Arabia on Thursday, after saying earlier that Ukrainian drones could help improve security in the Gulf region.

"Important meetings are scheduled. We appreciate the support of those who are ready to work with us to ensure security, and we support them too", he said in a message on social media.

Earlier on Thursday, Zelensky offered Ukraine's expertise in drone technology as a way of improving security across the globe, particularly in the Gulf.

"This matters because energy security - and the cost of living, particularly in Europe - depends on their oil, gas and other resources, and stable global mar-

kets," he said in a video message to the Joint Expeditionary Force, a security alliance which held a summit meeting in Helsinki.

"The key is not only producing new weapons - especially drones - not just technology, but also real experience in using it, and integrating it with radars, aviation, and other air defence systems. We have this experience," he said.

Zelensky said that in exchange he would be looking for assistance in defending Ukraine against the ongoing Russian invasion.

"We would like Middle Eastern states to also give us an opportunity to strengthen ourselves. They have certain air defence missiles of which we don't have enough. That's what we'd like to reach a deal on," he said in an interview with the French newspaper Le Monde.

The BBC has spoken to sev-

eral Ukrainian drone companies who say they have been approached by Gulf states for help, but have not yet been given the green light by the government in Kyiv.

Kvertus, a Ukrainian company that makes anti-drone electronic warfare systems, said it had been approached by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

"We are waiting for approval to export any products. We understand that we need to coordinate with our government because it's not only about business, about selling drones, it's about politics," the company's chief executive officer Yaroslav Filimonov told the BBC.

Volodymyr Zinovsky, the CEO of Ukrainian manufacturer TAF Industries, said he was happy to wait for the government's permission to export because Ukraine's security is at stake.

"All of us are working to

protect Ukraine, to stay with Ukraine and to keep Ukraine alive. This is about survival. And if we need to wait a few months, we will," he told the BBC.

Zinovsky said his company had been approached by representatives of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, but told them to discuss this with the Ukrainian government.

Media reports suggest that the US is now considering diverting arms meant for Ukraine to the Gulf because of the war with Iran, making a drone deal even more crucial for Ukraine.

The Washington Post quoted sources as saying that the Pentagon is considering diverting weapons intended for Ukraine to the Middle East as the war in Iran depletes some of the US military's most critical munitions.

US prosecutors argue Maduro 'plundered' Venezuelan wealth in court battle over legal fees

A judge appeared sympathetic on Thursday to legal arguments that ex-Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cillia Flores should be allowed to use Venezuelan government money to fund their defence.

Maduro and Flores's attorneys asked the judge to dismiss the narco-terrorism case against the pair because the US has denied them use of the funds due to sanctions in place against the Latin American country.

Prosecutors argued Maduro "plundered" Venezuela's wealth and should not be able to use its money for legal fees.

The 92-year-old Judge Alvin Hellerstein however, noted that "the right to defence is paramount". He said he would not be dismissing the case over the dispute.

The judge said he would is-

sue a ruling at a later time, including the next court date.

Maduro and Flores were seized by US forces from his compound in Caracas in a dramatic night-time raid 3 January, and were brought to New York to face allegations of weapon and drug offences, which they deny.

On Thursday, wearing green khaki prison jumpsuits, Maduro and his wife sat quietly with several lawyers in-between them as they listened to a translation of the arguments through headphones.

The mood stood in stark contrast to their first court appearance, when Maduro gave a speech lasting several minutes claiming he had been kidnapped and was innocent. That hearing ended with a man yelling at Maduro from the back of the courtroom.

Because the Maduros and the Venezuelan government are subject to US sanctions, they needed to obtain a licence to allow the government to pay their legal fees.

The US Government Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) initially granted that licence, then revoked it.

Prosecutors argued in court that the Maduros should not be able to access Venezuelan government funds over national security concerns and claim they have access to personal funds available to pay for attorneys, which the Maduros deny.

Under US law, Maduro, like every defendant, would be entitled to a court-appointed lawyer if he is unable to afford his own.

Judge Hellerstein appeared to side with Maduro lawyer Barry Pollock's argument that the unusual case against the former

leader, taking place in another country, would be overwhelming for a public defender to take on and would hamper the counsel they provide.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, claimed OFAC was not allowing the Maduros to access Venezuelan government funds because of longstanding sanctions the US has had in place during his regime and because the couple had "plundered the wealth of Venezuelans" for their own gain.

Judge Hellerstein questioned that logic, saying that because of the Maduros' capture, that foreign policy situation had changed.

"We are doing business with Venezuela," he said. Since Maduro's arrest, former Vice-President Delcy Rodríguez has taken power and the country said it has resumed diplomatic ties with the US.



PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

Must crossover films struggle for global attention?

The world has taken film exploration in terms of gaining a wider audience into another lever. The filmmakers are aware that culture varies from one continent to another and therefore are devising creative means of making their films cut across polarized cultures and audiences. The new word that has made filmmakers to change the lens of viewing film acceptability from localising films to global using them. The worse is crossover films.

The term, crossover film, carries a dual weight in the cinematic world and amongst filmmakers. On one hand, it represents the holy grail of production. For example, having a movie that transcends its niche, whether that niche is cultural, linguistic, or genre-specific, to enable the movie to achieve mainstream, global success. On the other hand, it represents one of the most treacherous creative and commercial tightropes a filmmaker can walk whether he likes it or not.

From the outside, however, the formula seems simple: simply take a local story, work it up to your creative abilities and then give it a universal appeal. In practice, however, the path to a successful crossover film is littered with lost in translation moments, studio interference, and the inherent friction between cultural identity, authenticity and commercial viability. You may not know it, but the struggle for crossover movies by filmmakers begins with the paradox of specificity. At the heart of every great film is a sense of locale and identity. Filmmakers often find themselves in a creative mix up when attempting to cross over their film storytelling across cultures. If they lean too heavily into the specific cultural nuances, local idioms, and historical contexts of their home market, they risk alienating the diverse heterogeneous international audiences who lack that background and knowledge. However, if they dilute these symbolic creative elements to make the film more culturally mixed to a locale, but accessible to a global audience, they risk stripping the film of the very soul that made it interesting in the first place, because how does a German under a film storyline depicting more local nuances of a tribe in Edo State of Nigeria? This could be seen as one of the challenges of not quite defining the proper creative mix to make a film be acceptable to diverse global audiences.

The attempt by filmmakers to force a story from a particular demography on other international audiences may not fit well like a design from a craftsman. It would create some sort of confusion from the perspective of a cultural philosophy. The approach to attempt to reach other cultures with a film from another remote culture is what some film critics do call Cultural Dilution.

This is when a filmmaker deliberately modifies a script to satisfy a global distributor for a global audience. Without actually meaning to make the film be felt that way, but the result can somehow feel like a tourist version of the culture—a superficial representation that relies on stereotypes rather than depth. For example, a filmmaker from South Korea or India might feel pressured to explain traditions through clunky exposition or to cast an international star in a role that doesn't fit, simply to provide a "hook" for foreign markets. When a film tries to speak to everyone at once, it might often end up speaking to no one with any real conviction. This is where creative abilities in understanding how cultures can interrelate without blocking their boundaries to one another so as to understand the storyline of the film becomes necessary.

Language plays a great role in communication. We also know that film is a mix of audio and visuals and visuals alone can tell stories if such a film was planned that way from the onset. After all there was a period for silent film and these were appreciated globally. For most filmmakers working in non-English languages, the struggle to cross over such films is a battle against the systemic bias of the English-speaking market. This is one factor that has made making a crossover film to often involve a difficult choice of maintaining authenticity which makes such movies to face limited theatrical release and art-house labeling. We have also seen non-English speaking countries attempt to speak English in their films to increase global commercial potential and appeal which ends up not achieving the expected global appeal.

When filmmakers intentionally choose to pivot to English to reach a broader audience, they often lose the rhythmic beauty and emotional resonance of their native tongue in such movies. Dialogue that sounds poetic in Benin or Spanish might sound cliché or awkward when translated into English prose. This linguistic shift can fundamentally alter the chemistry between actors and the pacing of the narrative.

Narrative expectations in films vary wildly across the globe. Hollywood has standardized a "Three-Act Structure" that prioritizes tight pacing, clear character arcs, and a definitive resolution. However, many global cinematic traditions—such as the lyrical, non-linear storytelling of certain Middle Eastern films or the maximalist, multi-genre Masala style of Indian cinema—do not however fit neatly into this box.

Filmmakers struggle to make crossover films because they are often asked to re-edit their cultural logic. A filmmaker might be told that their film is too slow or that the ending is too ambiguous for a global audience. When a director tries to force a story rooted in one tradi-

tion into the structural mold of another, the result is often a disjointed experience. For example, while tribes in Edo State and other parts of Nigeria love play with words in their application of idioms, parables, proverbs in making a simple sentence, the Londoner would rather be direct in his sentence. The "struggle" here is essentially a negotiation between the filmmaker's artistic vision and the global market's demand for familiarity.

Even if a filmmaker now manages to create a masterpiece that balances identity and authenticity with universal themes, they also face the brutal reality of industrial gatekeeping. The global film market is dominated by a few major conglomerates. For a film to truly be a "cross over," it needs a massive marketing budget, a wider theatrical release, and an "Oscar campaign" or a significant push on streaming platforms.

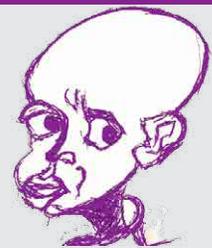
This commercial pressure creates a homogenized cinema. Filmmakers find themselves struggling not just with the art, but with a system that views cultural diversity as a "risk factor" that needs to be managed rather than strength to be celebrated. Unlike a domestic filmmaker who can tell a small, specific story without any form of consequence, the crossover filmmaker often carries the burden of being an ambassador. When a film from an underrepresented country gains international traction, it is often treated as the definitive statement on that entire culture.

This pressure can be paralyzing. Filmmakers struggle because they feel they must represent their country correctly while also being innovative. If they portray the dark side of their society, they are accused of poverty porn for Western consumption. If they portray a polished, modern version, they are accused of being inauthentic. This social and political tightrope makes the creative process exponentially more difficult than it is for a filmmaker working within a single locale and stable market.

Few filmmakers who succeeded in this regards, do so by leaning into the universality of human emotion while remaining unapologetically specific about their world. They have proven as well that the more local a story is within its locale, the more universal it can become. However, there are hundreds of films that fall into the "crossover chasm"—movies that were too "foreign" for the mainstream and too "commercialized" for the critics.

Filmmakers struggle to make crossover films because it requires a near-impossible alignment of cultural integrity, structural flexibility, and marketing luck. It is a battle against a global system that often prefers "sameness" over the vibrant, messy, and specific realities of the human experience.

TATAFO



Content creators na actors?

Awa pipo say wen handshake don de use style near awa elbow, naim be say na Mighty Igor and Power Mike fight don be dat. De rison be say, if na hand we wan shake, make we shake am but if na fight de awa mind, den make kukuma fight de fight. Today yaning no be about fight sha, I only jus use handshake de explanate wetin I wan yan us later.

Abeg, I really want us to shine awa eyes wella and make we also siddon to yan dis mata wey I wan put for grand well-well, bicos meni pipo don de scratch head for house, de ask say weda "content krietors na actors?"

Bifor-bifor, if una still rememba, wen person yan say him be actor, pipo mind go jus fly laik lekeleke go de tink say de person de show for inside film, television or maybe him even de inside Hollywood de rub shoulder laik pikin for him mama back with dem James Bond or Baba Sala. But today? Abeg shift commot for road joor! Tins don shange finish laik pikin wen him mama shange him dross Afta him piss. If you jus manage to fit hold small phone, ring light, and you get small data join, you fit bicom dat person wey millions of pipo go com de wosh evri day pass dem Richard Mofe Damijo. Abi na lie? But again, dat one true true mean say you don be actor?

Neva hurry to ansa me as time still de. I no say ya blood don de pump laik bore-hole pumping mashin. Jus relax make we de break am down small-small, de way wey evribody go undastand.

Inside de world of entainment, de line wey divide content krieshon and acting don tin sotey, even awa eyes nor fit even de see am again. If you use style take luk meni of awa content krietors today; jus rison am, and yan me wetin dem de do? Abi you tink say dem jus wake up and bigin jump laik cricket and de shout for front of dia camera. Take style check dia costumes and you go see say all awa content krietors get dem difrent costumes and some wey be only one person fit de play papa, mama, pikin plus houseboy by himself. Omo, if dat one no be acting, I nor com fit no wetin be acting again! Abi acting no be wen you take anoda person karacta carri for body, and you come make pipo believe say dat person na real? Wen dis content krietors de do wetin dem de do wey de make us de laff, dat one nor be pure acting?

All of us also no say actors for Nollywood or oda online platforms get scriptwriter, director, cameraman, sound person, editor plus meni odas. But wot of content krietors? Most of de time, na only dem be dia full crew. Dem be de Writer. Dem be de Director.

Dem be de Actor. Dem be de Editor. Dem com still get dem own platform to de fit reach pipo.

So, if una use adult eye take lik dis mata, una go com see say na real og-bonge work dis content krietors pipo de do in a way. While de film actor jus de wait for "Action!" from him Director, de content krietor de worry him head about lightning, background noise, and weda de video go make sense and catch pipo attention for de first three seconds. Inside all dis mata so, meni pipo kross-mind say dis content krietors nor be actors. Even with all dem work wey full evri wia for soshal media, som film pipo for de film industri still de luk down on content krietors. Dem get their reasons, even though those reasons de shake laik handshake small.

Som pipo bilif say to be real actor, you must go de film school, do rehearsals for stage, or work under one big director for years. Dem feel say content krieshon na just play-play tin for for soshal media laik person wey nor get work. Dem even argue say acting need more wetin dis content krietors de do. Even dat one kpakpa com even konfuse me finish. Mus sombodi de karacta for two hours laik movie, instead of jus for one- 5 minutes of a reel bifor una go call dem actors?

We all no say acting for movie sometime de nashura and slow, while content krietors own acting de loud and over-acting bicos dem goal na to make you laff or shock you quick-quick bifor you go de nex video. Bicos of dis loudness, som pipo feel say dia style nor reach de standard of "Fine Art." Na all content krietors de shout? Na all movie actors nor de do over acting? I liv de ansa to una.

If you still de doubt say content krietors na actors laik dose for movies, no wahala. Na una sabi. But again, look wetin de shele for de film market nowadays. Why e com be say meni movie directors de find content krietors to com act for dem big cinema movies and big big adverts Directors dem no say dis guys get de talent. If you fit make person laugh or cry for inside one-minute video wey you record for ya bedroom, imagine wetin you go do when you get big budget and better equipment na!

De truth be say, de platform jus change, but de talent na de same. Weda you de big screen for big Cinema or you de de small screen of person phone, if you de act, you de act! De content krietor actor even get one pawa wey de tradishona actors no get: Direct Conneshon. If eni actor for movie act rubbish, you fit no get chance tell am. But if content krietor act nonsense, him comment seshon go catch fire sharp-sharp. Dis one de make dem refine dia acting skills evri single day.

ArtsWorld with Francis Odupute 08023680030

Why Elizabeth Pedro, Edo-born philanthropist, gains global relevance

FRANCIS ODUPUTE

On Wednesday, the 18th of March, 2026, from the global stage in New York to a prestigious International Women's Day celebration in Africa, Professor Elizabeth Pedro, the founder and global leader of Women Helping Women (WHW) Foundation, was honored with three major awards in a single day.

At the UN CSW70 Side Event, Professor Elizabeth Pedro received two elite awards presented by the WORLD MADAM Foundation and the EmpowerHer Forum, namely: The Women's Philanthropic Excellence Award: A prestigious recognition for her significant contributions to charity and her lifelong dedication to improving the welfare of women and girls child globally. Second was the "Overall Champion: WORLD MADAM 2026 (Canada Annual Selection)", a title that recognizes Prof. Pedro as a global gold standard for womanhood, leadership, and empowerment.

While the philanthropist was receiving these two awards in New York at the UN CSW70 Side Event, simultaneously, back home in Benin City, her humanitarian impact was celebrated at a high-level International Women's Day event organized by the Hapiwify Project in collaboration with the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations (CONGOs), Edo State. The award was christened "A Certification Award for Outstanding Contributions to Women's Empowerment".

In the evolving landscape of women's empowerment, where advocacy is often loud but impact sometimes shallow, Apostle Professor Elizabeth Pedro stands out for a different reason: her insistence that transformation must be both spiritual and structural.

As the visionary behind Women Helping Women (WHW) and its international expression, Women Helping Women for sustainable tomorrow foundation (WHW), Professor Pedro has built more than an organization. She has cultivated a movement rooted in faith, leadership development, and practical empowerment—one that is increasingly attracting attention across continents.

The story of Women Helping Women is not simply inspirational; it is strategic, scalable, and impact-driven. Talk about a calling that became a global mission! Apostle Professor Pedro traces her journey back to a deeply personal conviction: that every woman carries what she describes as "divine potential." Her life-long slogan, "empower a woman, empower a nation" continues to re-echo in her various humanitarian interventions.

Growing up, Prof. Elizabeth Pedro encountered women whose gifts were buried under cultural expectations, economic hardship, and societal limitations. Their stories became her catalyst. "Empowerment," she has often said, "is not a privilege—it is a necessity."

That conviction evolved into structured intervention. Today, through



PROFESSOR ELIZABETH PEDRO (MIDDLE) DISPLAYS THE TWO AWARDS SHE WON AT THE UNITED NATIONS CSW70 SIDE EVENT IN NEW YORK, USA.

Transformation over numbers. She believes in measuring success in transformation, not applause. Success, in her framework, is visible when a once-doubtful woman becomes a mentor to others. It is measured in generational impact rather than event attendance or media coverage

WHW and its allied platforms, she leads programs that restore confidence, provide vocational skills, mentor emerging leaders, and build systems designed to sustain long-term change rather than temporary relief.

Her leadership portfolio is expansive—doctor, ambassador, founder, coach—but she describes each title as an extension of one mission: to serve humanity through faith, empowerment, and compassion.

Unlike many development initiatives that treat spirituality as peripheral, Professor Pedro places faith at the center of her leadership philosophy. She openly describes herself as "God's Own," a declaration that shapes both her decision-making and institutional culture. For her, faith is the framework, not an ornament.

Through Great Shepherd Ministries, she integrates spiritual guidance with community outreach, addressing not only economic and social needs but also what she calls "the soul's need for hope."

This integration of faith and empowerment has proven particularly resonant in under-served communities, where spiritual institutions often serve as trusted pillars of society. For sponsors, this presents a unique advantage: programs embedded within values-based networks often enjoy higher community acceptance and deeper long-term engagement.

Beyond grassroots work, Professor Pedro's global engagement reflects a broader philosophy of inclusive leadership. As an Ambassador of Peace to the United Nations—a role she

describes as requiring empathy, collaboration, and moral courage—she advocates for peace that begins within individuals and expands outward to families, communities, and nations.

Her peace-building approach aligns seamlessly with the mission of Women Helping Women. Economic insecurity, gender inequality, and social marginalization often fuel instability. By equipping women with skills, confidence, and leadership capacity, WHW contributes to preventative peace-building at the community level. For international development partners, this linkage between empowerment and stability represents measurable social value.

When asked how she defines success, Professor Pedro's response is telling: transformation over numbers. She believes in measuring success in transformation, not applause. Success, in her framework, is visible when a once-doubtful woman becomes a mentor to others. It is measured in generational impact rather than event attendance or media coverage.

This philosophy shapes WHW's programming model. Initiatives are designed not merely to train participants but to position them as multipliers—women who will, in turn, uplift others.

The organization's vocational hubs, mentorship platforms, and leadership training initiatives reflect a long-term sustainability mindset. Rather than short-lived interventions, they aim

to build economic independence, personal confidence, and community influence.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Professor Pedro's leadership is her understanding of communication as a strategic asset. She employs strategic communication as a tool for expansion.

She emphasizes empathy-driven messaging—beginning with understanding audience realities before crafting narratives. Storytelling, she notes, inspires where statistics alone cannot. By sharing authentic accounts of women who have overcome adversity, the organization bridges cultural divides and galvanizes global support.

Beyond program implementation, Professor Pedro invests heavily in mentoring emerging leaders. Her training emphasizes clarity, compassion, and confidence in public engagement. Leaders, she teaches, must speak from conviction rather than convenience. This leadership pipeline ensures continuity and scalability—two factors critical to long-term institutional sustainability.

Her envisioned legacy is not one of titles, but of courage, character, and compassion. She hopes future female leaders will understand that greatness is defined not by position, but by impact. This emphasis on leadership replication signals return on social investment: empowered individuals who evolve into community change agents.

Friday Sermon

Do not curse your leaders, pray for them!

IMAM MUHAMMAD
YUSUF BABANGIDA

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of all creation. May Allah extol the Messenger in the highest company of Angels and grant him peace likewise, his family, his Companions and all those who truly follow him until the Day of Resurrection. To proceed:

Dear brothers and sisters! Know that, respecting and praying for our leaders is a divine mandate in Islam, rooted in the Qur'anic command to "Obey Allah, obey the Messenger, and those in authority among you" (Qur'an, 4:59). This obligation promotes social stability, justice, and collective well-being.

Sincerely speaking, respecting the leaders is not a choice but a mandate from Allah and His Messenger Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

Truly, leadership is a trust (amanah), not a privilege. And leaders are shepherds accountable to Allah for their flock.

Muslim believers must hear and obey their leaders in times of ease and hardship, provided the commands do not contradict Islamic law (See Sahih Muslim).

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) described the best leaders as those who are loved by their people and who pray for their people, and vice versa.

The Islamic scholars unanimously emphasise that instead of cursing or insulting the leaders, Muslim believers should supplicate for their guidance and righteousness. Because praying for a leader's righteousness directly benefits the Ummah's well-being.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) forbade cursing leaders and encouraged invoking Allah to make them righteous.

Supplicating for another's guidance, especially a leader, brings rewards to the person praying.

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) demonstrated respect by treating all with dignity, regardless of rank, including responding with kindness to those who were mentally ill or elderly.

During a famine, Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA) refused to eat better food than his people, illustrating that true leaders put their people's needs first.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) taught us that a leader must be followed even if they do not meet one's aesthetic or social preferences, such as a Habasha/Ethiopian slave, emphasising that authority is granted by Allah.

Also the story of Zul-Qarnain in the Qur'an teaches that the most impactful leaders are those who serve, build, and protect their people while remaining humble before Allah Almighty.

The pious predecessor, Imam Al-Hassan Al-Basri once saw a man cursing the tyrant leader Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf. He stopped him, saying:

"Do not do that! Verily, he was brought out from among you to be your leader. We fear that if he is replaced, someone worse might come because of your own behaviour."

This reminds us that a nation's

leaders often reflect the state of its people. By improving our own character and sincerely praying for our leader's guidance, we invite Allah's mercy upon our entire society.

Respected brothers and sisters! Know that, the leadership is viewed as an amanah and a heavy responsibility before Allah. Muslim believers are encouraged to maintain a good relationship of respect and sincere concern for their leaders to ensure the stability and well-being of the Ummah.

Supplicating for leaders is a Sunnah and an act of righteousness. Islamic scholars like Al-Fudail Bin Iyad stated that if they had one prayer guaranteed to be answered, they would offer it for the leader, because a righteous leader brings well-being to the entire land and its people.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said:

"The best of your leaders are those whom you love and they love you, you pray for them and they pray for you."

So instead of cursing or insulting the leaders, Muslim believers are encouraged to pray for their guidance and wisdom, as their righteousness directly impacts the Ummah's welfare.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) famously said:

"The religion is Nasihah (sincere advice/sincerity)."

This includes sincerity toward the leaders.

Nasihat to a leader must be done privately, not publicly, to avoid causing humiliation or inciting civil unrest. Advice should be delivered with the proper key—kindness and soft speech—to unlock the heart of the recipient.

The advisor must seek only the pleasure of Allah and the genuine benefit of the leader, rather than seeking to show off or express personal hatred.

Islam emphasises maintaining order through respectful conduct towards those in authority. Allah Almighty says:

"O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you." [Qur'an, 4:59]

And obedience is required in all matters that are good and upright (Ma'ruf). However, there is no obedience to any creature in disobedience to the Creator (Ma'asiyah).

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) taught us that part of glorifying Allah is to honour the just leader.

Every individual holds a leadership role in some capacity. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said:

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock."

This teaching humbles the leader by reminding them they are servants accountable to Allah, and it inspires followers to support their leaders in fulfilling this heavy trust (amanah).

Dear brothers and sisters! In Islamic history, the relationship between leaders and their peoples was built on absolute truth, humility, and the fear of Allah. The companions (Sahabah) did not merely follow; they were active guardians of justice who felt a religious obligation to provide sincere advice to their leaders.

Upon being elected the first Caliph, Abubakar as-Siddiq delivered a powerful



SULTAN of Sokoto, His Eminence, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III

address that set the standard for leadership of today. He famously told the people:

"I have been given authority over you, and I am not the best of you. If I do well, help me; and if I do wrong, set me right."

This means leadership is a trust (amanah), and a leader's strength lies in their willingness to be corrected by those they lead.

Huzaifah (RA) was known as the "Keeper of the Prophet's Secrets" and served as a governor under Umar Ibn al-Khattab.

When appointed as governor of Mada'in, he arrived on a simple mule, shocking the people with his humility. He warned his fellow Sahabah and citizens to "Beware of sedition," which he defined as entering the presence of a leader and falsely agreeing with everything they say.

True loyalty is not blind praise; it is the courage to speak the truth even when it is uncomfortable for the leader.

Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, was known for his rigorous self-accountability, but he still sought constant verification from his advisors. Umar once questioned Huzaifah Ibn al-Yaman and Uthman Ibn Hunayf regarding the taxation they had imposed on the land of Iraq. He feared they might have burdened the land beyond what it could bear.

The Sahabah assured him they had only imposed what was fair based on the yield.

Even a leader as strong as Umar feared the supplication of the oppressed and relied on his advisors to ensure no citizen was treated unjustly.

During the Battle of the Trench (al-Khandaq), the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) demonstrated the ultimate example of a leader accepting advice. Salman al-Farisi, an expert in Persian defensive tactics, suggested digging a massive trench around Madinah—a strategy unknown to the Arabs at the time.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be

upon him) accepted this advice, which became the decisive factor in the city's defense. Wisdom is not the monopoly of the leader; a great leader listens to experts in everything regardless of their background or status.

Therefore an advice was given out of love for the Ummah and the leader's own spiritual safety. Decision-making was a collective process to ensure ethical and balanced outcomes. The Sahabah prioritised truth over the desires of the wealthy or powerful.

My beloved people! Leadership is not a position of power, but a heavy trust (amanah) and a service to the people. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "The leader of a people is their servant."

Also the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said: "O Allah, whoever gains charge of any responsibility over my people and makes it difficult for them, then make things difficult for him. And whoever gains charge of any responsibility over my people and is gentle with them, then be gentle with him." [Sahih Muslim]

Therefore true leadership is defined by kindness, not harshness. This is a severe warning against abusing authority and a beautiful promise for those who serve with compassion. Meaning a leader's success is measured by how they ease the burdens of their people.

And Prophet Yusuf (AS) said: "My Lord! You have granted me power, and taught me the interpretation of events... You are my Guardian in this world and the Hereafter. Allow me to die as a Muslim and join me with the righteous." [Qur'an, 12:101]

This is the Du'a of Prophet Yusuf (AS) when he reached the pinnacle of political power. Recognising that power comes from Allah, asking for wisdom to interpret complex challenges, and prioritising a righteous ending over worldly status.

Our beloved leader and Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) used to pray as follows: "O Allah, I seek

refuge in You from the severe trials, from being overtaken by wretchedness, from a bad destiny, and from the rejoicing of enemies." [Sahih Bukhari]

Leadership involves making tough decisions that can lead to exhaustion or trials. This prayer protects a leader's mental and moral state, helping them maintain integrity under pressure and avoid humiliating, crushing situations that lead to poor judgment.

And he (Peace be upon him) said: "O Allah, I ask You for knowledge that is of benefit, a good provision, and deeds that will be accepted." [Sunan Ibn Majah]

Leaders need to make decisions that are not just politically expedient but morally sound. This Du'a asks for wisdom that helps people, honest resources, so that their service is accepted by Allah.

Respected servants of Allah! Remember that every leader is a shepherd, and every shepherd is accountable for their flock. You are not only a leader in your office or nation; you are a leader of your own ego. True success is not in the praise of people, but in the pleasure of Allah.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) feared for his Ummah, and you must fear the weight of this responsibility. Repel the ego with humbleness and injustice with fairness.

A story is told of a leader who was warned that his oppression only hurts himself. When a leader acts with justice, he benefits himself and his people; when he oppresses, he ruins his own soul.

Among the prayers of Umar Ibn al-Khattab is: "O Allah, enable us to see the truth as truth and grant us the ability to follow it, and show us the falsehood as falsehood and grant us the ability to avoid it."

No doubt, leaders often face gray areas. This Du'a is the ultimate plea for clarity and conviction, essential for steering a community through confusion.

As a leader, always consult, even if you are the highest authority. Be fair regardless of race or status. Fear the day you will be questioned. And never rely on your own strength; always ask for Allah's help through Du'as and prayers!

Ya Allah, grant our leaders the wisdom to lead with justice, the fear of You in their decisions, and the strength to serve the Ummah honestly.

Ya Allah, Protect our nation, guide those in authority to the straight path, and distance them from those who would mislead them.

Ya Allah accept our fasting and all our good deeds in this noble month of Ramadan, ameen.

All praise be to Allah, the Sovereign Judge, the Most Merciful and Compassionate to His weak servants, and the Almighty Avenger against the oppressors. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah alone with no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and most faithful Prophet. O Allah, send Your blessings and peace upon him and his family and companions.

• Muhammad Yusuf Babangida is the Chief Imam of 4 Brigade Central Mosque, GRA Benin City

Feature

GLOBAL SHOCKWAVES: How rising wars across continents are quietly strangling Nigeria's Economy and Stability

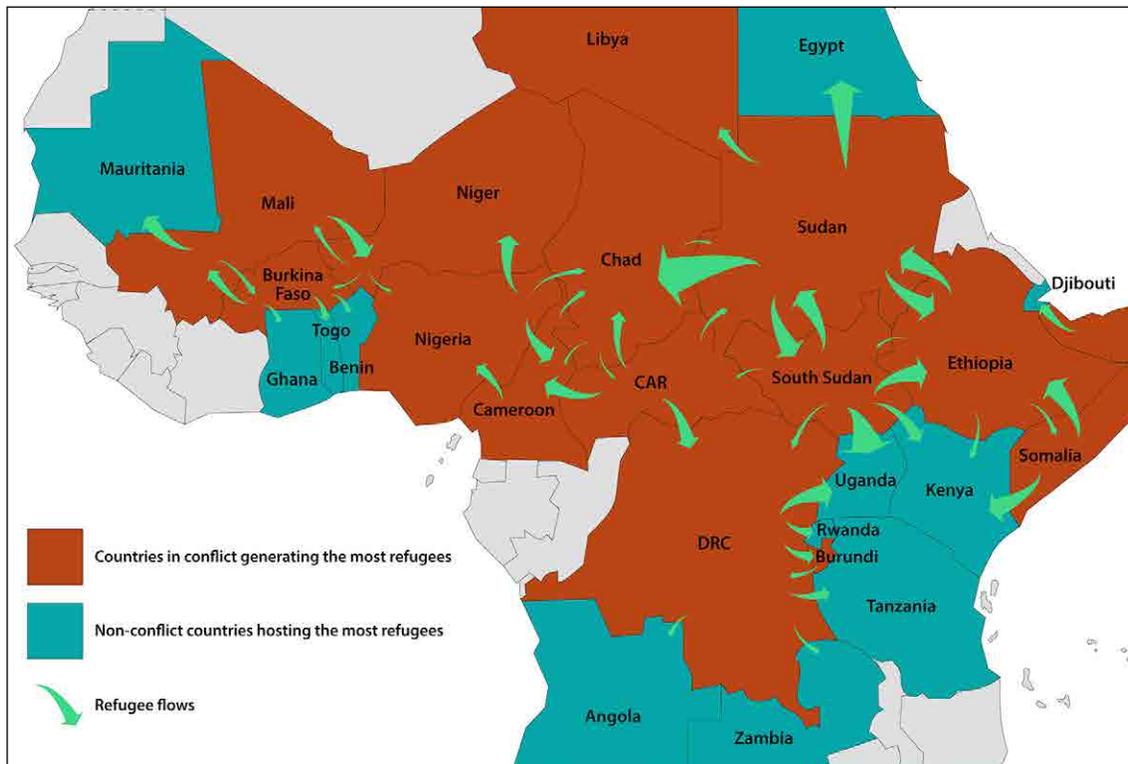
GENERAL IWU COSMOS JP.

Across the globe today, the drums of war are beating louder than they have in decades. From Eastern Europe to the Middle East and parts of Africa, conflicts are no longer isolated national crises—they are global economic earthquakes with ripple effects reaching as far as Nigeria. For millions of Nigerians already grappling with inflation, unemployment, and a weakening currency, these wars are not distant headlines; they are harsh realities shaping daily survival.

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine remains one of the most impactful global conflicts. Since it began in 2022, it has disrupted global supply chains, especially in energy and food. Ukraine, once a major exporter of wheat and fertilizers, has seen its production severely reduced, while sanctions on Russia have tightened global energy markets. For Nigeria, which relies heavily on imported refined petroleum products and wheat, the result has been soaring fuel prices and skyrocketing food costs. Bread, once a staple affordable to the average citizen, is now a luxury for many households.

In the Middle East, the intensifying conflict involving Israel and Gaza Strip has further destabilized global oil markets. The region is critical to the world's energy supply, and any escalation sends shockwaves through oil prices. Ironically, while Nigeria is an oil-producing nation, it has failed to fully capitalize on rising crude prices due to limited refining capacity and ongoing challenges in the oil sector. Instead of benefiting, Nigerians face increased transportation and production costs, which trickle down to higher prices for goods and services.

Meanwhile, Africa itself is not



spared. The conflict in Sudan has displaced millions and disrupted trade routes within the continent. Instability in the Sahel region, including unrest in Mali and Niger, has also heightened insecurity across West Africa. For Nigeria, which shares borders and economic ties with several of these nations, the consequences are immediate. Increased arms proliferation, refugee movements, and cross-border terrorism have intensified security challenges, particularly in northern regions already battling insurgency.

Another critical flashpoint is the rising tension between China and Taiwan. While not yet a full-scale war, the situation poses a looming threat

to global trade. Taiwan is a key player in semiconductor production, which powers everything from smartphones to banking systems. Any disruption could cripple global technology supply chains. For Nigeria, a country increasingly dependent on digital infrastructure and imported technology, such a crisis could slow economic growth and hinder innovation.

The global consequences of these conflicts converge into a single painful reality for Nigeria: inflation. The cost of living continues to rise as imported goods become more expensive. The naira, already under pressure, weakens further as global uncertainties drive investors away from emerging mar-

kets. Businesses struggle with higher operational costs, leading to layoffs and reduced productivity. The average Nigerian is left to bear the burden.

Beyond economics, these wars also influence Nigeria's political and diplomatic positioning.

As global alliances shift, Nigeria must navigate a complex international landscape, balancing relationships with Western powers, emerging economies, and regional partners. Failure to do so effectively could isolate the country from critical trade and investment opportunities.

Yet, within this crisis lies a call to action. Nigeria's vulnerability to global shocks highlights the urgent need

The current wave of conflicts is a brutal reminder that in an interconnected world, no nation is insulated from the consequences of war

for structural reforms. Investing in local agriculture can reduce dependence on imported food. Revamping the refining sector can cushion the impact of global oil price fluctuations. Strengthening regional security cooperation can mitigate the spillover effects of nearby conflicts.

The truth is stark: Nigeria cannot control global wars, but it can control its preparedness. The current wave of conflicts is a brutal reminder that in an interconnected world, no nation is insulated from the consequences of war. What happens in Kyiv, Gaza, or Khartoum does not stay there—it travels across borders, markets, and economies, landing squarely on the streets of Lagos, Abuja, and Benin City.

As the world watches these conflicts unfold, Nigeria stands at a crossroads. It can either remain a passive victim of global turbulence or rise with strategic resilience and bold reforms. The choice will determine whether these global shockwaves continue to drown the nation—or become the catalyst for its long-overdue transformation.

“Power or progress? Nigeria's defining choice between personal ambition and national destiny”

GENERAL IWU COSMOS JP

At a time when nations across the world are redefining their futures through bold leadership and people-centered policies, Nigeria stands at a critical crossroads. The question is no longer whether the country has the potential to become a global powerhouse—it undoubtedly does—but whether its political class is willing to place national development above personal ambition. This is the defining challenge of our time, and the consequences of failure are too grave to ignore.

Nigeria is richly endowed with human and natural resources. From vast oil reserves to fertile agricultural land, from a vibrant youth population to an energetic entrepreneurial culture, the building blocks of greatness are firmly in place. Yet, despite these advantages, the nation continues to struggle with persistent economic hardship, insecurity, unemployment, and failing infrastructure. The problem is not a lack

of potential, but a lack of focused and selfless leadership.

For decades, politics in Nigeria has been driven more by personal ambition than by public service. Many political actors see power as an opportunity for wealth accumulation and influence rather than a responsibility to serve. Elections are fought with intensity, promises are made with passion, but governance often falls short of expectations.

This pattern has weakened public trust and slowed national progress.

It is time for a fundamental shift in mindset. Leadership must be redefined. Holding public office should be seen as a duty to build, reform, and uplift society. Nigerian politicians must begin to ask themselves not what they can gain from power, but what they can contribute to national development.

True leadership is measured by impact, not position.

Infrastructure remains one of the most urgent areas requiring attention. A nation cannot grow without func-

tional roads, stable electricity, quality healthcare, and a strong educational system. Businesses cannot thrive without reliable power. Citizens cannot reach their full potential without access to good schools and hospitals.

These are basic responsibilities of government, not optional achievements.

Equally critical is the need to invest in human capital, especially the youth. Nigeria's young population is one of its greatest assets, yet many young people face limited opportunities.

Rising unemployment, lack of skills development, and poor access to funding have left many frustrated and uncertain about their future. Politicians must prioritize policies that create jobs, encourage innovation, and support entrepreneurship. Empowering the youth is not charity; it is a strategic necessity.

Transparency and accountability must also take center stage. Corruption has long undermined Nigeria's progress, diverting resources

meant for development into private hands. Leaders must lead by example, demonstrating integrity in both words and actions.

Institutions must be strengthened to ensure that public funds are used responsibly and that those who abuse power are held accountable.

Another critical issue is national unity. Nigeria's diversity is a powerful asset, yet it is often manipulated for political advantage. Ethnic and religious divisions have been used to gain support, creating tension and weakening the nation's collective strength.

True leadership requires rising above these divisions and fostering a shared vision that unites all citizens regardless of background.

The responsibility for change does not rest solely on politicians. Citizens also play a vital role in shaping the nation's future. Voters must become more conscious and demand accountability from their leaders. Elections should not be influenced by short-term incentives or empty

promises, but by careful evaluation of candidates' competence, integrity, and commitment to development.

Nigeria stands on the edge of possibility. The nation's future depends on the choices made by its leaders today. Will they continue to pursue personal ambition at the expense of national progress, or will they rise to the occasion and lead with purpose and vision? History will not remember titles or political victories; it will remember the legacies of transformation and service.

The path forward is clear. Nigeria needs leaders who are committed to building institutions, investing in people, and creating opportunities for all. It needs politicians who see power not as a prize to be won, but as a responsibility to be honored.

The call to action is urgent and unmistakable: Nigeria must choose progress over power, service over self, and development over ambition. Only then can the nation fulfill its promise and secure a prosperous future for generations to come.

Opinion

In protest of regional politics



THE PROTESTERS

SAIFULLAHI ATTAHIR

The desperation to fail President Tinubu by some politicians and their consistent attempt to recruit others into believing their rhetoric will always be an anticipated issue in the realm of politics, but whenever myopic outlooks like sectarianism, blame games, and regionalism are used, that's what irritates my conscience into responding at the expense of whatsoever others may label me. What I believe is to stand for what I think is right, even if I have to stand alone.

The level of those campaigns was to the extent that you can't say anything good about the Tinubu government without being portrayed as anti-North or even a heretic. This is preposterous!

Politics should not be built on emotions, and governance should not be like inheritance, where no matter who it is, if they're not your kinsmen, all is not well. This is not the original personality of a typical Northerner.

I'm not any party card-carrying member but an ordinary student, so I have the liberty to express my views according to my little understanding. I would like to address the issue of labelling every project done by President Tinubu as nepotistic, especially when sited in the South-West.

Let me give an example with the recent trip President Tinubu led to the United Kingdom, where he secured a deal to revamp Tin Can and

Apapa ports, Lagos. Sealing a deal to revamp Tin Can, Apapa ports, should be viewed with such an open mind as a national investment. Lagos would remain the economic bloodline of this country for a time being, hence supporting its economic growth.

Among the notable achievements of even the most pro-Arewa leaders, like the late Gen. Murtala Ramat, during his short stint was the decongestion of the Lagos Apapa port led by the famous brig. Benjamin Adekunle (The Scorpion).

I'm not promoting the idea of continuing channelling of funds to develop Lagos at the expense of other regions, but it would be absurd when overnight we heard the FG seal a deal to start importing goods through Niger-Maradi or the Lake Chad basin or create artificial ports in the North linking us to the transatlantic trade (it's possible, but not overnight like in Libya or the UAE).

The North should have focused more on ensuring fighting illiteracy through at least mandatory universal secondary school education with skills. The 'right education' would solve 60% of all this menace.

An enlightened self would not be used as a tool to create and perpetuate insecurity in the form of banditry and suicide bombings. An ignited mind wouldn't be fertile ground for sectarian conflicts. You can't woo an educated person into choosing a leader whose focus is to distribute spaghetti.

We should accept the fact that the

In a region with the highest illiteracy rate, things worse than this could happen. Spaghetti and religious affiliation can woo the masses to vote for a candidate.

North is a landlocked region. We are surrounded by Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. We have our own priorities that, if well executed, can boost the regional economy. Comparing ourselves to Lagos wouldn't help matters. Lagos was an island inhabited by whites many centuries ago. It was the former national capital for almost thirty years and home to almost all the major industries in the country.

As to the second part of the rhetoric, which was also the ultimate agenda, to wrest power from President Tinubu and hand it over to an-

other 'Arewa politician'. Governance returning to Arewa would never be our solution. This was tried in 2015 by removing Jonathan through every possible means, only to regret a similar decision less than 4 years later.

A bitter truth to swallow was that, since our return to democracy in 1999, leaders from the South-West proved to contribute more to issues of national development. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo's 8 years would always be remembered for bringing a near-normal political stability to the country, improved national security, an improved economy, the cancellation of national debt, improved foreign relationships, the introduction of several empowerment programmes, the introduction/subsidisation of telecommunications, and a decisive leadership unparalleled when compared to late President Buhari's 8 years of bewilderment.

It's not about Tinubu prioritising Lagos and intentionally killing Arewa. The seed of sustainable national development was sown long ago, when Awolowo's Action Group were fighting for universal education and ideological politics in their region, while our NPC was busy looking for alliances to dominate the Parliament. It's better to hold our governors more responsible instead of the federal government.

Between 2007 and 2015, the South-west Governors (Aregbesola, Fashola, Mimiko, Adams Oshomole, etc.) used their opposition to create massive

developmental programmes for their region, consolidate power around the leading opposition figure Tinubu, and enhance their regional security, while we were busy trying to wrest power from Jonathan.

To the question of 'Arewa-2027', who should be the candidate? The inconsistent Baba Atiku, or politicians renowned for vengeance politics, or those lacking an accommodating mind for others to win national elections, or politicians without international exposure? Tinubu is not the ideal for Nigeria, but the aforementioned politicians are no match for his governance track record as governor and now 2 years into the presidency.

The current insecurity menace is a testimony to how one man would be incapable of addressing it. Many among the top security brass are from the North: NSA, Federal and State Ministers of Defence. In a region with the highest illiteracy rate, things worse than this could happen. Spaghetti and religious affiliation can woo the masses to vote for a candidate.

We should better focus on searching for the RIGHT MAN instead of which part of the country he came from.

Saifullahi Attahir is the President, National Association of Jigawa State Medical Students (NAJIMS) National Body.

Wrote this piece from Rasheed Shekoni Federal University Dutse Teaching Hospital.

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NPFL condoles NRA on death of its President, Sani Zubairu



SANI ZUBAIRU

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Chairman of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Otunba Gbenga Elegbeleye has commiserated with the immediate Zubairu family, the Nigeria Referees Assistant (NRA) and the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) on the death of the NRA President, Alhaji Sani Zubairu.

In extending condolences on behalf of the Board and the NPFL clubs on the passing of the retired FIFA referee, Eleg-

beleye said the contributions of the former referee to the development of the league is a legacy to active and aspiring referees.

He prayed for the repose of his soul and that the Almighty Allah comfort his family, referees' association, and the football community over his demise.

The Bauchi-born retired FIFA referee was elected president of the association during the 2023 delegates conference held at Bovina Hotels in Kwara State on Saturday, April 29, 2023.



ANTSINO TWANYANYUKWA

Moroccan FA asks CAF to suspend Namibian referee Antsino after WAFCON final

The Moroccan Football Federation has asked CAF to suspend Namibian referee Antsino Twanyanyukwa after the WAFCON final between Nigeria and Morocco.

Morocco lost the match 3-2 and believes some decisions by the referee were unfair. They submitted video evidence to CAF, claiming there were "serious refereeing mistakes." One of their main complaints was about a penalty given to Nigeria, which they described as too soft. They also questioned why their own penalty in the 82nd minute was cancelled af-

ter a VAR review.

The penalty was first awarded for a possible handball but later overturned after a long check by VAR, led by Salima Mukansanga.

After the match, Morocco FA president Fouzi Lekjaa reportedly confronted the referee during the medal ceremony and was accused of making threats.

Following the controversy, CAF removed its head of refereeing, Désiré Noumandiez Doué. However, CAF has not officially announced any punishment for the referee.

So far, no action has been taken against Twanyanyukwa.

Debswana backs World Relays with cash boost

Botswana's diamond giant Debswana has stepped onto the global athletics stage, sealing a P16 million equivalent of \$1,172,800 sponsorship deal that rebrands the upcoming World Athletics Relays as the Debswana World Athletics Relays Gaborone 2026.

The landmark backing signals a powerful fusion of sport and commerce, with Debswana aiming to leverage the global spotlight to reinvigorate the natural diamond market.

Chief Executive Officer Andrew Motsomi said the partnership goes beyond athletics, positioning Botswana to tell its diamond story to a worldwide audience.

He noted that the relays offer a rare platform to showcase how natural diamonds have transformed communities, driven sustainable growth and elevated the nation's economic standing.

"With the world's attention on Gaborone, we have a unique chance to project the authentic story of our diamonds, one rooted in impact, sustainability and national development," Motsomi said.

The event is expected to draw around 1,700 athletes and officials, alongside a wave of global visitors, media and technical crews.

Organisers project over one billion online impressions, coverage from more than 150 international broadcasters and participation from over 120 accredited journalists and photographers, a figures that underline the scale of exposure on offer.

On the track, fans can ex-

...Event rebranded for Gaborone 2026

pect elite competition across the men's and women's 4x100m and 4x400m relays, as well as mixed events, with top athletes from around the world set to converge on Botswana's capital.

Minister of Sport and Arts Jacob Kelebeng hailed the sponsorship as a defining moment, describing it as a bold vote of confidence in Botswana's future and the unifying power of sport.

"This is more than sponsorship, it's a symbol of national pride and progress," Kelebeng said.



BOTSWANA ATHLETICS

CAS to hear Senegal's case against Morocco's AFCON title award

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has confirmed receipt of an appeal from the Senegalese Football Federation (FSF), challenging a controversial de-

cision by the Confederation of African Football to award the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) title to Morocco.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, CAS said Senegal

is seeking to overturn CAF's ruling and be officially recognised as the tournament's winner. The federation has also requested a suspension of the deadline for submitting its full appeal, pending CAF's provision of detailed grounds for its decision, which was initially released without explanation.

CAS confirmed that an arbitral panel will be constituted to hear the case, after which a procedural timetable will be established. Under standard rules, appellants are given 20 days to submit detailed arguments, followed by a 20-day window for respondents to reply.

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AFCON: CAS promises swift but fair hearing on Senegal's appeal against CAF and Morocco

The CAS Director General Matthieu Reeb has stated that the tribunal is prepared to handle the Senegal case against CAF and Morocco efficiently.

"CAS is perfectly equipped to resolve this type of dispute,

with the assistance of expert and independent arbitrators," he said.

"We understand that teams and fans are eager to know the final decision, and we will ensure that arbitration proceedings are conducted as swiftly

as possible, while respecting the right of all parties to a fair hearing."

CAS noted that proceedings will remain confidential while ongoing, with further updates to be provided only when key milestones, such as a hearing

date, are confirmed.

The case now sets the stage for a potentially landmark legal battle over the outcome of one of Africa's biggest football competitions, with the final status of the AFCON 2025 title hanging in the balance

NWFL Matchday 12: Bayelsa Queens run riot as Delta Queens edge thriller

Matchday 12 of the Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) Premiership produced an exciting round of fixtures across the country, with emphatic victories, closely contested encounters, and standout individual performances shaping the latest actions.

In Ikenne, Remo Stars Ladies were held to a 1-1 draw by Confluence Queens. Aishat Animashaun opened the scoring in the 35th minute to give the hosts the lead, but Marvelous John restored parity shortly after the restart, netting in the 50th minute to ensure both sides shared the spoils.

Delta Queens edged out FC Robo Queens in a five-goal thriller in Asaba, securing a 3-2 victory. After falling behind early to Kemi Adegbuyi's 11th-minute strike, Delta Queens responded through Princess Adams and Norah Davies, who both scored to keep the game level. Anatasia Terfa's 71st-minute goal ultimately proved decisive in a tightly contested encounter.

Abia Angels claimed a narrow 1-0 away win over Osun Babes in Ile-Ogbo, courtesy of Blessing Okon's 54th-minute strike, which separated both sides in a cagey affair.



BAYELSA QUEENS VS DELTA QUEENS

Nigeria vs Iran and Jordan — For whose benefit?

DOUGLAS BAYE-OSAGIE

The scales have fallen from our eyes: it is now clear that Nigeria's participation in the 2026 FIFA World Cup has become a fairy tale.

The push to qualify through a poorly documented legal process was a badly written script by the federation, meant to keep fans hopeful and shield officials from criticism by a demanding football public during the last African Cup of Nations.

It also gave the Football Federation members a quiet window to prepare for a possible re-election later in the year. The whole episode feels less like sport and more like political stagecraft.

The same football federation that failed to qualify for two consecutive World Cups and two Olympic tournaments seems eager to stay on for another four years. Nothing is impossible in Nigerian politics — and with an election of just about 40 voters, most of them the 36 state FA chairmen who sail in the same boat as the incumbent president, we may well see the Gusau-led board returned to run the NFF. Accountability has become an optional extra.

As other nations prepare for World Cup playoffs, Nigeria's football hierarchy is leveraging the team's decent outing at the last Nations Cup in Morocco to arrange friendlies with World Cup-bound countries. This weekend we face Iran and Jordan — two Middle Eastern teams with modest pedigrees that don't command high stakes and respect in world football. They

are convenient, low-risk fixtures that pay the bills.

Nigerians aren't asking questions about real development of the game at all levels. Fans are no different from administrators, and that's Nigerian football's first problem: we have chased tournament glory while neglecting to build a foundation for growth. Grass-roots pitches remain dusty, and academies survive on goodwill.

Women's AFCON preparations also need serious attention. A double-header friendly against Cameroon was worthwhile, but the April window has been left unattended. No friendlies for the Women and we are not asking questions about the preparations. The postponed WAFCON will serve as qualification for next year's World Cup in Brazil; if we fail to make it, this board will go down as the worst in modern history. The Super Falcons deserve more than afterthought scheduling.

As for the Super Eagles, we shouldn't be playing Iran or Jordan — with all due respect — if we had qualified for the World Cup. Even having missed out, we ought to have lined up a stronger European or South American opponent from among World Cup-bound sides. Zambia, who finished bottom of their AFCON group in Morocco and also missed the World Cup, will face world champions Argentina. There is real interest in that fixture; it is more than a friendly, it is a rare chance to measure, learn and grow. Games like those aren't judged by the final score alone, but by what they reveal about administration, structure, and mental

preparation. If you ask me, this is an opportunity missed.

The NFF seems to have prioritised appearance fees — oil money from the Middle East — over the quality of opposition. We trade tests for cheques.

We haven't heard the end of the contract imbroglio with Eric Chelle. The decision to extend his deal and give him a raise hasn't been finalised. If Chelle takes the job, any coach the federation ties down should also be ready to lead the Olympic team. Our inability to qualify for back-to-back Olympic soccer events has badly hurt competitiveness in World Cup qualifiers. I recall vividly that the U-23 team's gold-medal triumph in Atlanta '96 made qualification for France '98 a stroll in the park.

The last time we qualified for the World Cup — Russia 2018 — we had also qualified for the Olympics in Brazil 2016. The link between youth success and senior qualification is no coincidence.

A cursory look at the squad called up for the friendlies shows Chelle is stamping his authority. Some players who surprisingly made the AFCON final list didn't make this one. It clearly showed that some of those players who couldn't even get minutes were not expressly selected by the coach like most of us suspected.

Nwabali's curious decision to terminate his contract with Chippa United has left him without a club since AFCON. That could usher in the return of Maduka Okoye, despite his turbulent Super Eagles career. Regular football in Italy is an advantage to his mental preparation. Okoye's club

minutes might just steady his nerve at international level.

In defence, there is a little to be excited about, aside from the inclusion of 6'5" Rangers centre-back Emmanuel Fernández. Born in the UK, he has earned high praise this season, and it would be gratifying to see him earn his Super Eagles baptism of fire. His displays for Glasgow Rangers have raised his stock, with top English clubs now circling. A composed debut could solve a problem area for years.

We have two new attackers who have been knocking on the door: Genk speedster Yira Sor and Hamburger SV winger Philip Otele. They'll spice up any attack in Africa and, in a competitive atmosphere, should raise the team's level. Both offer the kind of directness that breaks low blocks.

Old heads must treat these friendlies as preparation for next year's AFCON. Alex Iwobi, Wilfred Ndidi and Moses Simon should use the final years of their careers to lead the next generation toward a winning mentality. The Super Eagles should be the team feared in Africa. Losing to hosts

Morocco only on penalties shows we are close; we need focus forged on grit and panache to overcome any opponent. At the moment, leadership now matters more than ever.

Victor Osimhen's absence should give Paul Onuachu a chance to establish himself as a reliable centre-forward when Victor is unavailable. That was a big problem during the World Cup qualifying series. Without Osimhen we struggled, taking just 3 points from the first 12. We roared back when he returned, but South Africa had already built a healthy lead. Building a Plan B is not optional.

Going forward, while we entertain friendly invitations, we should keep an eye on Olympic qualification in 2028, building momentum for the 2030 World Cup in Morocco, Spain and Portugal. A crop of U-23 players will form the nucleus of the Super Eagles in four years. The national team is not a permanent home, and those involved must bring their best. The Super Eagles will rise again against all odds. If structure finally matches talent, there is no ceiling.

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SUPER EAGLES IN TRAINING



NWABALI

CAS to hear Senegal's case against...

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However, proceedings remain on hold due to Senegal's request.

CAS Director General, Matthieu Reeb, stated that the body is equipped to resolve the dispute efficiently while ensuring fairness. He noted that although fans and stakeholders are eager for clarity, due process will be maintained throughout the arbitration.

The appeal stems from CAF's ruling on March 17, which upheld Morocco's protest and declared that Senegal forfeited the AFCON final, awarding the match 3-0 to Morocco.

Senegal had originally secured a 1-0 victory in the final on January 18 in Rabat, courtesy of an extra-time goal from Pape Gueye. However, the match was marred by controversy after Senegalese players staged a 15-minute walk-off in protest against a late penalty awarded to Morocco.

CAF's Appeals Board later overturned an earlier decision by its Disciplinary Board, ruling that Morocco's protest was admissible and that

Senegal's right to be heard had not been adequately respected in the initial proceedings.

Reacting to the development, the FSF described CAF's decision as "unfair, unprecedented, and unacceptable," arguing that it undermines the integrity of African football. The federation subsequently confirmed its intention to seek redress at CAS.

CAF President, Patrice Motsepe, acknowledged Senegal's right to appeal, emphasising that all 54 member associations are entitled to pursue justice through appropriate channels, including CAS.

Meanwhile, Morocco's head coach, Mohamed Ouahbi, welcomed CAF's ruling, describing the decision to award the title to his side as "well-deserved." He congratulated the players, staff, and supporters, adding that the outcome had been positively received within the country.

CAS is expected to provide further updates once the arbitration panel is constituted and proceedings formally commence

Beyond the Headlines
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The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

The National Electric Power Authority, later rebranded as the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, and now unbundled into distribution entities such as the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC), has never truly endeared itself to Nigerians.

Regardless of the nomenclature it has assumed over the years, the story has remained depressingly consistent— poor service delivery, systemic inefficiency, exploitation of consumers, and an almost ritualistic pattern of epileptic power supply.

For some time now, parts of Edo State, particularly within the Benin metropolis, have been plunged into an unforgiving darkness. Entire neighbourhoods go for days, sometimes weeks, without a flicker of electricity. In areas where power supply exists, it is grossly erratic, unpredictable, and insufficient for any meaningful economic activity. The consequences of this persistent blackout are not abstract; they are painfully real, deeply personal, and economically devastating.

Business operators, especially small and medium-scale entrepreneurs, have borne the brunt of this dysfunction. The barber who depends on electric clippers, the welder whose craft is powered by current, the tailor who must meet delivery deadlines, the frozen food seller whose goods require constant refrigeration— all have been forced into a daily struggle for survival.

In the absence of public electricity, they have turned to alternative sources of power, most notably petrol and diesel generators. However, this alternative has become increasingly unsustainable due to the astronomical rise in fuel prices.

The recent surge in fuel pump prices has compounded the already dire situation. Petrol, once relatively affordable, has now become a luxury for many Nigerians. Diesel, which powers larger generators, is even more exorbitant. For business operators, this means a sharp increase in operational costs.

What used to be a manageable expense has now ballooned into a crushing financial burden. Many entrepreneurs spend more on fuel than they do on rent or staff salaries. This is not just economically irrational, it is fundamentally unsustainable.

The ripple effect of this reality is evident across the economy. As the cost of production rises, so too does the cost of goods and services. The baker increases the price of bread because of the cost of powering ovens. The sachet water producer raises prices due to the expense of running generators. The cybercafé operator charges more, while the hairdresser adjusts her service fees upward. In essence, the inefficiency of electricity supply, coupled with rising fuel costs, has triggered a chain reaction of inflationary pressures that ultimately burden the ordinary Nigerian.

What makes this situation particularly troubling is the apparent indifference of those at the helm of electricity distribution. The management

BEDC: The merchant of darkness



of BEDC appears disconnected from the lived realities of the people. There is little evidence of urgency, empathy, or accountability. Instead, consumers are met with silence, excuses, or, at best, vague assurances that rarely translate into tangible improvements.

Even more galling is the persistence of estimated billing—a practice that has become synonymous with exploitation. Despite repeated complaints, regulatory interventions, and public outcry, many households and businesses continue to receive outrageously inflated bills for electricity they did not consume. It is a system that defies logic and undermines trust. How does one justify paying for darkness? How does a company reconcile charging customers for services not rendered?

This practice has not only deepened public resentment but has also reinforced the perception that the system is rigged against the average Nigerian. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that consumers are being taken for granted, if not outrightly exploited. In a civilised society, service providers are held accountable to clear standards. Here, however, inefficiency appears to be rewarded, while consumers are left with little recourse.

Beyond the economic implications, the social consequences of this persistent blackout are equally alarming. Students are unable to study effectively at night, particularly those preparing for critical examinations. Families are forced to endure sleepless nights in poorly ventilated homes, especially during periods of intense heat.

Healthcare services are compromised, as clinics and pharmacies struggle to preserve medicines and operate essential equipment. Security is also affected, as dark streets and neighbourhoods create fertile ground for criminal activities.

In a broader sense, the failure of electricity supply represents a significant barrier to national development. No modern economy can thrive with-

out reliable power. Industrial growth, technological innovation, and digital transformation all depend on a stable electricity infrastructure. By failing to provide this basic necessity, the power sector is effectively stifling progress and undermining the country's development aspirations.

It is important to note that the challenges facing the power sector are not entirely new. They are the result of years of neglect, poor planning, inadequate investment, and policy inconsistencies.

However, the privatisation of electricity distribution companies was expected to herald a new era of efficiency, accountability, and customer-oriented service delivery. Unfortunately, for many Nigerians, this expectation has not been met. If anything, the situation appears to have worsened in certain areas.

The question, therefore, is not whether the system is broken, it clearly is, but what is being done to fix it. Regulatory bodies must rise to the occasion and enforce compliance with service standards. Electricity distribution companies must be held accountable for their performance, not shielded by bureaucracy or political considerations. There must be transparency in billing, investment in infrastructure, and a genuine commitment to improving service delivery.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to address the issue of metering. The widespread lack of prepaid meters has perpetuated the culture of estimated billing and its associated abuses. Providing consumers with accurate metering is not a privilege; it is a fundamental right. It ensures fairness, promotes accountability, and restores a measure of trust between service providers and consumers.

At the same time, there must be a broader conversation about energy diversification. Nigeria cannot afford to rely solely on a dysfunctional national grid. Renewable energy sources such as solar power offer viable al-

ternatives, particularly in a country blessed with abundant sunlight. Encouraging investment in such alternatives could help alleviate the pressure on the grid and provide more reliable power to underserved communities.

However, while long-term solutions are necessary, the immediate suffering of the people cannot be ignored. Nigerians are enduring a daily ordeal that tests their resilience and patience. The combined effect of unreliable electricity and soaring fuel prices has created a perfect storm of hardship. It is a situation that demands urgent intervention, not rhetoric.

One cannot help but reflect on the irony of the situation. In a nation endowed with vast natural resources, including the capacity for power generation, millions of citizens are forced to live in darkness. Businesses struggle to survive, families are pushed to the brink, and the promise of a better future seems increasingly elusive. It is a contradiction that speaks to deeper systemic issues that must be addressed.

Worst still, customers are compelled to shoulder responsibilities that rightly belong to the electricity distribution company. In many communities, residents contribute funds to procure and install electric poles, purchase cables, and even provide transformers.

What should ordinarily be a basic obligation of service providers has, over time, been transferred to long-suffering consumers, who must organise themselves to secure the most rudimentary infrastructure for power supply.

Ironically, after these facilities have been sourced and installed through communal effort, the BEDC turns around to lay claim to ownership of the very materials it neither funded nor provided. This paradox reflects a deeply troubling imbalance, where those who invest their scarce resources into public utilities are denied both control and due recognition. It raises

fundamental questions about fairness, accountability, and the ethics of service delivery.

More troubling is the bureaucratic bottleneck that often accompanies the use of these facilities. Customers are frequently subjected to unofficial demands before basic technical services such as the fusing of transformers are carried out.

These practices not only undermine public trust but also entrench a culture of inefficiency and exploitation within the system. Essential services that should be rendered promptly are instead delayed, pending inducements that have no place in a regulated sector.

The delays in responding to fault reports are equally exasperating. When transformers develop faults or power outages occur, affected communities are left in prolonged darkness, sometimes for days on end, despite having invested heavily in the infrastructure. Calls placed to the appropriate authorities are often met with indifference or sluggish responses, compounding the frustration of already burdened consumers and crippling economic activities in the process.

There is, therefore, little surprise that many view BEDC as a menace rather than a service provider. The combination of neglect, exploitation, and inefficiency paints a grim picture of a system in dire need of reform.

For any meaningful progress to be achieved, there must be a deliberate effort to restore accountability, enforce service standards, and prioritise the welfare of consumers who, for too long, have borne the brunt of systemic failure.

Until meaningful reforms are implemented, BEDC and similar entities will continue to be viewed not as providers of essential services, but as symbols of systemic failure. The label "merchant of darkness" is not merely a rhetorical flourish; it is a reflection of lived experience. It captures the frustration, anger, and disillusionment of a people who have been denied a basic necessity for far too long.

Electricity is not a luxury. It is a fundamental component of modern life. Its absence affects every aspect of human existence, from economic productivity to social well-being. The current state of power supply in Edo State, and indeed in many parts of Nigeria, is unacceptable. It is a situation that calls for urgent, decisive, and sustained action.

The people deserve better. They deserve a system that works, a service that delivers, and a future that is not shrouded in darkness. Until then, the story remains the same— of a people striving for light in the face of unrelenting darkness, and of a system that must either reform or be remembered as one of the greatest disappointments in the nation's history.

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