

Court clears Abba Kyari, brothers of asset non-declaration charges

● **As NDLEA insists drug case continues**

● **Abba Kyari still in our custody —NCoS**

ABUJA
The Federal High Court in Abuja on Thursday discharged and acquitted suspended Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Abba Kyari, and his two younger brothers of charges filed by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) over alleged non-declaration of assets. Delivering judgment, Justice

James Omotosho dismissed the case against Kyari and his brothers, Mohammed and Ali Kyari, ruling that the anti-narcotics agency failed to prove the allegations beyond reasonable doubt. The judge described the prosecution's case as weak and lacking in factual basis, stressing that the defendants were presumed innocent and that the burden of proof rested squarely on the prosecution.

"The defendants are still presumed innocent and thus a heavy burden rests on the prosecution to establish their guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Failure to do so will see the defendants walk home free," the judge said. Justice Omotosho further remarked that it was unfortunate that the first defendant, whom he said had served the country bravely and competently in dangerous assignments, was

arraigned on what he described as a baseless charge. "For a Nigerian to put his life on the line for this country and then be rewarded with being charged for offences that are quite ridiculous is baffling, to say the least," he added. The court held that the NDLEA carried out what it described as a shoddy investigation and struggled unsuccessfully to establish wrongdoing

against the defendants. "The prosecution struggled badly to hang something on the defendants, but in the clear daylight of facts failed miserably. "There is nothing to hold the defendants based on the evidence presented by the prosecution," the judge said. Justice Omotosho concluded that the prosecution failed to discharge the burden of proof required in criminal trials and

therefore discharged and acquitted the defendants on all counts. The NDLEA had arraigned Kyari, a former head of the Police Intelligence Response Team (IRT), alongside his brothers on a 23-count charge bordering on alleged failure to declare assets. The agency claimed it uncovered 14 properties allegedly linked to Kyari, including shop-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Gold reserves hit \$3.5bn as Nigeria boosts local sourcing —SMDF —Pg 2

2026: Reps approve N140bn budget for S'East Devt Commission

ABUJA
The House Committee on the South East Development Commission (SEDC) has approved the commission's ₦140 billion budget proposal for 2026. The approval was announced

after the committee, chaired by Rep. Chris Nkwonta, adopted the proposal as a working document. Nkwonta praised SEDC Managing Director Mr. Mark Okoye for his leadership, describing him as "a round peg in a round hole" and commend-

ing his development plans for the South-East region. Okoye outlined the commission's development agenda, which includes constructing railways across the five South-East states to improve trade and attract investment. He said harmonising economic policies across the zone would create a unified economic block and facilitate growth. He also thanked President Bola Tinubu for approving the South East Development Company Limited, which is expected to enable the commission to

secure a one-billion-dollar market portfolio within ten years. Okoye added that the commission is committed to addressing

underemployment, which remains high in the region. The budget will support projects such as industrial parks, agro-processing centres, and technology hubs aimed at boosting the regional economy and creating jobs.



ANEKE VISIT DIRI: Governor Douye Diri of Bayelsa State (L) receiving a souvenir from the Chief of Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Sunday Aneke, during a visit by the latter to Government House in Yenagoa.

Edo residents rally behind President Tinubu ahead of 2027 elections

IRRUA (EDO)
Edo residents are demonstrating strong grassroots support for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, with local groups mobilising resources and visibility materials in a show of confidence in his leadership. Governor Monday Okpebholo, who received a delegation of supporters at his country home in Irrua, praised the initiative as a clear reflection of Edo citizens' appreciation for the developmental strides in the state and the policies of the Federal Government. The supporters presented T-shirts, face caps, vests, and other campaign items customised with the ruling party's logo, signalling an organised effort to galvanize public backing ahead of the 2027 presidential election. Governor Okpebholo

commended the volunteers, describing their contributions as voluntary acts of patriotism that underscore trust in national leadership. "We are grateful for this show of support. It demonstrates the confidence Edo people have in President Tinubu's vision for Nigeria," he said. Engineer Uwadike Oziegbe, the initiator of the campaign, said the donation was inspired by the governor's achievements and pledged that more materials would be provided in the months leading up to the election. "The progress we are witnessing in Edo motivates us to actively support the leadership we trust," he added. The mobilisation reflects a coordinated effort to strengthen political participation at the grassroots level, positioning Edo as a key player in shaping national electoral outcomes.

FG moves to digitise academic records, tackle certificate fraud —Pg 3

Reps panel demands pre-shipment records from key agencies over revenue leakages —Pg 6

China sets lowest economic growth target since 1991 —Pg 9

Postponed! CAF moves 2026 WAFCON to July! —Pg 16

Gold reserves hit \$3.5bn as Nigeria boosts local sourcing

—SMDF

ABUJA

Nigeria's gold reserves have risen to about \$3.5 billion, the Solid Minerals Development Fund (SMDF) has disclosed, following the delivery of additional locally sourced gold refined to international standards to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

The Executive Secretary of the SMDF, Hajiji Fatima Shinkafi, announced the development while confirming the latest delivery of responsibly sourced gold refined to the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) Good Delivery standards.

In a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja by the fund's Head of Corporate Communications, Mrs Idowu Jokpeyibo, Shinkafi said the gold was sourced locally and aggregated through the National Gold Purchase Programme (NGPP).

She noted that the latest delivery validates the strength of the SMDF's framework for formalising the gold sector, including supply-chain due diligence processes embedded in the NGPP.

Shinkafi made the remarks at a recent workshop titled "Strate-

gies to Maximise the Economic Benefits of Minerals in Nigeria."

She said the initiative demonstrates Nigeria's capacity to responsibly harness its mineral resources for economic growth.

Earlier, the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake, had disclosed in 2024 that about \$5 million had been added to Nigeria's foreign reserves through gold transactions under the programme.

According to the minister, the gold bars were refined by the SMDF to meet the LBMA Good Delivery standards.

The SMDF began its 2026 training programme in February for staff of the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Development Initiative (PAGMI) to deepen reforms in the gold mining sector.

The initiative aims to provide artisanal miners access to formal markets through the NGPP, promote safer and more efficient mining practices and ensure responsible sourcing of gold.

Shinkafi said that Nigeria launched the gold purchase initiative ahead of several African countries, positioning the nation as a regional leader in responsible gold reserve management.

"Nigeria launched this gold purchase initiative ahead of the Ghana Gold Bullion and oth-

er countries, positioning the nation as a regional leader in responsible gold reserve management," she said.

She explained that the programme engages artisanal and

small-scale miners within a responsible sourcing framework aligned with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Due Diligence Guidelines and

the World Gold Council's London Principles.

The Governor of CBN, Olayemi Cardoso, said that the monetary-grade gold was acquired using the naira, with pricing linked to LBMA benchmarks.

Cardoso noted that the arrangement helps preserve Nigeria's foreign exchange, while strengthening the country's gold reserves.



KRULL VISITS OSHIOMHOLE:

L-R: Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, Iryn Omorgiwa Esq.; Commissioner for Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, Hon. Chris Okaeben; Consul-General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Daniel Krull; Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Adams Oshiomhole; and Director of Entertainment and Creative Economy, Mr. Harrison Ehizoba during the visit of the Consul-General to the State.

Edo restates commitment to youth devt through sports

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to youth development through sports, describing athletics as a vital tool for promoting discipline, resilience and teamwork among young people.

The Commissioner for Youth Affairs, Charity Amayaevbo, gave the assurance on Thursday during the 16th Annual Inter-House Sports Competition of Command Children School in Benin City.

Amayaevbo, who attended the event as special guest of honour, commended the Nigerian Army and the school management for using sports competitions to build character and leadership among pupils.

He noted that sporting activities provide young people with opportunities to develop essential life skills beyond the classroom.

"Sports competitions like this are not just about winning medals or trophies; they are about discipline, teamwork, courage, resilience and leadership — values that the Nigerian Army represents and values every young person should learn," he said.

According to the commissioner, the performances displayed by the pupils highlighted the importance of dedication, teamwork and perseverance.

He assured that the state government would continue to partner with institutions and organisations that promote youth development through sports and other constructive activities. "The state government is

proud to partner with you in youth mobilisation through sports as we continue to mould our children and imbue them with the spirit of discipline and hard work," he said.

Commander of the 4 Brigade of the Nigerian Army, Brig.-Gen. Ahmed Balogun, described the inter-house sports competition as a long-standing tradition in command schools aimed at promoting fitness, teamwork and healthy competition.

Balogun said the programme aligns with the Chief of Army Staff's command philosophy, which places strong emphasis on training and capacity development.

"Training and retraining remain the only panacea for fitness and relevance in any endeavour, especially in the lives of our young children," he said.

The competition featured track and field events, including the 200 metres, 100 metres and 50 metres races for senior, junior and nursery pupils respectively, as well as sack races and relay races.

At the end of the competition, Green House emerged overall winner, while Purple House came second and Blue House finished third.

Chief Godday Erewa, proprietor of Valley Stream British School, donated cash prizes of N250,000, N150,000 and N100,000 to the first, second and third positions respectively.

Amayaevbo also presented additional prizes of N50,000, N40,000 and N30,000 to the top three houses, while Yellow and Red Houses received N20,000 each as consolation prizes.

APC inaugurates Edo EXCO, sets eyes on 2027 elections

BENIN CITY

The Edo State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) on Thursday inaugurated its State Executive Council, charging members to strengthen party structures and consolidate electoral gains ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Speaking during the ceremony at the party secretariat in Benin City, the State Chairman, Emperor Jarrett Tenebe,

described the newly elected executives as a "driving force" that would steer the party over the next four years.

Tenebe said the executives were chosen based on their integrity and contributions to the growth of the party.

According to him, the inauguration followed the successful ward and local government congresses, reflecting the party's commitment to internal democracy and unity.

He also highlighted the de-

fection of members from other political parties into the APC, describing the development as a "political tsunami" that has strengthened the party across Edo State.

The chairman reaffirmed the party's alignment with the policies of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the SHINE Agenda of Governor Monday Okpebholo.

He urged the new executives to intensify grassroots mobilisation and ensure greater par-

ticipation of youths and women in the party's activities.

Tenebe also commended party members for their peaceful conduct during the congresses and appreciated the media for supporting democratic engagement and public awareness.

Looking ahead to the 2027 elections, he expressed confidence that the APC in Edo State would deliver overwhelming support for the party's candidates.

Court clears Abba Kyari, brothers of asset non-declaration...

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ping malls, residential estates, farmland, land parcels and a polo playground located in Abuja and Maiduguri, Borno State.

It also alleged that more than N207 million and €17,598 were traced to bank accounts linked to the officer in Guaranty Trust Bank, United Bank for Africa and Sterling Bank.

According to the agency, the defendants disguised ownership of properties and converted funds in a manner that contravened provisions of the NDLEA Act and the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, 2011.

However, Kyari and his brothers pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

During the trial, the prosecution called 10 witnesses and tendered about 20 exhibits to support its case.

After the prosecution closed its case, Kyari filed a no-case submission through his lawyer, Onyechi Ikpeazu (SAN), arguing that the agency had failed to present credible evidence link-

ing him to the alleged properties.

Justice Omotosho, however, dismissed the no-case submission on October 28, 2025, ruling that the prosecution had established a prima facie case requiring the defendants to open their defence.

Kyari subsequently opened his defence on November 4, 2025, insisting that he had declared all his assets and those of his wife in accordance with the law.

He also denied ownership of several properties attributed to him by the NDLEA, explaining that some of the assets belonged to his late father, who had about 30 children.

The suspended police officer further rejected the claim that he owned a polo playground in Borno State, saying he was surprised that such a large expanse of land could be linked to him.

Kyari closed his defence on November 26, 2025, after testifying and undergoing cross-examination by the prosecution.

His brothers, Mohammed and Ali Kyari, did not call any witnesses and instead rested

their case on the evidence already presented before the court.

In his ruling, Justice Omotosho noted that testimony from the prosecution's ninth witness indicated that Kyari was not the sole owner of funds in his accounts, as some of the money had been transferred from the Central Bank of Nigeria for operational use by the police.

According to the judge, the evidence showed that such funds were deployed for operations in violence-prone parts of the country, including logistics and accommodation for members of the Inspector-General of Police Intelligence Response Team.

He added that there was no evidence from the NDLEA to suggest that the funds were misused.

"There is no evidence that the first defendant used the monies for his own purposes. There are also no complaints from the Nigeria Police or any other organisation that paid into the account that the funds were not used for their intended purpose," the court held.

On the allegation involving

foreign currency in Kyari's domiciliary account, the court noted that the officer had declared about £7,000 in the account.

Kyari explained that the money was part of funds used for his father's medical treatment abroad more than a decade ago and that the remaining balance stayed in the account.

Justice Omotosho held that the prosecution failed to present evidence to contradict the explanation or prove that the foreign currency was unlawfully obtained.

Without proof of any underlying offence, the court ruled that the charges could not stand.

Consequently, the court discharged and acquitted Kyari and his brothers on the affected counts, describing the case as "persecutory rather than prosecutory."

However, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency later clarified that the judgment does not affect the separate and substantive drug trafficking case pending against the suspended police officer.

NEWS

FG moves to digitise academic records, tackle certificate fraud

ABUJA

The Federal Government has intensified efforts to safeguard the integrity of academic records in Nigeria through the implementation of the Nigeria Education Repository and Data Park (NERD).

The Minister of Education, Tunji Alausa, said on Thursday in Abuja during a National Capacity Building Programme for school representatives

that the initiative was aimed at strengthening institutional compliance and curbing academic fraud.

Alausa explained that the NERD platform is a strategic national digital infrastructure designed to secure, standardise, digitise and authenticate academic records across post-secondary and tertiary institutions nationwide.

He said the initiative underscores the Federal Government's

commitment to data ownership, zero tolerance for academic fraud and the preservation of Nigeria's academic history.

"The Nigeria Education Repository and Databank is not merely a technology platform but a strategic national infrastructure for securing and verifying academic records," he said.

The minister cited key components of the system, including the National Credential Number and the Federated Re-

pository of Academic Test and Assurance.

Alausa disclosed that within four months of enforcement, the platform had curated nearly 100,000 digital student submissions and onboarded more than 350 universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education for real-time credential verification.

According to him, more than 133,000 students and 6,800 lecturers are currently

enrolled on the platform, supported by more than 655 focal persons nationwide.

He added that more than 1,000 digital service centres had been established in collaboration with Nigerian technology entrepreneurs.

Alausa emphasised that protecting the integrity of academic certificates was vital for maintaining trust in Nigeria's education system, noting that certificates represent national guarantees that due process and academic standards were followed.

He also revealed that the government had investigated cases of fraudulent certificates from unaccredited institutions, leading to the removal of individuals with illegal qualifications from the public service to uphold accountability.

To further promote academic excellence, the minister announced the establishment of the NERD Annual National Knowledge Prize and Award Programme, which will reward outstanding undergraduate, master's and doctoral theses with prizes ranging from ₦5 million to ₦20 million.

Alausa urged tertiary institutions to establish robust internal verification systems, designate competent personnel and prioritise digital capacity development to strengthen compliance and accountability.

The Chief Executive Officer of NERD, Tunji Ariyomo, said preserving the nation's knowledge and historical records was critical, warning that poor documentation had created gaps that hinder knowledge growth.



WORKSHOP:

Governor of CBN, Olayemi Cardoso (left) and the Executive Secretary, Solid Minerals Development Fund (SMDF), Hajia Fatima Shinkafi recently at a workshop on 'Strategies to Maximise the Economic Benefits of Minerals in Nigeria' in Abuja.

FG launches free eye screening for civil servants

ABUJA

The Federal Government has launched a nationwide free eye screening programme for civil servants as part of efforts to improve health and productivity in the public service.

Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, declared the 2026 programme open on Thursday in Abuja, describing it as a key component of staff welfare and occupational health.

The screening exercise, organised by the Office of the Head of

the Civil Service in collaboration with the Tulsi Chanrai Foundation, was held at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Walson-Jack said good eyesight is essential for effective service delivery and workplace productivity.

"Vision is not only about leadership; good eyesight is fundamental to effective performance," she said.

She explained that the programme, first introduced in 2024, was expanded due to its positive impact.

According to her, 2,329 civil servants benefited from profes-

sional eye screening, diagnosis and treatment in 2025.

The Head of Service commended the Tulsi Chanrai Foundation, the medical team and volunteers for supporting accessible and quality eye care.

Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Mrs Nkeiruka Onyejeocha, described the initiative as timely and significant, noting that it aligns with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda on human capital development.

She urged civil servants to take advantage of the programme, emphasising that

preventive healthcare contributes to a healthier and more efficient public service.

Chief Executive Officer of the Tulsi Chanrai Foundation, Mr Shravan Kasam, said the programme began on the 100th day of the current Head of Service's tenure.

Kasam highlighted the foundation's more than 30 years of work in healthcare, sanitation and vision care.

He added that the foundation operates hospitals in Abuja, Kebbi and Calabar where eye care services, including surgeries, are provided.

NUJ pledges media support for disability inclusion in Delta

ASABA

The Delta State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting disability inclusion and access to information following an advocacy visit by the Nigeria Association of the Blind (NAB), South-South Zone.

The Chairman of the NUJ in Delta State, Mr Churchill Oyowe, made the pledge while receiving the NAB delegation at the NUJ Press Centre in Asaba during a strategic engagement aimed at strengthening collaboration between both organi-

sations.

Oyowe commended NAB for its sustained advocacy and assured the delegation of adequate media support in promoting disability-related issues, particularly public awareness of the Marrakesh Treaty.

According to him, the NUJ under his leadership will prioritise inclusive journalism and ensure that disability matters receive sustained and responsible media coverage.

Oyowe acknowledged that disability issues had not received sufficient media attention in the past and pledged to change the narrative through deliberate and

sustained coverage.

The advocacy visit was led by the South-South Zonal Coordinator of NAB, Mr Nkemakonam Ofili, alongside Augustine Ubaka, Azubuikwe Oba and Nneamaka Akaze.

In his remarks, Ofili emphasised the importance of the Marrakesh Treaty, adopted by the World Intellectual Property Organization and domesticated by Nigeria.

He explained that the treaty facilitates the production and distribution of books and learning materials in accessible formats such as audio, large print and digital versions for persons

with visual and print disabilities.

Ofili noted that less than 10 per cent of published materials in developing countries are accessible to persons with print disabilities, a situation that continues to limit their educational, economic and social participation.

He stressed that journalists play a critical role in shaping public perception, influencing policy implementation and promoting inclusive development.

Ofili therefore called for stronger media engagement in amplifying disability issues and ensuring that progressive policies translate into tangible benefits for persons with disabilities.

Kano Assembly serves impeachment notice on deputy governor

KANO

The Kano State House of Assembly on Thursday commenced impeachment proceedings against the Deputy Governor of the state, Aminu Abdulsalam.

The move followed a petition submitted by the executive arm of government urging the House to take action against Abdulsalam over alleged irregularities during his tenure as Commissioner for Local Government Affairs between 2023 and 2024.

Reading the petition, Majority Leader, Lawan Hussaini (APC-Dala), said the notice was issued in compliance with Section 188 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended).

Hussaini explained that the allegations relate to Abdulsalam's activities while overseeing the state's 44 local government areas.

According to the petition, the deputy governor allegedly breached public trust by di-

verting funds meant for local government administrations for personal gain, reportedly receiving kickbacks amounting to ₦462 million between June 2023 and January 2024.

It further alleged that between February and July 2024, Abdulsalam received ₦726 million from local government councils under the guise of executing special assignments.

The petition also accused him of abusing his office by facilitating the improper release of ₦440 million to North Med Pharmaceutical Limited in violation of public procurement laws and state fiscal regulations.

"These actions are said to constitute gross misconduct under Section 188(2) of the Constitution, representing serious breaches of constitutional norms and ethical standards for public office holders.

"Based on the evidence presented, Abdulsalam should be impeached and removed from office in accordance with constitutional procedures," Hussaini said.

World Bank, SERVICOM launch e-grievance platform to boost accountability

ABUJA

The World Bank, in collaboration with the Service Compact with All Nigerians (SERVICOM), has inaugurated the Nigeria Electronic Grievance Management and Feedback Mechanism Platform (E-GM) to strengthen accountability and service delivery in the country.

The platform is a digital system designed to create a centralised, transparent and trackable mechanism for receiving and managing complaints and feedback from citizens, par-

ticularly on projects supported by the World Bank.

In his keynote address, the Permanent Secretary of the General Services Office in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Dr Ibrahim Kana, said the initiative would reinforce accountability and transparency in Nigeria's public service.

Kana, represented by Mrs Kamiltu Kida, Director of Legal Services in the office, described the platform as a landmark initiative that would strengthen citizens' trust in government institutions.

"It is a great honour to witness the launch of the Nigeria Elec-

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Troops kill suspected kidnapper, rescue 4 victims in Edo forest

BENIN CITY

Troops of the Nigerian Army have neutralised a notorious suspected kidnapper and rescued four abducted victims during a night operation in Warake Forest, Auchi, in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State.

The Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, 4 Brigade, Capt. Kennedy Anyanwu, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday in Benin City.

Anyanwu said the operation was carried out under Operation IGBO DANU 1 by troops of the brigade under the 2 Division of the Nigerian Army, working in collaboration with the Edo Security Corps and local vigilantes.

He explained that on March 3, troops on night patrol heard gunshots in the forest and swiftly moved to engage the criminals.

According to him, the troops overpowered the suspects during the encounter, forcing the gang members to abandon their captives and flee.

"The troops responded to the gunshots heard in the forest with aggressive pursuit and minimum use of firearms and neutralised a notorious kidnapper that has been terrorising Auchi and its environs," Anyanwu said.

He said the four victims—Stella Abbas, 29; Tina Ododa, 19; Razak Rashid, 27; and Mutanibi Kalifa, 16, were rescued unharmed and later reunited with their families.

Anyanwu added that troops

recovered N650,000 in cash, footwear, a power bank and mobile phones from the neutralised suspect.

In a related development, he said troops arrested another suspected kidnapper during a separate operation in Ujemen community in Esan West Local Government Area.

According to him, troops working with the Edo Security Corps raided a house suspected to be a kidnappers' hideout where a 39-year-old suspect, Omogbegha Solomon, was apprehended.

He said that during the raid, security operatives discovered a shrine containing charms

and photographs of several individuals in an abandoned room within the compound.

"The shrine was destroyed on-site, while the suspect was handed over to the Nigeria Police Force, Ekpoma Division, for further investigation," Anyanwu said.

The Commander, 4 Brigade,

Brig.-Gen. Ahmed Balogun, commended the troops for their professionalism and urged them to sustain the offensive against criminal elements.

Balogun also reassured residents of Edo State of the army's commitment to protecting lives and property across the state.

Islamic scholar warns against misusing orphans' wealth

ILORIN

Professor of Islamic Law at the University of Ilorin, Abdur-Razaq Alaro, has warned that anyone who squanders or misuses wealth left for orphans risks severe spiritual consequences, including hellfire.

Alaro gave the warning in Ilorin while delivering a lecture at the 5th Annual Ramadan Lecture organised by the Muslim Community of the Michael Imoudu National Institute for Labour Studies (MINILS).

The lecture was titled, "The Role of Muslims in Supporting the Bereaved: Attitude and Responsibilities During and After Burial."

The professor, who also serves as an adviser to the Central Bank of Nigeria on non-interest Islamic banking, said caring for orphans and the bereaved should be regarded as a collective responsibility within society.

"Care for the orphans and the bereaved in our society becomes a collective duty and shared responsibility," he said.

Alaro explained that in Islamic tradition, an orphan is a child who loses his or her father before reaching maturity, while a bereaved person refers to someone who has lost

a close associate.

He stressed that supporting grieving families goes beyond attending burial ceremonies and should include sustained emotional and material assistance.

The scholar noted that global conflicts and instability were increasing the number of orphans and bereaved people worldwide.

"The world is slowly engulfed in chaos and wars, creating more orphans and bereaved people everywhere," he said.

He also warned against injustice, abuse of power and actions capable of disrupting peaceful coexistence, citing the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East as examples.

"Do not be power-drunk in life. There have been civilisations that were once superpowers, but have since lost their influence, and Allah can do the same again," he cautioned.

Alaro urged Nigerians to cherish peace and coexistence, while also praying for leaders to be guided aright.

Earlier, the Director-General of MINILS, Mr Issa Aremu, said the annual Ramadan lecture series, which began five years ago, was intended to continue as a regular programme funded by members of the Muslim community.

World Bank, SERVICOM launch...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 3

tronic Grievance Management Platform, a milestone that reinforces our collective commitment to accountability, transparency and service excellence in Nigeria's public sector," he said.

He commended SERVICOM for its sustained efforts in promoting service delivery reforms across Ministries, Departments and Agencies through service charters, complaint-handling systems and performance monitoring frameworks.

Kana said the decision by the World Bank to partner

SERVICOM to host and manage the electronic grievance redress platform demonstrates the agency's nationwide presence and institutional capacity.

According to him, embedding the platform within SERVICOM will ensure that grievance redress mechanisms for development projects remain functional even after the lifespan of such projects.

"This guarantees continuity in complaint resolution beyond the lifespan of individual projects and programmes, transforming what was once project-bound into a sustainable national mechanism," he said.



BUDGET DEFENCE:

L-R: Member, House of Representatives Committee on South-East Development Commission (SEDC), Ibe Osonwa; Deputy Chairman of the Committee, Paul Nnamchi, and Chairman of the Committee, Chris Nkwonta, during their budget defence session with the Managing Director of SEDC, at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Thursday.

ICMPD, NAPTIP train CSOs, seek stronger strategies against human trafficking

ASABA

The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has urged Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to adopt stronger strategies to combat Trafficking in Persons and Violence Against Persons (TIP-VAP) in Nigeria.

The call was made in Asaba during the opening of a training workshop organised by the centre in collaboration with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The three-day workshop is designed for partner CSOs on community sensitization approaches for the prevention of TIP-VAP in five states.

Mrs Rhoda Dia-Johnson, Project Manager of the Schools Anti-Trafficking Education and Advocacy Project

(STEAP) of ICMPD Nigeria, said the participating CSOs were drawn from Delta, Edo, Ogun, Enugu and Benue states.

She explained that the STEAP-TIP-VAP project, funded by the Government of the Netherlands, is being implemented by ICMPD in collaboration with NAPTIP and the Federal Ministry of Education.

According to her, the workshop is aimed at reviewing the activities carried out by partner CSOs in 2025, assessing challenges and strengthening operational capacity.

"We work with one civil society organisation in each participating state, so this workshop is to review what they have done, examine the challenges they faced and determine how best to address them," she said.

Dia-Johnson added that two new CSOs had joined the pro-

gramme and would be trained on administrative procedures, financial management, report writing and the use of project templates.

She noted that the workshop also marked an expansion of the CSOs' activities beyond Trafficking in Persons to include Violence Against Persons.

"So, the sensitization messages to communities will now cover both TIP and VAP so that citizens become familiar with the provisions of the Violence Against Persons Act," she said.

She urged participants to obtain abridged copies of the Act and disseminate its provisions widely within communities.

Dia-Johnson noted that the four-year STEAP project would run until 2027, adding that discussions were ongoing with the donor on the possibility of a second phase.

"We are already surpassing some of the targets set for the project, particularly in terms of

reach and impact," she said.

If approved, she added, the second phase could extend the programme to additional states.

Also speaking, the Commander of NAPTIP's Benin Zonal Command, Mr Sam Ofiah, said the collaboration between the agency and ICMPD had yielded positive results in tackling human trafficking and violence against persons.

He urged CSOs to intensify community sensitization by educating residents on warning signs of trafficking and encouraging reporting.

"NAPTIP's mandate is to eliminate human trafficking in our society, and women and children remain the most vulnerable," he said.

He explained that under the STEAP project, anti-trafficking and violence vanguards had been established in schools to sensitise students and mobilise them against the menace.

Gunmen shoot farmer, kidnap wife in Ondo attack

AKURE

The Ondo State Police Command has confirmed that gunmen shot a farmer and abducted his wife during an attack on Wednesday night in Akure, the state capital.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Abayomi Jimoh, disclosed this in a statement on Thursday.

According to him, the incident occurred at about 8:45 p.m. along Oda Road in the city.

Jimoh said suspected kidnappers invaded the residence of Adesida Daniel, a tomato farmer in Isagba Community, where the attack occurred.

"During the incident, the victim sustained a gunshot injury to his right hand while attempting to resist the assailants who had reportedly abducted

his wife," he said.

He explained that police operatives swiftly mobilised to the scene after receiving a distress call.

"The injured victim was rescued and taken to the Police Clinic for medical attention while the area was secured," Jimoh added.

He said the Commissioner of Police had directed intensified patrols, bush-combing op-

erations and intelligence gathering within the affected area and neighbouring communities to track down the suspects.

The command assured residents that every effort was being made to apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

Jimoh urged members of the public to remain vigilant and promptly report suspicious movements or individuals to the nearest police station.

NEWS

ABUJA **FEC approves gratuity for Fed civil servants**

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) has approved a new exit benefit scheme granting retiring federal civil servants a gratuity equivalent to 100 percent of their total annual emolument.

The Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja by the Director of Press and Public Relations, Mrs Eno Olotu.

According to the statement, the scheme, which takes effect from January 1, 2026, is de-

signed to strengthen the welfare framework of the federal civil service and ensure that officers who have served the nation for a minimum of 10 years retire with improved financial security.

Olotu explained that the approval followed recommendations by an inter-ministerial technical committee set up by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. She said the committee

worked with the National Pension Commission, the Budget Office of the Federation and the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation to develop a sustainable framework for the scheme.

The new exit benefit, she added, would complement the existing Contributory Pension Scheme and strengthen retirement income security for federal civil servants in treasury-funded ministries,

extra-ministerial departments and agencies.

The Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, commended the council for approving the scheme, describing it as a bold move that recognises the dedication, sacrifice and professionalism of federal civil servants.

"This approval is a profound acknowledgement of the invaluable contributions of our civil

servants who have devoted their productive years to public service and national development.

"The exit benefit scheme significantly enhances the retirement package of our officers and boosts confidence in the federal government's commitment to their welfare," she said.

Walson-Jack added that the initiative aligns with ongo-

ing reforms aimed at building a more motivated, performance-driven and people-centred civil service, noting that detailed implementation guidelines would be issued in due course.

The reintroduction of gratuity for federal civil servants comes 22 years after the introduction of the Contributory Pension Scheme.



PRESENTING RELIEF PACKAGE:

Wife of Kebbi State Governor, Hajija Zainab Nasiru (L) and Director-General, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Mrs Zubaida Umar (R), jointly presenting relief package to a beneficiary during the flag-off of NEMA distribution of relief materials to persons affected by banditry in Birnin Kebbi.

Afreximbank tops Africa's loan market with 23% share

ABUJA

African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) has emerged as the leading player in Africa's loan market, ranking number one Mandated Lead Arranger and Bookrunner in the 2025 Bloomberg Africa Borrower Loans League Tables.

The bank disclosed this in a statement issued in Abuja on Wednesday by its Communications and Events Manager (Media Relations), Mr Vincent Musumba.

According to the statement, the rankings released by Bloomberg show that Afreximbank accounted for a 23.65 percent market share as Man-

dated Lead Arranger, executing 20 transactions during the period under review.

As Bookrunner, the bank recorded a 21.66 percent market share, completing 14 deals and further consolidating its leadership in arranging debt solutions and mobilising capital to support Africa's economic growth.

The bank also ranked number three as Administrative Agent, recording a 13.92 percent market share across 13 deals.

Bloomberg explained that the Africa Borrower Loans League Tables are a subset of the Bloomberg Capital Markets League Tables, which track leading arrangers, book-runners and

advisers across transactions including loans, bonds, equity, and mergers and acquisitions.

The statement noted that the performance underscores Afreximbank's sustained dominance in African capital markets and its strategic role in mobilising large-scale financing from both domestic and international investors.

It added that most of the syndicated transactions were concentrated in the oil and gas sector, reflecting the bank's intervention in addressing the significant financing gap within the sector across the continent.

The Executive Vice President, Global Trade Bank at Afreximbank, Mr Haytham Elmaay-

ergi, described the ranking as a testament to the dedication and capability of the bank's team.

"I am delighted that the stellar performance of our colleagues has been reflected in Bloomberg's prestigious league tables, which is a real testament to their determination and capability.

"The rankings underscore Afreximbank's commitment to facilitating capital flows in order to drive economic growth and prosperity on the continent.

"We will continue to leverage our unique position to promote high-impact investments and bridge the financing gap across Africa's most critical sectors," Elmaayergi said.

FCTA moves to curb exam malpractice in secondary schools

ABUJA

The Education Resource Centre (ERC) of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) has intensified measures to ensure strict compliance with examination standards and enforce zero tolerance for examination malpractice in secondary schools.

The Director of the centre, Dr Neemat Abdulrahim, dis-

closed this in Abuja on Thursday while monitoring the Senior Secondary Certificate Mock Examination in Mathematics in selected secondary schools.

Abdulrahim explained that the mock examination is designed to prepare students for external examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO).

She said the monitoring ex-

ercise formed part of the centre's mandate to ensure that examinations are conducted in conducive environments and that question papers meet approved academic standards.

"The monitoring exercise will further boost the FCT Administration's commitment to strengthening academic standards and ensuring students are adequately prepared to excel in their external examinations," she said.

She commended the orderly conduct of the examination in the schools visited and noted a steady increase in the participation of private schools, which she said reflects the credibility and standard of the ERC mock examinations.

Abdulrahim also said that the ongoing renovation of school facilities by the FCT Minister, Mr Nyesom Wike, had significantly boosted students' morale.

Tax reforms 'll end multiple levies, reduce poverty —Shettima

ABUJA

Vice-President Kashim Shettima has said that the implementation of new tax reforms by the Federal Government will eliminate the burden of multiple levies on small businesses and reduce poverty among Nigerians.

Shettima stated this on behalf of President Bola Tinubu during an interfaith breaking of fast for Ramadan and Lent held at the State House in Abuja.

The event was attended by members of the Federal Executive Council, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria and other senior government officials.

According to him, the reforms are designed to remove tax burdens on low-income earners while improving livelihoods.

"The same people who are shouting hoarse that the tax reform is meant to pulverise and pauperise the poor are far from the truth.

"We have to go out and tell the

truth to the people. We have to educate them," Shettima said.

He urged government officials to communicate the administration's policies directly to Nigerians and counter misinformation.

The vice-president highlighted gains recorded under the administration's economic reforms, including increased foreign exchange reserves and a more streamlined exchange rate regime.

He also cited the removal of fuel subsidy, which he said had for many years benefited only a few individuals.

According to him, the president demonstrated courage by addressing long-standing distortions in the economy.

"Three years down the road, the economy has bounced back," he said.

Shettima further urged public officials to actively publicise the administration's achievements and remain prepared to counter false narratives from opposition parties.

Police announce March 9 screening for 2025/2026 constable recruitment

LAGOS

The Police Command in Lagos State has announced that the physical and credential screening exercise for applicants in the 2025/2026 recruitment into the Nigeria Police Force will commence on Monday, March 9.

The command's spokesperson, SP Abimbola Adebisi, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Lagos.

According to her, the screening exercise will run daily from 7:00 a.m. between March 9 and April 18 at the Police College, Ikeja.

She said the exercise is specifically for applicants who are indigenes of Lagos State and who successfully completed the online registration for recruitment as General Duty and Specialist Police Constables.

Adebisi said applicants must appear for the screening dressed in clean white T-shirts and shorts and present several mandatory documents neatly arranged in two white flat files.

"Among the required documents are the invitation slip indicating the assigned table, credential screening form,

original National Identity Number printout or card issued by the National Identity Management Commission.

"Others include O'Level certificates, birth certificate or declaration of age, and Local Government or State of Origin certificate.

"Specialist applicants are also required to present their trade test certificates," she said.

She added that applicants must submit a duly completed and signed guarantors' form with attached photocopies and passport photographs of referees.

The spokesperson explained that both original and duplicate copies of credentials must be packaged separately in the two flat files, each with recent passport photographs attached.

According to her, any applicant who fails to present the required documents will not be considered for the screening exercise.

Adebisi urged applicants to strictly adhere to their scheduled dates and other guidelines provided for the exercise.

She emphasised that the screening process is free of charge and will be conducted strictly on merit in line with professional standards.

Tinubu approves ₦334bn Kano–Kongolom highway project

KANO

Governor Abba Yusuf of Kano State has welcomed President Bola

Ahmed Tinubu's approval of the ₦334 billion Kano–Kongolom Road project, describing it as a historic breakthrough that will transform economic activ-

ities across the North-West.

The 132-kilometre highway will be constructed as a three-lane concrete carriageway equipped with solar-powered street lights and CCTV surveillance systems.

Yusuf made the remarks in a statement issued on Thursday in Kano by his spokesperson, Sanusi Dawakin-Tofa.

According to the governor, the project will stimulate trade, agriculture and industri-

al growth, while also creating jobs and improving road safety.

The Kano–Kongolom corridor connects Kano with Jigawa and Katsina states, making it a strategic economic route in the North-West and a vital gateway for trade, agricultural movement and industrial expansion.

Yusuf said the approval underscores President Tinubu's commitment to the development of Kano State and the

wider North-West region.

"This project will open new economic frontiers for farmers, traders and transporters, reducing travel time and improving safety," he said.

The governor commended the Minister of Works, David Umahi, for prioritising the project and assured that the Kano State Government would cooperate fully with contractors to ensure smooth execution and timely completion.

He expressed optimism that the road would generate employment opportunities and further strengthen Kano's status as a major commercial hub.

Yusuf also reaffirmed his administration's commitment to projects that would improve the living standards of residents.

"This is the result of our Kano First Agenda working in synergy with the Renewed Hope Agenda," he added.

NSE boss urges engineers to deploy smart solutions against insecurity

ABUJA

President of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), Ali Rabiū, has urged engineers across the country to deploy innovation, systems thinking and technology-driven solutions to support government efforts to tackle Nigeria's insecurity challenges.

Rabiū made the call during a webinar organised to mark the 2026 World Engineering Day celebration on Wednesday.

The event had the theme: "Smart Engineering for a Sustainable Future through Innovation and Digitalisation."

According to him, smart engineering involves applying advanced technologies and innovative design approaches to create efficient, sustainable and interconnected systems.

"As we engage in discussions aligned with this theme, we must also explore how engineering can help government deliver practical solutions to the lingering insecurity challenges facing our country," he said.

Rabiū noted that Nigeria's

global investment rankings and ease-of-doing-business indicators were strongly influenced by safety conditions and regulatory predictability.

He warned that without urgent intervention, security challenges could continue to undermine GDP growth, foreign direct investment, job creation and public confidence in governance.

"Engineers, as critical stakeholders in nation-building, have a vital role in addressing these challenges and strengthening the foundations for economic growth and stability," he added.

He also stressed the need to strengthen the capacity of young engineers, describing them as the future of both the engineering profession and the country.

He said the society would continue to position them competitively within the global engineering community.

Rabiū commended UNESCO for establishing the global platform and praised the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) for sustaining the World Engineering Day programme.



WORKSHOP:

L-R: Secretary, Board Youth Care Development Education Initiative (YCDEI), Adesola Adesokan; Programme Manager (YCDEI), Oluwatoyin Adebayo; Principal Investigator (YCDEI), Prof. Adefunke Ekine, and Co-Investigator, Dr Grace Abban-Ampiah at a workshop on ending gender violence in schools organised by (YCDEI) in collaboration with Fund for Innovation in Development in Ibadan on Thursday.

Bauchi targets \$200m agro-industrial investment

BAUCHI

Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to meeting all international requirements needed to secure a proposed \$200 million agro-industrial investment supported by the Islamic Development Bank and other development partners.

Mohammed gave the assurance while receiving officials of the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) mission on a courtesy visit in Bauchi on Thursday.

The visit focused on strengthening collaboration aimed at boosting agricultural productivity and accelerating agro-industrial development in the state.

The governor expressed confidence that Bauchi would meet all appraisal and compliance standards required by international financiers.

According to him, the state has strengthened its engineer-

ing, technical and feasibility teams to ensure that project documentation aligns with global standards used by institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

Mohammed described agriculture as the backbone of Bauchi's economy, noting that the state possesses vast arable land and comparative advantages in crops such as rice, cassava and sesame.

He added that the state already hosts some of the largest rice mills in the region and continues to attract investors by providing land and incentives.

However, the governor said that although Bauchi produces large quantities of sesame exported through neighbouring states to international markets, the state has yet to fully capture the benefits along the value chain.

He stressed the need to transition from subsistence farming to mechanised and science-driven agriculture anchored on strong private sector participation.

NDLEA seizes 1,499 bottles of codeine, arrests suspect in Kano

KANO

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Kano Strategic Command, has arrested a 45-year-old man, Ashiru Bala, for allegedly possessing 1,499 bottles of codeine-based cough syrup.

The command's Public Relations Officer, Sadiq Muhammad-Maigatari, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday in Kano.

He quoted the command's Commander, Dahiru Yahaya-Lawal, as saying that the suspect was arrested at his residence in Lambu, Tofa Local Government Area, on February 25 following an intelligence-led operation.

According to him, the suspect was intercepted after transporting the consignment from Abuja for delivery to a local dealer in Kano for illicit consumption.

Yahaya-Lawal said the suspect admitted to transporting illegal substances for about two

years, noting that he had previously worked in township services in Abuja for four years.

"He also confirmed receiving substantial payments for each consignment moved, indicating that he was fully aware of the illegal nature of the act," the commander said.

He noted that the arrest demonstrates the command's commitment to protecting communities from the dangers associated with illicit drug trafficking.

"Intelligence-driven enforcement, particularly during

periods of increased demand such as festive seasons, remains central to our operational strategy.

"We will continue to sustain pressure on drug networks and ensure offenders are brought to justice," he said.

Yahaya-Lawal added that the operation formed part of the ongoing "Operation Ramadan Mubarak," launched in line with the national campaign for a drug-free society championed by the NDLEA Chairman, retired Brig.-Gen. Mohamed Buba-Marwa.

Reps panel demands pre-shipment records from key agencies over revenue leakages

ABUJA

The House of Representatives Ad hoc Committee investigating revenue leakages has directed key government agencies to submit comprehensive documents relating to pre-shipment inspection of exports and the non-remittance of crude oil proceeds.

The agencies involved include the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines

and Agriculture (NACCIMA).

Chairman of the committee, Rep. Seyi Sowunmi (LP-Lagos), issued the directive during a public hearing in Abuja on Wednesday.

Sowunmi said documents earlier submitted by the agencies were outdated and required updates before the committee's next sitting.

He noted that the investigation was aimed at addressing revenue losses affecting the nation's finances.

"Part of the problems President Bola Tinubu is trying to solve is revenue leakage. We

must account for every naira that accrues to the nation, and that is what this committee seeks to achieve," he said.

The lawmaker added that all relevant agencies would be informed of their next appearance date and the deadline for submitting the required documents.

Speaking at the hearing, Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Customs Service, Bashir Adeniyi, explained that the agency's role in export processes was limited to verifying documentation at the point of export.

Represented by Deputy Comptroller-General, Caroline Diagwan, Adeniyi said Customs ensured that export

documents tallied with the goods presented for shipment.

"We ensure that the documents correspond with what is being exported. We conduct examinations and physical checks of goods at the export point," he said.

He clarified that the collection of export duties was not within the purview of the service.

"We do not collect export duties, and we do not determine how much exporters pay to the government," he added.

Also speaking, CBN Governor Yemi Cardoso, represented by a director at the bank, Dr Musa Nakurji, said the apex bank primarily coordinated data processing among relevant agencies.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as AIMEUGHEUWA GLORY, now wish to be known and address as OSAGIOBARE GLORY. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF SURNAME/ ADDITION OF MIDDLE NAME /DATE OF BIRTH

I, formerly known as UZOBU INNOCENT, now wish to be known and address as UZEBU INNOCENT OSE. Also my correct date of birth is 28/8/1994, not 28/8/1991. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

NEWS

JUDICIARY

Oduah, co-accused seek plea bargain in N2.4bn fraud case

ABUJA

Former Minister of Aviation, Stella Oduah, and a co-defendant standing trial over an alleged N2.4 billion fraud on Thursday opted for a plea bargain before

an Abuja High Court. The Director of Public Prosecution (DPP), Rotimi Oyedepo, who led the prosecution team, informed the court that the defendants had approached the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) seeking a

plea bargain arrangement. "They have made moves to refund certain amounts of money into the government coffers. What is left is the confirmation of receipt of the bank draft by the government," Oyedepo told the court.

Counsel to Oduah, Onyechi Ikpeazu (SAN), confirmed the development, while Favour Osuanya, counsel to the second defendant, also affirmed that discussions on the plea deal were ongoing.

Following submissions by

counsel, Justice Hamza Muazu adjourned the matter until March 26 for a report on the plea bargain agreement.

Earlier, on February 12, 2026, Oyedepo had informed the court that the application for plea bargain was made in line with Section 270 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015.

Oduah was arraigned in December 2025 alongside Gloria Oditia 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 alleged that the defendants conspired to obtain N2.4 billion from the Federal Ministry of Aviation through Broad Waters Resources Nigeria Ltd and Global Offshore Marine Ltd under allegedly fraudulent claims.

According to the prosecution, the alleged offence contravenes Sections 8(a) and 1(1)(a) of the Advance Fee Fraud Act and is punishable under Section 1(3).

Both defendants had earlier pleaded not guilty to the charges.



UNPAID ALLOWANCES:

Members of Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria (JUSUN) seal the premises of Kaduna State High Court over unpaid allowances in Kaduna on Thursday.

Court remands NetNaija founder over alleged copyright piracy

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has remanded the Chief Executive Officer of NetNaija Media Enterprises, Emmanuel Analike, in Kuje Correctional Centre over alleged copyright infringement.

Justice Suleiman Liman ordered the remand after defence counsel, Nnemeka Ejiofor, informed the court that he had filed a bail application on behalf of the defendant.

Ejiofor said the bail application was filed on Monday and

supported by a 23-paragraph affidavit and a written address.

Although the defence argued the application after 48 hours of arraignment, the judge declined to deliver a bench ruling and adjourned the matter until March 9 for ruling.

The court subsequently ordered that the defendant be remanded at the Kuje Correctional Centre pending determination of the bail application.

Earlier, the prosecution counsel and Head of Legal at the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), Gladys Isaac-

Ojo, told the court that the matter was slated for arraignment.

She said the defendant allegedly committed offences punishable under Section 44(1)(a) of the Copyright Act, 2022.

Analike, however, pleaded not guilty to the four-count charge.

The charges include alleged possession of infringing works, making infringing copies, distributing such works and making them available to the public.

Speaking with journalists after proceedings, Isaac-Ojo described the arraignment as a significant breakthrough in the

fight against online piracy.

"We are excited that we were able to get him after several efforts. It is a huge success and something remarkable because of the joy it will bring to the Nigerian Copyright Commission," she said.

She added that the allegations relate to online piracy involving sound recordings and audiovisual works, including movies belonging to both local and international authors.

The case will resume on Monday for ruling on the bail application.

Car dealer docked for allegedly diverting N5m from Lexus sale

LAGOS

A car dealer, Ayeni Morakinyo, on Thursday appeared before an Ogun State Magistrates' Court in Lagos for allegedly diverting N5 million from the sale of a Lexus car.

Morakinyo of Iju-Ishaga area of Lagos, is facing a charge of stealing.

The prosecutor, ASP Donjour Perezi, told the court that the offence occurred within the Ogun Magisterial District.

He alleged that the defendant dishonestly converted N5 million meant for the sale of a Lexus LS460 belonging to the complainant, Mr Augustine Ikwu.

According to Perezi, the complainant had authorised the de-

fendant, who is his friend, to sell the vehicle for N8 million.

The prosecutor said the defendant allegedly sold the car but transferred only N3 million to the owner before absconding with the remaining N5 million.

The offence contravenes Sections 280 and 287 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

Magistrate S. K. Matepo granted the defendant bail in the sum of N1 million with two reliable sureties.

The case was adjourned until April 1 for further hearing.

Police said the matter was initially reported at the Ogun State Police Division before being transferred to the District Criminal Bureau for investigation.

Graphics designer arraigned over N10.2m camera theft

LAGOS

Police on Thursday arraigned a graphics designer, Yusuf Oluwaseyi, before an Ogun State Magistrates' Court in Lagos for allegedly stealing cameras and accessories valued at N10.2 million.

Oluwaseyi, who resides in the Ijegan area of Lagos, is standing trial on a four-count charge bordering on conspiracy and stealing.

He pleaded not guilty.

The prosecutor, ASP Donjour Perezi, told the court that the defendant conspired with others now at large to commit the offences on January 25 at No. 10, Ikosi-Ketu, Lagos.

He alleged that Oluwaseyi stole a studio camera valued at N1.8 million and a lens worth

N950,000 belonging to Mrs Ruth Okpebru.

The prosecution further alleged that the defendant stole a Nikon D750 camera valued at N1.7 million, a lens worth N1.45 million and an adaptor valued at N250,000 belonging to Victoria Island Local Council Development Area.

In addition, he was accused of stealing a Nikon Z7 camera valued at N4 million belonging to one Joe Peter.

The offences contravene Sections 287 and 411 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

Magistrate S. K. Matepo granted the defendant bail in the sum of N2 million with two sureties in like sum.

The case was adjourned until March 23 for hearing.

Police arrest 62yr-old man for alleged defilement of minor

AKURE

The Ondo State Police Command has arrested a 62-year-old man over the alleged defilement of a 12-year-old girl in Akure.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Abayomi Jimoh, disclosed this in a statement issued on Thursday.

Jimoh said the case has been transferred to the Gender-Based Violence Unit for further investigation.

According to him, the incident was reported on March 3 by the victim's mother, Adebayo Sefunmi, who resides in the Oluwatuyi area of Akure.

He explained that the al-

leged offence occurred on February 28 at about 7:00 p.m. at Ehin-Ala.

"Sefunmi reported that one Imeje Mathew, 62, allegedly defiled her 12-year-old daughter after luring her to a nearby bush under the pretence of assisting her," he said.

Jimoh added that the suspect allegedly committed the act after the girl visited his shop to charge her mother's phone.

The victim is currently receiving medical treatment, while the suspect remains in police custody.

The police spokesperson reiterated the command's commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of women and children.

Uber driver docked for allegedly stealing N7m Toyota Camry

LAGOS

A 32-year-old Uber driver, Godswill Amfor, on Thursday appeared before an Ogun State Magistrates' Court in Lagos for allegedly stealing a Toyota Camry valued at N7 million.

Amfor, who resides in Mende, Maryland, Lagos, is

facing a charge of stealing.

The prosecutor, ASP Donjour Perezi, told the court that the offence was committed on January 25 at Awolowo Road, Ikeja.

According to him, the defendant allegedly stole a silver Toyota Camry with registration number ABJ 582 LB belonging to the complainant, Mr Caleb Daudu.

Perezi said police officers

arrested the defendant the following day, January 26, while he was driving the vehicle in the Maryland area of Lagos.

He added that the stolen car and other personal items belonging to the complainant were recovered from the defendant.

The prosecutor said the offence contravenes Section 287 of the

Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The defendant pleaded not guilty.

Magistrate S. K. Matepo granted him bail in the sum of N500,000 with two sureties in like sum.

The case was adjourned until March 23 for mention.

Three Sales Reps Docked Over Alleged N48.6m Employ-

er Fraud

Ibadan: Three sales representatives on Thursday appeared before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan for allegedly defrauding their employer of N48.6 million.

The defendants – Omole Temitope, 40; Ogungbe Bunmi, 34; and Oyekanmi Paul, 34 – all of no fixed address, are facing a two-count charge of conspiracy and fraud.

They pleaded not guilty.

The prosecutor, Sgt. Akeem Akinloye, told the court that the offences were allegedly committed between December 2022 and February 10, 2026.

Akinloye alleged that the defendants obtained cartons of milk, yoghurt and baby food worth N48,642,010 from their employer, Tilas Trading Store, Agbeni Market, Ibadan, without remitting the proceeds.

Foreign**NEWS****Nepalis vote in first election since Gen Z uprising for change**

Millions of Nepalis have voted in the country's first general election since violent youth-led protests toppled the government last September.

Corruption, economic stagnation and inequality were the main issues in the vote. They sparked the uprising in which 77 people died, many of them protesters shot by police.

The election represents a crossroads for Nepal, pitting the establishment against a new generation of politicians advocating for angry, young Gen Z voters hungry for change.

Counting the votes cast for parliament's 275 seats is expected to take several days, and results are not expected before next week.

Nepal's mountainous terrain makes it slow and difficult to transport ballots, which are tallied by hand.

Nearly 19 million people, including almost a million first-time voters, were registered to take part in the 5 March ballot for the House of Representatives. The Election Commission, speaking shortly after polls closed, said it expected voter turnout to be 60%.

Voting was largely peaceful, and there was a huge security presence across the country.

Leading candidates include

KP Sharma Oli, the prime minister toppled in the protests, and Balen Shah, a former rapper who resigned as Kathmandu mayor in January to take him on in his constituency in the Jhapa 5 seat, one of the key election races.

For Oli, the election will be a major test. He and his party, the Communist Party of Nepal UML, have insisted the protests were not a referendum on his leadership, and that he is still beloved by the public. He told the BBC he's confident he will win this election.

The leader of the Nepali Congress, Gagan Thapa, believes younger voters are tired of "unholy alliances" and "poor governance" in previous coalitions, and that the party is listening to Gen Z voters.

Balen Shah, who is representing the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), refused to speak directly to the press on Thursday, staying true to form, turning up in his signature black sunglasses and storming through a crowd of journalists.

It's a trend Nepal's media worry would continue if he took office. Yet, many of the young voters we've spoken to believe his youth and energy are exactly what the country needs, and that he represents a new chapter in Nepal's future.

First UK government flight to leave Middle East 'imminently' after delay

A flight chartered by the UK government to bring back some Britons stranded in the Middle East was on Thursday set to depart after having failed the previous day.

Problems with getting passengers on board meant the plane, which had been due to leave Oman's capital Muscat on Wednesday, stayed grounded.

But just before 12:00 GMT on Thursday, Foreign Office minister Hamish Falconer told MPs the flight was due to leave soon, with the government "determined" to get people home as "swiftly as possible".

Thousands of British nationals remain stuck in the Middle East since the US-Israeli strikes on Iran on Saturday prompted retaliatory strikes by Iran across the region.

Shadow Foreign Secretary Priti Patel asked what the government was doing "to get [UK nationals] back home", and why "Britain was so woefully unprepared" for the conflict with Iran.

More than 130,000 Britons in the region have registered for updates from the UK government.

Falconer described the situation as "a consular challenge on a scale not seen since Covid" and said there were "no instant solutions".

He said more commercial flights had been laid on from the region, with 10 anticipated to depart on Thursday.

Regarding the delayed flight, Home Office minister Alex Norris had earlier told LBC: "It didn't take off because there are operational reasons... about getting passengers on board, and it wasn't able to happen in the time that it had to happen."

Those eligible for the government flights are being asked to pay for their seat. When announcing the initial flight, the Foreign Office said it would prioritise the most vulnerable people, and that only British nationals, their spouse or partner, and children under 18 would be offered a seat.

Foreign Office officials said 138,000 British nationals in the Gulf had registered their presence, of whom 112,000 were in the United Arab Emirates.

Following the missile strikes across the Middle East, airspace remains severely restricted, with flights completely or partially grounded over Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Syria, the UAE and Israel.

Britons unable to secure a seat on the charter flight have been looking for alternative ways home.

Sam Sahabandu, 47, from Northamptonshire, who got stuck in Muscat after his flight back to London from Sri Lanka was diverted, was due to be on a Qatar Airways flight to Heathrow on Thursday afternoon local time.

**REBEL-HELD MINE:**

The Rubaya mine, currently under M23 control, has been poorly maintained, sources say.

Iran targets headquarters of Iranian Kurdish forces in Iraq

Iran's military has said it has targeted the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish forces in northern Iraq, stepping up strikes on Kurdish regions in both Iran and Iraq.

The military said it attacked "Kurdish groups opposed to the [Islamic] revolution in Iraqi Kurdistan with three missiles". One person was killed and three injured in the strikes on Tuesday and Wednesday, the BBC has confirmed.

Tehran is intensifying its attacks on Iranian Kurdish groups in Iraq amid reports that US President Donald Trump wants them to join the fight against Iran, as US and Israeli strikes continue.

Kurdish Iranian opposition parties in Iraq have denied reports that some of their forces

have crossed into Iran.

"This is not true. Do not believe it," said Hanna Hussein Yazdan Pana of the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK). "Not a single Peshmerga [fighter] has moved. No-one moves alone."

She said six Kurdish opposition groups - which recently formed a coalition - were co-ordinating their plans but needed the Americans to pave the way for a move. She told the BBC nothing would happen this week.

"It's not about the hours or days. We cannot move if the air above us is not cleaned. We need to see weapons depots [of Iran's security forces] being destroyed. Otherwise, it would be suicidal."

Pana also called for a no-fly zone to provide protection for Kurdish forces.

"The regime is very brutal," she said, "and the most advanced weapon we have is a Kalashnikov."

There has been growing speculation that Trump wants Kurdish forces to join the war, to provide boots on the ground.

The White House has denied a report that the president is considering arming them.

On Wednesday, the BBC visited the scene of the Iranian attack on attacks on two separate Kurdish opposition groups.

One base was hit by a ballistic missile at about 11:00 local time (08:00 GMT) on Wednesday, injuring four Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. One died later from his injuries.

One building at the base had been crushed, with rubble and

twisted metal strewn over a wide area. There was also a hole in the ground, gouged out by a missile.

At another base - belonging to the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) - the BBC saw the aftermath of a double drone strike on Tuesday, which was said to have injured one civilian.

A senior political leader of the KDPI told the BBC he believed that the Kurds would be fighting in Iran soon - but did not give an exact timeline.

He would not comment on reports that Trump has spoken to the KDPI leader in recent days.

A fighter called Hassan, 25, armed with an AK-47, said he was eager to go to Iran to fight for freedom.

DR Congo government says 200 killed after landslide at rebel-held mine

More than 200 people, including 70 children, have been killed after a landslide caused a collapse in a mining area in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the government says.

The landslide struck Rubaya, the country's biggest source of coltan - an ore vital in the electronics industry - in the rebel-controlled east on Tuesday following heavy rains.

The Rubaya mine, currently under M23 control, has been poorly maintained, sources say.

In a statement, the mines ministry blamed the tragedy on M23 rebels and said they were allowing illegal mining without proper safety standards.

The M23 are yet to comment but a source in Rubaya told the BBC the collapse was caused by attacks from government forces and only six had died. The government has not responded

to the claim.

The mines in Rubaya are thought to hold about 15% of the world's coltan supply and half of the DR Congo's total deposits.

The metallic ore contains tantalum, which is used to produce high-performance capacitors in a range of electronic devices, making it in high demand worldwide.

Since 2024, the M23 have been in control of Rubaya, which lies about 70 km (45 miles) west of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province.

The authorities said rescue efforts after Tuesday's landslide were hampered by dangerous conditions, which they blamed on restrictions imposed by rebels on civilians.

The mines ministry added that the lack of official oversight at the site had left workers without basic safety protections.

"The provisional toll counts

more than 200 compatriots who lost their lives, including 70 children and numerous wounded," the ministry said in a statement.

The BBC was unable to independently verify the death toll in the remote area, where humanitarian agencies and major medical facilities have little or no access, and telecommunications are frequently disrupted.

Many of the injured have been evacuated to hospitals in Goma.

The Congolese authorities said they had banned mining in the area last year, even though the rebels had already seized control of the mines by then.

When a BBC team visited the site in July 2025, they observed miners digging manually to source the precious mineral. Conditions at the site are very bad, with dangerous pits dotted around its vast expanse.

Over the past year, the

M23 has made rapid advances across the mineral-rich east of DR Congo, taking more areas where coltan is mined.

UN experts say there is evidence that minerals from DR Congo are being exported through Rwanda.

The experts have also accused Rwanda of backing the M23 - an opinion supported by the US government this week which imposed sanctions on the Rwandan army and four of its senior commanders.

Rwanda has rejected these accusations.

The Rubaya mining site was recently added to a shortlist of assets that is being offered to the US by the Congolese government under a minerals co-operation framework, according to the Reuters news agency.

A similar collapse at the site in late January following heavy rainfall killed more than 200 people.

NEWS

Foreign

China sets lowest economic growth target since 1991

China has cut its annual economic growth target to a range of 4.5%-5%, the lowest expansion goal since 1991 as it grapples with challenges both at home and abroad.

It is the first time the target has been lowered since it was cut to "around 5%" in 2023. A target was not set in 2020 due to the pandemic.

The details were released during China's biggest political gathering, known as the "two sessions", alongside the release of some details of the 15th Five Year Plan for the world's second largest economy.

Beijing aims to reshape its economy as it faces issues like weak consumption, a shrinking population, an ongoing property crisis, global trade tensions and an energy crunch due to the Iran war.

One China analyst told the BBC that the lower target gives China "more room to manage

the economy" without being forced into making huge financial commitments just to hit a precise goal.

"China has used flexible targets before, particularly during the pandemic, but it's not the norm," Jason Bedford from the East Asian Institute research group added.

The two sessions event, which began on Wednesday and usually runs for at least a week, brings the country's leaders together for back-to-back meetings.

Details of China's gross domestic growth (GDP) target and its objectives under its latest Five Year Plan were included in a 46-page report published by Premier Li Qiang, seen by the BBC.

The full text of the plan, which will outline China's economic development objectives to 2030, will be voted on during the closing day of the gathering.

It is expected to be released by

state media one or two days later.

Li told delegates that the Five Year Plan will include investments in innovation, high-tech industries, scientific research and more efforts to boost household consumption.

His comments underline Beijing's concerns that weak domestic consumption makes the country too reliant on exports, as well as highlighting its ambitions to upgrade the country's manufacturing industries.

The report outlines plans for more than 100 major projects over the next five years to expand China's industrial capacity, with a focus on science and technology, transportation and energy.

Beijing also made clear its ambitions to be a global technological powerhouse, with plans to roll out artificial intelligence (AI) tools across key industries.

China aims to lead a green energy push, reducing carbon

emissions and improving environmental protection, Li wrote.

The country will also build a "childbirth-friendly society" as it addresses concerns over employment, education and healthcare, the report said.

China faces an ageing population and falling birth rates, complicating Beijing's plans to boost its economy.

In January, official figures showed that China hit its 5% economic growth target for 2025 as a whole. But Beijing also said economic expansion had slowed to 4.5% in the last three months of the year, weighed down by weak domestic spending and a long-running property crisis.

More than two-thirds of China's provinces have scaled back their growth ambitions, either lowering targets or shifting language from aiming higher than a certain rate to targeting "around" that level.

Millions of Cubans plunged into darkness as fuel crisis deepens

Millions of people were left without power in Cuba on Wednesday - the latest in a string of blackouts to hit the island as it struggles with fuel shortages worsened by pressure from the US.

Two-thirds of the island was plunged into darkness following what officials described as an "unexpected" shutdown at one of the country's main power plants.

Cuba's national electricity company UNE said the blackout affected a vast area stretching from the central province Camaguey to Pinar del Rio in the west, and including the capital, Havana.

Cuba has been hit by a wave of power cuts in recent years, with chronic fuel shortages exacerbated by a US blockade on oil from key ally Venezuela since January.

The communist nation is also suffering from a shortage of aviation fuel, leading several airlines to suspend services there and limiting international tourism. Air France became the latest carrier to do so on Wednesday.

The cause of Wednesday's outage was sparked by a breakdown at the Antonio Guiteras thermometric plant, about 100km (62 miles) east of Havana, authorities said.

The national electricity company said efforts were under way to restore services.

The blackout is the second outage to affect Cuba's western

region in the past three months.

Creaking infrastructure has been compounded by fuel shortages, resulting in a crisis that has disrupted public transport and rubbish collection.

Cuba, which relies heavily on imported fuel to generate electricity, has partly survived crippling Western sanctions due to the help of its allies in the region, including the left-wing Venezuelan government.

Venezuela was believed to have sent around 35,000 barrels of oil a day to Cuba - providing about half the island's oil needs - before the former's President Nicolas Maduro was captured by US forces in early January.

Since then, the US has seized a number of shipments of oil bound for Cuba.

Power cuts lasting up to 18 hours a day have affected hospital emergency wards, dialysis patients and pumping stations.

The US and Cuba have had a strained relationship since the communist Fidel Castro overthrew a US-backed government in 1959. US economic and trade embargoes on Cuba have been in place since 1960.

US President Donald Trump has made no secret of his desire for a change of leadership in Cuba, threatening tariffs on goods imported into the US from any country that provides oil to the Caribbean nation.

Air France said it was halting services to Havana from the end of March until mid-June, citing fuel shortages.



ECONOMIC GROWTH MEETING:
Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang on 5 March

Trade court orders tariff refunds in setback for Trump administration

A federal judge has cleared the way for thousands of businesses to receive refunds for tariffs that the Supreme Court struck down last month.

The US Court of International Trade on Wednesday ordered Customs and Border Protection to issue refunds for levies US President Donald Trump introduced last year under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

"All importers of record whose entries were subject to IEEPA duties are entitled to the benefit" from the high court's ruling, Judge Richard Eaton wrote.

The payment process remains murky. But the trade court decision marks a setback for Trump,

who has moved to replace the import taxes and bemoaned the prospect of refunds.

The ruling was specifically on a case brought by a filtration company in Tennessee, Atmus Filtration, but the judge said he will be the only one to hear cases about refunds.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the US was "likely" to implement a 15% global tariff this week, up from 10%, following conflicting statements from President Donald Trump about the new rate. It is intended to replace the IEEPA tariffs struck down by the Supreme Court.

The Trump administration brought in an estimated \$130bn (£97bn) from tariffs imposed on most goods imported into

the US through IEEPA.

Companies including the global transportation and postal firm FedEx have filed lawsuits seeking full refunds of the tariffs.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The administration has been facing growing claims from firms who had previously paid the tariffs the Supreme Court struck down.

Dan Anthony, with We Pay the Tariffs, a small-business coalition formed to seek refunds, called the decision a "victory" in a statement.

"American small businesses have waited long enough. A full, fast, and automatic refund process is what these businesses

are owed and anything less is unacceptable," he said.

Significant questions remain about what US import tax policies will look like going forward.

Last April, Trump announced "Liberation Day" tariffs on dozens of countries, with rates starting at 10% and climbing toward 50% in some cases.

The duties kicked off a flurry of trade negotiations as countries pushed to secure lower rates in exchange for promises of investment and other changes.

The US Supreme Court's judgement struck those down last month, as well as some of the administration had previously announced on goods from Mexico, Canada and China, citing emergency powers.

Texas lawmaker admits 'lapse in judgement' in affair with aide

US Congressman Tony Gonzales has admitted to having an extra-marital affair with an aide, having previously denied that the relationship happened.

The Texas Republican, who is married with six children, said the relationship with married staff member Regina Santos-Aviles, who died by suicide last year, was a "mistake" and a "lapse in judgement".

"I take full responsibility for my actions," Gonzales, 45, told a podcast.

His admission came hours after a House of Representatives panel launched an ethics investigation into the relationship, and ahead of a primary run-off election. Gonzales had previously dismissed the allegations as "blackmail" and a "coordinated" attack to unseat him.

The primary race to decide whether Gonzales can remain as the congressional district's Republican candidate is headed to a May run-off after neither Gonzales nor rival Brandon Herrera crossed the 50% vote threshold earlier this week.

Whoever becomes the par-

ty's nominee will stand in November's midterm election. The district, which runs along the US-Mexico border, is heavily Republican.

Gonzales was endorsed by US President Donald Trump before the affair allegations surfaced.

The lawmaker is now facing growing calls for his resignation, including from fellow Republicans. Among them are South Carolina Congresswoman Nancy Mace, who has accused him of "predatory behaviour".

Santos-Aviles died in September 2025, after setting herself on fire near her home in Uvalde, Texas. The medical examiner ruled her death a suicide, according to the BBC's US partner CBS News.

In an interview released on Wednesday, Gonzales told conservative podcaster Joe Pags that Santos-Aviles' death had nothing to do with the affair, saying she was "thriving" at work.

"I had absolutely nothing to do with her tragic passing," he said. "And in fact, I was shocked just as much as everyone else."

Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

Art heists: Wearing masks of art collectors

Never pay money to receive money. A real collector pays for the art and the shipping. If told to pay administrative fees, customs clearance, or insurance upfront, you are the one being sold a lie

I still remember vividly the stories told to us by our grandparents while growing up, long before we could read and write. I remember being told of how our communities were rode over by horses mounted by white mercenaries who came with the holy book on one side, the intimidating sword on the other side, to first become our friends, then annex our kingdoms, depose our kings, kill the stubborn ones that tried to defend their communities and then hoisted their flags as sign of victory, control of these conquered kingdoms. We were told then with songs to accompany these evening stories, how many of our people were taken prisoners but later sold into slavery into foreign lands. What a happy sad story! Especially the part where ritual masks, deities carved in hard-to-get woods, with creative fast-fingers directed by unknown thoughts. Oh, and the bronzes from Benin Empire, and many other forms of sacred arts that suffered similar fate, inspired by ancient artistry from the wells of geni minds.

Our people saw deities and a way of life and worship in these masks and other art forms, but the white mercenaries and merchants saw only just pure arts with diverse markets waiting for it to be sold. Can we then call these merchants who killed for and carted away these bronzes, carved and sculpted deities into the open market "Arts Collectors" or "Arts Heist Merchants"?

In the sun-drenched various galleries scattered across Nigeria today, and the bustling creative hubs, creative studios littered in our cities, a new kind of mercenaries, merchants, predators are on the prowl. They are stalking the Nigeria's thriving art communities. They do not carry weapons, shoot canons, ride in decorated horses with love for raiding, and they do not break into vaults at midnight to steal arts, instead, they arrive via polished WhatsApp messages, sophisticated LinkedIn profiles, and emails dripping with the vocabulary of high society with a great knowledge and taste for the arts. They call themselves the "collectors," the "patrons," and the "curators." But under this facade of aesthetic appreciation lies a cold, calculated machinery of financial predation. If you fall in love with their write ups, or well rehearsed baritone voices, you would only increase the names of victims on their list.

Nigeria with over 200 million

people, can beats her chest of having quiet a good number of great painters, bronze casters, sculptures, wood carvers, mixed metal artists and so on, but in all, comes the unprecedented global traction, as Africa contemporary arts are fetching record prices in Europe and America. This craze for African mix arts as well as artifacts have created and given a huge rise to art thieves. These fraudsters are increasingly donning the dark masks of art collectors to exploit the dreams of local artists and the reputation of established galleries.

Do we still remember recently the bold move by IWALEWA ArtsGallery? If not for their timely response to uprooting the seed of fraud, many galleries, curators and art creators, may have fallen in love with suicide. According to ThisDay newspapers, these arts thieves did not just stole or borrowed a renowned art name, but "weaponised it, transforming a trusted name into a bait for a meticulously crafted deception." This simple shows that many galleries across the globe have been bitten by these venomous art thieves, and who knows how many did survive such bites? They know the strength of the new media and very bold in making the best of it negatively. They went as far as fabricating a fictitious affiliation with Caterpillar Inc.-none other than the global industrial titan- claiming a spurious partnership under the guise of an "Art Acquisition & Exhibition Program (2024-2029)."

This, surely, was not a petty street scam; it was a high-stakes digital impersonation designed to dismantle the trust between a pillar of the Nigerian art community and its constituents worldwide. Remember too, that Nigeria reputation in connection with digital scam is a stigma we are trying very hard to wipe off our skins with so much efforts. If this art theft had scaled through, Nigeria art galleries would have been worse off and many foreign media would have made it look like Nigeria having a taste of a bitter pill dole out by some of our fraudsters. The report would have died just almost like it would have surfaced.

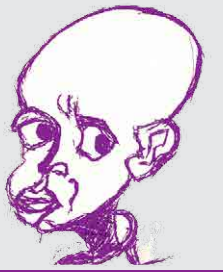
These fraudsters are predators, who watch their prey's every moves to make sure they don't lose in the process of engagement. They are like seasoned hunters who know how to set up irresistible baits, and how to track the hunted. Who won't swallow the bait for an invitation to participate in an exclusive international exhibition in the United States. I can tell you for free that to many emerg-

ing Nigerian artists, such an offer is a career-defining golden ticket. However, the price of entry was a familiar litany of red flags, ranging from requests for sensitive banking details and administrative fees, to how such fees were to be used to facilitate the international transit of works that would never actually had let the country, except the monies.

The Three Faces of the Modern Art Scam these fraudsters wear when targeting the Nigerian market posing as the "Generous Overseas Patron, as Tech-Savvy Collectors, and the Corporate Curator." The Nigeria art communities would always be a beehive for these art thieves now, just as it were whey they came in the guise of free trade that led to widespread invasion of palaces, shrine sites all in the bid to loot. Remember also, that many families whose ancestry were set-asides tasked with only creating these masks of deities for their communities people then, have educated children, who now transformed some of those knowledge into various genres of African art forms. These are people born into a traditional art cult not exposed to what are taught in Fine and Applied Arts Departments in Universities. I am not referring to the study of these unique arts or its philosophy but a family gift passed from generations to generations all in the bid to make its value and appreciation greater. With transferred family gifts mixed into various art forms learnt in schools, certainly a new trend of arts must be available to be appreciated worldwide by arts lovers as well as arts thieves.

Amongst other factors making these arts fraudsters to get some preys and vanish into thin air is the cross-border nature of art sales, which makes it difficult for law enforcement to handle with ease. A fraudster can operate a WhatsApp account from a remote location while posing as a buyer in Dubai, making recovery of funds nearly impossible once they leave the Nigerian banking system. The Nigerian creative community must have to weaponise education to fight back. The National Gallery of Art and various private foundations have begun circulating "Scam Alerts" to help artists spot the mask before it's too late. This and being on high alert would save arts lovers, curators and creators from being scammed. They should be wary of vague interest, like when faced by an arts collector who wants to buy any five art pieces but never asking about the medium, dimensions, or inspiration.

TATAFO



Wia awa moats for Benin City?

Dem nor fit born you for Benin City, bury ya placenta for awa soil, and you com grow up to say, you nor no wetin Benin pipo de call "Iya" wey mean MOAT. If you nor still no say dis moat or Iya as Benin pipo de call am, na wetin evri person dem born for hia, or true son of de soil must no, naim be say, dem need to do DNA for you sharp sharp and e get why. You laik, you fit take my yanings like say na joke o! But las las nor be me go open my mouth to yan you say de Benin Moat no be just ordinary gutter or hole for ground wey gofment do for eroshon wota to de pass.

Una see dis moat I de yan about so, na one of de ogbonge man-made earthwork for de whole wide world bifor de mashin age. We de yan about somtin wey awa ancestors use dia ordinary bare hands and simple tools dig, just to protect de Great Benin Kingdom.

But today, if you waka round de City, from Akpakpava go reach Third Junction, or you pass Sapele Road go reach Sakponba, you go want cry. Abi na de one wey pass Adesogbe road? Eniways, pipo don yan am say, wetin pipo nor value, dem can't fit to take care of or protect. Jus imagine de moat wey suppose be awa pride wey we for de take make iyanga, awa own "Eiffel Tower" or "Great Wall of China," don turn emababa, wey mean somtin wey nor serious wey pikins de take play. Na who do us laik dis?

De kwesion wey evribodi dey ask now na be say, na wetin exately happen to all of awa Moats? Na wetin fit difit awa moats laik yard wey dem trowey bomb put? Bifor we start to yan about de wahala wey de ground now, make we small-small look back, and we go see say awa ancestors dem no be small pipo at all. During de time of Oba Oguola (around 1280 AD) and later Oba Ewuare de Great (around 1460 AD), naim dem dig all dis moats and na for two main risons: Defense and Boundari. During dat time so, all de moats no easy to climb, and nor also easy at all to cross. If as at dat time, enemy wan attack de Benin Kingdom, dem go meet dis deep pit wey must to stop dem an bicom dia obstaku. Dis Moat so, long pass 15,000 kilometers and if you com join all of dem togeda for de whole old Benin Empire, na anoda tin be dat. Even de Oyinbo pipo, wey com Benin Empire for 1897 dat time, shocktalize as dem eyes see wetin dem neva see for dem life bifor. Na so dem open mouth for grand gbuoor as awa moats be laik abracadabra for dem eye. De rison wey make dem shocktalize na bicos, dem neva see dat kain engineering wonder wonder work bifor.

Oya na, make we fast-forward to 2026, dis tori don change. Na we even com shocktalized pass de Oyinbo pipo dem. Instead of tourists to dey troop com see dis man-made wonder, na different

tin we de see. Pipo don turn de moats into dem latrin, de trowey eni kain dorti dia, kormunities wey de nia de moats don sell dem to de pipo wey fit pay put to build dia houses, shops, and religious houses put. Dis pipo don go fill de place with sand, as dem de do for Lekki for Lagos, com block de way, and build tins put. If moat na human being, him nor go don kpai or give up since? Bicos of all dis yamayama behavior, awa Moats wey suppose de deep don turn normal grand finish.

But afta we don abuse awa moats fin-ish, de mata com be laik adumadubodi. De rison why be say, as pipo don block de natural flow of wota if heavy rain fall, de wota kukuma de enta pipo houses, religion centas, bizness centas, streets and evri wia. So dia for na, if small rain jus fall, you go see pipo for television de cry beg gofment to com helep dem as wota de fall dem houses, de carri pipo, de fall eletrik poles and many oda tins. The Moat wey suppose helep us de drain wota comot as rain fall, don turn to Wetin de carri wota com diffrent areas. De sand wey rain dey carri follow bodi don kukuma fill de remaining place, and de all de fences wey pipo build.

If we wan tell awafes de truth, de blame reach evribodi hand. From gofment wey don carri mega phone de shout for centuries say dem wan revive awa moats but nor do eni tin as no beta law de to gbab de pipo wey sell and buy all dis moats finish. Moats wey de oda kontris wey nor reach awa own na real National Monument wey de bring billions of money to dem from tourism.

We as citizens nor jus try at all, bicos we no jus value wetin we get. We only de see dis Moats as big gutter instead of Big History. If you see ya neighbor de pour dirti inside Moat and you keep kwayet, you don join cause de problem. And pipo just feel say awa history no mata reach de shop, house or religious centas wey dem build on top dis moats.

You fit ask say, "wetin concern me for inside dis moat mata? Afta all, de Moat don old, make we move on." Whosai! E nor be laik dat! De rison na bicos say, History na Identity. If we lose lose de Moat Kpatakpata, we don lose de physical proof of how great awa pipo be. We no fit de tell awa children tori of Great Benin when de evidence don disappear. And make we nor forget say, money dey dis Moat! If de Moats clean, and we get walkway, museums, and parks round am, walahi, tourists from Europe, America, and oda parts of Africa go de com. Hotel go full, transporters go get work, and Benin City go bubble with legit foreign exchange. And make we nor forget say, moat wey dem maintain wella na natural drainage system. E go helep to reduce de heavy flood wey de catch many parts of Benin eni time rain fall.

Friday Sermon

Zakatul Fitr and it's importance

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, we seek His help and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whomsoever He allows to go astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is His servant and Messenger.

Dear brothers and sisters in Islam, let us fear Allah (Taqwa), for Taqwa is the provision of the believers.

Allah says in the Qur'an: "O you who believe, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except in a state of Islam."

Today's sermon is about Zakatul Fitr and its importance.

Zakatul Fitr is a special charity that Allah has made obligatory upon every Muslim at the end of the month of Ramadan.

It is a duty upon every Muslim who has the means, whether male or female, young or old, free person or servant. The head of the household may pay it on behalf of his dependents.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) made Zakatul Fitr compulsory for Muslims.

Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) made Zakatul Fitr obligatory on every Muslim, one sa' of dates or barley, to be given before the Eid prayer.

Dear believers, Zakatul Fitr serves two major purposes.

First, it purifies the fasting person from any shortcomings that may have occurred during the fast.

During Ramadan, we strive to fast sincerely, but we may fall into mistakes such as idle talk, anger, or negligence. Zakatul Fitr acts as a purification for those shortcomings.

Second, it helps the poor and needy, allowing them to share in the joy of Eid. Islam is a religion of compassion and social justice. By giving Zakatul Fitr, we ensure that the less privileged members of society can celebrate Eid without worry or hunger.

Brothers and sisters, the amount of Zakatul Fitr traditionally prescribed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) is one sa' of staple food such as rice, wheat, dates, or similar items commonly eaten in the community.

In many places today, scholars also allow it to be given in monetary value equivalent to the staple food.

It is very important that Zakatul Fitr is given before the Eid prayer. If it is given after the Eid prayer, it will be considered ordinary charity and not Zakatul Fitr. Therefore, every Muslim should make effort to give it early so it reaches the needy in time.

Let us remember that Islam encourages generosity, especially in Ramadan.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was the most generous of people, and he was



even more generous during Ramadan.

Dear Muslims, do not neglect this important obligation. Give it with sincerity, and make sure it reaches those who truly deserve it.

The companions narrated exactly how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) instructed them to give it.

Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri (RA) said: "We used to give Zakatul Fitr at the time of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) one sa' of food, and our food at that time was barley, raisins, dried yogurt (cheese), and dates."

(Reported in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim)

Another narration from Ibn Umar (RA) states: "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) obligated Zakatul Fitr as one sa' of dates or one sa' of barley upon every Muslim, slave or free, male or female, young or old, and he ordered that it be given before the people go out for the Eid prayer." (Bukhari and Muslim)

From these hadiths we learn how the Prophet (peace be upon him) carried it out: It was given as food, not originally as money. The amount was one sa' (about 2.5-3 kg of staple food). The foods commonly given were: Dates, Barley, Raisins,

Dried cheese (aqit). And other staple foods of the community.

It is important to emphasise that it must be distributed before the Eid prayer

”
Let us use this opportunity to spread kindness and compassion. Look around your community and identify those who need assistance.

so the poor can benefit on the day of Eid.

In places like Nigeria, scholars say it can be given in staple foods such as: Rice, Maize, Millet, beans, Garri or other local staple foods.

Some scholars also allow giving the equivalent value in money if it benefits the poor more.

I say these words of mine, and I seek forgiveness from Allah for myself and for you. Seek His forgiveness, for He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad, his family, his companions, and those who follow them until the Day of Judgment.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we approach the end of Ramadan, we should reflect on what we have gained during this blessed month which includes increased faith, patience, discipline, and closeness to Allah.

Zakatul Fitr reminds us that our worship is not only between us and Allah but also involves our responsibility toward society. Islam builds a community where the rich support the poor and the strong help the weak.

Let us use this opportunity to

spread kindness and compassion. Look around your community and identify those who need assistance. They must not come and tell you all their problems before you help them. Try and identify them by yourself and support them. They include: the poor, widows, orphans, and struggling families. Your Zakatul Fitr may bring happiness to a household that has nothing to eat on the day of Eid.

We ask Allah to accept our fasting, our prayers, our charity, and all our acts of worship during Ramadan.

O Allah, forgive our sins, guide us to the straight path, grant us peace and security in our land, and bless our families and our communities.

Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and generosity to relatives and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression. He admonishes you that you may take heed.

Remember Allah, the Most High, and He will remember you. Thank Him for His blessings and He will increase you.

Abdul-Kadir Abdullah is the president of the Muslim Media Practitioners of Nigeria (MMPN), Edo State Chapter.

Feature

A WAR UNFOLDING BEFORE A GENERATION

Youth, power and the US–Iran–Israel conflict

CHUKWUFUMNAYAN ADIGWE

For many young people around the world, war once felt like something confined to history books. It was a subject encountered in Cold War chapters or seen in documentaries about the Middle East. But the unfolding confrontation involving the United States, Iran and Israel has brought the reality of war into the everyday conversations of a generation that grew up in the digital age.

Today's youth are not waiting weeks to read about events in newspapers. They are seeing videos of missile interceptions minutes after they occur. They follow live updates from journalists, analysts and ordinary citizens across social media platforms. For them, this conflict is not distant or abstract; it is immediate, emotional and deeply unsettling.

To understand how the current crisis developed, it is necessary to examine the long history of tension between these countries. For decades, Israel has regarded Iran as its most dangerous regional adversary. Israeli leaders have repeatedly warned that Iran's nuclear programme could eventually lead to the development of nuclear weapons — a prospect they say would threaten Israel's very existence.

Iran, however, maintains that its nuclear programme is intended solely for civilian purposes such as energy generation and scientific research. Despite these assurances, mistrust between the two nations has remained profound. Israel has long accused Iran of supporting armed groups hostile to it across the Middle East, while Iran has condemned Israel's military actions in the region and its close alliance with the United States.

For many years, this rivalry unfolded largely in the shadows through intelligence operations, cyberattacks and proxy confrontations. Analysts frequently described it as a "shadow war." In recent years, however, that shadow conflict has become increasingly visible.

One of the turning points came in 2024 when Israel carried out a strike on an Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus, Syria. The attack killed several Iranian military officials and provoked outrage in Tehran. Iran responded with a massive barrage of drones and missiles directed at Israel — the first time the two countries had exchanged such large-scale direct attacks.

For many young observers across the world, that moment felt like a line had been crossed. What had previously been a tense but indirect rivalry suddenly appeared to be evolving into a far more dangerous confrontation.

The situation escalated further in 2025. In June of that year, Israel launched coordinated airstrikes targeting key Iranian nuclear facilities and military installations. The attacks were intended to weaken Iran's nuclear infrastructure and halt further development of its programme.

Iran retaliated swiftly. Missiles and drones were launched towards Israeli territory, and air defence systems across the region were activated as the



U.S. AND ISRAEL LAUNCHED A MAJOR ATTACK ON IRAN ON SATURDAY

skies filled with projectiles.

The United States soon became directly involved, supporting Israeli operations and launching strikes on several Iranian nuclear facilities, including sites believed to be connected to uranium enrichment.

For nearly two weeks, the region braced for the possibility of a full-scale war.

That intense period of confrontation became informally known as the "Twelve-Day War." When a ceasefire was eventually announced, it brought a moment of relief. Yet the calm did little to resolve the underlying tensions that had brought the region to the brink.

Many analysts warned at the time that the ceasefire resembled a pause rather than a lasting solution.

Those warnings soon proved prophetic.

By early 2026, tensions had risen again. In late February, the United States and Israel launched a fresh wave of strikes on Iranian nuclear and military infrastructure. Explosions were reported in several locations across Iran, including areas near the capital.

For people watching from outside the region, the images were deeply unsettling — night skies illuminated by explosions, emergency sirens echoing through cities, and civilians rushing for safety.

Iran responded with force. Waves of drones and missiles were launched not only towards Israel but also towards locations across the Middle East hosting American military facilities.

Some of the projectiles were directed at bases in Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The attacks illustrated how quickly a regional confrontation could expand beyond its original battleground.

Within days, what began as a series of strikes had evolved into a wider regional crisis.

For young people following the war, one of the most striking features has been the speed at which the story develops. Every few hours brings new developments — another missile exchange, another diplomatic statement, another prediction from analysts about what might happen next.

Beyond the military developments, however, there is growing concern about the human cost of the conflict.

Wars are often discussed in terms of strategy and power, but for the people living in the affected regions, they are a daily reality. Families worry about air strikes. Businesses close early as tensions rise. Parents try to reassure frightened children when sirens sound in the night.

These human moments are often lost in the language of geopolitics, yet they remain the real stories behind every conflict.

Young people around the world are increasingly aware of this reality. Many students and young professionals are discussing the war in classrooms, on podcasts and across social media platforms. Some analyse the political decisions that led to the confrontation, while others focus on its humanitarian consequences.

In this sense, the youth perspective adds something valuable to the global conversation — empathy combined with curiosity.

There is also a growing awareness among younger generations that global conflicts are no longer as distant as they once seemed.

The Middle East remains one of the world's most critical energy regions. Instability there can affect global oil supplies and international shipping routes. Already, concerns have been raised about the safety of the Strait of Hormuz, a vital corridor through which a significant portion of the world's oil passes.

If tensions escalate further, the economic consequences could extend far beyond the region. Higher fuel prices, rising transportation costs and broader economic uncertainty could affect countries thousands of kilometres away.

For young people entering adulthood in an already complex global economy, these ripple effects carry real significance.

Another factor shaping the youth perspective is the nature of information in the digital era. In previous generations, news about wars arrived mainly through official channels — government briefings, newspaper reports and scheduled television broadcasts.

Today, the flow of information is constant.

Young people watch videos recorded by civilians during missile attacks. They follow journalists reporting from the ground. They read commentary from analysts, diplomats and activists across digital platforms.

This continuous stream of information can be overwhelming, but it also creates a sense of connection. People living far from the conflict often feel emotionally invested in what is happening.

At the same time, the digital age has made it easier for young voices to be heard. Across the world, youth activists and commentators are calling for diplomacy, humanitarian assistance and restraint from all sides.

Their message is straightforward but powerful: war should never be the only option.

The leaders involved in the confrontation, however, view the situation through very different lenses. Israeli officials argue that military action is necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Iranian leaders insist they are defending their sovereignty against foreign aggression.

The United States has framed its involvement as an effort to neutralise security threats linked to Iran's military capabilities.

Each side believes it is acting in the interest of national security. Yet history has repeatedly shown that wars often produce consequences far beyond their original objectives.

As the conflict continues, analysts warn that further escalation could draw additional regional actors into the confrontation. Armed groups aligned with Iran, as well as other regional powers, could become involved if tensions deteriorate further.

That possibility worries many observers.

Amid the uncertainty, however, one fact is clear: the younger generation is paying close attention.

Young people are asking questions about diplomacy, accountability and the role of international institutions. They are debating whether global systems designed to prevent war are still functioning effectively.

Most importantly, they are reminding the world that behind every missile launch and military operation are ordinary people whose lives may be changed forever.

The story of the US–Iran–Israel conflict is still unfolding, and its ultimate outcome remains uncertain.

But for today's youth, the crisis is already shaping how they understand global politics, power and responsibility.

It is teaching them that decisions made in distant capitals can reverberate across the planet.

And perhaps most importantly, it is reminding them that the future of global peace will depend not only on governments and military alliances but also on the awareness, engagement and humanity of the next generation now watching history unfold.

FEATURE

The DNA test challenge, why is it now a problem in relationships?

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

The DNA Test Challenge is becoming a problem in relationships in Nigeria, with many men discovering they're not the biological fathers of their children. Statistics show that about 25-27% of paternity tests conducted in Nigeria reveal that the presumed father is not the biological parent.

This trend is attributed to various factors, including infidelity, lack of accountability, and societal pressures. Many men are now seeking DNA testing due to suspicions of paternity fraud, with some even conducting secret tests without their partner's knowledge.

The consequences are far-reaching, with emotional trauma, financial burdens, and even social stigma for those involved. Experts warn that Nigeria's lack of specific paternity fraud laws leaves men vulnerable and highlights the need for legal reforms.

Firstborn children, especially sons, are most affected, with 64% of tested firstborn males not sharing biological ties with their presumed fathers.

PEOPLE IN NIGERIA SEEK DNA PATERNITY TESTS FOR VARIOUS REASONS, INCLUDING:

Personal Peace of Mind: To resolve doubts and uncertainties about a child's parentage, providing emotional closure and clarity.

Legal Purposes: For child custody cases, inheritance claims, and immigration requirements, as DNA tests are often required by courts and embassies.

Immigration: To prove biological relationships for visa applications and family reunification.

Medical Reasons: To understand potential genetic health risks and make informed medical decisions.

Relationship Clarity: To establish a clear understanding of parent-child relationships, strengthening family bonds.

Disputes and Doubts: To resolve suspicions of infidelity or paternity fraud, with 27% of Nigerian men tested discovering they're not biological fathers.

These tests are highly accurate, with a 99.9% accuracy rate when paternity is confirmed.

Rebuilding trust after paternity fraud is tough, but possible. Here are some steps couples can take:

Acknowledge and process emotions: Both partners need to recognize and work through their feelings.

Open and honest communication: Have transparent conversations about what happened and why.

Identify underlying issues: Address relationship problems that may have led to the infidelity.

Counseling or therapy: Professional help can guide the healing process.

Rebuild intimacy: Gradually work on emotional and physical connection.

Focus on co-parenting: Prioritize the child's well-being and maintain a united front.

It's a long journey, and trust needs to be earned back. Some questions to consider:

- Are both partners willing to work through the pain and rebuild?

- Is the relationship strong enough to withstand this revelation?

- What's the plan for moving forward, together or separately?

Some advocates have asked for DNA tests to be made mandatory.

That's a complex issue. Making DNA paternity testing mandatory in Nigeria could have both pros and cons.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Reduce paternity fraud: Encourage honesty and accountability in relationships

Protect children's rights: Ensure kids have accurate info about their biological parents

Prevent inheritance disputes: Clarify family lineage and reduce conflicts

HOWEVER, THERE ARE CONCERNS:

Privacy and consent: Mandatory testing could infringe on individuals' rights

Social and emotional impact: Results could lead to family breakdowns and stigma

Implementation challenges: Logistics, costs, and access to testing facilities

The costs associated with DNA tests in Nigeria vary depending on the type of test and clinic. Here are some approximate prices:

Paternity DNA Test*: N100,000 - N500,000 (standard test), N290,000 (Surjen), N250,000 (Onco-Genomics), N260,000 (Best Health care online), N310,000 (DNA Testing Centre)

Prenatal Paternity Test*: N800,000 - N1,500,000 (standard test), N2,300,000 (Onco-Genomics), N2,800,000 (DNA Testing Centre)

Legal DNA Test: N200,000 - N300,000 (standard test), N300,000 - N500,000 (non-standard test), N430,000 (DNA Testing Centre)

Immigration DNA Test*: N200,000 - N300,000 (standard test), N350,000 - N430,000 (DNA Testing Centre)

Some clinics offer additional services, such as home sample collection, and may charge extra for these services.

The time it takes to get DNA paternity test results in Nigeria varies depending on the clinic and type of test. Here are some approximate turnaround times:

5-7 working days: Smart DNA Nigeria and SYNLAB Nigeria typically provide results within this timeframe.

10 business days: Surjen and some other clinics take around 10 business days to deliver results

2-3 working days: Some clinics like EasyDNA Nigeria offer express testing with results in 2-3 working days.

1-2 working days: Greenplace Healthcare claims to provide results in as little as 1-2 working days

Keep in mind that these times are approximate and may vary depending on the complexity of the test and the clinic's workload.

DNA paternity test can be done without the mother's participation. This is often referred to as a "non-maternal" or "father-child" DNA test.

THE TEST TYPICALLY INVOLVES



COLLECTING DNA SAMPLES FROM:

- The alleged father
- The child

THE MOTHER'S DNA IS NOT REQUIRED, BUT IT CAN BE HELPFUL IN SOME CASES TO:

- Increase accuracy
- Rule out potential maternal DNA contamination

Without the mother's sample, the test will still determine if the alleged father is the biological father, but with a slightly lower accuracy rate.

FOR A DNA PATERNITY TEST IN NIGERIA, TYPICAL REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

ID verification: Alleged father and child's IDs (e.g., passport, driver's license)

Consent forms: Signed consent from all parties involved (or legal guardians)

DNA samples: Buccal swabs or blood samples from alleged father and child

Clinic or lab appointment: Book an appointment with a reputable DNA testing clinic

Some clinics may require additional info, like:

DNA paternity test can be done without the mother's participation. This is often referred to as a "non-maternal" or "father-child" DNA test.

-Relationship documentation: Birth certificate, marriage certificate, etc.

- Witnesses: Some clinics or legal cases might require witnesses

Check with the specific clinic for their exact requirements. DNA paternity tests are highly accurate, with a typical accuracy rate of 99.9% or higher when done correctly. To ensure accuracy, it's crucial to use a reputable testing clinic that follows proper procedures.

IN NIGERIA, DNA PATERNITY TEST RESULTS CAN BE USED AS EVIDENCE IN COURT, PARTICULARLY IN CASES LIKE:

- Child custody disputes
- Inheritance claims
- Paternity fraud
- Immigration cases

FOR COURT ADMISSIBILITY:

-Use a reputable clinic*: Ensure the clinic is accredited and follows proper chain of custody

Get a legal DNA test: Request a "legal" or "court-admissible" test

Proper documentation: Ensure the report is certified and notarized

Courts may consider DNA evidence alongside other factors. Consult a lawyer for specific guidance on using DNA test results in Nigerian courts.

You can do a DNA paternity test at home in Nigeria, but there are some things to consider:

Home collection kits: Some clinics offer kits for sample collection at home

Self-collection: You'll need to follow instructions carefully for valid results

Lab analysis: Samples are sent to a lab for analysis

However, for legal purposes (like court cases), it's best to use a clinic with proper chain of custody.

Not necessarily, but it's helpful. If you're using the DNA test for personal reasons, you might not need a lawyer.

However, if you're planning to use the results in court (e.g., for child custody, inheritance, or paternity disputes), it's a good idea to:

Consult a lawyer: They'll guide you on procedures and ensure the test is done correctly

Get legal advice: Understand your rights and implications

Some people also seek lawyers for: Interpreting results

Handling disputes

Ensuring admissibility

The main difference between home DNA tests and legal DNA tests is the purpose and level of documentation.

HOME DNA TESTS:

For personal information only

Typically less expensive

Results are not court-admissible

Often done without strict chain of custody

Legal DNA tests:

For use in court or official proceedings

Typically more expensive

Results are court-admissible

- Done with strict chain of custody and documentation

Think of it like this: if you just want to satisfy your curiosity, a home test might be fine. But if you're planning to use the results for legal purposes, you'll want a legal DNA test.

TO ENSURE YOUR DNA TEST IS VALID:

Use a reputable clinic: Look for accreditation and experience

- Follow procedures: Adhering to sample collection and documentation guidelines

- Chain of custody: Ensure proper handling and tracking of samples

- Get certified results: Request a certified report

SOME THINGS TO CHECK:

- Clinic accreditation: Verify with relevant authorities

- Lab standards: Check if they meet international standards (e.g., ISO 17025)

- Documentation: Ensure proper IDs, consent forms, and witness signatures (if needed)

By taking these steps, you'll increase the likelihood of your DNA test results being valid and reliable.

Okpebholo's hands-on approach exemplifies people-centered leadership

PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo's decision to join protesting residents in Benin City, recently, can be argued as offering a clear window into what scholars in the hereafter can describe as the populist character of his SHINE agenda. And it is at a time when public frustration over electricity supply has reached a boiling point in most parts of the State: the governor chose direct engagement over distant commentary, introducing a leadership style that puts visible responsiveness at the centre of governance.

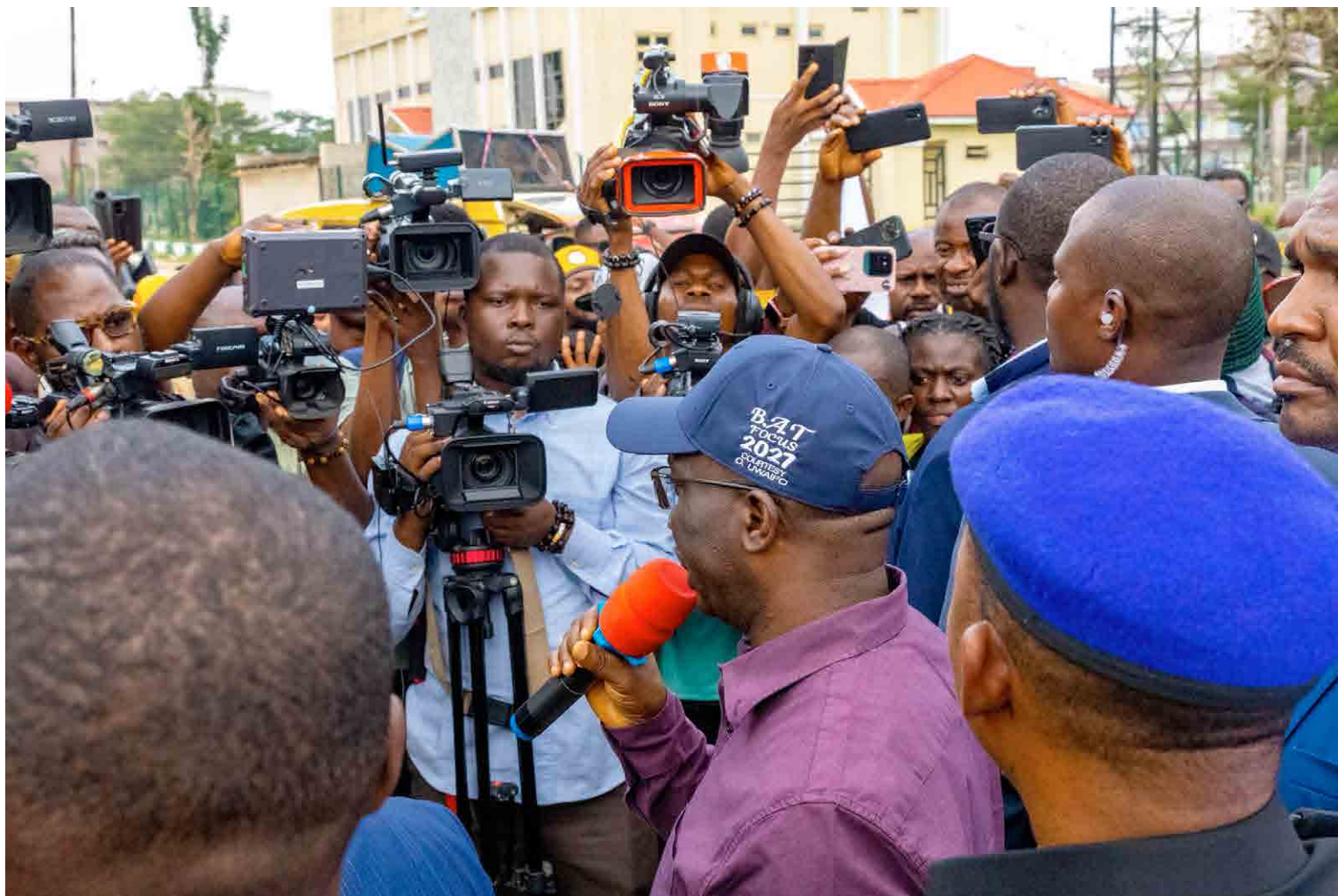
Earlier the Governor unexpectedly stopped at Ring Road, Benin City, where many youths and residents had gathered to protest prolonged black-out and billing concerns involving the Benin Electricity Distribution Company, BEDC. He could have dispatched officials or issue an official statement; No. He stepped into the crowd, telling demonstrators that like one of them, he had come to identify with their concerns. For him, it was a legitimate concern. The moment reflected a hands-on approach that has become increasingly associated with the SHINE agenda of the governor.

His message to the protesters was firm. He acknowledged that the electricity challenge affects everyone across the state, from rural communities to urban households, and even official quarters. He asked why Edo people should be subjected to persistent frustration arising therefrom. At the same time, he cautioned that serious as the situation is, what was required is careful engagement rather than emotional reactions which can become confrontational. He urged residents to remain calm while his government works toward solutions.

A man in of his words, the governor did not stop at symbolic solidarity. He immediately announced that a stakeholders' meeting would be convened and invited the protesting group to nominate representatives. That quick transition from street-level engagement to structured dialogue is central to understanding the populist tone of his SHINE agenda. It is a leadership approach that listens first but also moves quickly toward institutional response.

True to his word, the Governor convened and presided over the stakeholders' meeting in his office 24-hours after. The meeting brought together key players in the electricity value chain. At the session, he made it clear that the issues raised by residents are complex and cannot be solved by focusing on one company alone. He reminded participants that BEDC operates primarily as a service provider and does not generate electricity, a clarification aimed at broadening public understanding of the power supply chain.

Drawing from his background and experience in the telecom sector, the governor also explained that some of the meter deductions complained about by consumers are structured repayment arrangements designed to allow users start consuming power before completing payment. Howev-



EDO STATE GOVERNOR, SENATOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO WITH THE PRESS

er, he stressed that the broader concerns about supply, billing transparency and consumer confidence must be addressed comprehensively.

He went further to call for expanded engagement across the sector, including an appeal to Azura Power West Africa Limited to ensure Edo State receives adequate electricity allocation, though aligned to the National grid. His position is key to understanding the reality that Edo state's power challenges are tied to a wider national grid structure involving generation, transmission and distribution constraints.

Representatives of BEDC at the meeting highlighted supply limitations, noting that the company currently receives far less megawatts than required to effectively serve its franchise area. That disclosure reinforced the governor's position that the crisis is systemic and requires coordinated solutions rather than isolated blame.

For many students of Edo state leadership, what stands out is the sequencing of Governor Okpebholo's actions. He first met citizens at the point of protest, then moved swiftly to convene industry players, and finally pushed for broader technical engagement. This pattern reflects a governance model that combines political visibility with administrative follow-through.

The SHINE agenda, as demonstrated in this episode, rests heavily on public trust and rapid response. By physically appearing at the protest ground, the governor projected accessibility. By convening stakeholders within 24 hours, he signalled urgency. By expanding the conversation beyond a single

company, he indicated awareness of the structural depth of the problem.

Of course, engagement alone will not resolve Edo's electricity challenges. The sector remains heavily influenced by federal regulation, gas



The SHINE agenda, as demonstrated in this episode, rests heavily on public trust and rapid response. By physically appearing at the protest ground, the governor projected accessibility.



supply dynamics, and transmission capacity nationwide. Yet the political significance of the governor's intervention cannot be dismissed. In a climate where citizens often feel disconnected from decision-makers, visible responsiveness carries weight.

Residents and businesses across Edo State will ultimately judge the SHINE agenda by improvements in power stability and fairness in billing. But in terms of political messaging and citizen engagement, the recent events in Benin City have strengthened the perception of an administration attempting to stay close

to public sentiment while pursuing longer-term reforms.

For now, Governor Okpebholo has set a tone that blends empathy with action. Whether that momentum translates into lasting electricity relief will become clearer in the months ahead. What is already evident is that the SHINE agenda is being driven not only from policy desks but also from the streets where ordinary Edo people continue to demand reliable power.

• Dr Patrick Akhere Ebojele is the Chief Press Secretary to Governor Monday Okpebholo

Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Golf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

2026 World Cup: Mexico, FIFA hold security talks amid concerns after drug cartel violence

Representatives of world football's governing body, FIFA, met with Mexican security officials on Wednesday to review safety arrangements for matches scheduled to take place in the country during the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The meeting came amid heightened security concerns following a wave of violence

in several Mexican states last week. The unrest erupted after a military operation that led to the capture and death of alleged drug kingpin Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes—also known as “El Mencho”—the leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel.

Mexico's federal security secretary, Omar García Harfuch, said authorities and FIFA

officials examined intelligence assessments and operational plans designed to ensure the safety of players, officials and fans during the global tournament.

“We reviewed the intelligence, prevention and operational deployment protocols that will be implemented during this international event,” García Harfuch said in a statement shared on social media.

Mexico will co-host the 2026 World Cup alongside the United States and Canada. The country is scheduled to stage 13 matches across three host cities: Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey.

The opening match of the tournament—featuring Mexico national football team against South Africa national football team—is set to take place on June 11 at the historic Estadio Azteca in Mexico City. The stadium, currently undergoing extensive renovations, is

expected to reopen later this month with a friendly match between Mexico and the Portugal national football team on March 28. Once upgrades are complete, the venue is projected to hold approximately 87,000 spectators.

Wednesday's security meeting also included members of Mexico's Security Cabinet and authorities from Mexico City as well as the states of Jalisco and Nuevo León.

Earlier, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said federal and state security forces were fully prepared to ensure a safe tournament for visitors and participants alike.

“Security is guaranteed, and there is sufficient surveillance and inspection to ensure that absolutely no problems occur,” Sheinbaum said during her daily press briefing, adding that the country aims to host a “great and peaceful World Cup.”



SENEGAL TEAM

Crises rock Senegal Football Federation, CAS to rule next week

A major dispute surrounding the leadership of the Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) has escalated, with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) set to hear the case next week.

The controversy stems from the federation's presidential election held in September 2025, which saw Abdoulaye Fall declared the winner.

However, the outcome was challenged by rival candidate Mady Touré, who subsequently filed an appeal at CAS.

Touré has questioned the legitimacy of the electoral process and is seeking a review of the

result by the Switzerland-based sports arbitration body.

CAS is now expected to examine the petition and deliver a decisive ruling that could shape the future leadership of Senegalese football.

The tribunal will either validate the election victory of Fall or order that the electoral process be reopened, potentially paving the way for a fresh vote within the federation.

The impending decision is widely anticipated by stakeholders in Senegalese football, as it could bring clarity to the ongoing leadership crisis within the federation.

Bayelsa State Government, Nilayo Sports Management Limited announce maiden Yenagoa City International 10km race

The Bayelsa State Government has officially announced the maiden edition of the Yenagoa City International 10KM Race, a landmark sporting event designed to position the state as a premier destination for global sports tourism.

Scheduled for Saturday, April 4, 2026, the inaugural race is owned by the Bayelsa State Government and will be organized by Nilayo Sports Management Limited, Africa's leading sports management company.

Under the theme “The Reveal,” the event represents a bold unveiling of Bayelsa's immense human and cultural potential to the international community, inviting the world to witness the resilience, grit, and talent rooted in the heart of the Niger Delta.

The race will officially flag off at 9:30 a.m. from the Opolo Roundabout, guiding participants through a carefully designed 10-kilometre route that highlights the scenic beauty and vibrant atmosphere of Yenagoa.

The course will culminate at Peace Park Square, where athletes will cross the finish line into a grand celebration of endurance, unity, and community spirit.

To elevate the experience for runners and spectators alike, the finish venue will host a high-energy post-race concert featuring performances from top A-list artists, blending sport and entertainment in a festival-style atmosphere.

Registration is now open online at www.yenagoacity10kmrace.com.

Physical registration forms are also available at the Sports Department Office, Ministry of Sports, Sports Complex, Opposite First Baptist Church, Ovom, Yenagoa.

All registered participants are required to collect their race bibs and kits at the designated Peace Park Square between March 30 and April 3, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily.



Sports Department Office, officially presented to Ministry of Sports, Yenagoa City International 10KM Race

South Africa minister challenges Morocco over WAFCON hosting doubts

South Africa's sports minister has accused Morocco of creating uncertainty around the hosting of the next Women's Africa Cup of Nations and says his country is ready to step in if needed.

Gayton McKenzie, South Africa's Minister of Sports, Arts

and Culture, said the country has the infrastructure to host the 2026 edition of the tournament if Morocco withdraws from its hosting duties.

The tournament, organised by the Confederation of African Football (CAF), is currently scheduled to take place in

Morocco. It would be the third consecutive time the North African nation hosts the competition.

However, speculation has grown in recent weeks that Morocco could reconsider its commitment following the conclusion of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations earlier this year. CAF president Patrice Motsepe previously said the tournament would still go ahead in Morocco, but reports of a potential withdrawal have continued.

Speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, McKenzie said South Africa would be ready to host the event if CAF needed an alternative venue.

“If Morocco is ready to host the WAFCON because they had a brilliant AFCON, they should do so,” he said.



GAYTON MCKENZIE

Moroccan FA to hold Gala for Regragui, Unveil Ouahbi as New Coach

The Royal Moroccan Football Federation has announced plans to host a special gala to officially bid farewell to former head coach Walid Regragui.

The ceremony is intended to honour Regragui's remarkable achievements with the Morocco national football team, widely known as the Atlas Lions.

Under his leadership, Morocco made history by reaching the semi-final of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, be-

coming the first African and Arab nation to achieve the feat.

The federation said the gala will celebrate his contribution to Moroccan football and his role in one of the country's greatest sporting moments.

Following the tribute, the federation will officially introduce Mohamed Ouahbi as the new head coach of the Atlas Lions as the team begins preparations for upcoming international competitions



MOHAMED OUAHBI

George Innih Stadium Complex: A sleeping giant in Kwara State's economy

HUSSAIN OBARO

Deliberate investment in sports infrastructure witnessed a tremendous surge since inception of the current administration in the state more than seven years ago, from the construction of additional ten squash courts (including rehabilitation of the two existing ones), the first of such investments in sub-Saharan Africa, rehabilitation of the Handball courts, construction of the Table Tennis arena, massive rehabilitation works at the Rashidi Yekini Main Bowl to the ongoing reconstruction of the Indoor sports hall. Sports has never received the kind of huge investment and attention that the current government has given it since creation of the state.

Kwara is blessed to be to be one of the few states in Nigeria that has a concentration of all sports in one location, it is, how-



ever, sad that the massive edifice that has enjoyed so much investment from the government has contributed close to nothing to the internally generated revenue of the state of harmony. Criminals and hoodlums have a free run and operate freely due to unavailability of adequate security in the stadium complex, athletes and coaches are lured and poached to other states due to poor reward system, lack of state-sponsored training and

retraining programs and meager monthly stipends and low remuneration.

Arguably, the George Innih stadium complex is the only sporting edifice in Nigeria whose main gate is thrown open twenty four hours a day, all year round. The Kwara football academy, which was established to identify, nurture, expose, and sell talented footballers with the aim of bringing in revenue to the state and serv-

ing as a poverty alleviation project for poor but talented young Kwarans, has deviated from its core mandate. Fees are charged far above what the target population can afford, thereby turning the academy into an elite soccer institute for well-to-do families from outside the state.

The George Innih Stadium Complex has lots of potentials but are grossly untapped and underutilized. A sustainable security arrangement should urgently be employed in partnership with the quartet of the Nigeria police, Civil defence, the Nigeria Legion, and the vigilante association personnel to provide a robust and air-tight security to prevent activities of vandals, hoodlums, and criminal-minded elements. All entries into the stadium complex should be closed and locked latest by 10:00 PM if there are no events that linger beyond this time.



NLO digital workshop gets March 7 date

As the Nationwide League One (NLO) continues to modernise the "Cradle of Nigerian Football," it will hold a digital workshop via Google Meet on March 7.

This session aims to train managers and selected personnel from Division One and U19 Youth League clubs on how to use the new website and registration portal for the 2026 season.

In a statement from Africa's largest grassroots football league secretariat, the launch of the upgraded official website and digital registration system was announced.

The NLO highlighted the significance of the new platform, designed to simplify player licensing, improve data security, and offer a more efficient experience for all member clubs.

To ensure a smooth transition and registration process, all Club Secretaries and Ad-

ministrators are required to attend the virtual training.

Scheduled for March 7 at 9:00 AM, the training will be conducted via this Google Meet / Digital Link: <https://meet.google.com/toj-hsfh-ehc>.

The training agenda includes:

- Touring the New Interface: Overview of the 2026 NLO dashboard.

- Player and Official Registration: Uploading documents and biometric data.

- Payment Integration: Handling league fees through the portal.

- Transfer & Clearance: Managing player transfers digitally.

- Q&A: Addressing specific technical issues faced by clubs.

Important notes:

- Preparation: Ensure a stable internet connection and access to a laptop or PC during the training.

Celtic boss explains Iheanacho's limited game time after injury concerns

Kelechi Iheanacho has struggled for regular game time at Celtic F.C. this year due largely to concerns about his fitness, according to head coach Martin O'Neill.

The 29-year-old Nigerian forward joined the Scottish champions in the summer after ending his contract with Sevilla FC earlier than expected.

Iheanacho made a bright start to life in Glasgow, contributing to three goals in his first four appearances for Celtic.

However, his progress was disrupted by a hamstring injury that forced him off early in a UEFA Europa League match against SK Sturm Graz.

The striker later suffered another setback during a league game against St Mirren F.C. in December.

Since returning from those injuries, Iheanacho has featured only sparingly, playing just 59 minutes since the beginning of the year. His most recent appearance came as a brief substitute outing in Celtic's Europa League meeting with VfB Stuttgart.

O'Neill said the forward's fitness has remained a concern, although he acknowledged the player's abilities.

"I don't think he has played that much during the course of the season, to tell you the truth," O'Neill said.

"But I think he's got a good ability to hold it up. It's just in terms of full fitness and things, that's a bit of a concern."

The Northern Irish manager also admitted the Nigerian may feel frustrated by the lack of opportunities.

"I do feel for him a little bit, because my job is not to please everyone here at the football club," he said.

"To be perfectly honest, I don't think he's had a proper chance, because I thought there were other people who may be better equipped for this league at this minute."

Celtic strengthened their attacking options during the January transfer window while Iheanacho continued his recovery.

O'Neill added that the situation might have been different if he had worked with the striker during pre-season.

"It might have been a different ball game if I'd had a pre-season," he said.



KELECHI IHEANACHO

Road to semifinals begins as CAF confirms Champions League quarterfinal dates

The Confederation of African Football (Confederation of African Football) has confirmed the schedule for the quarterfinal stage of the CAF Champions League, with the competition set to resume after a brief pause following the draw.

The standout tie will see Tunisian giants Espérance Spor-

tive de Tunis take on defending champions Al Ahly SC in what promises to be one of the most anticipated clashes of the round. The first leg will be played in Radès before the decisive return match in Cairo, renewing a historic rivalry between two of Africa's most successful clubs.

Elsewhere, the battle for a place in the semifinals is expect-

ed to be equally intense. Morocco's AS FAR will face Egyptian side Pyramids FC, while South African powerhouse Mamelodi Sundowns meets Mali's Stade Malien in a tie that could produce an upset. In the remaining fixture, RS Berkane will take on Sudanese side Al Hilal SC.

With only four semifinal spots available, the two-legged encounters promise high drama where even the smallest mistake could prove decisive.

QUARTERFINAL SCHEDULE (GMT)

First Legs

- March 13 – 6:00 p.m.: Mamelodi Sundowns vs Stade Malien
- March 13 – 10:00 p.m.: AS FAR vs Pyramids FC
- March 14 – 10:00 p.m.: RS Berkane vs Al Hilal SC
- March 15 – 9:00 p.m.: Espérance Sportive de Tunis vs Al Ahly SC

Second Legs

- March 21 – 4:00 p.m.: Pyramids FC vs AS FAR

1ST LEG	14 MAR 2026	2ND LEG
RS BERKANE	22:00	AL HILAL SC
AL HILAL SC	16:00	RS BERKANE
1ST LEG	15 MAR 2026	2ND LEG
ES TUNIS	21:00	AL AHLY FC
AL AHLY FC	19:00	ES TUNIS
1ST LEG	13 MAR 2026	2ND LEG
M. SUNDOWNS	18:00	STADE MALIEN
STADE MALIEN	16:00	M. SUNDOWNS
1ST LEG	13 MAR 2026	2ND LEG
AS FAR	22:00	PYRAMIDS FC
PYRAMIDS FC	16:00	AS FAR

Postponed! CAF moves 2026 WAFCON to July!

Rasheedat Busayo Ajibade of Nigeria celebrates victory during the 2024 Women's Africa Cup of Nations final match between Morocco and Nigeria at the Olympic Stadium in Rabat, Morocco on 25 July 2025.

Rasheedat Busayo Ajibade of Nigeria celebrates victory during the 2024 Women's Africa Cup of Nations final match between Morocco and Nigeria at the Olympic Stadium in Rabat, Morocco on 25 July 2025.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has rescheduled the 2026 Women's Africa Cup of Nations to July 25 to August 16 this year.


The shift from the initial March 17 to April 3 confirmed

speculations that the tournament might suffer a postponement on the request of host Morocco bidding for more time for preparation after hosting the 2025 AFCON in January.

The continent's football administrative body confirmed the new dates for the tournament through a statement on its website indicating that,

"After discussions between CAF and its partners, FIFA and other stakeholders, CAF decided to reschedule the dates of the TotalEnergies CAF WAFCON 2026, to 25 July – 16 August 2026; to ensure the success of this important women's competition, in the light of certain unforeseen circumstances.



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HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023



December 2025: When salary becomes a prayer point

Nothing is more unsettling than a worker who labours faithfully for a month yet receives no wages. It strikes at the very foundation of dignity, productivity and trust.

Across some federal institutions in Nigeria, including Auchi Polytechnic, a disturbing salary anomaly has left a segment of staff unpaid for December 2025. What should have been a season of joy became, for many, a season of anxiety, embarrassment and quiet despair. As of the time of crafting this piece, over one hundred affected members of staff of Auchi Polytechnic have yet to receive any payment notification for their December 2025 salaries. It is disheartening; it is exasperating!

Christmas and the New Year traditionally represent periods of reflection, reunion and modest celebration. Families gather. Obligations are met. Children anticipate small gifts and festive meals. Yet for several staff members in federal institutions, December 2025 was marked, not by celebration, but by uncertainty. Salaries that should have been credited before the holidays were simply not paid, even till this moment.

The immediate impact was obvious: a gloomy Christmas and a restrained New Year. But, beyond the emotional toll lies a deeper issue — the systemic fragility of public sector payment mechanisms and the culture of blame-shifting that often accompanies administrative failure.

For many affected staff whose salaries are domiciled in Fidelity Bank, the first instinct was to attribute the delay to the bank's network instability. It therefore seemed plausible, at least initially, that the December salaries had been processed, but were simply caught in the usual web of digital inefficiencies.

Hope lingered through the Christmas week. Some waited for the familiar vibration of a credit alert. Others refreshed their banking apps repeatedly. A few made anxious trips to automated teller machines, just in case the balance had changed without notification. Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. The expected alert never came.

Gradually, it became clear that this was not merely a routine case of poor network performance. Something more fundamental was wrong.

It is now approximately three months since the December 2025 salaries were due, yet a number of affected staff members remain unpaid. This is not a minor delay measured in days. It is a prolonged withholding of earned income.

In a country where inflation continues to erode purchasing power and the cost of living rises steadily, even a short delay in salary can destabilise households. Three months is cata-



strophic. Rent, school fees, medical bills and daily sustenance cannot be deferred indefinitely. Creditors do not accept "system error" as legal tender.

The prolonged delay raises troubling questions. How can a federal institution complete a payroll cycle for some employees while others remain unpaid? Why was the problem not detected and resolved immediately? And perhaps most importantly, why has there been no clear, authoritative explanation?

As is often the case in bureaucratic crises, responsibility has travelled in circles.

According to informal explanations circulating among staff, the bank insists that it processed all valid instructions received. On the other hand, some staff believe the difficulty may have originated from the central payroll processing system under the Office of the Accountant-General.

In the absence of a single, credible statement that outlines the problem, its cause and a timeline for resolution, distrust flourishes.

There are lecturers who prepared examination scripts while uncertain how to provide for their families. There are administrative officers who reported for duty daily despite knowing that their December wages had vanished into bureaucratic limbo. There are junior staff whose modest earnings sustain extended families in rural communities.

For them, December is not merely

Salary is not a favour; it is compensation for labour already rendered. Delaying it without explanation diminishes the value of that labour.

a calendar month; it is often a period when additional financial obligations arise. School fees for the new term must be paid. Travel expenses increase. Cultural and religious expectations intensify. Being unpaid in December carries emotional weight far beyond the numerical value of the salary itself.

The humiliation of borrowing to survive while colleagues who use different banks were paid in full adds another layer of quiet resentment. Inequality within the same payroll cycle breeds suspicion and weakens institutional cohesion.

It would be unfair to suggest that the management of Auchi Polytechnic and the various staff unions have been indifferent. Reports indicate that

efforts have been made to escalate the matter and seek redress. Yet despite these attempts, the problem persists.

When institutional advocacy proves abortive, morale declines. Workers begin to question not only the efficiency of the payment system but also the strength of representation structures meant to protect their welfare. The situation therefore risks evolving from a salary dispute into a broader crisis of confidence.

This episode highlights a chronic vulnerability in Nigeria's public payroll architecture. Centralised systems, while designed to enhance transparency and eliminate ghost workers, can become paralysed by technical or procedural bottlenecks. When errors occur at a central node, the ripple effect is nationwide.

Moreover, the absence of real-time accountability mechanisms means that affected workers often receive no immediate explanation.

In a digital era where private financial institutions process millions of transactions daily with remarkable efficiency, it is troubling that salary disbursement for federal employees can remain unresolved for months.

An unpaid worker is rarely a motivated worker. Although many affected staff members continue to perform their duties professionally, it would be unrealistic to assume that morale remains unaffected.

Anxiety about unpaid wages can reduce concentration, increase irrita-

bility and dampen enthusiasm. Institutions thrive on morale. When trust in remuneration falters, productivity inevitably suffers.

At the heart of this crisis is not merely the delayed salary itself, but the absence of transparent communication. If the problem lies with a banking interface, it should be clearly stated. If it originates from central payroll processing, that too should be acknowledged. If reconciliation errors are involved, the affected staff deserve to know.

Silence breeds suspicion. Clear communication restores confidence.

Beyond resolving the immediate arrears, structural reforms are necessary. Payment systems should incorporate fail-safe mechanisms that detect partial disbursements instantly. When some employees are credited and others are not, an automatic alert should trigger immediate investigation.

Workers should not be punished for the choice of a legally approved bank. Ultimately, this issue transcends technical malfunction. It touches on dignity. Salary is not a favour; it is compensation for labour already rendered. Delaying it without explanation diminishes the value of that labour.

For an academic institution such as Auchi Polytechnic, where intellectual development and national capacity-building are core mandates, safeguarding staff welfare should be paramount. A demoralised workforce cannot effectively nurture students or sustain academic excellence.

Three months is too long. The festive season of December 2025 has come and gone. What remains is a pressing need for resolution.

The affected staff deserve clarity. They deserve prompt payment. They deserve institutional reassurance that such an episode will not recur. It is not unreasonable to expect that in a modern federal system, earned wages should be paid in full and on time.

A Christmas without pay should never become normalised. If lessons are drawn from this episode — lessons in transparency, accountability and systemic reform, then perhaps the hardship endured will at least catalyse improvement.

Until then, the December 2025 salary delay remains more than a technical anomaly. It stands as a sobering reminder that institutional efficiency is measured not in rhetoric, but in reliability.

When the December 2025 salaries are eventually disbursed, will interest be paid for the unjustifiable delay? That is the ten-kobo question.

Odaro, a columnist, lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.