

# Okpebholo vows accountability as Edo first flyover project advances

RICHARD EWEKA

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to high-quality infrastructure and strict project oversight as construction of the state's first flyover at Ramat Park, Benin

City, progresses.

During an unscheduled visit to the site, Governor Okpebholo expressed satisfaction with the pace of work and assured Edo residents that his government would not tolerate sub-standard execution.

The flyover, launched in November 2024, just a week after

he assumed office, is expected to be completed within 18 months.

The contractor, CCECC, represented by Mr Andy Duan, confirmed that 20 percent of the work had been completed, including seven pillars and underground cross beams.

He assured that the compa-

ny was committed to delivering according to specifications.

Governor Okpebholo stressed that his administration is actively monitoring projects across the state to ensure quality delivery. "We are not sleeping. We are moving around the state to inspect ongoing projects and ensure they

meet agreed standards.

The Ramat Park flyover contractor is doing well, and I am impressed with the speed and quality of materials. If this pace continues, the project will be completed on time," he said.

However, the governor issued a strong warning to underperforming contractors,

stating that any project failing to meet expectations would be revoked.

"We have visited some sites where contractors are not meeting our targets. We cannot allow mediocrity. One contractor, in particular, has

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## The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Edo govt strengthens access to justice through mediation, legal aid

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# Tinubu flags-off Benin-Asaba highway project

To be completed in 30 months  
As Umahi lauds Okpebholo's vision

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on Sunday, flagged-off the 125km Benin-Asaba Highway project. The project is expected to be completed within 30 months.

President Tinubu was represented at the flag-off by the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo.

At the flag-off, Minister of Works, Engr. Dave Umahi commended the visionary leadership of Governor Okpebholo whom

he said has turned the state into a construction site in less than 150 days in office.

The Minister used the opportunity to thank President Tinubu for his love for the people of Edo State, saying that as a Minister, he has visited the state about three times for action projects.

He also commended Governor Okpebholo whom he said has demonstrated love and commitment for his people by embarking on people-oriented projects, like

the flyover at Ramat Park in Benin City, the state capital.

"In less than 150 days in office, you have turned the entire capital city into a construction site. I commend you very highly for this foresight.

"I am an infrastructure person and when I see good infrastructure going on like the ones going on in Edo State, I feel very happy and commend you for the hard work.

"We need good infrastruc-

ture in this country. Infrastructure is the most important foundation upon which every other programme of the State or country thrives.

"Thank you so much for what you are doing for Edo people. I saw the flyover you are constructing for your people. It is great wisdom. You are not saying this should be done by the Federal Government because we don't have federal people here in Edo State but you are doing this

for the welfare of Edo people.

"You took an oath for the welfare of Edo people and you are doing justice to that, embarking on people-oriented projects that will benefit the people of Edo State.

"The government of Senator Monday Okpebholo is a government of divine inspiration and a government ordained by God. When I see people taking you to court, I say it is because they don't hear from God because if they do they will know that you are a divine governor.

"Under you, miracles are happening and under you, the road tagged federal roads are now fixed.

"The Federal Ministry of Works has come to Edo State for the third time in less than 100

days not by choice as Mr President directed all these visits. We thank the president for his love.

"This construction is like a cashless programme. We will not see the money but the work will keep going on. We will not be begging for money or quarreling over money issues but checking the projects and there will be results. The credit will always go to Mr president.

"The President is working on several sections of roads across the nation ensuring that the country has good roads and people enjoy and benefit from the dividends of democracy.

"We were here about three weeks ago, appealing to you to

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COURTESY VISIT:

Chairman, House Committee on Nutrition and Food Security, Hon. John Okafor (right), briefing the Speaker of the House Rt. Hon. Abbas Tajudeen, on progress made by the National Legislative Network (NLN) on Nutrition and Food Security, during a courtesy visit to the Speaker at the National Assembly, Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Scientist tasks FG on more molecular diagnostic labs

LAMAI CASSIUS

A former Vice Chancellor of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, Prof. Dennis Agbonlahor has called for the establishment of more molecular diagnostic laboratories across the nation to ensure quick detection of emerging tropical diseases of epidemic and pandemic nature.

Prof. Agbonlahor made the call at the maiden Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Edo University Iyamho, lecture series, titled, "Emerging and

Resurging Epidemic/Pandemic-Prone Diseases Caused by Pathogenic Microbes and Superbugs."

Prof. Agbonlahor said that only 25 functional molecular diagnostic laboratories are in the country out of the 40 established during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"There is an urgent need to encourage the establishment of public and private networks of molecular diagnostic laboratories across the nation.

"These laboratories will help

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Workshop to drive Edo non-oil export diversification holds in Benin —Pg 3

Senate to investigate Cameroonian encroachment on Nigerian territories —Pg 4

Pope Francis makes first appearance from Rome hospital —Pg 5

World Cup Qualifier: Zimbabwe arrives Nigeria for Super Eagles clash —Pg 8



# Edo govt strengthens access to justice through mediation, legal aid

The Edo State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to expanding access to justice through alternative dispute resolution and legal aid services.

This was highlighted by the Honourable Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Dr Samson Osagie, during a press briefing on the activities and achievements of the Citizens' Mediation Centre (CMC) and the Citizens' Rights De-

partment (CRD).

Osagie emphasised that Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration is dedicated to ensuring that the Ministry of Justice functions, not only as a prosecutorial body, but also, as a pillar of social harmony, peace, and efficient dispute resolution.

The Citizens' Mediation Centre, established as part of broader justice sector reforms, provides free mediation serv-

ices to vulnerable citizens.

Since its inception, the Centre has handled 634 civil cases, including inheritance disputes, landlord-tenant conflicts, and employer-employee disagreements.

Notably, 70% of these cases have been resolved amicably, reducing the burden on courts and preventing social unrest.

To raise awareness about mediation, the CMC has engaged in extensive public sensitization through media campaigns and community outreach.

A major success story involved an inheritance dispute within the family of a deceased

oil mogul. The CMC's intervention led to the withdrawal of all legal proceedings and a peaceful settlement.

However, Osagie noted challenges such as limited public awareness, misconceptions about alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and the over-centralisation of services in Benin City.

To address these, the government plans to establish new mediation centres in Ubiaja and Auchi, introduce online dispute resolution platforms, and collaborate with the judiciary to ensure mediated settlements are legally enforceable.

The Citizens' Rights Department (CRD) has also played a crucial role in providing legal assistance to underprivileged citizens, handling 393 cases related to human rights violations, domestic violence, and landlord-tenant disputes. Operating through the Public Complaints Unit and the Correctional Centre Legal Services Unit, the department has successfully resolved 103 public complaints and facilitated the release of 290 inmates who had overstayed in correctional facilities due to prolonged trials.

To further enhance access to justice, Osagie encouraged cit-

izens to utilise these free services by visiting the Ministry of Justice, calling designated helplines, or engaging with legal outreach programmes.

He also called on legal practitioners, civil society organisations, and the media to support the government's vision of a just and peaceful Edo State.

With plans underway to formally inaugurate these departments as statutory agencies, Osagie assured that the government remains committed to alternative dispute resolution and legal aid, ensuring that justice is accessible to all, not just the privileged few.

## Okpebholo vows accountability as...

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disappointed us, and we will meet with him on Monday. If improvements are not made, there may be consequences," he added.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works, John Obanor, who accompanied the governor, reassured residents that although the flyover project is still in its early stages, its impact will become more evi-

dent as work progresses.

Beyond the flyover, Governor Okpebholo also inspected key road projects, including Uteh Temboga Road, the open drainage at Upper Ekenhua Road opposite the Nigerian Army cantonment, and Catholic Charismatic Renewal Road in Ugbiyoko. His visits underscored his administration's commitment to infrastructure development and accountability in project execution.

## Scientist tasks FG on more molecular...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

to ensure very quick detection of the causative agents and containment of these emerging tropical diseases of epidemic and pandemic.

"How can we cope as a nation if we are suddenly confronted by the emergence of a new deadly super virus as Nigeria can only boast of an abysmally few functional molecular diagnostic laboratories," he asked.

The former VC noted that about 25, with three from Edo State have managed to remain functional after their hurried establishments across the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As long as this nation remains endemic for most of these diseases, Nigeria will continue to witness an increasing burden of emerging and resurging epidemic and pandemic-prone disease outbreaks," Agbonlahor stated.

The guest Lecturer further stated that Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when the pathogens (bacterial, viruses or fungi) that cause infections resist the effect of the medicines used to treat them.

According to him "Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is a major threat to global health and constitutes an on-going global pandemic.

"AMR is one of the top ten global public health threats confronting mankind as AMR occurs when the pathogens (bacterial, viruses or fungi) that cause infection resist the effect of the medicines used to treat them.

According to him, globally, an estimated 4.95 million deaths were associated with drug-resistant infections, with 1.27 million of these deaths occurring annually.

He added that sub saharan african bears a disproportionate burden, accounting for 24% of these deaths, largely due to

limited access to effective treatment and diagnosis.

"The key contributing factors to AMR in the region include: overuse and misuse of antibiotics, poor infection control in healthcare settings, limited access to innovative diagnostics and treatments," he said

The Don however called for the continuous sensitization about the dangers of AMR and its preventive measures against development of AMR/Superbugs

Earlier, the Acting Vice Chancellor, Edo University, Iyamoh, Prof. Dawood Egbefo said that the lecture is timely to address the critical need for interdisciplinary collaboration in the fight against infectious diseases.

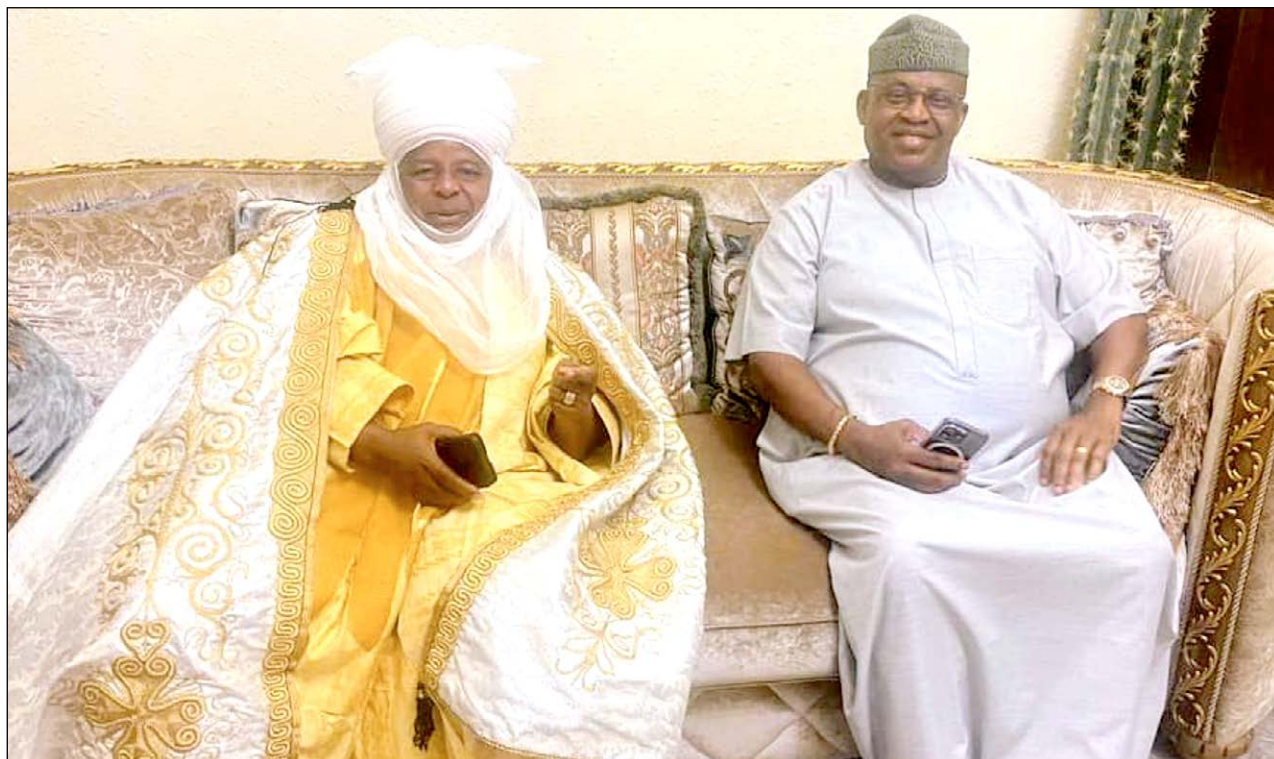
Prof. Egbefo said that the fight against infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance requires concerted effort from researchers, healthcare providers, policy makers and communities.

"The rapid mutation of pathogens and the growing menace of antimicrobial resistance make it imperative for us to, not only improve our understanding of these microbes, but also to innovate in terms of prevention, treatment and control strategies.

He said that the Faculty of Applied Health Science is proud to be at the forefront of this effort as the lecture serves as an important milestone in the institution's commitment to advancing health sciences research and education.

"We are privileged to have him share his insights with us as we examine the complex nature of these emerging diseases and the ongoing battle against Superbugs that threaten public health worldwide," Egbefo said.

The highlight of the event was the unveiling of the lecture series textbook by Dr. Osifo Osagie, the Bursar of the institution.



**AAU ALUMNI ASSOCIATION:**

Emir of Pindiga, Gombe State, and Chancellor of Adamawa State University, Mubi, His Royal Highness, Alhaji Dr. Muhammed Seyoji Ahmed (left), and the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Edo State, Chief Dan Osi Orbih, during a visit by the AAU Alumni Association, Lagos State Chapter.

## Tinubu flags-off Benin-Asaba highway...

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intervene on some sections and you did intervene by taking out 23 Km of the road going to Warri for a total contract sum of not less than N40 billion and that work has commenced.

"The President is doing the second section and third section. There are 20 other projects between Delta and Edo States that the president is doing.

"This project is 125 Kilometres by 2, that is 250 kilometres. It is going to have solar lights and the Federal Government is not putting in any money. Private Public Partnership is the way to go," said Engr. Umahi.

The Minister of finance and coordinating Minister of the economy Wale Edun thanked the president for his foresight in ensuring that the people of Nigeria enjoy good roads across the country assuring the people that the finances for the project is available as such the projects from start to finish is sure.

Governor Okpebholo who represented President Tinubu at the occasion, said that the road is a legacy project and Edo State is now becoming like Lagos, in terms of infrastructural development.

He thanked the president for the love shown to Edo State under his watch as governor, saying that the people are now benefiting from the dividends of democracy.

According to him, "The President loves Edo State so much so that whenever he sees me, he always asks me about the welfare of Edo people and also that of the Oba of Benin.

"The good things happening in Lagos are now also happening here in Edo State and we have made progress under my watch as governor."

He assured President Tinubu that Edo people will take his re-election in 2027 as a big deal.

"All the local governments will be delivered for Mr President come 2027 because he has shown the difference. We once had a president from this region that never remembered us. Edo is a gateway to the nation and when the roads are bad, the economy of the State will be bad as well.

"What Mr President did in Rivers State is a welcome development to ensure peace in the region. The decision he took is for the best interest of the economy of this nation as the State needed to be protected. The President was proactive and his

decision has saved the economy of the nation," he added.

Okpebholo thanked the president for his vision for the nation, saying that the people are enjoying the dividends of democracy following the good initiatives his administration has embarked on.

Governor of Delta State, Sheriff Oborevwori thanked the president for what he is doing for the people of Edo and Delta States, appealing to him to extend the road to Onitsha bridge.

Oborevwori, represented by his deputy, Sir Monday Onyeme said that the road is a critical infrastructure that connects the Eastern and Western regions of Nigeria.

He noted that the road will improve the standard of living of the people urging all to work together to ensure successful completion.

Managing Director, African Plus Partners, Mr Adeniran Ajakaye said from the King square to bypass it will be like a 10-lane carriage way comprising 5-carriage ways on each side to allow movement faster.

Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Works, Olufunso Adebisi said the Benin-Asaba Highway corridor is

under phase one of the highway development initiative.

He noted that the event marks a significant milestone in the president's renewed hope agenda to improving the road infrastructure and fostering sustainable development.

Adebisi said the Benin-Asaba Highway is a crucial link between the Southern and Northern region of Nigeria which is vital to trade and other economic activities recognizing that the highway is an essential part of the nation's economic backbone and has long been in need of urgent rehabilitation and upgrade.

Other guests at the occasion included the state Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, former Governor of Edo State and Senator representing Edo North Senatorial District, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, Speaker EDHA, Rt Hon Blessing Agbeku, Deputy speaker EDHA, Hon. Maria Edekor, Secretary to the State Government, Musa Ikhlil, Chief of Staff to the state Governor, Gani Adams, Chairman of APC in the State Jarret Tenebe, State APC secretary, Lawrence Okah, Pastor Osagie Ize-Iyamu, religious leaders, members of the NURTW and others.



## NEWS

## One dead, others injured as Fulani cattle herders attack Edo community

HAMEED BRAIMAH

The peaceful Ukhun community in Esan West Local Government

Area of Edo State came under attack at the weekend by some persons, suspected to be Fulani cattle herders.

The suspected herders were

said to have attacked some of the indigenous people who are predominantly farmers on the way to their farms.

The herders it was reported

made attempts to kidnap them on their way to their respective farms, but the farmers managed to escape through divine intervention.

Other farmers who were apparently oblivious of the activities of the marauding herders while working in their farms, came under attack as the terrorists opened fire on them, killing one of the farmers, whose name was given as Mr Daniel in the process and injuring others in the process.

It was gathered that incidences of kidnapping and killings have become rife in the agrarian community necessitating calls on security agencies and government to rid the forests of unauthorized occupants.

According to residents of Ukhun, "This is one of the several incidents that have occurred in the community in the last two years."

They said that just last month, February 2025 to be precise, one Mallam Bello Obadan was macheted and kidnapped on his way to the farm. He was said to have suffered severe and deep cuts on his nose and other parts of his body, leading to loss of strength before collapsing, while the assistants were taking him to their camp.

"Leaving him for dead, the villagers reported, the felons

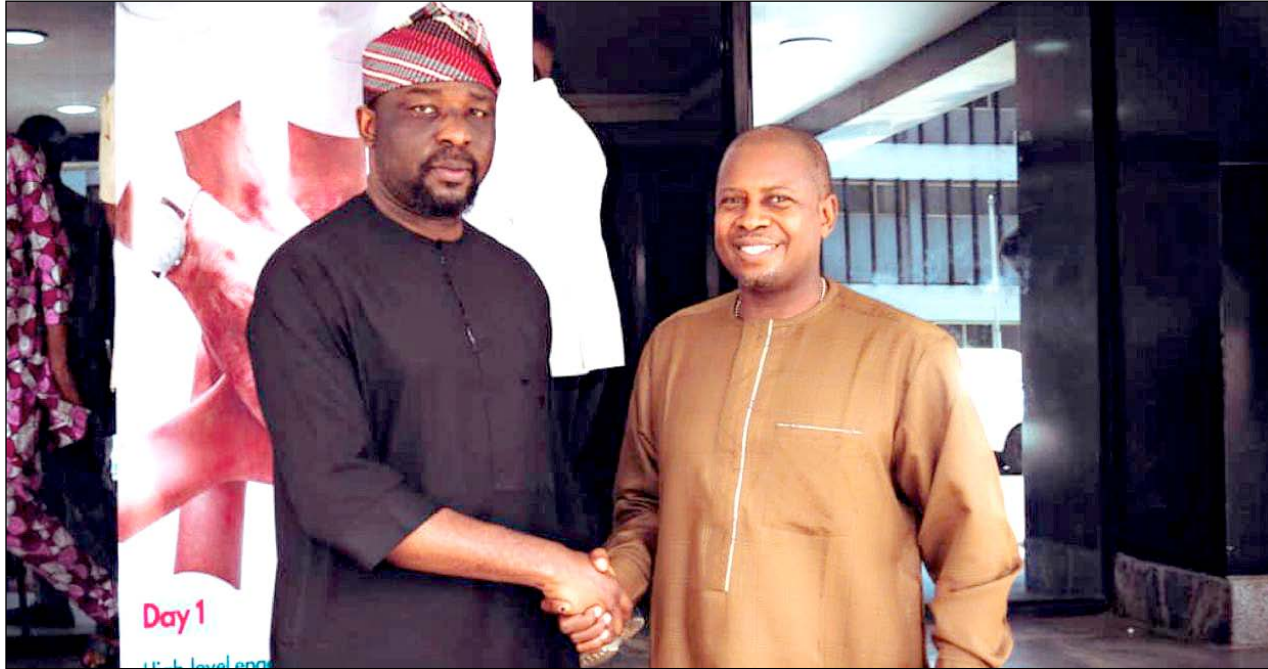
abandoned him to his fate. However, Mallam Bello was miraculously rescued from this cruel situation. He spent fortunes in the hospital after being in admission for three months.

The Onojie of Ukhun kingdom, Zaiki Thomas Aboiralor Omoigiade used the medium to appeal to the State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo; the Commissioner of Police, Mrs Betty Nekpen Isokpan Otimenyin; Director, DSS, Mr Bello Bakori; Director of Edo State Security Network, CP Friday Ibadin (Rtd) and the Divisional Police Officer, Ekpoma to come to their rescue.

"Ukhun is in dire need of government intervention and assistance to protect their lives and property," Chief Omoigiade said.

Meanwhile, the Divisional Police officer, Ekpoma Mr. Solomon Ekewe has reportedly visited the crime scene with his men to boost the confidence of villagers many of whom had reportedly fled to Ekpoma town for safety.

As at the time of filing this report, the police were yet to make any official statement on the attack.



## TECHNICAL WORKSHOP:

Managing Director of ESIPO, Amen Odigie (left), and State Coordinator, Nigeria Export Promotion Council, Okhiulu Andrew, during a technical workshop organised by ESIPO on fostering collaboration within Edo State's export ecosystem which held at the Edo State One-Stop-Investment Centre (ES-OSIC), Benin City.

## Workshop to drive Edo non-oil export diversification holds in Benin

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

In aligning with the vision of Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State towards achieving economic prosperity, the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), Ease of Doing Business Secretariat, in collaboration with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), has concluded its two-day technical workshop with focus on fostering collaboration within Edo State's export ecosystem.

The event, which was held at the Edo State One-Stop-Investment Centre (ES-OSIC) aimed at boosting the state's non-oil export sector, and featured insightful presentations, practical sessions, including strategic discussions.

The Managing Director of ESIPO, Hon Amen Odigie in

his remarks, expressed gratitude to participants, stakeholders, and financial institutions.

He acknowledged the contributions of seasoned exporters, whose shared experiences provided invaluable guidance to aspiring businesses.

"To our financial institutions, we appreciate your commitment to supporting MSMEs with the necessary tools and funding to succeed in the global market,"

However, Hon Amen stressed that the workshop's success hinges on translating knowledge into action.

According to him, "The real work begins now. The insights we have gained must translate into action. Let us leave here not just with knowledge, but with a renewed commitment to work together, foster partnerships, and create an Edo State that is

recognized for its thriving, globally competitive export sector.

"This is part of the vision of His Excellency, the Governor. He wants MSMEs to thrive in Edo, that is why he came up with the ₦1-billion interest free loan to support market women. It is currently being handled by the Edojobs"

Hon. Amen urged participants to continue collaborating for a stronger Edo export ecosystem, reinforcing the state's commitment to diversifying its economy and achieving sustainable growth through non-oil exports.

A key highlight of the programme was a presentation by Okhiulu Andrew, the Edo State Coordinator of the NEPC, who addressed the critical need for diversification in Nigeria's export portfolio.

In his presentation, titled "An

Overview of Export Operations in Nigeria," Andrew emphasized, that the current poor world oil prices call for diversification of Nigeria's Non-Oil export sector to generate the required foreign exchange earnings to boost the domestic economy.

He underscored the urgency of moving away from over-reliance on oil and leveraging the state's abundant non-oil resources.

The workshop provided invaluable practical sessions for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Leading financial institutions, First Bank of Nigeria and Union Bank of Nigeria, conducted sessions focused on accessing export-tailored financial products, equipping participants with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of international trade financing

## NCAA faults Delta Air Lines delay, maltreatment of passenger

The Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority has criticised Delta Air Lines for allegedly delaying a Nigerian passenger and subjecting them to poor treatment.

The passenger was reportedly delayed at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, causing them to miss a connecting flight in Atlanta.

Despite being rescheduled for another flight with a nearly seven-hour wait, the airline allegedly refused to provide hotel accommodation or lounge access.

This Director of Public Affairs, NCAA, Michael Achimugu, made this known in a post on X on Sunday.

The NCAA Director, however, threatened that the authority would take action on the incident.

His tweet reads, "Dear @Delta airline. Your delayed departure from Lagos on Saturday afternoon and the lengthy tarmac delay on arrival in Atlanta meant that one of your Nigerian passengers who, incidentally, is a staff of the NCAA, missed their connecting flight

due to no fault of theirs.

Court orders NCAA to reinstate wrongfully dismissed employee

"You then schedule them for another flight, with an almost 7-hr waiting time, and refuse them hotel accommodation or, at least, lounge access.

"This passenger was left sitting in an uncomfortable chair all night, and their rescheduled flight still suffered a delay. Your station manager claims that they cannot lift a muscle because they are not responsible for Atlanta.

"This ill-treatment of Nigerian passengers, similar to the Gloria Omisore incident, is not acceptable and the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority will react to this, per Part 19 of the NCAA Regulations 2023."

He insisted that "Nigerian passengers, whether they know their rights or not, must be accorded the level of care and dignity they are entitled to."

When contacted, Delta's Media Relations Officer in Nigeria, Adeola Olanrewaju, said she would request details and respond accordingly.

## NEMA strengthens ties with Edo NUJ on disaster mgt

LUCKY EFESÉ

## BENIN CITY

The operational management of the Benin Office of the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, has sought strategic partnership with the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, towards disaster control, prevention and management in the state.

Speaking when he led other senior officials of the agency on a courtesy visit to the NUJ secretariat in Benin City, the

Edo State Head of Operations, Kenoma Ojuederie, said that in line with the vision of the agency, he decided to reach out to critical stakeholders in the state to ensure disaster control and management.

Ojuederie asserted that journalists are critical stakeholders that play pivotal roles in the dissemination of accurate information on disaster control and management, stressing that the visit was also to build and strengthen existing relationships so as to achieve greater results.

He added that his agen-

cy remains accountable and prepared to collaborate with critical stakeholders in the areas of disaster management to achieve the purpose of its establishment.

He noted that the visions and missions of the Director General are aimed at building relationships and collaboration with critical stakeholders to achieve success.

Responding, the NUJ Chairman, Comrade Festus Alenkhe, thanked the Head of Operations and his team for the visit, emphasizing the necessity for a healthy collaboration

between the journalists as first responders in disaster management and NEMA towards achieving the desired results in disaster control and management

Alenkhe assured the agency of Edo journalists' readiness to partner the agency towards ensuring effective and efficient disaster control and management.

The NUJ chairman called on the agency to organise routine training programmes for journalists for the purpose of disseminating viable and accurate information to the public.





# Edo govt launches digital policy workshop to drive inclusive growth

The Edo State Government, in collaboration with the Policy Innovation Centre (PIC), the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has commenced a three-day Digital Policy Project workshop.

Themed "Advancing an Inclusive and Enabling Policy Environment for Digital Growth and Capabilities in Edo State," the event, which began on Wednesday, March 19, 2025, aims to integrate digital policies across key sectors such as health, agriculture, education, transportation, and e-procurement.

Declaring the workshop open, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication, Dr. Desmond Agbama, urged participants to become "policy champions" within their ministries, departments, and agencies, ensuring the successful adoption of digital policies.

The workshop centred on the Edo State Digital Policy, a blueprint designed to transform service delivery and foster inclusivity through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The policy aligns with global trends in technology-driven governance, targeting reduced

bureaucracy, improved accessibility, and economic growth.

Discussions covered critical strategies, including the deployment of digital platforms for education and healthcare, the development of digital infrastructure to support justice, agriculture, and revenue gen-

eration, and the implementation of robust cybersecurity and data protection measures.

To ensure effective implementation, the policy will be guided by a structured governance framework that mobilises resources and promotes collaboration among stakeholders.

The Edo State Government has identified key agencies, including the Ministry of Digital Economy, Science and Technology (MDEST), the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), and the Edo Digital Governance and Data Management

Agency (DiDA), to spearhead digital transformation efforts.

With this initiative, the Edo State Government reaffirms its commitment to building a sustainable digital ecosystem that enhances governance, drives economic growth, and improves the quality of life for residents.

## Senate to investigate Cameroon encroachment on Nigeria territories

CAROLINE AMEH

The Nigerian Senate has launched a probe into the alleged encroachment of Nigeria territories by Cameroon, raising concerns over violations of international treaties, economic losses, and threats to national sovereignty.

The decision followed a motion raised by Senator Aniekan Bassy (Akwa Ibom North), who highlighted that 16 ancestral Nigerian communities and over 2,500 oil wells were reportedly affected.

He stressed that these areas were not part of the territories ceded to Cameroon under the 1913 Anglo-German treaties or the 2002 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling.

Bassy warned that the encroachment has led to economic setbacks in oil and gas revenues while Nigerians residing in the affected regions face the imposition of Cameroonian laws and military presence.

Supporting the motion, Senators expressed concerns that the development undermines Nigeria's territorial integrity

and violates agreements, including the 1960 Organization of African Unity resolution, which upholds post-independence borders.

The Senate has urged the Attorney General of the Federation and the Chief Justice of Nigeria to urgently examine the issue.

In response, Senate President Godswill Akpabio emphasized that the matter constitutes a violation of the ICJ ruling and must be thoroughly investigated.

The Senate resolved to establish an ad hoc committee to assess the affected territories, including Nigerian Mangos Island, and recommend measures to protect the country's sovereignty and economic interests.

Additionally, lawmakers called on President Bola Tinubu to engage in diplomatic discussions with his Cameroonian counterpart to resolve the situation.

This development comes amid lingering tensions over border demarcations between Nigeria and Cameroon, despite previous ICJ rulings and bilateral agreements.



**5TH ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY:**

Former Minister for Transportation, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi (middle); Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), in the 2023 General Elections, Peter Obi, and other guests, during the 5th Anniversary ceremony of the creation of the Diocese of the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia, Anambra State.

## Diri reaffirms commitment to science education

Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to enhancing science and technology education as part of the A.S.S.U.R.E.D Prosperity Agenda, aimed at securing a brighter future for the state.

Speaking at the Annual Founders' Day Celebration of Government Secondary School (GSS) Odi, held in Yenagoa, Governor Diri, represented by his deputy, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, emphasised that science and technological innovation are central to sustainable social and political development.

He highlighted the government's investment in technical and vocational education, noting that the administration has built and equipped more schools to develop skilled manpower for industrialisa-

tion and economic growth. He also assured that when the recently suspended teacher recruitment exercise resumes, priority will be given to hiring science teachers. Addressing the cancellation of the previous recruitment process, Diri explained that due process was not followed, necessitating a fresh exercise to align with the administration's educational goals.

Governor Diri further stated that the government is actively reorienting education towards science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by increasing the number of science institutions and teachers. He mentioned initiatives such as the teachers' registration council, the teachers' inspectorate unit, and the PRIME programme, which monitors classroom performance. The state executive council, he add-

ed, has approved the employment of 995 teachers in critical subjects like biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and computer literacy.

Commending the GSS Odi Alumni Association for its dedication to improving the school, the governor urged alumni associations to also focus on instilling moral values in the younger generation.

Chairman of the occasion, Vice Chancellor of the University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Prof. Solomon Ebobrah, underscored the importance of alumni contributing to their alma mater's growth. In the keynote lecture titled "Exploring Science and Technological Innovations for Sustainable Social and Political Development," nuclear scientist and former Director General of the Nigerian Atomic Energy Commission, Prof. Franklin Osaisai,

stressed that national development is closely tied to advancements in science and technology. He warned that without significant improvements in power generation and technological infrastructure, Nigeria's aspirations for security and sustainability would remain unfulfilled.

Earlier, National Chairman of the GSS Odi Alumni Association, Dr Ebikisei Udisi, announced that proceeds from the event's ₦100 million fundraising would be used to build a new science laboratory, renovate deteriorating structures, and construct sports facilities. The Chief Launcher, High Chief Victor Wayles Egukawhore of De Wayles Group of Companies, donated ₦20 million and encouraged continued alumni support to enhance education in Odi and beyond.



CAMEROON-NIGERIA BORDE

## Reps move to enhance legislative scrutiny, mandates thorough verification of Bills

JOY ODOR

The House of Representatives has mandated a strict verification process done to prevent discrepancies in Bills passed by the National Assembly before transmitted to the president for assent.

To address these concerns, the House mandated the Clerk to the National Assembly to ensure that all authenticated Bills are reverted to the Clerks of both chambers for confirmation before transmission to

the President.

Raising the motion on the floor of the House, Hon. Sada Soli informed that by doing so, the National Assembly would strengthen public trust in the legislative process and prevent unnecessary delays in governance caused by errors requiring corrections or rejections.

The Lawmakers agreed, there should be mandatory for all Bills, including Constitution alteration Bills, to safeguard their accuracy, integrity, and legitimacy.

They said Clerks of both

Houses must verify the authenticity and accuracy of all Bills to certify that no alterations or errors occurred during authentication.

Hon. Sada Soli expressed concern over allegations that some Bills contained provisions different from what was originally passed by both chambers of the National Assembly.

He pointed to a recent instance where the President declined assent to a Bill due to errors, underscoring the need for meticulous scrutiny before final submission.

While the Authentication Act requires all passed Bills to be forwarded to the Clerk of the National Assembly for authentication, Soli noted that there is currently no mandatory provision requiring the Clerks of both the Senate and House of Representatives to verify the final version before it is sent to the President.

This, he argued, created a loophole that could lead to legislative inconsistencies, errors, and alterations that may undermine the integrity of the legislative process.



## NEWS

## Foreign

# Pope Francis makes first appearance from Rome hospital

Pope Francis has appeared at the window of the hospital in Rome for the first time since being admitted on 14 February.

The 88-year-old pontiff was discharged minutes later and doctors say he will need at least

two months of rest at the Vatican.

During the past five weeks, he presented "two very critical episodes" where his "life was in danger", Dr Sergio Alfieri, one of the doctors treating the Pope, said.

Pope Francis was never intubated and always remained alert and oriented, Dr Alfieri said. The Pope is not completely healed, but no longer has pneumonia and is now in a stable condition, according to his doctors.

The Pope will offer a blessing from his window at the Gemelli hospital on Sunday - the first time he will appear in public since he was admitted to hospital - before returning to his residence at the Vatican.

Dr Alfieri said that patients

with double pneumonia lose their voice a little and "especially in the elderly, it will take time for your voice to return to normal".

On Friday, Cardinal Victor Fernandez had said "high-flow oxygen dries everything out" and as a result the Pope "needs to relearn how to speak", Reuters had reported.

If the trend of improvement continues, doctors said, the Pope would be able to return to work as soon as possible.

The Vatican had said on Friday that the Pope had seen some improvements in his breathing and mobility.

It had confirmed he no longer uses mechanical ventilation for breathing at night, but was instead receiving oxygen via a small tube under his nose. During the day, he is us-

ing less high-flow oxygen.

The Pope has only been seen by the public once since he was admitted to hospital, in a photograph released by the Vatican last week, which showed him praying in a hospital chapel.

Earlier this month, an audio recording of Pope Francis speaking in his native Spanish was played in St Peter's Square in Vatican City.

His voice was breathless as he thanked the Catholic faithful for their prayers.

Pope Francis has spent 12 years as leader of the Roman Catholic Church.

He has suffered a number of health issues throughout his life, including having part of one of his lungs removed at age 21, making him more prone to infections.



## PUBLIC APPEARANCE:

Pope Francis make first public appearance since he was admitted on Feb 14.

## Fear, anger mount as 'battle for the soul of Romanian democracy' looms

The Romanian village of Poeni has a couple of shops, a kebab grill and a pack of stray dogs.

It also has a fair few voters who wanted a far-right candidate to become president.

Poeni, just over an hour's drive from the capital, is not alone in that.

Last November, Calin Georgescu - who admires Vladimir Putin and is no fan of Nato - came from the extremist fringe to win the first round of Romania's presidential election with 23% of the vote.

In Poeni he did even better, with 24%.

Then the constitutional court scrapped the entire election in an unprecedented move, citing intelligence that Georgescu's online campaign had been boosted by Russia.

In Poeni, a young voter called those claims "lies", angry at the cancelled vote. "They should have let him run to see what happens," Maria argues.

A new ballot will be held in May but Georgescu has been barred from participating.

In Bucharest, supporters who

took to the streets yelled that the judges were destroying democracy. A handful clashed briefly with police, who used tear gas.

Now nationalist politician George Simion has stepped into the race and is polling strongly instead.

Many Romanians fear their country's core European values, and its global alliances, are still in danger.

"We are in the middle of a battle of ideas. We don't have options here," is how one democracy activist describes the mood. "The fight is now."

### 'THEY TRICKED US. THEY PROMISED US MORE'

In Poeni village there's less talk of values and of Russian meddling, more about the money in their pockets. Or rather the lack of it.

By the side of the main road, where the traffic alternates between heavy trucks and horses and carts, men buy charred chunks of kebab and pensioners chat on dusty benches.

A metal public phone box is bent out of shape, its sign dangling as it probably has for years.

Incomes here are small, prices are climbing and life is tough as in much of Romania.

"I want Georgescu to straighten everyone out. They tricked us. They promised us more pension money," a middle-aged woman speaks quietly at first, then becomes bolder. "The others have done nothing for us here!"

In the village store, Ionela is just as disenchanted.

"Young people finish college here and can't get work, so they go abroad. That isn't normal. We need our young people to have places here to work," she complains from behind the shop counter.

Millions of Romanians work elsewhere in the EU and send money home to their families. In Poeni you can see where some of that ends up, in all the half-done new homes.

Ionela's whole family voted for Georgescu. He promised to cut taxes, she thinks, but she doesn't seem to have registered his far-right ideology.

A man who's praised extremist figures from Romania's past, he's now under investigation for suspected links to

a group with "fascist, racist or xenophobic characteristics".

Emerging after questioning, the politician was filmed giving a fascist-style salute.

Other villagers in Poeni did see that and do know all about the murky characters Georgescu has been linked to.

On hearing his name, one pensioner grabs her crutch and wields it like a machine gun, shouting that he is dangerous.

Another told me people were suspicious of someone who surged to prominence from nowhere and of his focus on sovereignty over economic sense.

"He tells us we don't need Europe to help us with money. So how are we going to live? Let's face it: Europe feeds us!" she says.

### 'FLIMSY SUSPICIONS'

Romania's vote has become the topic of talk far beyond the streets of Poeni, or even Bucharest.

When US Vice President JD Vance shocked Europe with a speech in Munich, claiming that the EU's greatest threat came from within and not from Russia, he cited Romania several times.

## US special envoy dismiss Starmer's plan for an international force in Ukraine

Steve Witkoff said the idea was based on a "simplistic" notion of the UK prime minister and other European leaders thinking "we have all got to be like Winston Churchill".

In an interview with pro-Trump journalist Tucker Carlson, Witkoff praised Vladimir Putin, saying he "liked" the Russian president.

"I don't regard Putin as a bad guy," he said. "He's super smart."

"Witkoff, who met Putin 10 days ago, said the Russian president had been "gracious" and "straight up" with him. Putin told him, he added, that he had prayed for Trump after an assassination attempt against him last year. He also said Putin had commissioned a portrait of the US president as a gift and Trump was "clearly touched by it".

During the interview, Witkoff repeated various Russian arguments, including that Ukraine was "a false country" and asked when the world would recognise occupied Ukrainian territory as Russian.

Witkoff is leading the US ceasefire negotiations with both Russia and Ukraine but he was unable to name the five regions of Ukraine either annexed or partially occupied by Russian forces.

He said: "The largest issue in that conflict are these so-called four regions, Donbas, Crimea, you know the names and there are two others."

The five regions - or oblasts - are Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Crimea. Donbas refers to an industrial region in the east that includes much of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Witkoff made several assertions that are either not true or disputed:

He said Ukrainian troops in Kursk were surrounded, something denied by Ukraine's government and uncorroborated by any open-source data

He said the four partially occupied regions of Ukraine had held "referendums where the overwhelming majority of the people have indicated that they want to be under Russian rule". There were referendums only in some of the occupied parts of Ukraine at different times and the methodology and results were widely discredited and disputed.

He said the four partially occupied oblasts were Russian-speaking. There are many Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine but this has never indicated support for Russia.

The US is set to hold separate talks in Saudi Arabia with Ukraine and Russia about a ceasefire at meetings over Sunday and Monday.

Ahead of that, Ukrainian authorities said Russia had launched drone attacks on Kyiv overnight, resulting in deaths of three people, including a five-year-old child.

Officials said that eight people had been injured.

Russia also struck the southern city of Zaporizhzhia on Friday, killing a family of three.

Meanwhile, on Sunday Russia's ministry of defence said it had shot down 59 Ukrainian drones across a number of regions in the south as well as in Crimea, the peninsula illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.

During his interview, Witkoff also repeated several Kremlin talking points about the cause of Russia's full-scale invasion.

He said it was "correct" that from the Russian perspective the partially occupied territories were now part of Russia: "The elephant in the room is, there are constitutional issues within Ukraine as to what they can concede to with regard to giving up territory. The Russians are de facto in control of these territories. The question is: will the world acknowledge that those are Russian territories?"

## At least two dead as wildfires rage in South Korea

At least two people died and hundreds evacuated their homes as wildfires raged in South Korea on Saturday.

Two firefighters were found dead in Sancheong County in the country's south-east, news agency Yonhap reported, citing local officials.

Two others were reported missing as multiple fires blazed across the country, according to the Korea Forest Service.

A state of national disaster was declared at 18:00 local time (09:00 GMT), covering Ulsan city and North and South Gyeongsang provinces in the south-east.

More than 200 residents were ordered to leave their homes in eight villages because of the deadly fire in Sancheong County in South Gyeongsang province.

Acting President Choi Sang-mok had urged all efforts be put forward to extinguish the blaze by sunset, but strong winds hampered efforts at the

scene around 250 kilometres (155 miles) southeast of Seoul.

Elsewhere, more than 400 residents were displaced because of a wildfire in Uiseong county in North Gyeongsang Province.

The forest service issued a serious wildfire warning in 12 locations, including Busan and the central city of Daejeon.



## NEWS

## Foreign

# Istanbul mayor arrested ahead of selection to run against Erdogan

**A**rival to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been formally arrested and charged with corruption.

Ekrem Imamoglu, the mayor of the Turkish city of Istanbul, is expected to be selected as the opposition Republican People's Party's (CHP) 2028 presidential candidate in a ballot on Sunday.

Imamoglu denies the allegations and in a statement on social media, he is quoted as

saying: "I will never bow".

His detention on Wednesday has sparked off some of the largest protests in more than a decade. Erdogan has condemned the demonstrations and accused the CHP of trying to "disturb the peace and polarise our people".

On Saturday, tear gas hung in the air outside the mayor's office in Istanbul, before the protests had even properly begun.

As the crowds had grown throughout the evening, it be-

came hard to breathe as round after round was fired to disperse demonstrators.

Chanting "rights, law, justice", people of all ages defied a government ban on gatherings to protest against what they see as an unlawful detention.

One young woman, dressed in black and wearing a face mask, told the BBC she was not protesting for political reasons or because she supported the opposition, but instead to defend democracy.

"I'm here for justice, I'm here for liberty. We're free peo-

ple and Turkish people cannot accept this. This is against our behaviour and culture."

Another woman, who had brought her 11-year-old son to the protests, said she wanted to bring him as she is worried about his future.

"It's getting harder to live in Turkey day by day, we can't control our lives, we can't choose who we want and there is no real justice here."

It is very telling that no one the BBC spoke to felt comfortable giving their name or showing their face.

Many on the streets on Saturday night, braving arrest themselves, told the BBC they were out fighting for a future they could believe in.

In Ankara and Izmir, police deployed water cannons against protesters.

For the past four nights, thousands have taken to the streets across Turkey in largely peaceful demonstrations.

Authorities tried to stifle the street demonstrations with a four-day ban on all gatherings in Istanbul, which was extended to Ankara and Izmir as pro-

tests spread across the country.

Since Thursday, riot police have repeatedly clashed with protesters and could be seen firing pepper gas and water cannons towards crowds of demonstrators.

Turkish authorities said 343 people were arrested on Friday night, the third day of protests, across the country.

Imamoglu is seen as one of Erdogan's most formidable political rivals. He is the only person running in the CHP's presidential candidate selection, which is set to take place on Sunday.

## My husband is a fighter pilot in Ukraine, here's how I really feel about a ceasefire'

**M**aria's life has been reduced to waiting for the next phone call from her husband - never knowing if it might be the last.

Ivan, a 31-year-old Ukrainian fighter pilot, began defending the skies from the very first hours of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, and has now flown more than 200 perilous missions in his old Soviet-era Mig-29 warplane.

The squadron commander has lost several comrades in the war. Some were close friends. Others were godfathers to each other's children. The location of his current air base in western Ukraine cannot be revealed for security reasons.

But as US-led efforts to negotiate a ceasefire gather pace - and fresh talks with Russia and Ukraine planned on Monday - things have changed.

"If any ceasefire comes [about], we will feel safer," says Maria.

Across Ukraine, more and more people are openly talking about war fatigue. They're calling for an end to the most brutal fighting in Europe since World War Two, and for firm guarantees of Western protection to ensure Russia can't attack again.

At the same time, Maria fears that any deal could involve accepting the loss of four Ukrainian regions in the south-east partially seized by Russia, as well as Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014. "No-

body will give us back our lost territories", the 29-year-old says. "They will stay under Russian occupation."

She asks: "What [did] so many men, our heroes, sacrifice their lives for if Ukraine can't fight for them, and is forced to make concessions?"

When Maria and Ivan met, the prospect of a full-scale war in Ukraine seemed impossible.

Maria was an English teacher at a local children's club in western Ukraine attended by the daughter of one of Ivan's comrades. The comrade offered to set Ivan up with Maria, who he described as "a very nice teacher".

At first Ivan felt pressured by the arrangement - but he eventually agreed to come.

He was glad he did. They soon started seeing each other.

On one of their first dates, Ivan warned Maria he had a dangerous job. She said it wouldn't be a problem. Ivan was courageous, caring and protective, and Maria was falling in love.

He soon had to go on a long-term deployment far from home. They lost touch for a year, and it seemed like their relationship might be over.

But then he returned with a giant bouquet of flowers and promised her he didn't want to waste her time. Within a year, the two were married and they were soon expecting their first child.



**KILLED IN KHAN YOUNIS:**

Senior Hamas figure Salah al-Bardaweel, pictured here in 2015, was killed in Khan Younis

## Israeli air strike kills top Hamas official in Gaza

**A**n Israeli air strike on the southern city of Khan Younis in Gaza has killed top Hamas political leader Salah al-Bardaweel, a Hamas official has told the BBC.

Locals say the air strike killed both Bardaweel, regarded as Hamas's highest-ranking political leader, and his wife. Israeli officials had no immediate comment.

The total death toll in Gaza since the war began surpassed 50,000 on Sunday, its Hamas-run health authorities said, with at least 30 people killed in Khan Yunis and Rafah so far on Sunday.

Israel resumed heavy strikes

on Gaza earlier this week - in effect ending the first phase of a ceasefire that lasted almost two months. It blamed Hamas for rejecting a new US proposal to extend the truce.

Hamas, in turn, accused Israel of abandoning the original deal - mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the US. It envisaged the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the subsequent release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners - in addition to negotiations to end the war entirely and reconstruct Gaza.

In a statement on Sunday, Hamas said Bardaweel, 66, had been praying along with his wife when an Israeli missile struck

their tent.

A father of eight, Bardaweel was one of Hamas's most prominent political figures.

Born in Khan Younis refugee camp, he was known to be close to Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar and is considered part of the second generation of Hamas leadership, following the movement's founders.

He headed the political wing of Hamas's parliamentary bloc and was re-elected to the group's political bureau in 2021.

Following the killing of Sinwar and Rawhi Mushtaha during the ongoing war, Bardaweel was regarded as Hamas's high-

est-ranking political leader.

The air strike that killed Bardaweel was part of one of the most intense waves of aerial bombardment in southern Gaza since the collapse of the ceasefire agreement last Tuesday.

A spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society told the BBC that Israeli forces were surrounding several of the organisation's ambulances as they attempted to reach an area hit by an Israeli strike in Rafah.

He added that several paramedics were wounded, and contact had been lost with one of the trapped teams, which has been besieged for hours.

## Trump revokes security clearance for Harris, Clinton, and critics

**U**S President Donald Trump revoked security clearances from his previously defeated Democratic election rivals, Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton, as well as a number of other former officials and critics.

Trump said in February he was revoking security clearance for his predecessor Joe Biden. His order confirmed that decision, adding that he was also revoking the security clearance of "any other member" of the Biden family.

"I have determined that it is no longer in the national interest for the following individuals to access classified information," Trump's memorandum read.

Former US presidents and top security officials usually keep their security clearance as a courtesy.

Trump ordered department and agency leaders to "revoke unescorted access to secure United States government facilities for these individuals."

"This action includes, but is not limited to, receipt of classi-

fied briefings, such as the President's Daily Brief, and access to classified information held by any member of the intelligence community by virtue of the named individuals' previous tenure in the Congress," the order stated.

For several named figures, the loss of access to classified material and spaces will have a more symbolic impact.

It may limit the materials they are able to review, or restrict access to some government buildings or secure facilities.

The lawyers and prosecutors named by Trump, however, could potentially face roadblocks in accessing or reviewing information for their cases or clients.

Trump's revocations focus on top Biden administration officials, as well as prominent political critics and attorneys who have challenged Trump or his allies in court.

Biden's secretary of state Antony Blinken, national security advisor Jake Sullivan, and deputy attorney general Lisa Monaco

all lost their clearances.

Trump also targeted two of his own former officials from his first term: Fiona Hill and Alexander Vindman, who testified during his first impeachment trial that began in 2019.

Trump also revoked access for high-profile Republican critics, former Representatives Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger.

They were the only two Republican lawmakers who joined a US House investigation into Trump's role in the 6 January 2021 attack on Congress.

Both also voted to charge Trump in his second impeachment, which a Democratic-led US House of Representatives instigated after the riot. Trump was acquitted by the Senate on the charge of inciting the 6 January riot.

Trump has also singled out top legal opponents in his latest decision on security access. His order revoked clearance for New York attorney general Letitia James, who brought multiple lawsuits against Trump and his businesses.



# Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Gulf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

## World Cup: Victor Osimhen brace lifts Super Eagles from qualification limbo

The Super Eagles' World Cup qualification got back on track Friday evening in Kigali after a 2-0 defeat of hosts, Rwanda.

Great thanks to Victor Osimhen whose brace in the first half earned Nigeria a first World Cup qualification win since 13 November 2021 when they beat Liberia 2-0 in Tanger, Morocco. are facing a huge battle to qualify for next summer's World Cup.

It was Osimhen's first match in the World Cup qualifications series that has entered

match-day 5.

Nigeria entered the match under serious pressure and sat precariously fifth in a log of six teams.

The fact that they had not won any match in the series and had also not beaten Rwanda in Rwanda also added to the pressure.

The 2-0 win and also the loss by Lesotho to South Africa has lifted the Super Eagles to the fourth position and a shouting distance to the three front-runners – South Africa, Benin and Rwanda.

Another win on Tuesday

against bottom-placed Zimbabwe could lift them to the second position depending on the outcome of the duels of Rwanda versus Lesotho and Benin – South Africa.

Chelle named a strong starting XI, featuring many players with Premier League experience.

Ola Aina lined up at left-back, Alex Iwobi partnered Wilfred Ndidi in midfield and Calvin Bassey continued his partnership with captain, and former Watford star William Troost-Ekong in central defence.

Nigeria's quest got on course

from an Ademola Lookman's free-kick.

Osimhen peeled away to the back post, gambling on the delivery being inch-perfect, and made no mistake from close range to open his account in World Cup qualification.

Almost at the stroke of half-time, Osimhen doubled the lead as he pinched the ball ahead of his marker, and raced through before producing a lovely, dinked finish over Ntware to leave the hosts with a huge mountain to climb in the second half



Victor Osimhen celebrates a goal with his team mates

## Spanish Liga F: Real Madrid end Barcelona 20-match dominance

After 20 games without a win against FC Barcelona, Spanish side, Real Madrid finally beat their rivals 3-1 in a league clash on Sunday.

The European and Spanish champions had won their previous 20 meetings with the capital club in all competitions ahead of Sunday's top-of-the-table clash.

Alba Redondo scored the opener for the visitors in the 41st minute from Caroline So-

phie Moller's assist.

Caroline Graham Hansen restored parity for the Catalan side set up by Maria Leon in the 67th minute.

Two late goals by Caroline Weir won the game for Real Madrid.

First, in the 87th minute, Linda Caicedo provided the assist for Weir to restore the capital club lead.

In the additional minutes of the second half, Weir complet-

ed her brace to end Barcelona's dominance over them.

Barcelona lead at the top of the table is now reduced to four points after 23 games.

Both sides will now focus their attention on the UEFA Women's Champions League

(UWCL) quarter-final return leg matches.

Barcelona has a 4-1 lead ahead of their clash with Wolfsburg this week, while Real Madrid also holds a 2-0 lead to take to London against Arsenal.



## Niger Delta Sports Festival torch arrives Benin Monday

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The much anticipated Niger Delta Sports Festival looks certain to begin on April 1st with the unity torch to illuminate the festivity already moving from one state to the other among the nine participating states of the zone as Edo is set to receive it on Monday (today).

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele is set to receive the torch on behalf of the Government of Edo State.

According to the Executive Director, Sports Development and Operations Mrs Sabina Chikere, Athletes and coaches as well as members of staff of the Edo State Sports Commission are expected to assemble at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium at 8.00 am to join the Honourable Chairman, Amadin Enabulele to welcome the torch bearers.

Chikere said that "the Executive Chairman on receiving the festival torch, will immediately lead the team of sports men and women to the Government House where they will hand it over to the Governor of Edo State Senator Monday Okpebholo.

The Festival Torch was lit in a colourful ceremony at the Samson Siasia Stadium on 21st of March 2025, in Yenagoa, and will be arriving in Benin on Monday March 24, 2025.

The Niger Delta Sports Festival, scheduled to hold in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, from April 1st to 8th, 2025

is a project funded by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to harness sports talents in the nine mandate states. The festival holds from April 1- 8 in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital.

About 3000 athletes and 500 Coaches are expected to take part in the festival.

## Coaching and referees refresher course set pace for 2025 Nigeria Beach Soccer League season

Head of the 2025 Nigeria Beach Soccer League (NBSL) slated to kick off on March 31st, the league is set to organize coaching and referees refresher courses.

The three-day course will be held virtually via Zoom application from Monday, March 24, to Wednesday, March 26, 2025, from 12:00 to 2:00 pm daily.

Day one of the course will be a joint session involving referees and coaches on Monday, March 24. The second day is for coaches on Tuesday, March 25, while referees will take their turn on Wednesday, March 26.

Tagged "Coaches and Referees Refresher Course 3.0",

the program aims to brush up the skills and knowledge of participants in the laws of the game, new developments, and prerequisites ahead of the 2025 season.

Coaches role, style, planning, training, and match coaching will be examined during the coaching course.

Referees who will officiate during the league shall also attend the course alongside others nominated across the country for the same purpose.

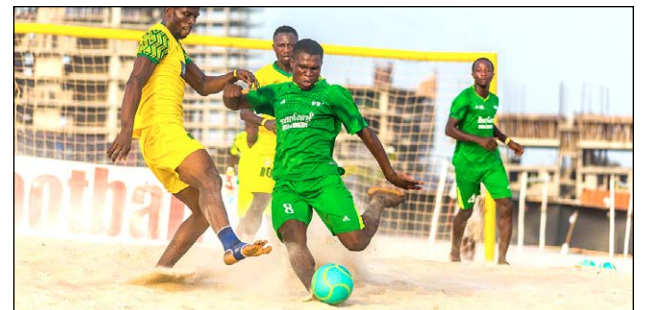
Facilitators and instructors for the event include FIFA Beach Soccer Instructor and NBSL Head of Technical Study Group (TSG), Sunday Okayi; CAF License Coaches and Ni-

geria National Beach Soccer Team Coaches/NBSL Technical committee members, CAF/UEFA licensed Coach Abdul-lahi Isa and Christopher Kadi-ri; and an external instructor.

FIFA Beach soccer referee who has officiated at multiple Beach Soccer World Cups, Ab-

djeli Ogunmuyiwa will be one of the refereeing instructors for the course.

Teams participating in the 2025 NBSL are expected to nominate three coaches and a player for the course. Ex Beach Soccer Internationals are also invited for the course.





# SPORTS

**The Nigerian Observer**  
...that the people may know

## World Cup Qualifiers: Zimbabwe unveils lucrative bonus to motivate warriors against Nigeria

The Federal Government of Zimbabwe has reinforced its commitment to the national football team by introducing a significant financial incentive ahead of their crucial 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Nigeria.

In a move aimed at boosting the players' morale, President Emmerson D. Mnangagwa has approved a performance-based bonus for every victory, including their upcoming clash against Nigeria on March 25 at the Godswill Akpabio Stadium.

The \$150,000 reward will be shared among players, the technical team, and support staff, serving as a major motivation for the squad.

This incentive follows the

government's \$1 million (approx ₦1.5 billion) allocation for Zimbabwe's participation in the CAF Africa Cup of Nations Finals.

The Government of Zimbabwe has reaffirmed its commitment to national football by extending significant financial support to the Warriors ahead of their upcoming crucial FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

A government statement reaffirmed this financial backing and encouraged Zimbabweans to support the team in their quest for a historic World Cup qualification.

"This support underscores the Government's unwavering commitment to the growth and success of football in Zimbabwe. The nation is urged to

rally behind the team as they carry our hopes and pride onto the field," the statement reads.

The on Friday showcased their resilience with a dramatic comeback against Benin Republic, fighting back from two goals down to secure a draw at the Moses Mabhida Stadium in South Africa.

That performance signals their determination heading into the huge fixture against Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the Super Eagles on the other hand have also dowsed tension by beating Rwanda 2-0 in Kigali on Friday. The Super Eagles were under pressure, having collected only three points from four matches in the qualifiers before the Rwanda clash.



THE ZIMBABWEAN NATIONAL TEAM ARRIVING NIGERIA.

## Bendel Insurance FC pip Sunshine Stars 1-0 as superb goal earns Kayode Oke NB award

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Bendel Insurance Football Club, weekend defeated Sunshine Stars of Akure 1-0 in the match day 30 of the Nigeria Premier Football League, played at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium, Benin.

Kayode Oke Solomon scored the only goal of the match in the 20th minute of the game to help the Benin Arsenal secure the maximum three points against the Owena waves of Akure. The energetic striker Kayode Oke who was outstanding in the match, sent his long range curled

strike into the far corner of the net to send the already agitated home fans into wild jubilation.

Kayode's outstanding performance and the fantastic strike earned him the Man of the Match award.

The important 1-0 home victory has now pushed Insurance FC up to number 5 on the table with 44 points.

Recall that Insurance defeated Sunshine Stars 2-1 in the first round of the season.

The Benin Arsenal will be heading to the Northern part of the country again on Wednesday as they face Kano Pillars in

the match day 31 where Insurance would be looking to take back their pound of flesh.

Bendel Insurance suffered a 1-0 defeat in the hands of Kano Pillars in Benin during the first round meeting at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium.

In a post match interview, the Head Coach of Bendel Insurance Greg Ikhenoba showered praise on his boys for being able to hold on to the first half goal lead despite the noticeable weakness.

According to him, the three

maximum points are the important part of the game and thanked God his team managed to get it. "I thank God we got the three points, it was what we planned to get. I thank the management for standing behind us and thank the boys for their resilience."

"As a matter of fact, some of my boys were fatigued. They need some rest. The boys have been very busy, playing two or three games within a week and long distant journeys. Last week, we traveled to Umuahia for Abia Warriors and next day from there to Lafia, Nasarawa state for the round of 64 FA cup. So, I must commend my boys they have done well."

The awards winning Coach Greg Ikhenoba said that the focus of the team now is on Kano Pillars game and assured Insurance fans of good result.



OKE

## World Cup: Zimbabwe arrives Nigeria for Super Eagles clash

As the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers continue, Zimbabwe's national team, the Warriors, have arrived in Nigeria ahead of their crucial match against the Super Eagles.

On Thursday, Zimbabwe secured a hard-fought 2-2 draw

against Benin Cheetahs in a match played in South Africa.

Following that result, the team and its delegation landed in Lagos on Saturday morning before taking a connecting flight to Uyo for their upcoming encounter.

Meanwhile, Nigeria's Su-

per Eagles sent a strong message to their opponents with a commanding 2-0 victory over Rwanda's Amavubi on Friday.

The highly anticipated clash between Nigeria and Zimbabwe is set to take place at the Godswill Akpabio Stadium in Uyo on Tuesday.

## CAF President congratulates history-making IOC President Ms Kirsty Coventry

President of CAF, Dr Patrice Motsepe was one of the early dignitaries to congratulate the newly elected President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Ms. Kirsty Coventry.

Coventry is the current Minister of Youth, Art, Sport and Recreation in Zimbabwe. She made history by becoming the first African and the first woman to be elected President of the IOC.

CAF President Dr Patrice Motsepe said: "On behalf of the CAF Member Associations who represent 54 African countries, we would like to express our heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Kirsty Coventry on her election as President of the IOC."

"Her election as President of

the IOC fills us with enormous pride and is also a recognition of her outstanding achievements and embodiment of the philosophy of Olympism. We wish her everything of the very best."



COVENTRY

## ...NPFL25: Enabulele congratulates team after 1-0 victory

The Executive Chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, has congratulated Bendel Insurance FC on their 1-0 win against Sunshine Stars FC of Akure.

The Edo state Sports Commission boss praised the team for their impressive performance in the Saturday match at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium, Benin.

The Benin Arsenal defeated the Owens Wales of Akure Courtesy of Kayode Oke's 20th minute shot from about 22 meters to give Bendel Insurance the deserved victory.

Enabulele said, "This victory shows the hard work and commitment of our players and coaches. Bendel Insurance has proven their competitiveness. And I am happy we are going up

every week."

Enabulele urged the team to sustain the momentum as the season continues. He stressed the importance of teamwork and determination in achieving success.

