

20,000 stranded Nigerians returned from Libya, others —Report

No fewer than 20,197 Nigerians stranded in various countries have voluntarily returned to their homeland.

According to data collated from various repatriation exercises facilitated by the International Organisation for Migration, the stranded Nigerians

The stranded Nigerians returned to their country under the IOM's Assisted Voluntary

Return and Reintegration programme, which involved intervention from the Federal Government and various Nigerian missions abroad.

Women and girls constitute nearly 88 per cent of the returnees, while men account for 13 per cent.

Most VoTs fall within the age bracket of 18 to 39 years, with those aged 18 to 25 being particularly susceptible to re-

cruitment by traffickers.

One of the reports read, "The stranded Nigerian migrants returned home from transit and destination countries along the Mediterranean irregular migratory route.

"From April 2017 to May 2018, over 7,000 of those returned from Libyan detention centres and urban areas while 750 were from neighbouring countries, mainly Niger and Mali."

The agency also revealed that "19,452 Nigerians have been assisted to voluntarily return home between April 2017 and February 2022."

Within the first quarter of 2024 alone, the IOM said it facilitated the return of 167 victims to Nigeria, 81 per cent of whom were female. However, this trend is not new.

In 2022, the number of female victims reached its peak with 908

identified cases, whereas male victims were significantly fewer, peaking at 166 in the same year.

In the period reviewed, economic instability was the predominant reason for irregular migration, with a staggering 94 per cent of VoTs citing the search for better economic opportunities as their primary motivation.

Only two per cent sought specific job opportunities, one per cent sought to escape ad-

verse family situations, and 3 per cent had varied reasons, including education, family reunification and fleeing violence.

Italy, Libya, and Mali were among the top intended destination countries for the VoTs.

The three countries constituted nearly 60 per cent of all returnees, with Italy retaining its prominence, harbouring 26

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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NEPL/ Seplat JV hosts 2025 education summit

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 952

MONDAY 3RD MARCH, 2025.

₦200

Ramadan: Okpebholo, Idahosa salute Muslim faithful

● Congratulate Oshiomhole on honorary doctorate

RICHARD EWEKA AND BERNADETTE IDALU

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, and his depu-

ty, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, have extended warm greetings to the Muslim faithful as the Holy Month of Ramadan begins, urging them to use the period for prayers, spiritual renewal, and acts of kindness.

They also took the opportu-

nity to congratulate Senator Adams Oshiomhole on the conferment of an honorary doctorate degree by Edo University, Iyamho, recognising his significant contributions to the political and developmental landscape of Edo State and Nigeria.

Governor Okpebholo, in a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Fred Itua, called on Muslims to dedicate the sacred month to praying for peace in Edo State and across the country, while extending love and support to their neigh-

bours, the needy, and the less privileged in society.

"As the crescent moon graces our skies, birthing the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan, I extend my warmest greetings to all Muslim faithful in Edo State and across the country. Ramadan is a time of profound spiritual reflection, self-discipline, and devotion.

"It is a period of fasting, prayer, and charity, where Muslims are encouraged to strengthen their connection with the Almighty and foster a spirit of unity and compassion within their communities," Okpebholo stated.

He emphasised that Ramadan

is not just about fasting, but also about extending kindness and promoting peace among people.

"I urge everyone, especially the Muslim faithful, to use this blessed month to deepen their faith, extend a helping hand to those in need, and promote peace and harmony among fellow residents and citizens of Edo State.

"Let us remember the less fortunate and share our blessings with them, which embodies the true spirit of Ramadan," he added.

The governor also urged Muslims to pray for President Bola

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EMPOWERMENT CONFERENCE 2025:

Minister of Women Affairs, Hon. Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim (left), and Chairperson, House of Reps Committee on Women Affairs and Social Development, Hon. Kafilat Ogbara (right), presenting an award plaque to the Speaker, House of Representatives, Hon. Abbas Tajudeen (middle), at the Nigerian Women Leadership and Empowerment Conference 2025 in Abuja. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

12 burnt to death in Edo road crash

● as Police arrest 2 suspects in community shooting

Twelve passengers were burnt to death in a fatal collision between a Toyota Hiace bus and a truck early Saturday morning along the Benin-Auchi highway.

The tragic accident occurred around 5 a.m. at Igueovio-bo community, near an army checkpoint on the highway.

Edo State Sector Commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Cyril Mathew, confirmed the incident, stating that the bus, which departed from

Zuba in the Federal Capital Territory and was en route to Benin, collided head-on with an oncoming truck heading towards Auchi. The impact ignited a fire that engulfed the bus, making rescue efforts impossible.

"All the occupants of the bus were killed in the crash," Mathew said, adding that driver fatigue might have been a factor, as the bus driver could have dozed off at the wheel.

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Edo govt pledges swift action in militancy-ravaged communities —Pg 2

Pro-Ukraine protests across US after Trump, Zelensky clash —Pg 6

Four dead and several missing after India avalanche —Pg 7

Kenyans, Ethiopians dominate ECOWAS Abuja Marathon as Nigerians win 5km race —Pg 8

Alenkhe, Igbinoaro shine at NIPSS Strategic Leadership Course

The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, successfully hosted the 13th Basic Stream Short Course on Strategic Leadership, Ethics, and Policy Making (SLEAMP).

The intensive training brought together professionals from various government agencies across Nigeria, equipping them with advanced leadership perspectives and ethical decision-making frameworks crucial for governance and policy implementation.

Edo State was well represented at the course, with top government officials in attendance,

including Mrs. Bose Joy Igbinoaro, Permanent Secretary, Human Resources; Mrs. Ese Martina Omoruyi, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Mining; Mr. Joseph Nyamdi, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Water Resources; Mrs. Irenonsen Joy Ihensekhen, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development; and Chief Marie Bisi Idaomi, Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development.

Also present was Dr. Festus Alenkhe, Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, and Security and Defence Correspondent of

Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS). Speaking at the passing-out ceremony, Professor Ayo Omotayo, Director General of NIPSS, reaffirmed the institute's dedication to grooming quality leaders in Nigeria.

He highlighted that since its establishment in 1979, the institute has produced top leaders

across both the military and public service. He encouraged aspiring leaders to take advantage of the program to refine their leadership and policy implementation skills.

The course provided a unique platform for cross-sectoral engagement, reinforcing the role of ethical leadership in national

development.

In an interview, Dr. Festus Alenkhe commended the Federal Government for sustaining NIPSS over the years. He also expressed gratitude to Edo Broadcasting Service for its support and encouragement, emphasizing that the knowledge gained from the training would be put

to effective use in the discharge of his duties. With professionals like Mrs.

Igbinoaro and Dr. Alenkhe actively contributed to governance and media in the course which further highlighted Edo State's commitment to fostering capable leadership for national progress.

20,000 stranded Nigerians returned...

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per cent of returnees.

Other choices include Germany, Spain, UAE, France, Lebanon, Senegal, and Cote d'Ivoire. Among the returnees, Libya stood out as the leading country of exploitation, accounting for 53 per cent of abuse cases, followed by Mali with 29 per cent.

In the last two decades, Libya has served as a destination and transit point for millions of Nigerians embarking on the desperate journey to Europe through the Mediterranean.

Since the ousting of its former leader, Muammar Gaddafi, in October 2011 and the ensuing instability, there have been rising cases of alleged slave trade and extortion, which has reportedly become an income stream for Libyan communities.

On the nature of exploitation, most VoTs primarily faced forced labour and sexual exploitation.

Further details from the IOM showed that 1,114 victims, predominantly females (82 per cent), were exploited through forced labour in Libya, as Mali was noted for sex trade exploitation, affecting 1,109 victims, 98 per cent of whom were female.

The data also revealed that, although traffickers employed diverse means of control, physical and psychological abuses were

prominently reported. Deception was another key method, combined with threats and withholding wages, ensuring victims remained trapped and subjugated.

Most VoTs reported being trafficked by friends or acquaintances, who accounted for 46.6 per cent female and 53.2 per cent male victims trafficked.

The IOM said it had partnered with various governmental and non-governmental actors to provide reintegration support to VoTs, with over 3,122 victims (64 per cent) successfully reintegrated into their communities.

"They have received assistance ranging from medical care to vocational training aimed at fostering their economic independence and resilience.

"The main source of stress for returnees who find themselves in a state of regret and limbo between what they planned to achieve and what they have at hand upon return is often the uncertainty about their future, source of income and their place within the community," the report read.

The most vulnerable set of returnees were VoTs, survivors of Gender-Based Violence, unaccompanied minors, those with severe mental and psychosocial needs, physical health needs, and those exposed to violence or who experienced other forms of exploitation.

12 burnt to death in Edo...

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FRSC officials identified the deceased through the vehicle's passenger manifest and have since contacted their families. The truck driver and his assistant, commonly referred to as the "Motor Boy," escaped unhurt.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Police Command has arrested two individuals in connection with an attack on the Igukpe community in Benin City, the state capital, during which the youth leader and another person sustained gunshot injuries.

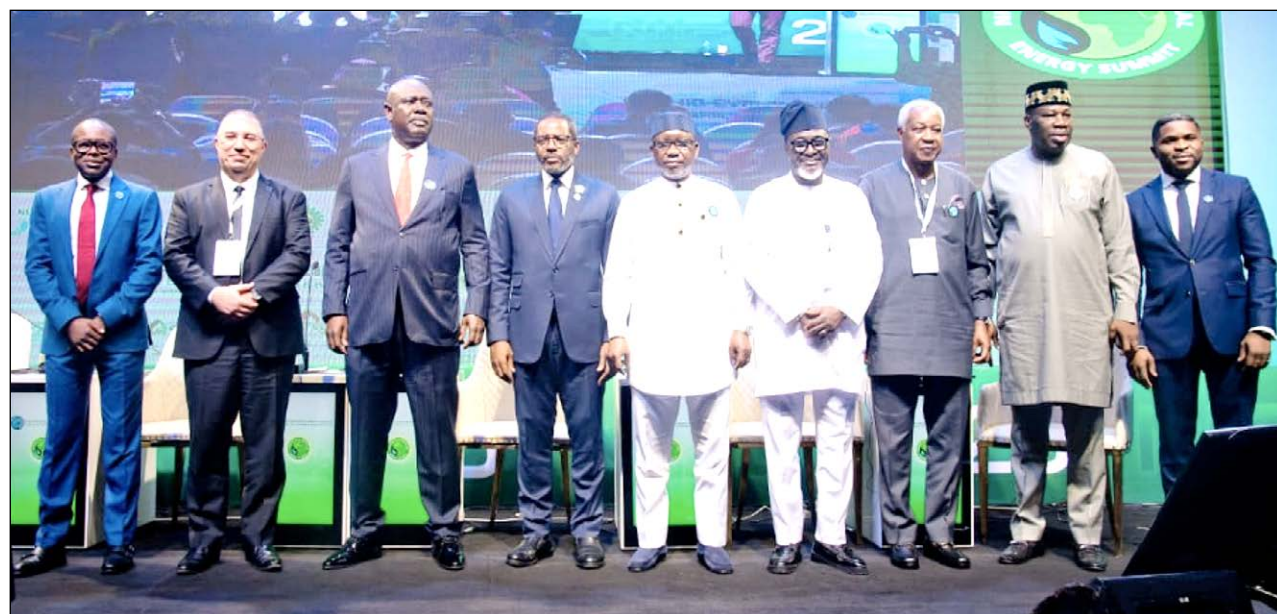
The spokesperson for the command, Moses Yamu, confirmed the incident in a statement on Saturday.

"On February 28, 2025, at about 16:00 hours, the command received a report that Edobor Edwin, the former Okiaghele of Igukpe Community, led a group of thugs in a sporadic shooting

spree. As a result, the current Okiaghele of the community, Victor Ogierioba, sustained a gunshot wound to the stomach, while one Efe Agbaoghoghoh was shot in the face," Yamu stated.

According to the statement, operatives from the Iyekogba Division, in collaboration with Operation Rescue, responded swiftly, arresting one suspect identified only as Osator and the principal suspect, Edobor Edwin. The police restored normalcy to the area and have intensified efforts to apprehend other fleeing suspects.

Edo State Commissioner of Police, Betty Otimenyin, has ordered the immediate transfer of the case to the State Criminal Investigation Department (CID). She urged residents to refrain from taking the law into their own hands, warning that the police would no longer tolerate acts of lawlessness in the state.



NIES CONFERENCE:

Chief of Staff to Minister of Energy and Mines, Algeria, Hallal Mohammed Nassim; Nigeria's Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Oil), Dr Heineken Lokpobiri; Chairman, Central African Pipeline Systems (CAPS) and Former Minister of Petroleum, Equatorial Guinea, Gabriel Mbega Obiang Lima; Nigeria's Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Gas), Ekperikpe Ekpo; GM, Government, JV & External Relations Heritage Energy Operational Services Limited (HEOSL), Rev. Sola Adebawo; Country Chairman, Energy Institute, Mr Austen Olorunsola; Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum Resources (Oil & Gas), Amb. Nicholas Agbo Ella, and other dignitaries at the NIES Conference in Abuja.

Edo govt pledges swift action in militancy-ravaged communities

The Edo State Government has pledged urgent intervention following a brutal attack by armed militants in several communities in Ovia Southwest Local Government Area, including Madoiti, Agolobi, Gbalematen, Eto, Baba-Dele, Dipe, and Taye.

The attack left numerous casualties, displaced hundreds of residents, and resulted in widespread destruction of homes, farmlands, and livelihoods.

In response, the Edo State

Emergency Management Agency (EdoSEMA), in collaboration with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), immediately conducted an on-the-spot assessment to evaluate the extent of the devastation.

Hon. Jerry Idahosa, Executive Secretary of EdoSEMA, assured victims that the government, under Governor Monday Okpebholo's leadership, is fully committed to restoring security and supporting those affected.

He acknowledged the widespread destruction, including the burning of homes and farmlands, and emphasized that relief measures were already being planned.

He urged displaced residents to remain calm and law-abiding while the government works on immediate interventions.

As part of efforts to address the crisis, the state government has vowed to strengthen security in the region and launch a thorough investigation to identify

and prosecute those responsible for the attack.

Idahosa stressed that acts of terror would not be tolerated and that measures were being put in place to prevent further assaults.

NEMA's Head of Operations, Mr. Ojuederie Kenoma, also expressed sympathy for the victims and reassured them that both the state and federal governments were actively working to ensure urgent relief and long-term solutions.

Ramadan: Okpebholo, Idahosa salute...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Ahmed Tinubu and his administration as they work towards improving the lives of Nigerians.

"I urge all Muslim faithful to continue to pray for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and his administration, as he works tirelessly to make the lives of Nigerians better and address the many challenges facing our dear country. May Allah (SWT) accept your fast, prayers, and good deeds. May this Ramadan bring everyone closer to Him and fill our hearts with peace, joy, and blessings.

"On behalf of the Government and the people of Edo State, I wish you all a blessed and fulfilling Ramadan Kareem," Governor Okpebholo stressed.

The State Deputy Governor, Hon Dennis Idahosa, also extended his Ramadan greetings, recognising the significance of the month for Muslim faithful in Edo and beyond.

Speaking through his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Friday Agbedo, Idahosa wished Muslims a

solemn and meaningful Ramadan, urging them to use the period to strengthen relationships, foster forgiveness, and deepen their connection with Allah. "As we step into the ninth and sacred month of the Islamic calendar, characterised by fasting from dawn to sunset, I pray for Allah's guidance throughout this period. May this be a time of faith, reflection, and unity," he said.

He further encouraged Muslims to see the month as an opportunity to cultivate a stronger society through kindness and spiritual discipline.

"Together, let us build a future where love and understanding prevail, where the light of hope shines brightly for all," he stated, emphasising the power of faith in fostering harmony and societal progress.

Beyond their Ramadan messages, Governor Okpebholo and his deputy also celebrated Senator Adams Aliu Oshiomhole on the conferment of an honorary doctorate degree in Political Science by Edo University, Iyamho.

The governor described the

recognition as a testament to Oshiomhole's unwavering dedication and contributions to Edo State and Nigeria.

"This prestigious honour is a confirmation of Senator Adams Oshiomhole's outstanding contributions to Edo State and Nigeria in general. His unflinching dedication, patriotism, and service to the people have earned him this well-deserved recognition by the university," Okpebholo remarked.

The governor further highlighted Oshiomhole's lasting impact on the state's development and governance. "Senator Oshiomhole's work has had a profound impact on Edo State, and we are proud to see his achievements acknowledged by such an institution.

"This honorary doctorate degree reflects his lifelong dedication to serving the public good," he stated, commending Edo University for recognising Oshiomhole's contributions.

Deputy Governor Idahosa also celebrated Oshiomhole's achievement, describing it as a

notable development that would further inspire the political landscape of Edo and Nigeria.

Through his Chief Press Secretary, Idahosa praised Oshiomhole for his visionary leadership and commitment to progress.

"I congratulate you, my mentor and leader, Senator Adams Aliu Oshiomhole, on this prestigious award of an honorary doctorate degree conferred on you by our reputable state university, Edo University, Iyamho.

"Your leadership has been instrumental in shaping the developmental trajectory of Edo State," he stated.

Idahosa also emphasised that Oshiomhole's influence remains invaluable to the current administration.

"The Monday Okpebholo-led administration is privileged to have your support, and we are eager to tap into your vast political resourcefulness. Your drive and cohesion for unity and development are commendable and worthy of emulation. Once again, congratulations, my leader," he concluded.

NEWS

Ramadan: Edo Speaker tasks Muslims on devotion in worship

FRIDAY OBANOR

The Speaker Edo State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Blessing Sheriff Agbebaku has tasked Muslim faithful on total devotion in the

service of Allah as they fast in this year's Ramadan.

The Speaker in his message went down memory lane on the origin of Ramadan which is deeply rooted in the religion of Islam that forms an integral

part in the lives of Muslims worldwide.

Rt Hon. Agbebaku noted that the Holy month of Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar year when Muslims fast from sunrise to sun-

set, upholding the fourth pillar of Islam.

He stressed that this core value reflects the obligation that makes Ramadan fast compulsory for Muslims who honour the five pillars of Islam.

The Speaker who emphasized the need for a total devotion and reflection during and after this period of Ramadan, however urged all Muslim faithful to

embrace this moment of fasting to strengthen our unity and work towards common goals that benefit everyone.

Rt. Hon. Agbebaku further charged all to imbibe the spirit of love, care, kindness and peace especially in our dear State and nation in general.

He therefore reassured that the Edo State House of Assembly ably led by him is committed in ensuring that people-oriented bills, socio-economic and industrial development of the state is strengthened for the good of all citizens of Edo state irrespective of political, religious or ethnic background.

He then prayed for a successful Ramadan celebration for all Muslims in the state, Nigeria and the entire world.



PLENARY:

Majority Leader, Edo State House of Assembly, Hon. Charity Iguodala (middle); flanked by Hon Asonsere Friday, representing Ikpoba Okha Constituency (left), and Hon Omosigho Uyi Frank, representing Oredo East Constituency, during the plenary.

PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN.

Ika South agric department presents data on farmers to LG chairman

AJUWA VICTOR

The Supervisory Councillor for Agriculture in Ika South Local Government, Hon. Kelvin Ehiwarior, along with senior officers in the Agriculture Department, has presented data on farmers in the local government area to the Executive Chairman of the Local Government, Engr. Jerry Ehiwarior.

Receiving the document, which captured farmers in all communities in Agbor, headquarters of Ika South LGA, the Chairman commended the Supervisor on Agriculture, Hon.

Kelvin Ehiwarior and his team for the painstaking and deliberate effort they put in collecting the data.

Engr. Jerry Ehiwarior said his administration was deeply committed to the development of agriculture, and stressed that farmers in the Local Government Area would be assisted in any way possible to ensure that there is enough food for the people of Ika South.

The Chairman assured that his administration would continue to initiate and pursue policies and programmes that would enhance the lives of the people, maintaining that the

primary responsibility of any government was the welfare and security of its people.

He thanked the Supervisory Councillor, Hon. Ehiwarior, and members of staff of the Department of Agriculture of the local government for their commitment to duty, and encouraged them to always remain dedicated to their duties.

Earlier, while presenting the document to the Executive Chairman, the Supervisory Councillor for Agriculture, Hon. Ehiwarior, disclosed that the exercise, which covered all the communities in Ika South, was made possible due to the im-

mense support of the Chairman.

The Supervisory Councillor explained that during the exercise, "approximately 6,000 farmers were captured across the local government area."

He noted that as the rains draw near, signalling the approach of the planting season, the data would help in identifying areas of assistance to farmers in Ika South.

The Supervisory Councillor thanked the Chairman for his leadership approach, which, he said, was geared towards human capacity building and infrastructure development of the entire local government area.

FG names Admiralty varsity VC amid controversy

The Federal Government has confirmed the appointment of Prof Lucian Chukwu as the substantive Vice Chancellor of Admiralty University, Ibuzor, Delta State.

Chukwu, a Professor of Marine Biology and the current Deputy Vice Chancellor (Management Services) at the University of Lagos, was officially announced as the new Vice Chancellor at the weekend.

The Minister of Education, Tunji Alausa, confirmed Chukwu's appointment in a statement made available to newsmen by the ministry's Director of Press and Public Relations, Folasade Boriowo.

According to the minister, Chukwu scored 83.41 per cent to emerge the institution's new vice chancellor.

The development comes after

an earlier announcement by the university's Registrar, Isaac Mankilik, on Friday, declaring Prof Christopher Ogbogbo as the new VC, a move that reportedly confused the university community.

Mankilik, in a statement, claimed that Ogbogbo, a Professor of African History at the University of Ibadan, emerged as the successful candidate after receiving nine out of 15 votes from the members of the university's Governing Council at an extraordinary meeting held on Friday.

However, the Chairman of the Council, Dele Ezeoba, dismissed Ogbogbo's appointment, describing it as "illegal."

Ezeoba said the registrar neither had the authority nor the mandate to announce Ogbogbo as the vice chancellor.

"What authority does he (Mankilik) has to announce the

appointment of the vice-chancellor? Does his authority override that of the Federal Government?"

"His announcement is illegal; it is only the Chairman of the Governing Council that can do that. So, whatever they have done is illegal, and that was why the minister issued a statement approving the appointment of Professor Lucian Chukwu, the substantive VC," Ezeoba told newsmen.

It was gathered that to ensure the integrity, transparency and professionalism of the selection process, the council engaged the services of KPMG, a globally recognised and reputable consulting firm, to conduct the recruitment and selection of the 52 candidates that applied for the position of vice chancellor.

A report by KPMG indicated that the scores of the top five candidates with Chukwu scor-

ing 83.41 per cent and Ogbogbo 72.5 per cent.

A source from the university, who spoke with newsmen on the condition of anonymity, said some members of the council resisted the move by Ezeoba to announce Chukwu as the vice chancellor-designate after he (Chukwu) emerged as the overall best candidate.

"The overall best was supposed to be declared winner when the Chairman of Governing Council and Pro-Chancellor, Vice Admiral Dele Ezeoba (ret'd.), informed the council that they should declare Prof. Chukwu winner and the vice chancellor-designate, but some selected members of Council resisted and said they would prefer to go with the candidate that came second and thereby abandoning merit."

Edo State Govt rescues mentally ill mother, newborn

PEACE OSEMWEGIE

In a swift and compassionate response towards family support, the Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development has rescued a mentally ill nursing mother, Miss Nkechi, and her newborn baby boy.

Miss Nkechi and her newborn were rescued soon after giving birth on February 25, 2025 by a Good Nigerian who facilitated her admission to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH).

The Ministry's prompt intervention ensured the safe transfer of Miss Nkechi and her baby to the Ministry's care.

Upon assessment, Miss Nkechi's mental health status was confirmed, and she was handed over to the Director of the Rehabilitation Services, Mr. Sylvester Okegualo who promptly placed Miss Nkechi on specialized treatment and rehabilitation at one of the Ministry's partners Herbal Healing Homes.

Meanwhile, the newborn baby boy is under the care of the Department of Child Development, where his well-being and immediate needs are being met. The Ministry has commended the Good Nigerian who paid the medical bills at the UBTH, encouraging them to continue their good works.

The collaborative efforts of the Department of Child Development and Rehabilitation Services Department are crucial in providing necessary care and support for both mother and child. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will ensure the best possible outcomes for this vulnerable family.

The Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development remains committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable citizens, particularly women and children. This rescue mission is a testament to the Ministry's dedication to providing critical support services to those in need.

Foundation supports persons living with sickle cell

AJUWA VICTOR

A Non-governmental/ Humanitarian Organisation, Michael Oghenegueke Foundation, has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting individuals living with sickle cell in Otu-Jeremi General Hospital.

The foundation's reaffirmed its monthly support for the "WORRIORS", as the sickle cell patients are fondly referred to at the Otu-Jeremi General Hospital during their monthly clinic day.

The Founder and Director General of the Foundation, Hon. Evang. Michael Oghenegueke, stressed the need for collective action to address the burden faced by victims just as he assure the WORRIORS of the foundation's monthly support for their medications.

The Chairperson of the Foundation Vera Okpemu said, "We recognize individuals with sickle cell as WORRIORS with special gift from God."

Our goal is to support them financially to get medications to manage their conditions ef-

fectively."

Parents and the warriors also expressed the deep appreciation to the foundation for its kindness.

The Chief Matron of the General Hospital at Otu-Jeremi, Mrs. See-dee Onoriode on behalf of the management of the Hospital, expressed gratitude to the Foundation for its generous contributions toward the welfare and medication of Sickle Cell patients in the Hospital.

"We are truly appreciative of the foundation's unwavering dedication to improving the lives of the children who are our WORRIORS and look forward to building a lasting partnership to inspire hope and joy in their future.

"Your kindness will continue to make a meaningful impact!

"The Michael Oghenegueke Foundation deserve commendation because they are not enjoying any government patronage or eyeing any political post.

"I pray God to give you more grace and more resources to continue to do the good work you have started".

NEPL/Seplat JV hosts 2025 education summit

● Graduates 327 teachers, 15 Chief Inspectors

BENIN CITY

The NEPL/Seplat Energy Joint Venture has successfully hosted the 2025 Seplat Education Summit, themed "Transforming the Education Workforce: A Critical Success for Nation Building."

The summit brought together key stakeholders to discuss sustainable solutions for improving Nigeria's education sector, with a focus on enhancing teacher capacity and leadership.

A major highlight of the event was the graduation of 327 teachers and 15 Chief Inspectors of Education from the 2024 Seplat Teachers Empowerment Programme (STEP).

This milestone reflects NEPL/Seplat Energy's ongoing commitment to upskilling educators and improving the quality of education in Edo and Delta States.

Chioma Afe, Director of External Affairs and Social Performance at Seplat Energy, emphasized the crucial role teachers play in shaping a thriving education system. She noted that through initiatives like STEP, educators are equipped with modern teaching methodologies and technology-driven learning approaches, ensuring a more engaging and impactful classroom experience.

She also highlighted that Seplat JV has trained 1,334 teachers across its host states, posi-

tively impacting over 100,000 students annually.

The Minister of Education, Dr. Maruf Tunji Alausa, represented by Mrs. Agatha Ogeferi, the Director of Basic and Secondary Education at the Federal Ministry of Education, stressed the importance of continuous teacher development, calling it essential for national progress.

He commended the STEP program for aligning with global best practices and enhancing Nigeria's evolving curriculum.

Dr. Emmanuel Iyamu, the Commissioner for Education in Edo State, underscored the need for collaboration in strengthening the education system, recognizing the vital role of dedicated educators in building a brighter future.

Similarly, Delta State Commissioner for Secondary Education, Rose Ezewu, represented by Mrs. Justina Ishaka, the Deputy Director of Secondary Education, praised the transformative impact of STEP in Delta State, where over 600 teachers have benefited since 2020.

She emphasized that the program has significantly improved STEM education, enhancing teaching quality and student outcomes.

Susan Bassey of NNPC Exploration and Production Limited (NEPL) reaffirmed the company's commitment to sustaining the STEP initiative, cit-

ing its tangible impact on grassroots education.

She noted that past participants have leveraged their training to elevate their teaching skills and professional capacities, further driving systemic change in the education sector.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Yinka Omorogbe (SAN) provided an insightful analysis of the summit's theme, emphasizing the need for strate-

gic investments in the education workforce to drive national development.

She highlighted the long-term socioeconomic benefits of equipping teachers with modern skills, ensuring sustainability and progress in education.

A panel session featuring seasoned educationists and STEP alumni further explored the importance of continuous investment in teacher development.

Panelists shared personal experiences on how the training had enhanced their skills, improved instructional techniques, and positively impacted their professional growth.

To celebrate excellence, awards were presented to the top 10 teachers, while the top three innovative projects developed during the training received special recognition. These projects demonstrated the practical application of skills gained through STEP, reinforcing its impact on modern teaching methodolo-

gies. Reflecting on her experience, Lydia Aiganigbee, a teacher from Chinel Universe Academies in Edo State, shared how STEP had transformed her teaching approach, making learning more interactive and engaging.

Ereraka Lucky Ovie of Agbor College, Delta State, who was named the top teacher of the 2024 STEP cohort, described the program as a game-changer, enabling him to make his students active participants in the learning process.



PUBLIC HEARING:

L-R: Senate President, Godwill Akpabio; Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance, Sani Musa, and Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele, during the public hearing on Tax Reform Bill in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

Retired Generals highlight challenges in preventing payment 'bandits levies'

Retired Nigerian military generals have expressed that the armed forces face significant challenges in preventing residents of troubled northern regions from paying levies and ransoms to bandits, despite ongoing counterterrorism efforts.

They attribute this to deep-seated distrust in the military's capacity to provide adequate protection, leading communities to comply with bandits' demands to avoid attacks.

In states like Benue, Niger, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, farming communities have been compelled to pay substantial sums, ranging from ₦20 million to ₦200 million, to various bandits and terror groups. For instance, in July 2024, residents of Toro community in Benue State sold their farm produce to raise a ₦20 million levy imposed by bandits, with individuals contributing ₦50,000 each to avert attacks. Similarly, in September 2024, the people of Moriki town in Zamfara State struggled to gather a ₦30 million levy demanded by notorious bandit leader Bello Turji.

More recently, in January 2025, another bandit leader, Dantsito, threatened communities in Zamfara's Tsafe LGA with

attacks unless they paid a ₦200 million levy within two weeks.

Despite the Defence Headquarters' repeated advisories against yielding to bandits' financial demands, the lack of consistent security presence in remote communities hampers residents' ability to heed this advice.

Retired Brigadier General John Sura noted that military deployments are often limited to local government headquarters or major road junctions, leaving villages, sometimes five to ten kilometers away, vulnerable and necessitating self-defense measures or compliance with bandit demands.

Another retired general, speaking anonymously, highlighted the military's inadequate manpower as a significant factor limiting their capacity to provide widespread security.

He emphasized that residents are more likely to comply with bandits, who maintain a constant presence in their communities, compared to security forces that are intermittently present.

These insights underscore the complex security challenges in Nigeria's northern regions, where residents, lacking reliable protection, often feel compelled to meet bandits' demands to ensure their safety and maintain peace.

D Prince Builders reaffirms commitment to affordable housing for Nigerians

MONDAY OISE

The Group Managing Director of D Prince Builders and Estate Developers, Mr. Cyril Omoregie, has reiterated his commitment to making homeownership accessible and affordable for average Nigerians.

He assured that the company remains dedicated to providing a seamless process for acquiring property without the risk of financial loss.

Speaking to journalists after allocating lands and buildings to subscribers at the estate in Obaretin, Sapele Road, Mr. Omoregie described the D Prince Builder City as a mod-

ern development emerging from the historic city of Benin.

He emphasized that the estate is designed as a cosmopolitan hub where even Nigerians living abroad can confidently invest in property and get value for their money.

Highlighting the estate's features, he noted that it is a gated community with round-the-clock security, perimeter fencing, and an access card system for residents.

"The roads leading to the estate are fully tarred, ensuring convenience for homeowners. The estate includes both residential and commercial plots, with the commercial section housing a shopping mall, event centers, hotels, and apartments.

"Residential plots cater to duplexes and bungalows, with standardized prototype designs available for those who wish to build," he said.

Mr. Omoregie encouraged the public to take advantage of the flexible home acquisition opportunities provided by D Prince Builders, including installment payment plans that make homeownership more accessible.

He further disclosed that the estate will feature recreational facilities such as a mini football pitch, a swimming pool, and a mini golf course to enhance the quality of life for residents.

He also mentioned that the company has offices in Abuja, Lagos, and Benin City for easy

access.

Some of the new property owners, including Canada-based Mrs. Okundia Queen Abiewense and United Kingdom-based Mr. Omoruyi Osamogie, International Coordinator of the Dedicated People Mission Worldwide, commended D Prince Builders for its transparency and efforts in restoring confidence among Nigerians in the diaspora who want to invest in property back home.

They urged others to take advantage of the initiative, emphasizing that the flexible payment system allows buyers to acquire homes at their own pace while ensuring value for their investment.

Tinubu celebrates Gbajabiamila's mother at 95

President Bola Tinubu has felicitated with Alhaja Lateefat Olufunke Gbajabiamila on her 95th birthday.

He described her as a "revered leader, accomplished entrepreneur, and philanthropist."

Alhaja Gbajabiamila, the mother of the President's Chief of Staff, Right Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila, was celebrated for her "contributions

to Nigeria's socio-political landscape and her unwavering commitment to humanity and faith."

In a Sunday statement released by Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, Tinubu praised the nonagenarian's "unmatched kindness, humility, and unwavering dedication to serving God and humanity."


He highlighted her influential role in politics as the first elected female local government chairperson during the Lateef Jakande Administration, describing her as a "formidable political force in Lagos and beyond."

"When chronicling the women who have left lasting marks on Nigeria's socio-political landscape, Alhaja Gbajabiamila's name will un-

doubtedly stand out," Tinubu remarked, underscoring her pioneering impact and service.

The President also expressed gratitude for her "support and consistent prayers" and offered prayers for her continued health and happiness.

"I ask God Almighty, whom she serves faithfully, to grant her many more years filled with good health, joy, and laughter," he added.

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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

Haiti police raid gang leader's stronghold in capital

The government of Haiti says police have launched a large-scale operation in a shantytown controlled by powerful gang leader Jimmy Chérizier, who is widely known as Barbecue.

The authorities say several gang members have been

killed in the Lower Delmas area of the capital Port-au-Prince.

Local reports say military drones carrying explosives are being used in the operation.

Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé praised the assault. He said it was the work of a

special task force created two days ago to tackle insecurity.

Chérizier, aged 47, is the feared leader of Viv Ansam (Live Together), a coalition of gangs that control much of the city.

It is not clear whether Kenyan police officers deployed in

Haiti last year to help fight the gangs are involved in the security operation.

Last week, a Kenyan police officer - who was on patrol with the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support mission - was killed in a confrontation with gang members.

Gang control in Port-au-Prince has led to an almost complete breakdown of law and order, the collapse of health services and emergence of a food security crisis.

More than 5,500 people were killed in gang-related violence in the Caribbean na-

tion in 2024 and more than a million people have fled their homes.

Haiti's transitional presidential council, the body created to re-establish democratic order, has made little progress towards organising long-delayed elections.



GAZA FRAGILE PEACE:

Palestinians in Gaza are struggling to put their lives back together in the current, fragile peace

Israel blocks entry of all humanitarian aid into Gaza

The Israeli government says it has blocked the entry of all humanitarian aid into Gaza because the first phase of the ceasefire with Hamas has expired.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Hamas had so far refused to accept a temporary ceasefire extension under a proposal by US President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff.

A Hamas spokesman called the move "cheap blackmail" and a "coup" on the ceasefire agreement and urged mediators to get Israel to resume the supply of aid.

The Palestinian group wants phase two of the deal to go ahead as originally negotiated, with the release of hostages and Palestinian prisoners and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

It previously said it would not agree to any extension of phase one without guarantees from US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators that phase two would eventually take place.

A statement from Netanyahu's office said: "With the end of Phase 1 of the hostage deal, and in light of Hamas's refusal to accept the Witkoff outline for continuing talks - to which Israel agreed - Prime Minister Netanyahu has decided that, as of this morning, all entry of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip will cease."

"Israel will not allow a ceasefire without the release of our hostages. If Hamas continues its refusal, there will be further consequences."

The Hamas spokesman said: "Netanyahu's decision to stop aid going into Gaza once again shows the ugly face of the Israeli occupation... The international community must apply pressure on the Israeli government to stop starving our people."

Late last night, Netanyahu's office said Israel had agreed to

a US proposal for the ceasefire to continue for about six weeks during the Muslim Ramadan and Jewish Passover periods.

If, at the end of this period, negotiations reached a dead end, Israel would reserve the right to go back to war.

US envoy Witkoff has not made his proposal public. According to Israel, it would begin with the release of half of all the remaining living and dead hostages.

Witkoff proposed the six-week extension after becoming convinced that more time was needed to try to bridge the differences between Israel and Hamas on conditions for ending the war, according to the earlier statement from Netanyahu's office.

Israel would immediately start negotiations on this if Hamas changed its position on the six-week ceasefire extension, Netanyahu's office said.

The first phase of the ceasefire that came into force on 19 January expired on Saturday.

It halted 15 months of fighting between Hamas and the Israeli military, allowing the release of 33 Israeli and five Thai hostages for about 1,900 Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

But negotiations on phase two, including the release of all remaining living hostages and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, have barely begun.

There are believed to be 24 hostages alive, with another 39 presumed to be dead.

Hamas carried out an unprecedented attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, killing about 1,200 people and taking another 251 hostage.

Israel responded with an air and ground campaign in the Gaza Strip, during which at least 48,365 people have been killed, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry.

Pro-Ukraine protests across US after Trump-Zelensky clash

Pro-Ukraine protests have taken place across the US after Donald Trump and JD Vance's angry exchange with Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House.

Hundreds of people gathered in New York, Los Angeles and Boston to express their support for Ukraine after the furious row in the Oval Office.

Protesters holding pro-Ukraine signs also lined a road in Waitsfield, Vermont, where Vice-President Vance and his family were visiting for a ski holiday.

US media reported the family moved to an undisclosed location from their planned ski resort because of the demonstrations.

A protest in Waitsfield against the Trump-Vance administration had been or-

ganised earlier in the week - before the US president and vice-president's clash with Zelensky - but many signs referenced the row and Russia's war with Ukraine.

"I think [Friday's] performance at the White House has probably galvanised even more people to come out today," Judy Daly, from Indivisible Mad River Valley, the group which organised the protest, told Vermont Public Radio.

"[Vance] crossed the line," protester Cori Giroux added.

Ahead of the Vance family's trip, Vermont's governor Phil Scott had urged people to "be respectful" to them.

Scott, the Republican governor who refused to vote for Trump, said: "I welcome the vice-president and his family to Vermont and hope they en-

joy their weekend here.

"It's no surprise they chose Vermont, we've had a lot of snow this winter, which has been good for our economy."

He added: "I hope Vermonters remember the vice-president is here on a family trip with his young children and, while we may not always agree, we should be respectful."

"Please join me in welcoming them to Vermont, and hoping they have an opportunity to experience what makes our state, and Vermonters, so special."

Vance, who has three young children with his wife Usha, has not publicly commented on the protests. Counter-protesters supporting Trump and Vance were also reportedly in Waitsfield.

Demonstrators also gathered outside Tesla stores across the US on Saturday to protest against Elon Musk's push to slash government spending.

Musk, the billionaire chief executive of Tesla, has been tasked by US President Trump to oversee the Department of Government Efficiency, more popularly known as Doge.

In extraordinary scenes in the Oval Office on Friday, Trump clashed with the Ukrainian president, telling him to make a deal with Russia "or we are out".

At one point, Trump told Zelensky he was not thankful enough for US military and political support during Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion, and that he was "gambling with World War Three".

R&B hitmaker Angie Stone dead in car crash

Grammy-nominated R&B artist Angie Stone died after a car crash, aged 63, her daughter says.

"My mommy is gone," her daughter, Diamond Stone, wrote in a Facebook post.

Stone was fatally injured when a van she was travelling in overturned in Alabama early on Saturday following a performance, according to media reports.

The artist, who was behind songs like No More Rain (In This Cloud) and Wish I Didn't

Miss You, was nominated for three Grammys over her career. She started out in the 1970s as a member of the female hip-hop trio The Sequence.

The group's most popular song, Funk You Up, peaked at 15 on Billboard's Hot Soul Singles.

Her daughter, who is also a musician and goes by the nickname Ladi Diamond, said on Facebook that she was "numb". Hours earlier, she had asked for prayers for her family and said she was on the road.

A spokesperson for the artist told the BBC that her family had travelled to Montgomery, Alabama, and planned to release more information soon.

Guy Todd Williams, known as Rahiem in the hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, said about nine other passengers were in a van with Stone at the time of the crash.

"She left her indelible mark on the music industry initially as a member of the legendary rap

group Sequence," Williams said. He said she was the sole fatality in the crash.

The BBC has contacted police in Montgomery for details. Along with her music career, Stone also had some success in film.

She made her movie debut with a role in The Hot Chick, a 2002 hit starring Rob Schneider, Rachel McAdams and Anna Faris.

She also starred in The Fighting Temptations in 2003 with Cuba Gooding Jr and Beyoncé.



NEWS**Foreign****Kurdish group PKK declares ceasefire with Turkey**

Outlawed Kurdish group the PKK has declared a ceasefire with Turkey after its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan called on the movement to lay down its arms and dissolve.

In Saturday's statement, the PKK said it hoped Turkey would release Ocalan, who has been imprisoned in solitary confinement since 1999, so he could lead a process of disarmament.

It follows his call this week aimed at ending four decades of armed struggle in south-eastern Turkey in which tens of thousands of people have been killed.

His announcement came months after Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of Turkey's ultra-nationalist MHP party and an ally of the Turkish government, launched an initiative to bring an end to the conflict.

The PKK - which stands for the Kurdistan Workers' Party - has waged an insurgency since 1984, with the initial aim of carving out an independent homeland for Kurds, who account for about 20% of Turkey's 85 million people.

The group has since moved away from its separatist goals, and is now pushing for more autonomy and greater Kurdish rights.

It is banned as a terrorist group in Turkey, the EU, UK and US.

Ocalan - affectionately referred to as Apo by Kurdish nationalists - met MPs from a pro-Kurdish party this week on Imrali, an island in the Sea of

Marmara, south-west of Istanbul, where he is imprisoned.

"In order to pave the way for the implementation of leader Apo's call for peace and democratic society, we are declaring a ceasefire effective from today," the PKK executive committee said in a statement on Saturday, quoted by the pro-PKK ANF news agency.

"None of our forces will take armed action unless attacked," it added.

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said later on Saturday that military operations would resume against the PKK if "promises given [by the group] are not kept" and the disarmament process stalled.

The PKK said Ocalan's prison conditions must be eased, adding he "must be able to live and work in physical freedom and be able to establish unhindered relationships with anyone he wants, including his friends".

Calling for disarmament, Ocalan had appealed to members of the PKK in a letter read out by Dem party members Ahmet Turk and Pervin Buldan in both Kurdish and Turkish.

He said "all groups must lay down their arms and the PKK must dissolve itself", adding that his movement was formed primarily because "the channels of democratic politics were closed".

However, Bahçeli, backed by positive signals from Erdogan and other political parties, had created the right environment for the PKK to lay down its arms, Ocalan added.

**RESCUE OPERATION:**

A rescue operation has been taking place in the mountain state of Uttarakhand

Zelenskyy moves on after Oval Office blowout with Trump

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy thanked the American people and leadership and voiced hope for "strong relations," a day after an astonishing Oval Office blowout with U.S. President Donald Trump that left many uncertain where the once staunch allies stood.

Zelenskyy on Saturday arrived in London for a summit organized by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer with

other European leaders.

The summit on Sunday will also include leaders from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Turkey, Finland, Sweden, Czechia and Romania, as well as the NATO secretary-general and the presidents of the European Commission and European Council.

The shouting match that unfolded Friday in the final minutes of the highly anticipated meeting between Trump and

Zelenskyy seemed to dash, at least for now, Ukrainian hopes that the United States could be locked in as a reliable partner in helping fend off, and conclude, Russia's three-year onslaught.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Saturday spoke to his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov about the war in Ukraine, officials said.

The phone call came a day before Fidan is due to attend a London summit of European leaders to discuss bringing the three-year conflict to an end.

Turkey, which has close ties to both Ukraine and Russia, has previously offered to mediate talks. It hosted unsuccessful peace talks in 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy voiced thanks to the "American people" and leadership, and hope for "strong relations," less than a day after an astonishing Oval Office blowout with Trump that left many uncertain where the once staunch allies stood.

Ukraine had walked into the meeting prepared to sign a mineral deal with the U.S., hoping it would be a step toward a just ceasefire, but left empty handed.

In a series of posts on X on Saturday, Zelenskyy said Ukrainians are "very grateful to the United States for all the support," and specifically thanked Trump and Congress alongside the "American people."

"Our relationship with the American President is more than just two leaders: It's a historic and solid bond between our peoples. ... American people helped save our people," he said. "We want only strong relations with America and I really hope we will have them," he added.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer plans to meet Saturday afternoon with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy following the dramatic blowout with President Donald Trump at the White House.

Zelenskyy's plane with the Ukrainian flag on its tail landed at London Stansted Airport the morning after the diplomatic spat on live TV.

Zelenskyy had been due to meet with Starmer on Sunday, hours before taking part in a London summit of European leaders to discuss how to ensure a peaceful end to the war and provide security across the continent.

They lost their families in a plane crash - then came the online hate

A plane crash in South Korea last December left Park Guen-woo an orphan. The 22-year-old had barely found space to mourn his parents when he came across a torrent of online abuse, conspiracies and malicious jokes made about the victims.

The Jeju Air plane, which was returning from Bangkok, Thailand, crash-landed at Muan International Airport on 29 December and exploded after slamming into a concrete barrier at the end of the runway, killing 179 of the 181 people on board.

Police investigations have identified and apprehended eight people who have been accused of making derogatory and defamatory online posts. These included suggestions that families were "thrilled" to receive compensation from authorities, or that they were "fake victims" - to the extent that some felt compelled to prove they had lost their loved ones.

Authorities have taken down at least 427 such posts.

But this is not the first time that bereaved families in South Korea have found themselves the targets of online abuse. Speaking to the BBC, experts described a culture where economic struggles, financial envy and social

issues such as toxic competitiveness are fuelling hate speech.

Financial resentment

Following Seoul's Halloween crowd crush in 2022, victims and bereaved families were similarly smeared. A man who lost his son in the incident had his photo doctored by hate groups - showing him laughing after receiving compensation.

People whose loved ones died in the Sewol ferry sinking in 2014 - a maritime disaster that saw 304 people killed, mostly schoolchildren - have also for years been the targets of hate speech.

The tragedy saw the government pay out an average of 420 million won (\$292,840; £231,686) per victim - triggering comments that claimed this figure was unreasonably high.

"People who are living day by day feel the compensation is overrated and say the bereaved are getting 'unfair treatment' and that they are making a big deal when everyone's life is hard," Koo Jeong-woo, a sociology professor at Sungkyunkwan University, told news site The Korea Herald.

In later comments to the BBC, Prof Koo suggested that economic stress and a competitive job market - particularly

in the wake of Covid - has left many people feeling socially isolated, exacerbating the issue of hate speech.

Many South Koreans, he says, now "view others not as their peers, but as adversaries", pointing to a widespread culture of comparison in South Korea.

"We tend to compare a lot... if you put someone else down, it's easier to feel superior yourself," he told the BBC. "That's why there's a bit of tendency in Korea to engage in hate speech or make derogatory remarks, aiming to diminish others to elevate oneself."

Mr Park says the families of

the Jeju Air crash victims have been characterised as "parasites squandering the nation's money".

By way of example, he refers to a recent article about an emergency relief fund of three million won (\$2,055; £1,632) that was raised for the bereaved through donations. That article was met with a flood of malicious comments, many referencing the erroneous suggestion that taxpayers' money was used for the fund.

"It seems like the families of the Muan Airport victims have hit the jackpot. They must be secretly delighted," said one such comment.

Four dead and several missing after India avalanche

At least four people have died and several others are missing after an avalanche hit the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, authorities have said.

A rescue operation has been under way after the avalanche swept away road construction workers in the village of Mana, which shares a border with Tibet, on Friday.

Some 50 people who were buried under snow and debris were rescued, but four died from their injuries, the Indian

army said.

Helicopters have been deployed in the search for five people who are still unaccounted for in the Himalayan mountain state, it added.

Uttarakhand state chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said rescue teams were "continuously engaged in relief efforts" following the avalanche, which hit a Border Roads Organisation camp.

He added that the government was committed to providing all possible assistance to those

affected "in this hour of crisis".

Footage posted on X on Friday by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police showed rescuers carrying people on stretchers and walking through several feet of snow - even as more snow continued to fall.

Gaurav Kunwar, a former village council member of Mana, told BBC News on Friday the area where the avalanche hit was a "migratory area" and "no-one lives there permanently".

"Only labourers working on border roads stay there in the winter," he added.

"There's also some army presence there. We've heard that it has been raining in the area for two days. The road workers were in a camp when the avalanche hit."

The India Meteorological Department warned on Friday of heavy rainfall and snow in the northern Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, as well as Jammu and Kashmir.

Orange alerts were also issued for snowfall in several districts of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Sports

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

Kenyans, Ethiopians dominate ECOWAS Abuja Marathon as Nigerians win 5km race

Thousands of runners pounded the streets of Abuja on Saturday, 1 March, for the 2025 ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon, which began at the ECOWAS Commission Yakubu Gowon Way, followed by the 5-kilometer race, Afrosport reports.

An estimated 5,000 Nigerian and international runners battled for the \$71,000 prize money on Saturday.

For the elite runners that participated in the 21 km race of Africa's most lucrative half-marathon, the focus was on the \$10,000 prize money for the top finisher. The top runners in the 5 km race also had their sights fixed on the prize

money for the top five finishers. It was, however, a dominant display for the Kenyan contingents as Harrison Muchira Wanjiru won the men's category at the ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon half-marathon.

Wanjiru led the way for a Kenya 1-2 finish with compatriot Adam Sulaiman Muhammad, clocking a time of 1.05.27 to finish in second place, while Nigeria's Francis James Musa came third in 1.05.51.

The women's category, meanwhile, had competitors from Ethiopia at the forefront, with Lydia Natiyaka Wamalawa and Aberash Minsewo finishing in first and second

places, respectively.

Wamalawa won the women's race in 1:15.3; Minsewo followed closely in 1:17.14; and like in the men's race, a Nigerian, Patience Dalyop, was third in 1:21.15.

However, the 5 km race was dominated by Nigerian runners, who also won most of the prizes reserved for ECOWAS citizens.

The men's and women's winners of the 21 km half-marathon race won \$10,000. Also, all the first 200 runners to cross the line received bronze medals to show they had participated.

The Chairman of the main organizing committee and ECOWAS Director of Youth and Sports, Amb. Francis Njo-

aguani, noted that the event was part of activities to commemorate ECOWAS at 50.

Njoaguani stated that the initiative is aimed at encouraging regional participation and celebrating homegrown talent.

He reiterated that the future goal is to achieve the World Athletics Gold Label status within the next four years, positioning the ECOWAS Abuja International Marathon among the most prestigious road races globally.

The 21km race began and ended at the ECOWAS Commission headquarters, while the 5km race started at Independence Drive by Sahad Stores and CDB, concluding at the same venue.



South West Games Get Segun Odegbami Endorsement

The much-anticipated 2025 South West Games has received the massive support of former Super Eagles star and Nigerian football legend, Chief Segun Odegbami. The celebrated sports icon described the event as a groundbreaking initiative that will foster talent development, youth empowerment, and regional unity through sports.

Odegbami gave his endorsement yesterday at Abeokuta Sports Club, Abeokuta, Ogun State, while receiving the President of the Organising Committee, Akogun Olanrewaju Alfred and his team.

He commended the vision behind the tournament, emphasizing its potential to revive grassroots sports and strengthen the sporting culture across the Southwest region.

"The South West Games 2025 is a visionary project that will not only harness the immense sporting potential within the region but also create opportunities for young athletes to showcase their talents on a grand stage. I commend the organizers for their dedication to this historic event, and I fully support its success," Odegbami stated.

Set to be held later this month, March 2025, the South West Games 2025 will feature 1,200 athletes and 120 officials from all six South West states, promising an electrifying display of sporting excellence and competition. Odegbami noted that beyond the excitement of the Games, the event serves as a strategic platform to highlight the rich cultural and economic potential of the region.



NDSF competitions set for success with new facility upgrades

Organisers of the Niger Delta Sports Festival (NDSF) have made reasonable progress in the upgrade of some of the sporting facilities identified for competitions.

A turning point in the ongoing facelift of the facilities has been the effective deployment of Engineers and other support workers.

According to the Chairman of the Facility and Transport subcommittee, Dr Ochuko Igbigbisie, the major work is the refurbishment of the Uyo Township Stadium Swimming Pool.

"It is an Olympic size 9-lane pool but many of the Technical facilities have been vandalised. "The work started today

with the draining of the water to ascertain the condition of the floor", Igbigbisie told Journalists after an inspection round in Uyo.

On an upbeat note, the Facilities subcommittee Chairman said that the preliminary report of Engineers showed that the pool is not leaking and can be revived.

"Our major fears was allayed when the Engineers handling the swimming pool upgrade declared that the pool is not leaking which would have posed an extended threat to timely repairs", Igbigbisie further explained.

He assured that the facility will be ready in a week's time to

the games.

On the state of some other facilities like tennis and basketball courts, he disclosed that they would require reflooring and other touch-ups.

The refurbishment of moribund facilities in the host state is a major collateral benefit the festival, sponsored by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) brings to host states.

"The organisers will not be

going away with these upgraded facilities at the end of the festival, that is the essence of hosting the event and benefiting from the NDDC intervention through sports", Igbigbisie added.

The NDSF starts from April 1-8 in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and will feature over 3000 athletes competing in 17 games. Dunamis Icon is the project consultants

Mateta given 25 stitches after horror head tackle in FA Cup clash

Crystal Palace striker, Jean-Philippe Mateta, has now been discharged from hospital following a horrific head-high tackle by Millwall goalkeeper Liam Roberts.

Mateta was stretchered off at Selhurst Park on Saturday during their 3-1 win.

Palace have now revealed that the Frenchman had to undergo 25 stitches to a "severe laceration" to his left ear.

An official statement also confirmed that Mateta had normal scans and was feeling well. Referee Michael Oliver had initially shown Roberts a yellow card for the tackle.

However, following further consultation on the VAR pitch-side monitor, he brandished a straight red card.

Palace chairman Steve Parish labelled Roberts' challenge as "the most reckless" he has ever seen and claimed that the keeper was "endangering a fellow professional".

Liverpool's Salah beats Mbappe in latest 2025 Ballon d'Or ranking

The forward for Real Madrid, Kylian Mbappe, has ascended to the second position in the 2025 Ballon d'Or rankings, coming behind Liverpool's Mohamed Salah.

Recall that last year marked a significant moment in football history, as it was the first occasion since 2003 that neither Lionel Messi nor Cristiano Ronaldo received a nomination for the prestigious individual player award.

In their absence, Rodri from Manchester City claimed the award, finishing ahead of Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr.

Currently, Mohamed Salah

appears to be the front-runner for this year's Ballon d'Or award.

The prolific Egyptian is on the verge of securing the Premier League title with Liverpool, who hold a commanding 13-point lead over Arsenal with 12 matches remaining.

Salah is experiencing what could be considered the finest season of his career, having netted 30 goals and provided 22 assists across all competitions, making him the most impactful player in Europe's top five leagues.

Additionally, Liverpool is among the leading contenders for the Champions League title.



Future stars emerge as 1st grassroots swimming championship ends in Abuja



Not fewer than 74 emerged and different talents were discovered at the maiden First Swim to Future Championship which successfully ended in Abuja on Saturday.

The two-day swimming tourney saw over 100 participants registered in an event set up for discovering future talents who will make Nigeria proud at international tournaments. The organizer, the Aquatic Federation of Nigeria in 27 swimming events got 74 medalists who won gold, silver and bronze in each category. In U8 Freestyle girls; Elisa Bestie finished at 53:09 to emerge champion while Esosa Imafidon and Jemma Aiyetan won silver and bronze medals respectively.

In the boys freestyle category, Diego Gaultieri won gold medal while Naetochi Kenneth was gold medalist in 9-11 years 50m freestyle swimming event. The tournament according to the Aquatic Federation of Nigeria is expected to spread across the country by organizing same in all six geo-political zones. This is to first to catch the talents young and also create a platform to help them excel and be ranked among the best in the world in the nearest future

Taye Taiwo Reveals Nigeria Secret Of Winning U20 AFCON To CAF

Twenty years ago, Taye Taiwo, then 20-years-old, saw his career take a major turn: a signature at Olympique de Marseille, a continental title with Nigeria, and a FIFA U-20 World Cup where he won the Bronze Ball, behind Lionel Messi and his compatriot John Obi Mikel.

Before revealing himself to the world, it was on the African stage that the left-back laid the foundations of his rise, playing a key role in Nigeria's triumph at the 2005 edition of the TotalEnergies U-20 Africa Cup of Nations.

This tournament remains a pivotal moment in his career. Alongside a golden generation led by John Obi Mikel, Isaac Promise, and Chinedu Obasi, Taiwo stood out with his physical power, powerful shots, and natural leadership.

Under the guidance of Samson Siasia, the Flying Eagles dominated the competition with flamboyant play and deadly efficiency. In the final, they defeated Egypt 2-0, claiming their fifth continental title and securing their FIFA U20 World Cup in the Netherlands.

This African title was much more than just a victory for Taiwo. For someone who had just joined Marseille, the 2005 U-20 AFCON edition was a foundational step, opening the way to the elite of world football, where he would shine by reaching the final of the World Cup.

In this interview, he shares his memories of this decisive period, the challenges he had to overcome and the influence of this title on the rest of his career.

CAFOnline: Twenty years ago, you played in the TotalEnergies CAF U-20 Africa Cup of Nations in Benin. What was your mindset before the tournament?

Taye Taiwo: With the team we had at the time, we worked really hard. It wasn't easy, but we were fortunate to have an experienced coach, Sam Siasia, who had played at the highest level, winning the senior AFCON in 1994. Before heading to Benin, we gathered in Lagos to prepare. There was great competition within the group: some players came, others left, but those who stayed formed a real family. It was this sense of cohesion that allowed us to go far in the competition.

What were the expectations surrounding the team before the tournament?

Taye Taiwo: Before we left for Benin, many Nigerians doubted us. Some thought we could win, others didn't. But we believed in our potential. We worked hard and had the unwavering support of our coach, who instilled a conquering mentality in us. When we arrived in Benin, we were determined to show our superiority on the field and go for the title. Our ambition was clear: we were there to win.

In the first match, you scored the first goal for Nigeria against the host nation, Benin (3-0 victory). How did you experience that moment?

Taye Taiwo: It was an exceptional moment for me. Playing in a U-20 Africa Cup of Nations is an immense opportunity for a young player. These tournaments are an incredible showcase. All of Africa is watching, and it's a chance to be noticed. Scoring in the first match was a great pride. That's when I realized how important it was to seize every moment on the field.

In your opinion, what was the strength of Nigeria in this competition?

Taye Taiwo: Our collective. We had talented players like John Obi Mikel, who was very strong in midfield. The team was well-balanced: we had solid defenders, midfielders who could hold the ball, and effective forwards. Everyone knew their role. We defended together, attacked together. It was this unity that allowed us to become African champions.

What does did the title mean to you?

Taye Taiwo: It was a dream come true.

When I was a kid, I played barefoot in the streets of my neighbourhood, watching great players like Jay-Jay Okocha or Nwankwo Kanu on TV. I've always dreamed of wearing the national team's jersey. Winning this title was a crucial step in my career. I knew it was an opportunity I couldn't miss, and I gave everything to make the most of it.

How did you celebrate the title?

Taye Taiwo: It was incredible! When we returned to Nigeria, we received a triumphant welcome. Thousands of people were waiting for us. Even the president received us. We had a meal with him, and he congratulated us for our performance. Some players then signed contracts abroad, while others stayed in the country. It marked the beginning of a new chapter for each of us.

A few months later, you went to the U-20 World Cup in the Netherlands as African champions. What were your ambitions?

Taye Taiwo: We were highly motivated. The staff decided to keep the core of the team that had won the U-20 AFCON. We wanted to go as far as possible. Our coach warned us that the World Cup was a step up. In Europe, the fields are different, the referees are stricter, and every mistake can cost you. We worked a lot on defensive discipline and analysed the videos of the opposing teams. We were ready for the challenge.

Your journey was impressive: victory against Ukraine (1-0) in the round of 16, against the Netherlands (1-1, 10-9 on penalties) in the quarter-finals, and Morocco (3-0) in the semi-finals. Then came the final against Argentina and a certain Lionel Messi.

Taye Taiwo: Yes, and what was crazy was that we shared the same hotel as the Argentinians. We crossed paths with them at the restaurant, we observed them. We were ready for the final. Unfortunately, we conceded two penalties converted by Messi (2-1). He was already impressive at that age. We gave it everything, but we lacked luck. Argentina was a very strong team, with players like Sergio Agüero. We were disappointed, but proud of our journey.

Looking back, what do you think about that year 2005?

Taye Taiwo: It was an unforgettable year. I signed with Olympique de Marseille, my first club, then I won the U-20 AFCON and reached the final of a World Cup. It's something that very few players experience. This team will always be special to me. The U-20 Africa Cup of Nations launched my career. I have incredible memories of it and a great sense of pride.

NPFL: Eric Chelle watches Kano Pillars' comeback win over Rangers

Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle was in the stands as Kano Pillars staged a comeback to defeat holders Rangers 2-1 at the Sani Abacha Stadium on Sunday.

Rangers silenced the home crowd when Bashir Usman converted from the penalty spot in the 33rd minute.

However, experienced midfielder Rabi'u Ali levelled the score for Pillars with another penalty three minutes before half-time.

Jerry Alex secured all three points for Pillars with the win-

ner on the hour mark.

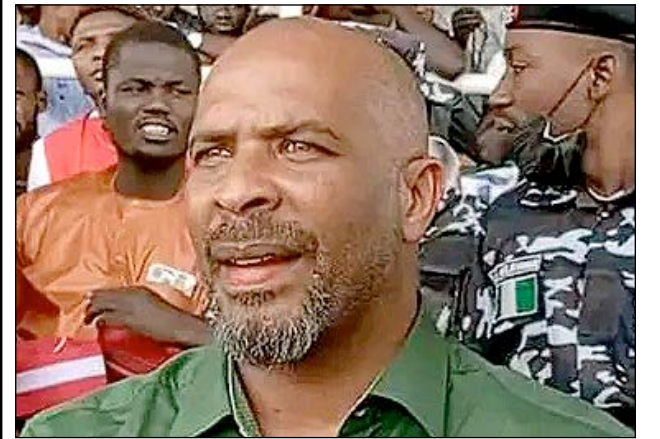
In Ikenne, Remo Stars extended their lead at the top with a narrow 1-0 home victory over Plateau United.

Samson Olasupo netted the decisive goal 14 minutes from time.

Full Results

Kano Pillars 2-1 Rangers
Bayelsa Utd 2-1 Bendel Insurance

Tornadoes 0-1 Enyimba
Remo Stars 1-0 Plateau Utd
Ikorodu City 2-0 Heartland
Abia Warriors 1-1 Nasarawa Utd.



Tsitsipas beats Auger-Aliassime 6-3 6-3 to win Dubai final

Stefanos Tsitsipas on Saturday beat Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3 6-3 in straight-set to lift the final of the Dubai Tennis Championships.

The 26-year-old Greek secured a maiden ATP 500 title with victory over his in-form Canadian opponent.

The fourth seed had reached the final of the tournament twice before, losing to Novak Djokovic in 2019 and then again to Roger Federer a year later.

Saturday's win was world number 11 Tsitsipas' 12th tour-level title, and the biggest outdoor hard-court trophy of his career.

He defeated 24-year-old Auger-Aliassime - who is leading the ATP Tour this season with 16 match wins and two titles - in one hour and 28 minutes, and will return to the top 10 of the world rankings on Monday for the first time since May 2024.

In a related development, Jannik Sinner's nomination for the Laureus World Sportsman

of the Year award was withdrawn after a three-month doping ban.

The 23-year-old Italian, who won the Australian Open in January, is suspended from 9 February until 4 May.

"Following discussions by the Laureus Academy, it has been decided that Jannik Sinner's nomination for this year's Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award is to be withdrawn.

"We have followed this case, the decisions of the relevant global bodies and - whilst we note the extenuating circumstances involved - feel that the three-month ban renders the nomination ineligible," Sean Fitzpatrick, chairman, Laureus World Sports Academy, said following the withdrawal.

The world number one accepted an immediate three-month ban from tennis earlier this month after reaching a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency over his two positive drugs tests last year.



FEATURE

Asue Ighodalo's desperation versus Governor Okpebholo's steadfastness

FRED ITUA

Recently, Team Asue Media Organization (TAMO), launched a baseless attack on the Executive Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, over his well-founded remarks on the glaring manipulative attempts surrounding the ongoing Governorship Election Petition Tribunal proceedings.

Dr. Ighodalo's outburst, laced with empty rhetorics and hollow accusations, only confirms what the people of Edo State already know: the PDP's case before the tribunal is weak, crumbling, and destined to fail. Their frustration is evident, and their desperation is now manifesting in cheap attempts to twist narratives and preempt the judiciary.

Governor Okpebholo, during his appearance on TVC News' Journalist Hangout, simply reaffirmed what every well-meaning citizen of Edo State knows—that the people overwhelmingly gave him their mandate at the polls and that no backdoor machinations or desperate underhand tactics will subvert the will of the people. This position remains firm and unshaken.

It is indeed laughable that Dr. Ig-



hodalo, rather than addressing the substance of his hollow petition, has chosen to embark on an empty tirade. His claims of "blackmailing the judiciary" are as false as his dream of occupying Osadebey Avenue. The Governor's remarks were a patriotic caution

against attempts to pervert justice, a position rooted in his confidence in the integrity of the judiciary.

FOR CLARITY AND EMPHASIS:

1. Governor Okpebholo has absolute confidence in the judiciary but

will not hesitate to call out any desperate attempt by the PDP and its candidate to manipulate the due process.

2. The will of the Edo people is not for sale. The PDP can mop up as much money as they like; Edo State's destiny can not be bought.

3. Ighodalo's reckless accusations reek of fear and acceptance of defeat. His hollow rhetorics expose the PDP's crumbling case at the tribunal, which they now seek to salvage through media blackmail.

Let it be known that Governor Monday Okpebholo's mandate is solid, untainted, and fully backed by the good people of Edo State. The resort by Ighodalo and his handlers to media stunts and baseless allegations is a tired script that will yield no results.

Governor Okpebholo stands for justice, transparency, and accountability. No amount of propaganda or malicious twisting of facts by the PDP will change the truth: Edo State has spoken clearly, and that voice will not be silenced or overturned by desperate politicians clutching at straws.

The desperate antics of a failed candidate and his media lackeys will not distract this administration from delivering the dividends of democracy. Edo must move forward—and move forward it will under the leadership of Senator Monday Okpebholo, the *ELECTED, and *EXECUTIVE* Governor of Edo State

Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor

IBB's Journey of service

JUSTIN UWADIA

Between June 24, 1993, when Nigeria's Military President, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, annulled the June 12, 1993, presidential election, and August 27, 1993, when he "stepped aside," Nigeria was in turmoil. The annulment led to loss of lives, destruction of public and private businesses, closure of tertiary institutions, and widespread unrest that nearly set the nation ablaze. Nigeria lost its standing among the global community. Almost thirty-two years later, on February 20, 2025, eminent Nigerians gathered at the Transcorp Hilton, Abuja, to honor the same man, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (retired), for the launch of his book, *A Journey of Service*, and a fundraiser for the IBB Presidential Library. What an irony. In more accountable societies, such an occasion might have warranted an inquiry into some of the indiscretions of his administration, as he had largely lived in seclusion since leaving power—or since power left him. Instead, the event attracted Nigeria's elite: political heavyweights, serving and retired military top brass, business moguls, and other prominent figures.

General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida is a household name in Nigeria and will remain so. Even Nigerians who were not born when he ruled from 1985 to 1993 will read about both his positive and negative legacies.

During his eight-year rule as a military dictator, IBB oversaw numerous infrastructural developments. No head of state or president after him has matched his achievements in that sector. However, his administration was also marked by many controversial and, in some cases, outrightly condemned actions. The most infamous was the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election. Some had seen it coming. An African adage says, what elders see while seated, children cannot see even if they climb a mountain.

The sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, had warned Nigerians to be wary of IBB's transition to civil rule program, but they did not listen. When Awolowo was invited to be part of IBB's Political Bureau, part of his response on February 28, 1986, was: "I do fervently and will continue fervently to pray that I may be proved wrong. But something within me tells me, loud and clear, that we have embarked on a fruitless search. At the end of the day, when we imagine the new order is here, we would be terribly disappointed." IBB,

after multiple bans and unbans of politicians and repeated postponements of handover dates, committed his ultimate political sin by annulling the June 12 presidential election won by his longtime friend, Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola.

June 12 remains dear to Nigerians. The Buhari administration even declared it a national holiday in remembrance of what is still regarded as the freest, fairest, and most credible election in Nigeria's history. As long as June 12 is commemorated, the name Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida will never be forgotten.

IBB has at least three aliases, each reflecting how different people perceive him. To some, he was and still is The Godfather, a title reminiscent of Mario Puzo's classic film, *The Godfather*. Those who call him this see him as a benefactor. To others, he is The Evil Genius, a term attributed to an Italian strategist who once said, "All evil deeds of a ruler are in perfect order as long as they help sustain him in power." Many Nigerians use this title for IBB because of the numerous controversies and suspected state-backed atrocities under his rule. A few examples include the parcel bomb assassination of the journalist Dele Giwa, the Ejigbo plane crash that killed some of

Nigeria's brightest young military officers, Nigeria's secret membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the execution of military officers—including his friend, General Mamman Vatsa—on allegations of plotting a coup, and, of course, the annulment of the June 12 election.

To others, he was known as Maradona, a reference to the legendary Argentine footballer Diego Armando Maradona. Just as Maradona mesmerized defenders with his dribbling skills—scoring even with the infamous "Hand of God" goal against England—IBB outmaneuvered Nigerian politicians of his era. He played them against each

other, wasting their time and resources because, ultimately, he wanted to transition himself into a civilian president.

Now, at 84, by God's grace and mercy, IBB has been granted a long life. His book is likely a reflection on his past actions, perhaps even a wish to turn back the hands of time—but he cannot. Conscience, they say, is at work. As H.L. Mencken once said, "Conscience is a mother-in-law whose visits never end." The best we can hope for the great General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida is that, in the years he has left, he will use his power, influence, and wealth to better the lives of ordinary Nigerians.

