

UTME: 16-year-old Edo-born Oshawo Ephraim scores 368

Amid a national trend of poor performance reported by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), 16-year-old Master Oshawo Ephraim has emerged as one of the top scorers in the 2025 UTME with an aggregate of 368.

● Records above 90 in Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics

He hails from Iyora community in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State.

A student of GoldMark Academy, Benin City, Ephraim scored an outstanding 98 in Mathematics, 98 in Physics, 98

in Chemistry, and 74 in English Language.

He narrowly missed a perfect score in three subjects by just two marks each.

His total score of 368 places him among the highest-per-

forming candidates nationwide.

This achievement stands out in a year when JAMB revealed that 75 percent of UTME candidates scored below 200 and fewer than one percent scored

above 300.

Ephraim's exceptional result has inspired many in Edo State and beyond. He has expressed optimism about gaining ad-

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EPHRAIM

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Edo govt approves renovation of burnt Oba Market

● Releases 25% payment for 2nd flyover in Benin ● To revamp infrastructure for cattle ranching

The Edo State Executive Council has approved the renovation of the Oba Market in Benin City, parts of which were gutted by fire several years back.

This decision marks the fulfilment of a campaign promise made by Governor Monday Okpebholo.

This was announced by the

Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon Paul Ohonbamu, after the weekly Executive Council meeting chaired by Governor Okpebholo in Benin City.

Ohonbamu stated that the entire Oba Market, including the sections affected by fire, will be renovated under the approved project.

Also, the council approved the construction of a road leading to the hometown of former Governor Godwin Obaseki in Uhumwonde Local Government Area.

Hon Ohonbamu criticised the former governor for allegedly abandoning the road throughout his tenure, despite it being vital to his the former

governor's community.

"People from Obaseki's village in Uhumwonde came to appeal to Governor Okpebholo to construct the road, which had long been neglected," he said.

"Governor Okpebholo, who is leading an inclusive administration, believes development must reach every part of the

state. This is why the road has now been approved," Ohonbamu added.

The Council also approved a 25 percent advance payment for the construction of eleven roads across the state, including a second flyover at the Sapele Road, Adesuwa Junction.

According to the Commissioner, this upfront payment

will enable contractors to immediately mobilise to site for both the roads and the flyover project.

He further disclosed that the Council has given approval for the construction of an office for the Edo State Traffic Management Agency (EDSTMA) at Sapele Road.

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INVESTIGATIVE HEARING:

L-R: Senate Chief Whip, Mohammed Tahir Monguno; Senator Patrick Ndubuisi, and Chairman, Senate Committee on FCT, Onyesoh Allwel, during the investigative hearing on the Federal Character Commission, at the National Assembly, Abuja. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

Nigeria's inflation rate drops to 23.71% in April 2025

Nigeria's headline inflation rate dipped slightly to 23.71 per cent in April 2025 from 24.23 per cent recorded in March, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

The bureau announced the figures in its latest Consumer Price Index report released on Thursday. It said that the April 2025 inflation figure showed a 0.52 per cent decrease compared to March.

On a month-on-month basis, the headline inflation rate stood at 1.86 per cent in April, down from 3.90 per cent in March, a drop of 2.04 percentage points.

The NBS also reported that food inflation on a year-on-year basis stood at 21.36 per cent in April 2025.

This marks a sharp decline of 19.17 percentage points from the 40.53 per cent recorded in April 2024.

The bureau attributed this sig-

nificant drop largely to a change in the base year for comparison.

Month-on-month, food inflation fell slightly to 2.06 per cent in April from 2.18 per cent in March.

This decline was linked to a fall in the average prices of staple items such as maize flour, wheat grain, dried okra, yam flour, soya beans, rice, and various beans.

Regionally, food inflation year-on-year was highest in Benue (51.76 per cent), Ekiti (34.05 per cent), and Kebbi (33.82 per cent).

The slowest increases were seen in Ebonyi (7.19 per cent), Adamawa (9.52 per cent), and Ogun (9.91 per cent).

On a month-on-month basis, Benue (25.59 per cent), Ekiti (16.73 per cent), and Yobe (13.92 per cent) recorded the highest food inflation.

In contrast, Ebonyi (-14.43 per cent), Kano (-11.37 per cent), and Ogun (-7.06 per cent) saw food prices fall.

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Police arrest 8 kidnap suspects in Delta

● Recover ₦4m ransom

The Delta State Police Command has arrested eight suspected kidnapers and recovered N4 million in ransom money from them, in a major breakthrough in its ongoing campaign against abductions in the region.

Parading the suspects before journalists at the command headquarters in Asaba on Thursday, the Commissioner of Police, Abaniwonda Olufemi, stated that the force is deploying every available resource to curb the menace of kidnapping and ensure the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for disturbing the peace across Delta State.

He explained, "Our approach is grounded in proactive policing, intelligence gathering, and the regular raiding of criminal hideouts."

Providing a breakdown of recent operations, CP Olufemi said, "On May 12, 2025, officers attached to the Dragon Pa-

trol Team, while conducting a routine stop-and-search along the Kwale/Ozoro expressway, intercepted a gold-coloured Toyota Sienna bus transporting passengers from Ughelli to Asaba.

"Upon searching the vehicle, they discovered N3.1 million in the possession of four suspects: Abubakar Alwalu (25), Usman Husseini (25), Adamu Mohammed (30), and Anwalu Umaru (23).

"Preliminary investigations revealed that the four men are members of a five-man gang responsible for the abduction of a woman in Ughelli.

"The victim, who was held captive in her home for four days, positively identified the suspects. A ransom of ₦4 million had been collected. Investigations are ongoing," he added.

In another operation carried out on May 10, 2025, operatives of the CP Special Assignment

Team (CP-SAT), acting on credible intelligence, tracked down and arrested one Abdul-lahi Ibrahim (22), a suspected kidnapper and gang leader from the Ekenwan community in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State. He was apprehended in Ore town, Ondo State.

Ibrahim subsequently led the team to arrest an accomplice, Adamu Usman (24), also hiding in Ore. During interrogation, the suspects guided officers to a forest along the Ore-Lagos expressway near a location known as "Stepdown", where police recovered one AK-47 rifle loaded with 14 rounds of live ammunition and

a locally made long gun loaded with six cartridges.

Both suspects remain in custody as investigations continue.

CP Olufemi also disclosed that another suspect was apprehended and more ransom money retrieved during a separate incident in Ibusa.

"Also on May 12, 2025, following intelligence concerning a kidnap incident in Itego community, Ibusa—where a man (name withheld) was kidnapped and an undisclosed ransom paid, the Commander of the Special Anti-Kidnaping and Cyber-Crime Squad swiftly mobilised his men and intercepted one of the suspects

at Koka Junction in Asaba.

The suspect, identified as Lawal Tasiu (26), a resident of the Federal Capital Territory, was arrested after a hot pursuit," he said.

Upon searching him, officers recovered N900,000 in cash. During interrogation, Tasiu confessed to being part of a criminal syndicate operating in Ibusa, Ogwashi-Uku, and Issele-Azagba areas. He admitted the money was his share of the ransom.

"On May 13, 2025, he led our operatives to their hideout in the Issele-Azagba area, where one AK-47 rifle, one pump-action shotgun, two AK-47 magazines, and 87

rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition were recovered," the police chief said.

In a separate development, CP Olufemi revealed the arrest of a suspected child trafficker, Mrs Joy Temitope Oyetimi (49), who allegedly drugged a woman with juice and abducted her two-month-old baby in Warri.

Following an intelligence-led investigation by the Divisional Police Officer of Ekpian Division, the suspect was arrested.

During discreet interrogation, she confessed to stealing the baby, who has since been rescued, now five months old and reunited with his parents.

Reps consider making voting mandatory to curb electoral apathy

In a move aimed at strengthening democratic participation, the House of Representatives has advanced a bill to amend the Electoral Act 2022, which would make it compulsory for all eligible Nigerians to vote in elections.

The proposed amendment, jointly sponsored by Speaker Tajudeen Abbas and Representative Daniel Ago, passed second reading during Thursday's plenary.

Introducing the bill, Daniel Ago argued that the legislation was a necessary response to the persistent problem of voter apathy in Nigeria's electoral process.

He noted that compelling citizens to vote would enhance civic engagement and reinforce democratic accountability.

However, the proposal was met with scepticism from some lawmakers, including Mark Esset, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party representing

Akwa Ibom State.

Esset challenged the rationale behind the bill, warning that mandatory voting laws would be ineffective unless deeper electoral reforms were carried out to restore public confidence in the system.

"Let us not put something on nothing. If citizens have lost confidence in the electoral system, there is a lot of work to be done.

"Many Nigerians do not vote during elections because they believe that their votes will not count," Esset argued.

"If we must make a law to make voting compulsory, we must also make another one to make their votes count."

Despite the reservations, the bill remains under consideration as lawmakers continue to debate the best means to revitalise Nigeria's electoral culture and ensure inclusive political participation.



CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF:

Chief of Defence Staff, Christopher Musa, arrived Borno State on Thursday.

Appeal Court reserves ruling on Edo Gov appeals

The Court of Appeal in Abuja has reserved judgment in multiple appeals over the September 21, 2024, Edo governorship election in which INEC had declared Monday Okpebholo of the APC the winner of the poll.

A three-man panel led by Justice Mohamed Danjuma heard three appeals and a cross-appeal but did not give a ruling date.

The main appeal was filed by the PDP and its candidate, Asue Ighodalo, challenging the election tribunal's April 2 judgment.

Their lawyer, Robert Emukpoeruo, SAN, said the tribunal failed to address key issues of non-compliance raised in their petition.

He argued that Form EC25B lacked the serial numbers required by the Electoral Act,

which was central to their case. Emukpoeruo rejected the tribunal's claim that they dumped documents and insisted no oral evidence was needed.

He added that the case was about result discrepancies between ward collation and polling units, not the conduct of the vote.

Lawyers for the APC, INEC, and other respondents urged the court to dismiss the ap-

peals and uphold the tribunal's decision.

Onyechi Ikpeazu described the PDP's petition as academic and lacking substance.

The court also heard appeals filed by the Action Alliance and its chairman, Rufai Omoaje, and by Bright Enabulele of the Accord Party.

The date for judgment will be communicated to the parties.

CDS arrives in Borno amid resurgence of B'Haram attacks

Amid a wave of deadly Boko Haram attacks, Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, General Christo-

pher Musa, has landed in Maiduguri, Borno State.

His visit on Thursday comes as insurgent activities escalate, claiming the lives of both civilians and soldiers in recent weeks.

General Musa is expected to meet with military top brass, frontline troops, and key stakeholders to assess the security situation and strengthen counterinsurgency efforts.

The Theatre Commander of Operation Hadin Kai, Maj. Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar, linked the renewed insurgency to the worsening instability across the Sahel, warning that arms are flowing into Nigeria through porous borders.

Edo govt approves renovation of burnt...

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In addition, three fertiliser warehouses will be constructed to support farmers across Edo State.

These warehouses will be sited in Irrua, Auchu, and Benin City as part of the administration's push for food sufficiency.

The Executive Council also approved the construction of a 100-bed hospital at Uwessan, which will support the nursing school being developed in Udomi, Esan Central Local Government Area.

Also approved was the construction of Uhie Road, off Sapele Road, as well as the purchase of new furniture

and electronics for Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) that have recently been renovated.

Meanwhile, the State Government has taken steps to revive the Igarra Cattle Ranch by approving the development of supporting infrastructure to restore its operational capacity.

This was made known by the Director of Veterinary Services, Dr Thomas Haruna, who represented the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Dr Peter Osagie, during a courtesy visit by officials of the National Association of Cattle Dealers, Processors and Marketers of Nigeria (NACD-PAMN).

Dr Haruna said the decision is in line with Governor Monday Okpebholo's vision of promoting ranching as a modern solution to the persistent herder-farmer clashes.

He described the ranch as part of the state's agricultural revival plan, which aims to ensure both food and economic security for Edo people.

The National Vice President (North East) of NACD-PAMN, Engineer Garba Musa Gwani, who represented the association's national president, Alhaji Iliyasu Bulama had advocated for the full adoption of ranching in Edo State.

He emphasised that ranching is the only viable alternative to open grazing, which

has led to repeated conflicts between herders and farmers across Nigeria.

Gwani urged the Edo State Government to also consider establishing dairy centres as part of its ranching programme, noting that dairy farming could serve as a major source of income.

He also called on the state authorities to address the persistent problem of cattle rustling, which continues to affect livestock owners nationwide.

The association's delegation included its Deputy National Vice President (South West), Ibrahim Yusuf, Edo State Chairperson Lady Uwa Sylvia Iyamu, and other senior state executives.

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mission into the University of Benin (UNIBEN) to study Computer Science, which remains his course of choice.

His success has brought pride to his school, community, and state, and serves as a shining example of academic excellence in the face of national challenges.

Edo govt installs new traditional rulers in Okpella, Okhuesan, Onogholo

The Edo State Government has installed new traditional rulers in Okpella, Okhuesan, and Onogholo, presenting them with Staffs of Office and letters of appointment in a move that reshapes traditional leadership in parts of Etsako East and Esan South East Local Government Areas. The announcement was conveyed in a government statement signed by the Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor, Esq.

In Etsako East, the government formally presented His Royal Majesty Michael Eshioronoya Olorunfemi Sado with the Staff of Office and letter of appointment as the Okuokpelagbe of Okpella. This development marks a new chapter in the traditional administration of the Okpella community.

In Esan South East Local Government Area, the government concluded a lengthy regency in Okhuesan by revoking the appointment of Zaiki

Ehi-Douglas Lucky Ehidiemen, who had served as regent for eighteen years. His regency, which began when the rightful heir was a minor, officially ended on 30th April 2025. The state has now recognised His Royal Highness Lucky Ehi-chioya Imhadojiemu, who has come of age, as the substantive Onojie of Okhuesan, and has presented him with the Staff of Office and a letter of appointment.

Furthermore, the govern-

ment has installed His Royal Highness Ehinonhen Aigbojie as the new Onojie of Onogholo, also in Esan South East, presenting him with the official instruments of office to signify the commencement of his reign.

In the statement, the Edo State Government congratulated all the newly appointed traditional rulers and expressed hope that their leadership would usher in peace, stability, and socio-economic progress

for their communities. It reaffirmed its commitment to supporting traditional institutions as essential pillars of local governance and cultural identity.

These appointments are ex-

pected to have a lasting impact on the socio-political dynamics of the affected communities, as the newly recognised monarchs assume their roles with the full backing of the state.



MEDICAL OUTREACH:

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics), Delta State University, Abraka, Prof. Hilary Owamah (left), who represented the Vice Chancellor, being attended to at the free medical outreach programme organized by the university.

Senate advances Bill to establish National Malaria Eradication Agency

CAROLINE AMEH

The Nigerian Senate on Thursday passed for a second reading, a bill seeking to establish the National Agency for Malaria Evaluation and Eradication, a move aimed at intensifying efforts to combat malaria in the country.

The bill, sponsored by Senator Ned Nwoko (Delta North), was first introduced on No-

vember 28, 2023.

It proposes the creation of a federal agency solely focused on the eradication of malaria—a disease responsible for more than 1,000 deaths in Nigeria annually and over 6,000 deaths across Africa.

During debate on the floor of the Senate, Nwoko emphasized the severe impact of malaria on public health and national productivity.

He called for a comprehensive approach to malaria control, including vaccine research, improved environmental sanitation, and effective waste management.

Supporting the bill, Senator Victor Umeh and Senator Ède Dafinone described malaria as a persistent threat that has claimed countless lives in Nigeria.

They noted that the proposed agency could play a crucial role in reducing malaria-related

deaths and curbing the misuse of anti-malarial drugs.

The bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Health, which is expected to submit its report within four weeks.

A public hearing on the bill is anticipated soon, with stakeholders expressing support for what could become a major step in ending malaria's devastating toll in Nigeria and across the continent.

DELSU VC offers free medical services to residents of Abraka Kingdom

The Vice Chancellor of Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU), Professor Samuel Ogheneovo Asagba, has provided free medical treatment to residents of Oruarivie-Abraka and Umiaghwa-Abraka kingdoms as part of the university's commitment to community service.

The initiative was launched during a flag-off ceremony for the one-day free medical outreach, held at the Oruarivie-Abraka Town Hall.

Represented by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics), Professor Hilary Owamah, Professor Asagba expressed gratitude to the people of Abraka for their continued peaceful relationship with the university.

He urged them to maintain the atmosphere of cooperation that has characterised the interaction between the university and its host communities.

In his remarks, Professor Asagba encouraged residents participating in the outreach

to be open and truthful during medical consultations to enable healthcare professionals to offer accurate diagnoses and appropriate treatment.

He also pledged that his administration would continue to do more to support and uplift the host communities.

Following the event at Oruarivie-Abraka, the outreach programme was also flagged off in the Umiaghwa-Abraka Kingdom.

The outreach, a gesture of

goodwill and service, was attended by key university figures, including Professor Hilary Owamah; Professor Afeyodion Akhator, Dean of the Faculty of Clinical Medicine; Professor Patrick Igbigbi, former Provost of the College of Health Sciences; Professor Eze Nwangwa, former Dean of the Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences; Mr Henry Eseka, the university's Public Relations Officer; and a team of medical professionals.

Army, TANTITA intercept illegal crude haul in Delta

BETTY IDIALU

Personnel from the 181 Battalion of the Nigerian Army, stationed in Oleh, Isoko South Local Government Area of Delta State, have intercepted a vacuum truck suspected to be conveying stolen crude oil from Wellhead 3 in the Olomoro community.

The operation, carried out in collaboration with operatives of TANTITA Security Services Nigeria Limited, led to the arrest of the truck's driver, identified as Matthew Ojomikre.

The interception occurred on Monday at Oil Mining Lease (OML) 30, a site managed by Heritage Energy Operational Services Limited.

According to insider accounts, the driver gained unauthorised access to the wellhead and was reportedly in the process of siphoning crude oil when he was confronted.

The vehicle, believed to be owned by one Engr. Daniel Omoyibo, popularly known as 'Damotech,' had no authorisation from the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC).

Sources said military personnel accosted the suspect as he attempted to leave the facility.

TANTITA operatives were quickly alerted and the driver was taken into custody.

During initial questioning, Ojomikre reportedly claimed his company had been contracted by Heritage Energy to remove sludge from the wellhead.

However, he was unable to produce any official authorisation or evacuation permit to support this claim.

Industry stakeholders familiar with the procedures stated that any operation involving crude or condensate evacuation from Heritage Energy's wells requires official documentation, including a valid NUPRC

permit.

Such activities are typically coordinated with the Nigerian Army and TANTITA to ensure proper monitoring from the loading site to the discharge point.

At the time of reporting, security personnel from TANTITA, working alongside officials from Heritage Energy and the Nigerian Army, had taken samples of the truck's contents for laboratory analysis to determine the nature and origin of the substance being transported.

The incident has sparked concerns over alleged attempts by certain interests to prevent the truck's seizure and secure the release of the detained driver.

Stakeholders have voiced alarm over what they describe as a growing trend of unauthorised crude evacuation being carried out under the guise of legitimate operations.

Some have called on the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), and other relevant security and intelligence agencies to open a full-scale investigation into the activities of the company linked to the intercepted truck.

A concerned stakeholder remarked, "The driver did not have the mandatory NUPRC evacuation licence and made no prior notification to either the Army or TANTITA."

He proceeded alone, loaded crude oil, and was only caught while attempting to leave the site."

Further complicating matters, the driver is said to have confessed during interrogation that he lacked both a valid permit and a military escort, requirements which, if missing, automatically render such operations illegal.

In a brief response over the incident, Lt. Col. Goldman Azagba (Rtd.), the Security Manager for Heritage Energy Operational Services Limited, stated that he was not aware of the truck's movement or any licit bunkering activity connected to it.

GODWIN

The general public is hereby notified that **GODWIN OSAS IMUDIA** and **GODWIN IROGBETIN** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known as **GODWIN OSAS IMUDIA**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

ERIC

The general public is hereby notified that **ERIC OSEMWENGIE IMUDIA** and **ERIC IROGBETIN** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known as **ERIC OSEMWENGIE IMUDIA**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

ANTHONY

The general public is hereby notified that **ANTHONY ESOSA** and **IMUDIA** and **ANTHONY ESOSA IROGBETIN** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known as **ANTHONY ESOSA IMUDIA**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

NEWS

Oshiomhole calls out Abati over 'disrespectful' comments

Senator representing Edo North, Adams Oshiomhole, has dared Arise TV anchor and former presidential spokesperson, Dr Reuben Abati, to a fight over what he described as disrespectful and mischievous comments made

on live television.

Oshiomhole issued the challenge on Tuesday during an appearance on Channels Television's Politics Today, where he reacted to a recent episode of Arise TV's 'The Morning Show' in which Abati questioned for-

mer Delta State governor, Ifeanyi Okowa.

"I was particularly shocked that a senior editor could ask the immediate past governor of Delta state, Okowa, mischievously, I must say, with all due respect, 'did you get permission from Oshiomhole that your sins will now be forgiven before you decided to decamp to APC,'" Oshiomhole said.

Oshiomhole, a former President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and ex-governor of Edo State, said he found it absurd that Abati would imply he had such powers within the APC.

"How can you ask that?"

What is my status? I am in the legislature. Is the legislature responsible for the prosecution of anyone wrong in any way?" Oshiomhole questioned.

Although he did not mention Abati by name during the interview, Oshiomhole's references to the journalist's past and political career pointed clearly in his direction.

He also took a swipe at Abati's past, referencing his arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission after his time as President Goodluck Jonathan's spokesperson.

"The man who made that statement was at a time invited by the EFCC after he was Jona-

than's spokesman, shamelessly. Thereafter, EFCC arrested him. Was I the one who granted him bail to leave PDP to go where he is?" he stated.

Oshiomhole further accused Abati of deliberately refusing to acknowledge his role in labour movements, especially on May Day.

"Even on Labour Day, he was saying some labour leaders who had been involved in picketing and fought for workers; he could not even credit me with the fact that I led the protest. This is a guy who wrote 'Oshiomhole the people's president' when I was president of the NLC.

"Rather than crediting me

with that, he said when they leave NLC, they now go and become governors," Oshiomhole said.

The senator concluded with a direct challenge.

"If you are angry because you wanted to be a deputy governor and you lost an election in Ogun state, is that the reason you are paranoid, that every opportunity you want to abuse me? If you want to abuse me, don't hide behind the TV; let's meet in the street and fight it out," he said.

Abati was the running mate to Buruji Kashamu in the 2019 Ogun State gubernatorial election under the People's Democratic Party..

Lagos govt plans monthly rent payment scheme to ease burden

The Lagos State Government has announced plans to introduce monthly and quarterly rent payment options as part of efforts to ease the financial strain of housing on residents, particularly low-income earners.

The Commissioner for Housing, Moruf Akinderu-Fatai, made the disclosure during a press briefing marking the second year of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu's current term.

He explained that the new initiative builds on the success of the existing rent-to-own scheme, which allows tenants to make a five percent down payment and spread the remaining balance over ten years.

"That initiative was well-received, and its success encouraged us to explore new ways to reduce the pressure of yearly rent payment," he said.

Akinderu-Fatai noted that the

burden of sourcing lump sums for annual rent has become overwhelming for many residents, and the new system aims to provide relief by offering more flexible payment structures.

He said that consultations are ongoing with property owners, developers, and other stakeholders to address potential concerns over enforcement and payment tracking.

"There are issues to resolve, things like landlord cooperation and tracking systems. But we are listening to all sides," he added.

A pilot scheme is being planned for selected parts of the state, with the commissioner assuring that the government is committed to delivering tangible results.

"This is not just a policy on paper. We know what this means for many families, and we are determined to make it happen," he said.

Chimamanda Adichie to lead 2025 'Things Fall Apart' festival in Enugu

Celebrated novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has been announced as the headliner of the 2025 Things Fall Apart Festival, a week-long celebration of the literary legacy of Chinua Achebe.

The Centre for Memories, which organises the festival, made the announcement in an Instagram post on Tuesday, revealing that the event will take place from June 29 to July 5, 2025 at its premises in Enugu.

"We are screaming with excitement because the iconic Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie... is coming home," the organisers wrote.

Adichie, who recently concluded a global tour for her latest book Dream Count, will

headline the festival and reflect on Achebe's impact on African literature and identity.

Her keynote is expected to centre on the festival's theme: "Masculine, Feminine, Human: The Dialogue of Complementments in Things Fall Apart."

Organisers say the programme will feature dramatic performances, art exhibitions, film screenings, memory walks, and an immersive reimagining of Achebe's fictional Umuofia village.

The festival will also host youth initiatives, an essay competition, and intimate salon-style conversations, all aimed at deepening the engagement with Achebe's work and its contemporary relevance.



HOUSE PLENARY:

Minority Whip, Edo State House of Assembly, and member representing Igueben constituency, Hon Inegbeboh Ojie Eugene (right), and member representing Egor constituency, Hon Natasha Irobosa Osawaru, during the house plenary. PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN.

Microsoft to cut 6,000 jobs in latest restructuring effort

Technology giant, Microsoft has announced it will lay off 6,000 employees, representing roughly 3 per cent of its global workforce, as part of a broader effort to streamline operations.

According to The Guardian, the job cuts, which began on Tuesday with notice to affected staff, will impact employees across all levels and locations, with a particular focus on trimming the management structure.

The company, which employed 228,000 full-time workers as of June 2024, said the move was part of a continuing strategy to position itself for long-term success in an evolving technology landscape.

"We continue to implement organisational changes necessary to best position the company for success in a dynamic marketplace," the company stated.

The decision comes on the heels of a smaller wave of per-

formance-related layoffs earlier in the year, but marks the most significant reduction since Microsoft shed 10,000 jobs in early 2023.

Despite the job losses, Microsoft's financial health remains strong, buoyed by robust sales and earnings in the most recent quarter.

Chief Financial Officer, Amy Hood underscored the company's commitment to high performance and efficiency, noting during an April earnings

call that Microsoft was aiming to improve agility by reducing layers of management.

She added that while headcount had increased by two percent as of March 2025 compared to the previous year, it had slightly declined from year-end 2024 levels.

The layoffs come amid a broader recalibration within the tech industry, even as Microsoft maintains strong momentum in the artificial intelligence sector.



ADICHIE

NSIB disputes U.S. report, cites systemic failures in Wigwe crash

The Nigeria Safety Investigative Bureau (NSIB) has pushed back against findings by the United States National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) on the helicopter crash that killed former Access Holdings CEO Herbert Wigwe, his wife, son, and three others, insisting that systemic failure, not pilot error alone, was to blame.

In a statement issued on Wednesday by its Director of Public Affairs and Family Assistance, Mrs Bimbo Oladeji, the

NSIB criticised the NTSB's conclusion that pilot disorientation and poor judgment, particularly the decision to proceed visually in conditions requiring instrument navigation, were key causes of the February crash.

Acknowledging the NTSB's authority in leading the investigation, the NSIB clarified that it was not a co-investigator and had no active role beyond being kept informed of proceedings.

The bureau stressed that broader operational shortcomings should be considered.

"It appears there were systemic issues, and the flight risk assessment should have indicated a higher risk," the statement read.

"While it's easy to blame the pilot, there is a system behind the pilot that should have mitigated these risks."

The statement came a day after NSIB Director-General Alex Badeh, when asked by newsmen for the agency's view on the NTSB report, declined to comment, saying that accident reports are meant to en-

hance safety, rather than assign blame.

However, the NSIB had previously affirmed its full cooperation with the American authorities during the investigation.

The agency reiterated that it was not directly involved in the U.S.-led inquiry, but maintained its interest in the findings, noting that effective safety policy requires acknowledging institutional responsibilities in addition to individual mistakes.

Foreign

NEWS

Construction sites appear in Gaza ahead of Israeli-US aid plan rejected by UN, images show

Israel is preparing a series of sites in Gaza that could be used as distribution centres for humanitarian aid in a controversial new plan, satellite images show.

The Israeli government suspended food and medicine deliveries into Gaza in March.

Ministers said the move, which has been condemned by UN, European and Middle Eastern leaders, was intended to put pressure on Hamas to

release its remaining hostages. Israel also accused Hamas of stealing aid – an allegation the group has denied.

The UN has said the blockade has caused severe shortages of food, medicines and fuel, and an assessment on Monday warned that Gaza's population of around 2.1 million people was at "critical risk" of famine.

The US confirmed last week that it was preparing a new system for providing aid from

a series of hubs inside Gaza, which would be run by private companies and protected by security contractors and Israeli forces.

Images analysed by BBC Verify show that land has already been cleared, with new roads and staging areas constructed at a number of locations in southern and central Gaza in recent weeks.

Israel has not publicly said where the hubs will be, but

humanitarian sources - briefed previously by Israeli officials - told BBC Verify that at least four centres will be built in the southern section of Gaza and one further north near the Netzarim Corridor, a strip of land controlled by the military that effectively divides the territory.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation - an organisation set up to support the plan - initially said food, water and hygiene kits would be supplied

to 1.2 million people, less than 60% of the population.

On Wednesday it announced it would start operations before the end of May, and appeared to call for Israel to allow aid through normal channels until its distribution centres were fully operational. It also called for aid hubs to be built in northern Gaza, something not envisaged under the original plan and which had led to criticism that people would be forced to move south.

UN agencies have insisted they will not co-operate with the plan - which is in line with one previously approved by Israel's government - saying it contradicted fundamental humanitar-

ian principles.

A spokesperson for the UN's Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) accused Israel of seeking to use "food and fuel as leverage, as part of a military strategy".

"All aid would be channelled through a handful of militarised hubs," Olga Cherevko told BBC Verify.

"That kind of arrangement would cut off vast areas of Gaza - particularly the most vulnerable, who can't move easily, or are otherwise marginalised - from any help at all."

Meanwhile, Bushra Khalidi of Oxfam described the new plan as a "farce".



THE BAYESIAN, PICTURED SAILING NEAR PALERMO, IN A PHOTO RELEASED BY MANUFACTURES PERINI NAVI.

Bayesian crew unaware wind speeds of over 73mph could topple yacht, report finds

The owner and crew of a luxury superyacht that sank off the coast of Sicily, killing tech entrepreneur Mike Lynch and six others, were unaware wind speeds of over 73mph could tip it over, according to an interim report.

Modelling commissioned after the disaster indicates gusts of that speed hitting the side of the Bayesian, when it had its sails down and centreboard up, would "likely result" in its capsizing.

The UK's Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB), leading the international investigation, said winds of over 80mph "violently" hit the vessel, causing it to flood within seconds.

It sank near the town Porticello on 19 August last year during freak weather, with reports of water spouts.

Seven of the 22 people onboard were killed, including Mr Lynch, 59, and his 18-year-old daughter Hannah.

Investigators say the yacht was knocked to a 90-degree angle within 15 seconds at 04:06 am local time, causing people, furniture and loose items to fall across the deck.

"There was no indication of flooding inside Bayesian until

water came in over the starboard rails and, within seconds, entered the internal spaces down the stairwells," the report says.

The MAIB's chief inspector of marine accidents Andrew Moll said the situation was "irrecoverable" once the yacht tilted beyond 70 degrees.

The yacht had its sails down and centreboard up when it sank.

The MAIB commissioned modelling from the University of Southampton to examine the stability of the yacht in these conditions.

It indicated that - if the wind was blowing directly across the beam, or side, of the boat - wind speeds in excess of 73mph were sufficient to tip the boat over and "it is possible" the yacht was similarly vulnerable to lower wind speeds, the MAIB said.

But this information was not included in the onboard stability information book and "consequently, these vulnerabilities were also unknown to either the owner or the crew of Bayesian", the report found.

The MAIB is investigating the incident as the Bayesian was registered in the UK. No date has been set for when its final report will be published.

It said its report was based on "a limited amount of verified evidence" as a criminal investigation by Italian authorities has restricted access to the wreck.

An operation to raise the 56-metre vessel from the seabed was paused over the weekend after a diver died while working on the wreck. Work was set to resume on Thursday.

The report lays out more detail as to how the sinking unfolded.

Investigators say the yacht sailed to the site where it sank on the previous day, in order to "shelter" from forecast thunderstorms. The sails were furled at the time.

Wind speed was "no more than eight knots (9mph)" at 03:00 - about an hour before the incident. Some 55 minutes later it had increased to 30 knots (34.5mph), and it had accelerated to 70 knots (80.6mph) by 04:06 when the yacht capsized.

As the storm intensified, several crew members were working in response to the conditions. The deck hand went onto the deck to close the yacht's windows.

Five people were injured "either by falling or from things falling on them" and the deck

hand was "thrown into the sea", the report says.

Two of the yacht's guests used furniture drawers "as an improvised ladder" to escape their cabin, it adds.

Dr Simon Boxall, Oceanographer at the University of Southampton, said the Bayesian was in "the wrong place at the wrong time".

"The priorities for the crew would have been to shut the hatches and the doors, which they did," he told the BBC.

This means speculation about water flooding in because everything was open is "obviously not the case".

"The next priority would have been to start the engines - so they would have some manoeuvrability to position themselves within a storm - and to then lift anchor, which the crew did, but this takes time," he added.

"It's not like a car where you jump in and turn the key. It would take 5 or 10 minutes before you can start the engines with a vessel of this size."

Survivors escaped on the Bayesian's life raft and were rescued by a small boat dispatched from another nearby yacht, the report says.

Mexican beauty influencer shot dead during TikTok livestream

A 23-year-old Mexican social media influencer has been shot dead while live streaming on TikTok, the state prosecutor's office said.

Valeria Marquez was killed when a man entered her beauty salon in the city of Guadalajara "and apparently fired a gun at her", according to the Jalisco state prosecutor's office.

The motive for the fatal attack has not been identified but the case is being investigated as a femicide - when women and girls are killed because of their gender, the state prosecutor said.

Gender-based violence is highly common in Mexico where the UN reports 10 women or girls are murdered every day by partners or family members.

Moments before her death, Ms Marquez was sitting at a table holding a stuffed animal at her beauty salon in the suburb of Zapopan doing a livestream. Seconds later, she is shot dead,

with the footage only ending when another person picks up her phone to stop the recording.

Local media reports say she was killed by a man pretending to bring her a gift.

Police arrived at the scene around 18:30 local time (12:30 GMT) and confirmed Ms Marquez's death, according to the state prosecutor.

The prosecutor's office did not name a suspect.

Fans of Ms Marquez, whose social media following totalled nearly 200,000 across TikTok and Instagram, have reacted with horror to her death.

Mayor of Zapopan Juan José Frangie said his office had no record of Ms Marquez requesting help from the authorities due to threats against her, adding "a femicide is the worst thing", according to news agency AFP.

The state prosecutor says forensic experts are investigating the shooting.

US and Iran close to nuclear deal, Trump says

US President Donald Trump says that Iran has "sort of" agreed to the terms of a nuclear deal with the United States.

Trump described the latest talks between the two countries, which ended on Sunday, as "very serious negotiations" for "long-term peace".

Earlier, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader told NBC News that Tehran was willing to make concessions on its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of sanctions.

The US has insisted that Iran must scrap its uranium enrichment to prevent the country developing nuclear weapons - though Iran insists its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful.

Speaking on Thursday in Qatar, on the second stop

of his multi-day Gulf tour, Trump said that a deal was close on Iran's nuclear programme and suggested a military strike on Tehran's sites could be avoided.

"We're not going to be making any nuclear dust in Iran," Trump said after a meeting in Doha with business leaders.

"I think we're getting close to maybe doing a deal without having to do this."

"You probably read today the story about Iran. It's sort of agreed to the terms."

The president did not specify which remarks he was referring to, but an adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Ali Shamkhani, said in a US media interview that Tehran was willing to accept far-reaching curbs on its nuclear programme.

News

Foreign

Three Maori MPs face suspension over 'intimidating' haka

A New Zealand parliamentary committee has proposed that three Māori MPs be suspended from parliament for their protest haka during a sitting last year.

Opposition MP Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke began the traditional group dance after being asked if her party supported a controversial bill - which has since been voted down - to redefine the country's founding treaty.

The haka could have "intimidated" other lawmakers, the committee ruled, recommending that she be suspended for a week and Te Pāti Māori (Māori Party) co-leaders Rawiri Waititi and Debbie Ngarewa-Packer be banned for 21 days.

The Māori Party criticised the recommendations as a "warning shot to all of us to fall in line".

"When tangata whenua resist, colonial powers reach for the maximum penalty," it said in a statement on Wednesday, using a Māori phrase that translates to "people of the land".

It also said these are among the harshest punishments ever recommended by New Zealand's parliament.

Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, who is Māori, said

the trio were "out-of-control MPs who flout the rules and intimidate others with outrageous hakas".

Their proposed suspensions will be put to a vote on Tuesday.

The Treaty Principles Bill, which sought to redefine New Zealand's founding treaty with Māori people, was voted down 112 votes to 11 last month - days after a government committee recommended that it should not proceed.

The bill had already been widely expected to fail, with most major political parties committed to voting it down.

Members of the right-wing Act Party, which tabled it, were the only MPs to vote for it at the second reading on 10 April.

Act, a minor party in the ruling centre-right coalition, argued that there is a need to legally define the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi - the 1840 pact between the British Crown and Māori leaders signed during New Zealand's colonisation - which it said resulted in the country being divided by race.

Critics, however, say the legislation will divide the country and lead to the unravelling of much-needed support for many Māori.

Ben & Jerry's co-founder arrested after Senate Gaza protest

Ben Cohen, the co-founder of Ben & Jerry's, was arrested during a protest in the US Senate over military aid to Israel and humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

Protesters disrupted the hearing on Wednesday while Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr was testifying.

Mr Cohen was charged with a misdemeanour offence, while another six demonstrators were also arrested and face a number of more serious charges, US Capitol Police told BBC News.

A video shared on social media showed Mr Cohen being escorted from the building by police with his hands tied behind his back.

"Congress kills poor kids in Gaza by buying bombs, and pays for it by kicking kids off Medicaid in the US," he said in a video after someone asked why he was "getting arrested".

A police spokesperson said that Mr Cohen was charged with crowding, obstructing or incommoding - a misdemeanour offence often used in civil disobedience cases in the US capital.

Six other demonstrators were also arrested at the hearing and face charges including assaulting a police officer and/or resisting arrest.

Ben & Jerry's has long been known for taking a public stance on social and political issues since it was founded in

1978 by Mr Cohen and Jerry Greenfield.

It has often backed campaigns on issues like LGBTQ+ rights and climate change.

Ben & Jerry's was bought by the multinational consumers goods giant Unilever in 2000.

The merger agreement between the two companies created an independent board tasked with protecting Ben & Jerry's values and mission.

But Unilever and Ben & Jerry's have been at loggerheads for a while. Their relationship soured in 2021 when Ben & Jerry's announced it was halting sales in the West Bank.

The two companies are currently locked in a legal battle.

In response to a request for comment, a spokesperson for Unilever told BBC News: "Ben Cohen takes stances as an activist citizen on issues he finds personally important.

"These actions are on his own as an individual and not on behalf of Ben & Jerry's or Unilever."

In March, Ben & Jerry's filed a legal case accusing Unilever of sacking chief executive David Stever over disagreements over the brand's political campaigns.

At the time a Unilever spokesperson said it was "disappointed that the confidentiality of an employee career conversation has been made public".

The dispute escalated over the last year as Ben & Jerry's advocated for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Pregnant Israeli woman killed in West Bank shooting attack

A pregnant Israeli woman has been shot and killed in what Israeli authorities say was a terrorist attack in the north of the occupied West Bank.

Tzeela Gez, 30, was driving to a hospital with her husband Hananel to give birth when a gunman opened fire on their car near their home in the settlement of Bruchin on Wednesday evening. Mrs Gez was critically wounded while Mr Gez was lightly wounded.

Doctors performed an emergency caesarean section and delivered the baby in a serious but stable condition. But

they were unable to save Mrs Gez's life.

The Israeli military said its forces were pursuing the gunman. Troops reportedly surrounded the nearby Palestinian village of Bruqin afterwards.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he was "deeply shocked by the horrific attack in [the northern West Bank] against a pregnant woman and her husband, while they were making their way to the delivery room".

"This despicable event reflects exactly the difference between us - those who cherish and bring life - and the despic-

able terrorists whose life's goal is to kill us and cut off lives," he added.

Defence minister Israel Katz said he had ordered the Israeli military to "identify the origin of the attackers and respond with maximum force".

There was no immediate claim from any Palestinian armed groups, but Hamas praised the attack as a "heroic" response to Israel's "escalating crimes and ongoing aggression against our people in Gaza and the occupied West Bank".

Hundreds of Palestinians and dozens of Israelis have been killed in a surge in vio-

lence in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas's deadly attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023.

Israel has built about 160 settlements housing some 700,000 Jews since it occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war.

The vast majority of the international community considers the settlements illegal under international law - a position supported by an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) last year - although Israel disputes this.



DRONE ATTACKS:

Port Sudan, which was once considered a relatively safe city, has been hit by a series of drone attacks targeting key infrastructure

Drone attacks raise stakes in new phase of Sudan's civil war

Paramilitary fighters appear to have opened a new phase in Sudan's civil war after being driven from the capital, in a move which some experts have described as a "shock and awe campaign".

Just weeks after the army celebrated the recapture of Khartoum, its foe the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) launched a series of unprecedented drone strikes on Port Sudan in the east of the country.

The attacks have led to worsening power blackouts, as well as city residents facing water shortages.

"It's a level of power projection within this region that we haven't seen yet," says Alan Boswell, the Horn of Africa expert for the International Crisis Group.

"I think it raises the stakes quite a bit," he added.

The barrage of attacks on the war-time capital and humanitarian hub signals that the RSF is determined and able to carry on the fight despite significant territorial losses.

And it has showcased the growth of advanced drone warfare in Africa.

Drones have played an increasing role in the conflict, which has entered its third year.

The war began as a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF and has drawn in other Sudanese armed groups and foreign backers, plunging the country into what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) helped the army advance earlier this year. And the RSF escalated its own use of drones as it was pushed out of central Sudan, especially Khartoum, back towards its traditional stronghold in the west of the country.

In recent months the paramilitaries had stepped up drone strikes on critical civilian infrastructure in army-controlled areas. That continued on Wednesday night with attacks on three power stations in the city of Omdur-

man, which lies across the Nile River from Khartoum. The damage has caused widespread electricity outages in the capital region.

But it was the RSF's sustained strikes on Port Sudan, until now seen as a safe haven home to government officials, diplomats and humanitarian organisations, that underlined a shift in strategy to a greater emphasis on remote warfare, and aimed to demonstrate strength.

"The RSF is trying to show that they don't need to reach Port Sudan by land in order to be able to have an impact there," says Sudanese political analyst Kholood Khair.

The group is trying to achieve a "narrative shift" away from "the triumphant SAF that took over Khartoum," she says.

"It is saying to the Sudanese Armed Forces: 'You can take Khartoum back, but you'll never be able to govern it. You can have Port Sudan, but you won't be able to govern it, because we will cause a security crisis for you so large that it will be ungovernable... They want to unequivocally show that the war is not over until they say so.'"

The paramilitary group has not directly addressed the Port Sudan drone attacks. Rather, it has repeated its assertion that the SAF is supported by Iran and accused the armed forces of targeting civilian infrastructure and state institutions, calling the military strikes on Khartoum and RSF-held areas in the west and south of the country war crimes.

Both sides stand accused of war crimes which they have denied, but the RSF has been singled out over allegations of mass rape and genocide.

The change in its tactics may have been triggered by battlefield necessity, but is possible because of technological advancement.

The RSF had previously used what are known as suicide or loitering drones, small UAVs with explosive payloads that are designed to crash into targets and can carry out coordinated attacks.

Friday Sermon

"Be cautious of the fiery 'I' Pronoun"

IMAM MUHAMMAD SAMINU

Brothers and sisters, Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.

All praises and adoration be to Allah, May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon the noble Prophet Muhammad, his household, companions and those who follow his guidance till the Day of Resurrection.

Today, I want us to think together for a little while. Think about something so small, so simple, yet it carries such weight in our lives, in our hearts. It's just one sound, one little word we use all the time: the pronoun, "I."

We say it countless times a day. "I did this," "I want that," "This is mine." It seems so natural, so necessary. But I want to share a reflection with you today, a thought that has been weighing on my heart, about this little word and the two very different ways it can live within us.

Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala, in His infinite wisdom, created us all equal. Remember the powerful words in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat.

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." (Qur'an 49:13)

Think about that, brothers and sisters. Allah made us diverse – different colors, different tongues, different backgrounds, not so we can boast about one over the other, but so we can know one another, learn from each other. The only thing that truly elevates one person above another in Allah's sight is taqwa. That consciousness of Allah, that piety in our hearts and actions.

And look at the blessings Allah has showered upon us! He gave us eyes to see the beauty around us, tongues to speak and share knowledge, lips and teeth that allow us to taste and enjoy His provisions. These are gifts, pure gifts from Allah's boundless generosity. He gives without asking for a price. What does He ask in return? Gratitude. Shukr. And true gratitude, my dear brothers and sisters, begins with recognizing the Source of all these blessings.

Now, this is where Shaytan, may Allah curse him, tries to sneak in. He whispers into our hearts, plants a seed – the seed of ego. This ego, it's not just about having a sense of self. It's when that sense of self becomes inflated, distorted. It's the root of that "fiery I."

That "fiery I"... it's a simple word. Easy to say, light on the tongue. "I am this," "I achieved that," "Look at me!" It sounds harmless, doesn't it? But be careful, brothers and sisters, because this little word, when filled with pride and arrogance, can be incredibly dangerous. It can lead us down a dark path.

When we constantly focus on "I," on our own supposed greatness, we forget who truly holds all power, all glory. We start to think we are self-sufficient, that our achievements are solely our own doing. This is a direct contradiction to tawhid, the



very foundation of our faith, the Oneness of Allah. Everything we have, everything we are, comes from Him.

But there's another "I," my dear brothers and sisters. An "I" that is bright, that is full of light. We can call it the "illuminous I."

This "illuminous I" is the "I" that gives hope, confidence, yes, but also joy, a joy that comes from recognizing Allah's favour. It's an "I" grounded in humility, in gratitude. It doesn't deny our individual selves, but it places that self in its proper perspective, acknowledging that all good comes from Allah.

Think about the son of Prophet Adam, Habil (peace be upon him). When his brother threatened him, what did he say?

"Even if you should raise your hand against me to kill me, I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Qur'an 5:28)

Did Habil say, "I am stronger"? Did he say, "I will defend myself no matter what"? No. His "I" was rooted in the fear of Allah, in the understanding of the sanctity of life. That was the "illuminous I" in action, choosing righteousness over retaliation.

And remember our beloved Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him). After all the trials, the betrayal by his brothers, when he was in a position of power, what did he say to them?

"He said, I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allah has indeed been gracious to us. Indeed, he who fears Allah and is patient, then indeed, Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good." (Qur'an 12:90)

He didn't say, "Look at me now, after what you did!" His "I" was one of forgiveness, of recognizing Allah's grace upon him and his brother. It was an "I" of hope and healing. That, my brothers and sisters, is the beauty of the "illuminous I."

Now, let's look at the opposite, the "fiery I." This "I," as I said, is the door

How do we purify our souls? Through prayer, through fasting, through giving charity, through remembering Allah often, through reciting the Qur'an, through seeking knowledge, through surrounding ourselves with good company, and through sincere repentance when we fall short.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Islam, as we go into this blessed weekend, let us reflect on this message. Let us strive to avoid the "fiery I" within ourselves and to extinguish its flames with humility and selflessness. Let us cultivate the "illuminous I," the "I" that is filled with gratitude, hope, and a deep awareness of our dependence on Allah.

opener to pride, to arrogance, to wanting to dominate others, to selfishness, and ultimately, to destruction.

Remember Shaytan. When Allah commanded him to prostrate to Adam (peace be upon him), what was his response?

"Allah said, 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?' Satan said, 'I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay.'" (Qur'an 7:12)

That "I am better!" That was the fiery "I" speaking. It was based on a false sense of superiority, a rejection of Allah's command. And what was the consequence? Expulsion from Paradise! A powerful lesson for us all. And think about Pharaoh (Fir'awn)! He stood before his people and declared:

"And Pharaoh said, 'O my people,

does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and these rivers flowing beneath me; then do you not see? Or am I not better than this one who is insignificant and hardly makes himself clear?'" (Qur'an 43:51-52)

AND EVEN MORE SHOCKINGLY:

"I am your most exalted lord." (Qur'an 79:24).

"I am your most exalted lord!" Look at the arrogance! Look at where that "fiery I" led him, to claiming divinity, to oppressing his people, and ultimately, to his own destruction in the sea.

This "fiery I," my brothers and sisters, it corrupts. It blinds us to the truth. It creates division and injustice. It hardens our hearts and pushes us away from Allah.

So, how do we protect ourselves

from this dangerous "fiery I" and cultivate that "illuminous I" within us? I want to share three important ways with you today.

FIRST, SELFLESSNESS. What is selflessness? It's not just being kind. It's prioritizing others over ourselves. It's caring about their needs, their well-being, even if it means sacrificing something of our own desires.

Think about the Ansar in Medina. When their brothers, the Muhajirun, came with nothing, the Ansar didn't just give them a little bit. They shared their homes, their wealth, their very livelihoods! That's true selflessness. That's an "I" that says, "My brother's needs are as important as my own, if not more so." This pushes back against the selfishness of the "fiery I."

SECOND, HUMILITY. Humility in Islam isn't about thinking you're worthless. It's about recognizing that we are all equal in our humanity. The only measure of honour, as Allah tells us, is taqwa.

A humble person doesn't boast about their achievements. They recognize that any good they have is a blessing from Allah. They treat everyone with respect, whether rich or poor, powerful or weak. Humility shatters the arrogance of the "fiery I." It allows us to connect with each other as equals, as brothers and sisters in Islam.

THIRD, PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL. Our hearts, by nature, are drawn to desires, both good and bad. That's why we have a constant responsibility to purify our souls, to cleanse them from negative traits like greed, envy, hatred, and yes, pride.

This is a lifelong journey, my brothers and sisters. It requires constant effort, constant reflection. We need to be mindful of our thoughts, our intentions, our actions. We need to guard our hearts against the whispers of Shaytan and the allure of that egoistic "I."

How do we purify our souls? Through prayer, through fasting, through giving charity, through remembering Allah often, through reciting the Qur'an, through seeking knowledge, through surrounding ourselves with good company, and through sincere repentance when we fall short.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Islam, as we go into this blessed weekend, let us reflect on this message. Let us strive to avoid the "fiery I" within ourselves and to extinguish its flames with humility and selflessness. Let us cultivate the "illuminous I," the "I" that is filled with gratitude, hope, and a deep awareness of our dependence on Allah.

May Allah grant us the strength to purify our souls and to live lives that are pleasing to Him. May He protect us from the traps of arrogance and guide us towards humility and selflessness.

I wish you all a splendid week, free from that destructive "I" and full of selflessness and humility.

Imam Umar Muhammad Saminu, Squadron Leader, writes from the office of the Chief Imam, NAF Base, Benin City.

Feature

INSIDE THE IMPACT PROJECT:

How Edo is transforming PHC

EDWARD OSEGHE

The The Edo State Immunization Plus and Malaria Progress by Accelerating Coverage and Transforming Services (IMPACT) Project has driven significant improvements in primary healthcare delivery across the state.

Initiated by the Federal Government through the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), with support from the World Bank, the IMPACT Project is designed to strengthen healthcare systems, especially in rural and underserved communities where access to essential services is limited.

Through this initiative, the Edo State Government and its partners have demonstrated a firm commitment to improving the health and well-being of Edo residents. The results of the IMPACT Project are already evident in the enhanced services being delivered at the grassroots.

The core aim of the IMPACT Project in Edo is to enhance the quality and accessibility of immunisation, child, neonatal, and maternal healthcare, alongside the control and treatment of malaria.

Speaking during an interview at his office on 28 Ezoti Street, off Airport Road, on Wednesday, 14th May, Dr. Idemudia Osayomore, the IMPACT Project Manager, stated that the project focuses on transforming healthcare service delivery.

“We are working to upgrade infrastructure, enhance digital healthcare capabilities, improve the quality of health data, and ensure our facilities are adequately staffed and stocked with essential medicines,” he explained.

According to Dr. Osayomore, these interventions are aimed at creating a sustainable and efficient healthcare system across Edo State.

Among the achievements recorded under the IMPACT Project, Dr. Osayomore highlighted the delivery of modern equipment, including ultrasound machines, to Medical Officers of Health in all 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Staff have been trained on their use, and regular monitoring is ongoing to ensure effective deployment of these machines in supporting

patient care.

Additionally, laptops and iPads were provided to all 18 LGAs during a three-day digitalisation training on the District Health Information System (DHIS), held from 20th to 23rd January 2025. This training, funded by the World Bank, equipped health workers with vital skills for managing health data to support informed decision-making at local, state, and federal levels.

To aid project logistics, an 18-seater bus and a Hilux vehicle, donated by the World Bank were commissioned by His Excellency, Governor Monday Okpebholo, represented by the Chief of Staff, Mr. Gani Audu, on 20th January 2025 at the John Odigie Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA). These vehicles have since played a crucial role in monitoring project activities across healthcare facilities.

In March 2025, the Edo State Primary Healthcare Development Agency (EDSPHCDA), in collaboration with the State Ministry of Health (SMoH), conducted an Integrated Supportive Supervision (ISS) programme under the IMPACT Project. This three-week exercise was aimed at monitoring key health indicators and improving service delivery, with a particular focus on reducing under-five and maternal mortality. The supervision reviewed indicators such as antenatal registration, malaria treatment for pregnant women, postnatal care, child immunisation, and the availability of essential malaria treatments.

In April 2025, the Honourable Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Oshiomhole, accompanied by Dr. Osayomore and team, inspected healthcare facilities undergoing reconstruction in Amufi, Iwogban, Egor, and Useh. This was part of the effort to ensure facilities meet required standards and are fully equipped to provide high-quality services. Notably, over 61 Primary Healthcare Centres (PHCs) across Edo are currently under renovation as of May 2025, with close supervision to ensure quality outcomes. The IMPACT Project is proving to be a turning point for primary healthcare in the state.

To ensure uninterrupted supply of medical essentials, funds have also been allocated to all IMPACT-sup-

ported facilities for the procurement of essential medicines and consumables, helping to prevent stockouts and sustain smooth service delivery.

So far, 192 Skilled Birth Attendants (SBAs), including midwives, registered nurses, and Junior Community Health Extension Workers (JCHEWs)—have been deployed across facilities supported by the IMPACT Project. These health workers play a vital role in managing safe deliveries and improving maternal health outcomes.

From 5th to 8th May 2025, the Implementation Status Result Report (ISR) Team from the World Bank visited Benin City to assess the progress of the IMPACT Project in Edo State. The team was led by Professor Odunuga, Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) Specialist, and Mrs. Lulu Pwanedo, both representing the World Bank, and were accompanied throughout by Dr. Idemudia Osayomore.

The team monitored ongoing renovation work at PHC facilities and reviewed the implementation of the Environmental Safety and Mitigation Plan. They also assessed facility data and interviewed Medical Officers to better understand how the upgraded services are being utilised.

As part of their visit, they paid a courtesy call on the Honourable Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Oshiomhole, represented by Dr. Stanley Ehiamwhian, to formally present the objectives of their monitoring mission.

Following this, the team toured several PHC facilities, including Oghede, Iwogban, Ugbogio, and Ugbekun—to inspect ongoing work and evaluate progress on the ground.

The story of the IMPACT Project in Edo State would not be complete without acknowledging the relentless efforts of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU), led by the Honourable Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Oshiomhole, and the IMPACT Project Manager, Dr. Idemudia Osayomore.

With continued support from the Edo State Government and development partners, these leaders and their teams are working tirelessly to bring meaningful transformation to the state's primary healthcare system.



A step-by-step breakdown of new Kidnapping Prohibition Law in Edo State

FRED ITUA

In Edo State, Governor Monday Okpebholo and members of the State House of Assembly are united in taking a firm stand against the escalating threat of kidnapping. The Edo State House of Assembly has passed the Kidnapping Prohibition (Amendment) Law, 2025. This amended legislation marks a bold legislative milestone aimed at tightening the noose on kidnapers, their accomplices, and enablers. It reflects a sharpened resolve by the government to enhance public safety and restore confidence in law enforcement and judicial systems within the state.

Under this amended law, the penalties for kidnapping have been significantly strengthened. In what is considered one of the most stringent anti-kidnapping frameworks in the country, the law prescribes the death penalty for anyone who is directly involved in the act of kidnapping where a life is lost. For cases where victims survive the ordeal, a convicted kidnapper now faces life imprisonment, a stern departure from lighter sentences in previous enactments.

Furthermore, the law introduces a minimum sentence of 21 years for anyone who aids, abets, conspires, or attempts to commit the offence of kidnapping, reflecting the government's intention to criminalize not just the act itself but the entire chain of support behind it.

Another groundbreaking aspect of the amendment is the provision targeting those who provide shelter, hideouts, or logistical support to kidnapers. Such individuals, regardless of whether they directly participated in the crime, are now liable to a minimum of 14 years imprisonment upon conviction. This sweeping clause is designed to dismantle the ecosystem that enables the planning and execution of abductions, closing loopholes that perpetrators have long exploited.

Moreover, the law broadens the scope of what constitutes kidnapping. It now includes compelling another person through threats or deceit into confinement, regardless of the duration or nature of the detention. This redefinition seeks to capture a wider array of tactics employed by crimi-

nals, especially those that do not involve traditional hostage-taking scenarios but still infringe on the liberty of individuals.

Notably, the amendment also criminalizes the act of negotiating ransom. Any individual who receives, offers, or facilitates the exchange of ransom payments, whether a relative of the victim or otherwise, is now at risk of prosecution. The law aims to break the cycle of financial incentives that have fueled the persistence of the crime, making it less lucrative for perpetrators. In the same vein, the possession of property, whether movable or immovable, acquired through ransom proceeds is now a criminal offence, subject to forfeiture and other legal consequences.

The Kidnapping Prohibition (Amendment) Law, 2025 also includes clauses that ensure the protection of witnesses and victims during prosecution. It mandates confidentiality for witnesses and safeguards them from potential reprisals. This is an important provision given the fear and reluctance often associated with testifying against dangerous criminals, and it signals a move towards a more victim-sensitive justice system.

This new law comes in response to the growing calls from civil society, security experts, and the general public for tougher legislations to curb the surge in abductions, which has not only threatened lives but has also hampered economic activities and shaken communal peace.

The Edo State government's decision to adopt such comprehensive and tough measures sends a clear message that it will no longer tolerate acts of criminality that violate the sanctity of human freedom.

As the state implements the provisions of this law, emphasis will be placed on training law enforcement officers, sensitizing the judiciary, and educating the public on the implications of the amendments. This multi-pronged approach is necessary to ensure the law's effectiveness and to build a safer Edo State where citizens can live without fear.

Fred Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor



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NWFL Super Six MD 04: Edo Queens beat Bayelsa Queens 1-0, keep title hope alive

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Edo Queens on Thursday, defeated former league champions Bayelsa Queens 1-0 to keep their hope of retaining the Nigeria Women Football League title alive as the Super Six tournament gets tougher.

Goodness Osigwe scored the only goal of the match in the 45th minute to give the defending champions the maximum points.

The dazzling winger came from the bench to deliver the much needed result before the end of the half hour, as she grabbed her first goal of the competition when she tapped in Emem Essien's superb cross from the right flank, beating goalkeeper Monle Omini of Bayelsa Queens to the game.

It was a make or mar encounter for Edo Queens being their fourth match and one remaining to be played in the Super 6 tournament. A loss would have been a setback. The one nil triumph over Bayelsa Queens is a big relief and has

brought the Benin Girls' back to the game.

In the second half, both teams came out looking more hungry for goals, Edo Queens became more mobile mounting pressure on Bayelsa Queens.

Edo Queens were destined to win as Bayelsa Queens' striker had a one-one advantage against Edo Queens goalkeeper Uzoma Ijeoma, but

her magnificent save denied Bayelsa Queens an equalizer. Goodness Osigwe made several attempts to increase the goal tally but goalkeeper Monle Omini could not afford to disappoint her side again till the end of the game.

Edo Queens now have seven points from four matches. They succumbed to a 1-0 loss to Remo Stars Ladies in the

opening game and pulled a 1-1 draw with Rivers Angels before they spanked Naija Ratels 2-0 to regain confidence. They will now face Nasarawa Amazons in their last game.

Nasarawa Amazons are currently on top of the table with 8 points while Edo Queens, Bayelsa Queens and Remo Stars Ladies are tied in the same 7 points.



Enugu State pledges employment for medalists at Gateway Games 2025

In a bold move aimed at rewarding performance and building a sustainable sports structure, the Enugu State Government has announced that any athlete who wins a medal at the 22nd National Sports Festival, Gateway Games 2025, will receive automatic employment as a civil servant.

Speaking exclusively to Prime Sports Radio Enugu and Athletic NG, Comrade Ephraim Ochonma, Director of Coaching at the Enugu State Ministry of Youth and Sports, said:

"That's the biggest incentive—it's not just about giving athletes money. Once you win a medal for Enugu State, you're employed by the state government. You become a civil servant, continue to compete for the state, and you even have the opportunity to transition into coaching. We are building a structure that ensures we won't lack athletes or coaches in the future."

Team Enugu will be represented by 84 athletes and 24 officials, participating in 12 individual sports: Para Powerlifting, Para Athletics, Judo,

Badminton, Tennis, Swimming, Athletics, Boxing, and Wrestling. The state will also compete in three team sports: women's football, men's basketball, and men's handball.

While medals remain a priority, the state's broader vision is centred on talent development and long-term competitiveness.

"This festival is a stage where you identify states that are investing seriously in sports. You'll see athletes whose names you don't know now, but in the next edition, they'll make an impact. That's why some states are bringing younger talents—for exposure," Ochonma explained.

The Director also revealed that the state government provided athletes with funds for nutritional supplements and training. Both elite and up-and-coming athletes received financial support.

"Some of our top athletes were given money for supplements—we know what is expected of them. New athletes were also supported as part of our development plan. But employment is the biggest reward. It provides stability and keeps them in the system."

Among Enugu's standout athletes is Johnson Nnamani, a World U20 400m champion and Commonwealth Games competitor. In boxing, Israel Ogbodo will represent the state, while the para-sports division features several elite athletes, including Destiny Agbo (a double champion), Daniel, Ugochukwu, and Goodness.

AFN President Chief Tonobok Okowa welcomes CAA facilities inspection team for Youth Championship

A four member inspection team from the Confederation of African Athletics (CAA), are in Nigeria for the inspection of facilities for the forthcoming Africa U-18 and U-20 Athletics Championship scheduled to hold in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital, South West, Nigeria.

The delegates from CAA started arriving the country on Wednesday and the last officials landed in Nigeria on Thursday.

The delegates will inspect the MKO Abiola Stadium, Kuto, Abeokuta as well as the hotels and medical facilities earmarked to be used by athletes and officials.

The President of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN), Chief Tonobok Okowa stated

that the inspection team will also attend the opening ceremony of the 22nd National Sports Festival before leaving the country.

Okowa, a Vice President of the Confederation of African Athletics further explained that he exempted himself from the Local Organizing Committee of the third African Youth Athletics Championship because of the multipurpose roles he will be playing during the event.

"First and foremost, I'm an executive member of CAA as well as the leader of Team Nigeria to the competition and you know CAA's are the owners of the competition so it not possible for me serve in the LOC again as my roles in CAA are demanding and crucial to the success of the

championship."

The former Chairman of Delta State Sports Commission revealed that he personally nominated all the AFN board members on the LOC announced two days ago.

"All the AFN members on the list were submitted by me and if you do not see any board member on the Local Organizing Committee, it is because they're playing a key role in Team Nigeria preparations and build up for a successful outing at the Championship."

It's noteworthy to mention that during the 2018 Senior Africa Athletics Championship held in Asaba, Delta State, South South, Nigeria, the former President of the AFN, Ibrahim Shehu Gusau was not in the Local Organizing Committee of the competition as he was managing Team Nigeria.

Abeokuta, Nigeria was selected as the new host city for the 3rd edition of the CAA African U18/U20 Combined Championships from 16-20 July, 2025.

The biennial junior athletics championships is expected to draw more than 500 young competitors from the continent to the West African nation.

Confederation of African Athletics (CAA) stated that

the Council, Congress, and 3rd CAA African U18/U20 Combined Championships, scheduled to take place in Oran, Algeria, "will no longer take place in that country for various reasons".

Osimhen delighted after shattering Galatasaray goal record

Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen has shared his joy after setting a new goalscoring record at Turkish giants Galatasaray, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

Osimhen netted twice on Wednesday night in the Turkish Cup final, helping Galatasaray secure a commanding 3-0 victory over Trabzonspor.

With 35 goals across all competitions this season, Osimhen has now become the highest-scoring foreign player in the club's history, surpassing the previous record of 34 goals set by Mario Jardel in the 2000/2001 campaign.

"Of course, breaking the record is a great achievement, but I'm especially grateful to my teammates. Yunus, in particular, played a key role today,"

Osimhen said.

"Scoring goals brings me joy, but more importantly, I want to give back the support I've received since arriving here. Making history with this great club is a special feeling. We'll keep fighting until the end of the season."



MISSING LAND DOCUMENT

This is to inform the general public that Land Documents, to Wit Deed of Land Transfer of the year 2015 Between **MR. CHRISTOPHER OKAO** and **MRS. OKAFOR BLESSING** both of **Iguomon community**, and **Iguomon community Oba's Approval**, relating to a portion of Land measuring an area of approximately **100 Feet By 100 Feet**, lying, situate and being at **Barrister Uwaifo Street, Off Benin City Bypass, Iguomon, Uhunwode Local Government Area of Edo State** are missing.

The missing documents are particularly evidenced by a **Sworn Affidavit** by **Mrs. Okofor Blessing** sworn to at the **High Court Registry, Benin City** dated the **9th Day of May 2025** and a **Police Extract** of the **13th Day of May, 2025**.

Any person that transacts Business with the above-mentioned documents does so at his or her own risk.

The General Public, particularly residents of **Iguomon community** should take notice.

Signed: **Mrs. Okafor Blessing.**

Nigerian golfers embrace smart glasses in a landmark tech partnership

Golf in Nigeria is undergoing a bold transformation, as technology and tradition unite in a way that could forever change the game's identity.

The AutoVision Initiative, in collaboration with the pioneering Golfers In Tech Group, unveiled a cutting-edge smart glasses prototype in Edo State during the 2025 Captains' Inaugural Golf

Tournament at the Benin Club Golf Section (BCGS).

The launch marked a significant leap in how golf may soon be played, practised, and experienced in Nigeria.

The symbolic handover of the eyewear was made to the BCGS Captain, Engr. Stephen Ebaretonbofa by Professor Waziri Eramah, underscoring the initiative's alignment with top-level

golfing leadership.

Another key moment came when the overall men's tournament winner, Hon. Andy Modu, received his own pair, signalling a new benchmark in athlete recognition where innovation meets excellence.

The smart glasses, described by creators as a blend of function and flair, integrate music streaming, hands-free calling, camera and video features, and compatibility with prescription lenses.

More than a gadget, they offer a toolset for golfers to relive, reflect, and refine their play.

"This is more than just eyewear," said Desmond Bassey, Lead Consultant for the AutoVision Initiative.

"It's a portal into the modern golfing lifestyle. Golfers can now document their swings, enjoy the media, and share their most thrilling shots—all hands-free. This makes both practice and competitive play more immersive."

For Sala Oise, Esq., Chairperson of Golfers in Tech, said that the smart glasses are only the beginning. She expressed optimism about how the device could bridge recreational fun with professional advancement.

"Players can now study their performance in real time and benefit from health-oriented features like prescription clarity. We're not just enhancing the game, we're building a culture of innovation," she said.

Oise also announced the group's intention to equip tournament winners across Nigeria with free smart glasses, providing an incentive for participation, while nurturing a tech-forward athletic community.

She highlighted ongoing collaborations with rule-making bodies to ensure that the adoption of such technology respects golf's heritage while embracing its potential.

The AutoVision Initiative has made it clear that this venture is part of a wider campaign to bring wearable tech to the Nigerian mainstream, not just for sport, but also for driving safety, health, and lifestyle advancement.

Golf in Nigeria, long seen as a preserve of the elite, may now become a showcase of home-grown innovation.

As smart glasses are introduced to more courses and more players, the game's future looks not only sharper, but smarter.



SMART EYEWEAR DEVICE:

BCGS Captain, Engr Stephen Ebaretonbofa (2nd left), receiving the prototype smart eyewear device from Prof. Waziri Eramah (2nd right), while others are watching.

Cristiano Ronaldo tops Forbes' list of highest-paid athletes for third year in a row

Cristiano Ronaldo topped Forbes' list of the world's highest-paid athletes for the third consecutive year and the fifth time in his career.

Following his move to Saudi Arabian club Al-Nassr, Ronaldo's estimated total earnings are around \$275 million.

The Portuguese forward increased his income by \$15 million through off-field endorsements as well as lucrative sponsorship deals backed by his large social media followers: 939 million in total as of May.

Meanwhile, Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry, who in March became the first NBA player to reach 4,000 career three-pointers, jumped to second place in the rankings with \$156 million.

Boxer Tyson Fury claimed third place with \$135 million. Despite losing his world heavyweight titles to Oleksandr Usyk in December, Fury's income has been boosted by partnerships promoting Maltese tourism and his Netflix reality show.

Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott, reached fourth with \$137 million, thanks to record-breaking signing bonuses and a lucrative contract extension.

Meanwhile, Argentine Lionel Messi dropped to fifth place with \$135 million — the same as last year — having moved to Major League Soccer side Inter Miami, as well as continuing to receive high-profile endorsements from Adidas and Apple.

Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, nearing the end of his illustrious career, came

sixth with \$133.8 million.

MLB New York Mets outfielder Juan Soto came in at a remarkable seventh place, earn-

ing \$114 million. The 26-year-old Dominican signed a \$765 million, 15-year contract, the largest in baseball history.



Diri inaugurates world class table tennis facility in Yenagoa

It was a joyous moment as stakeholders in the sports sector across the country converged on Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital to inaugurate a world class ultra-modern table tennis facility, the "Coastal Fortress".

The Coastal Fortress is a state-

of-the-art facility built by Ama-Ebi Ebikpolade Stow, the chairman of the Bayelsa State Table Tennis Association to give table tennis players adequate preparation for tournaments.

Inaugurating the beautiful edifice, Governor Douye Diri who

was accompanied by his deputy, Senator Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo and other political appointees, noted that the initiator of the project, Mr. Ama-Ebi Ebikpolade Stow has written his name in gold, describing the event as a momentous occasion.

He noted that sports development remains one of the key pillars of his administration's "Assured" Prosperity programme, maintaining that sports is one area that can positively take the youths away from crime and criminality.

According to the state helmsman, sports has given the youths in the state a means of livelihood apart from education, stating that sports as a skill has ensured

many youths in the world are self-reliant.

He noted that team Nigeria's brilliant outing in the just-concluded African Senior Wrestling Championship in Casablanca, Morocco was a reflection of the huge investment in the development of sports, saying that wrestling remains a sport in which Bayelsa enjoys comparative advantage.

Governor Diri, while appreciating the Bayelsa State Table Tennis Association chairman for his investment in table tennis, asserted that Mr. Stow has reduced the pressure on government, urging other well-meaning Bayelsans to invest in sports development.

Under 20 AFCON: Amajitas disrupts Flying Eagles flight to final

● S'Africa to meet Morocco in the final

Nigeria's dream of winning the 2025 CAF U-20 Africa Cup of Nations have been shattered.

The Flying Eagles as the Nigeria U-20 team is affectionately called lost 1-0 to South Africa's Amajita in Thursday's first semifinal clash.

Led by coach Aliyu Zubairu, the Flying Eagles entered the contest on the back of a dramatic penalty shootout victory over Senegal in the quarterfinals—a win that also secured their qualification for the 2025 FIFA U-20 World Cup. However, their AFCON journey fell short of the final hurdle.

Both sides relying on counter-attacking football. Despite dominating possession, the Flying Eagles struggled to convert their control into clear-cut chances, and the first half ended goalless.

The second half brought

a major setback for Nigeria when 15-year-old goalkeeper Ebenezer Ifeanyi-Harcourt was forced off due to injury.

He was replaced in the 51st minute by Ajia Soliu Yakub.

Yakub, however, was unable to prevent South Africa from breaking the deadlock.

In the 66th minute, Tylon Christopher Smith rose to meet a cross and headed home.

Despite late substitutions and a push for an equalizer, Nigeria couldn't find their way back into the game, leaving the boys from the Southern tip of the continent to advance to the final.

Meanwhile, Hosts Egypt saw their hopes of reaching the U-20 Africa Cup of Nations final shattered after a narrow 1-0 defeat to Morocco in the semifinals at Cairo's Air Defense Stadium on Thursday.





JAMB mass failure and the crumbling educational system

The recent mass failure recorded in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has once again ignited widespread concerns about the state of education in Nigeria.

With an alarmingly low percentage of candidates scoring above the benchmark required for university admission, many stakeholders are left questioning the quality of learning taking place in the nation's primary and secondary schools. How is it possible that 70% of candidates scored below the 200 mark out of 400? This is a shocking revelation that casts a long shadow over the country's academic future.

Though JAMB has admitted its fault and expressed remorse over the glitches that may have caused the mass failure, it is rescheduling some candidates to re-take the UTME. However, the root cause of students' poor performance during internal examinations in their chosen courses and institutions lies much deeper in the moral decay, structural weaknesses, and pedagogical failures that have infected Nigeria's educational system.

A recent statement on social media by a university don paints a bleak picture of this devastating scenario. According to him, a student in his department was recently placed on academic probation after her Grade Point Average (GPA) fell below 1.00. "If her performance does not improve this semester, she may be asked to withdraw from the university," he asserted. Ironically, this same student had scored straight As in her Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and 220 in her JAMB result.

Her story is not isolated. It mirrors a growing national tragedy: a generation of students who score impressively on paper but fail to thrive in real academic settings. This contradiction highlights a system that rewards shortcuts, fosters examination malpractice, and produces students ill-equipped for the rigours of higher education.

The answer lies partly in the perverse culture of academic fraud that has taken root in the country. Many secondary school students now view cheating not as an ethical infraction but as a legitimate path to success. So-called 'miracle centres' promise guaranteed high scores for a fee, aided by complicit teachers and invigilators. In some cases, parents actively bankroll this fraud, prioritising immediate success over long-term competence.

The result is a generation that enters tertiary institutions through manipulated results, only to flounder when faced with independent assessments, critical thinking, and the academic discipline university demands. These students, unprepared and under-skilled, quickly unravel under pressure. No amount of parental influence or miracle centre magic can sustain them in the unforgiving halls of tertiary education.

The culture of examination malpractice, which often takes root in secondary school and becomes entrenched during the SSCE and UTME, continues

to yield devastating consequences in our higher institutions.

A few weeks ago, I addressed this growing menace in my column titled: "AAU's rusticated medical students: A grim reflection," that examined the shocking rustication of 34 medical students by the management of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. These students, who had gained admission into one of the nation's most demanding academic programmes, were caught cheating during internal university examinations— an indictment of the flawed process that brought them into the system in the first place.

That incident stands as a sobering reminder that the system is beginning, albeit belatedly, to push back. When students who entered university through dishonest means are eventually subjected to the rigours of authentic academic scrutiny, their inadequacies are laid bare. No amount of doctored results, forged credentials, or parental influence can conceal a lack of academic substance indefinitely.

The rustication of the AAU students represents a microcosm of a nationwide crisis; one where institutions are left to rectify failures that should have been prevented at the point of entry. It is within this context that the recent mass failure in the JAMB examination must be assessed not simply as poor academic performance but as a stark manifestation of a value system in decline.

In a society where students pursue certificates rather than competence, and where miracle centres flourish in place of merit, failure is inevitable. As universities begin to uphold stricter academic standards and as regulatory bodies take firmer steps against malpractice, the fragile edifice built on deceit will continue to collapse. Yet, without urgent reform and a collective moral reawakening, the future of education in Nigeria and, by extension, the future of the nation remains dangerously uncertain.

The tragedy, however, goes beyond institutional failure. It strikes at the heart of parenting, mentorship, and societal expectations. In many homes today, the emphasis is on grades, not learning; on paper qualifications, not practical competence. Parents often unwittingly fuel the malpractice culture by pressuring teachers or financing their children's participation in fraudulent schemes to secure high scores.

In doing so, they rob their children of the opportunity to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning skills— the very attributes required to succeed in today's knowledge-driven world.

Teachers, too, are not blameless. While many continue to give their all under difficult circumstances, others have compromised their professional integrity. Some have become collaborators in the malpractice syndicate, trading marks for money or other favours. The failure to properly remunerate and motivate educators has also contributed to this moral decline.



It is difficult to expect uprightness in a system where teachers are poorly remunerated, under-appreciated, and often overburdened. A nation that refuses to invest meaningfully in its educators is one that mortgages its own future.

Moreover, the government must shoulder its share of responsibility. The failure to enforce standards, provide adequate infrastructure, and implement comprehensive educational reform has created a vacuum filled by private interests, some of which prioritise profit over pedagogy.

Many secondary schools (particularly private ones) operate without qualified teachers, functional laboratories, or libraries. The result is a generation of students who are merely coached to pass examinations rather than taught to understand and apply knowledge. These students move in droves to 'miracle centres' where dubious principals gladly enrol and provide them with paraphernalia of examination malpractice to write and emerge with straight As that they cannot defend.

The solution must be holistic. It requires the collaboration of all stakeholders— parents, teachers, school administrators, government agencies, and the students themselves. There must be a return to merit-based assessments, genuine teaching, and disciplined learning environments.

Regulatory agencies must be empowered to investigate and sanction miracle centres and their collaborators. Schools must prioritise capacity building for teachers, while parents must be re-educated on the importance of nurturing integrity and hard work in their wards.

In the end, the mass failure in JAMB is not just about scores on a result sheet. It is a mirror held up to our collective conscience, reflecting the choices we have made and the values we have upheld. If we are to secure the future of our children and preserve the integrity of our educational system, we must rise to the challenge.

Compounding the crisis is the widespread addiction to social media,

which has rapidly eroded the reading culture among young Nigerians. Many students spend more time scrolling through TikTok and Instagram than engaging with textbooks or academic materials. This distraction contributes significantly to their poor preparation and underperformance in standardised examinations like JAMB.

The alarming decline in literacy and comprehension among youths is further exacerbated by the informal, shorthand-driven language used on social media platforms. The ability to read critically, write logically, and analyse abstract concepts— skills central to academic success continues to diminish.

As mentioned earlier, the proliferation of miracle centres has become a blight on the integrity of Nigeria's examination system. These centres guarantee high grades through organised malpractice, encouraging students to bypass learning entirely. Unfortunately, when these students arrive at universities, they are exposed for who they truly are: academically hollow, incapable of independent thought, and burdened by a false sense of achievement.

Such students often find themselves overwhelmed by the intellectual demands of tertiary education. Some drop out, others cheat their way through, and a few, like the AAU medical students mentioned earlier, end up being suspended or expelled. The damage done by miracle centres extends beyond individual failure; it erodes the credibility of the entire educational system.

With such poor foundations, it is unsurprising that students struggle to excel in national examinations. Expecting exceptional performance from those who have never encountered the tools of learning is unrealistic. The state's abandonment of public education has created a gulf between those who can afford quality private schooling and those left to languish in broken classrooms.

The Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) should not be viewed merely as a university entrance test. It is a national academic barometer,

a mirror reflecting the quality of Nigeria's basic and secondary education. When the overwhelming majority of candidates fail to meet the minimum score, it signals a crisis of systemic proportions.

JAMB's yearly reports, while often dismissed as statistics, should provoke urgent policy reforms. The mass failure is not a one-off aberration; it is the cumulative result of years of neglect, misplaced priorities, and institutional decay. We are not just failing students; we are failing the nation.

This crisis demands a whole-of-society response. The federal and state governments must prioritise investment in education, especially at the basic and secondary levels. Infrastructure must be rebuilt, teachers trained and better remunerated, and school supervision strengthened to eliminate malpractice.

Regulatory bodies such as WAEC, NECO, and JAMB must enforce stricter security measures during examinations and crack down on miracle centres. There should be no tolerance for schools or officials that aid and abet malpractice. Technology can play a key role here, with biometric verifications, surveillance, and digital monitoring of examination centres.

All tertiary institutions should also adopt rigorous post-UTME screening processes to ensure that only truly qualified candidates are admitted, thus filtering out those who gained entry through dishonest means.

Parents must resist the temptation to cut corners for their children. The pursuit of education must be grounded in integrity, not inflated grades. Helping children cheat is akin to handing them a future built on quicksand. True education equips the mind, shapes character, and empowers individuals to face the world and not just to pass exams.

Students, too, must awaken to the fact that there is no substitute for hard work and genuine learning. The easy way out often leads to regret. Knowledge gained through diligence endures; results obtained through fraud collapse under scrutiny.

The mass failure recorded in the recent JAMB examination is more than a statistical misfortune; it is a national embarrassment. It exposes the deep fractures within Nigeria's education system and serves as a dire warning of what lies ahead if urgent reforms are not implemented.

The case of the brilliant-on-paper student now on the verge of expulsion is a symbol of our flawed obsession with results over knowledge and shortcuts over substance. Unless we confront this reality head-on and commit to systemic change, we risk producing a generation that is academically unfit and globally irrelevant.

The time to act is now before the failure in our classrooms becomes the failure of our nation.

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