

# Fubara denied entry into Rivers assembly quarters

## ● Vows to implement Supreme Court judgement to fullest

The Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, was on Wednesday denied access to the official quarters of the state House of Assembly along Aba Road, Port Harcourt, where lawmakers loyal to his predecessor, Nyesom Wike, have been holding their sittings.

Fubara, who arrived at the

complex in the company of top government officials, including the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Tammy Danagogo, and his Chief of Staff, Edison Ehie, met a locked gate, effectively preventing his entry.

Speaking to journalists at the scene, the governor accused Speaker Martin Amaehwile of deliberately avoiding

him, stating that several calls placed to the lawmaker went unanswered.

He stated, "Before my arrival here, I made several attempts to speak to the Speaker. I also sent a letter which was transmitted for this particular invitation.

"Unfortunately, at the gate, you can see that the place is

completely sealed, and there is no sign that anything is going to happen today."

The governor insisted that his actions were in the interest of the people, stressing that he remained committed to fulfilling his constitutional duties.

"The reason why we are doing this, I have always said, is in the interest of our people,

which is the most important thing. I don't think there is anything to worry about. I expect to hear from them after today," he added.

After addressing the press, the governor and his entourage left the premises

Speaking during the inauguration of the New Judges' Quarters built by his adminis-

tration in the Old GRA, Port Harcourt, the governor assured that his administration would implement the Supreme Court judgement to the fullest.

He insisted that no personal interest should override the collective good and peace of Rivers State, assuring that no

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**BHSF president commends Okpepholo's drug crackdown**

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# Defections hit PDP, LP as APC takes majority lead in Edo Assembly

IDAHOUSA MUSA

The ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in Edo State took the majority lead in the State House of Assembly on Wednesday following the defection of three lawmakers from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and one from the Labour Party (LP) to the APC.

With this development, the

APC now holds 13 seats in the Edo State House of Assembly, while the PDP has 11 members.

The defected lawmakers are Hon. Donald Okugbe (Akoko Edo Constituency II), Hon. Bright Iyamu (Orhionmwon South Constituency II), Hon. Richard Edosa (Oredo West Constituency), and Hon. Sunday Ojezele (Esan South East).

The lawmakers arrived at the

APC party secretariat in Benin, where they were received by the State Working Committee of the party, led by Acting Chairman Jarret Tenebe.

Speaking on behalf of the defected lawmakers, Hon. Richard Edosa described their decision as a defining moment. He cited the deep divisions within the PDP and LP as a key reason for their defection, stating that the persistent crises at

the national, state, and local government levels made it impossible for them to remain in their former parties.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. We believe in the vision of Governor Monday Okpepholo and have decided to join him in achieving his plans for Edo State. We promise to work with the governor to strengthen both the party and the state," he said.

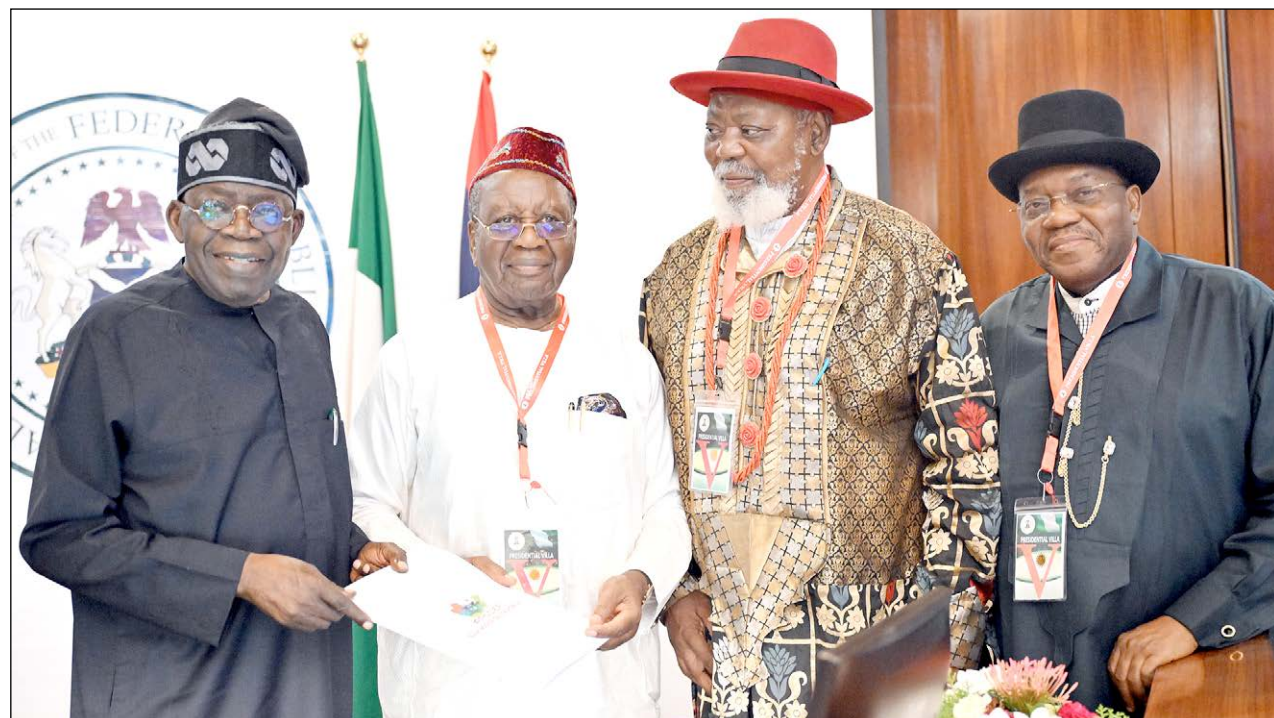
Elated by the defections, Acting Chairman of the APC, Emperor Jarret Tenebe, described the lawmakers' move as a significant moment for the ruling party in Edo State.

He assured them that they would enjoy the same rights

and privileges as any other party members.

"These honorable members, who bring with them a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives, have recognized that

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PANDEF:

L-R: President Bola Tinubu; former Akwa Ibom State governor and Co-Chairman, Board of Trustees, Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), Obong Victor Attah; Chairman Board of Trustees (PANDEF), King Alfred Diete-Spiff, and National Chairman, PANDEF, Amb. Godknows Igal, during the President's audience with leaders of PANDEF, at the Presidential Villa, Abuja. PHOTO: AMINU OMOYE

## Reps C'ttee proposes key amendments to Tax Reform Bills

JOY ODOR

The House of Representatives Committee on Finance has proposed significant amendments to the Tax Reform Bills submitted to the National Assembly by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The committee's proposals involve modifying several clauses, removing certain provisions, retaining others, and introducing new elements to address contentious issues.

One major change is the removal of the planned increase in the current 7.5% Value Added Tax (VAT) rate; the committee has recommended that the existing rate remain unchanged.

Additionally, while the original proposal would have taxed the entire estate of a deceased person, the revised provision now stipulates that only the portion of the estate inherited and subsequently invested in a business generating returns will be subject to taxation.

Other modifications include the continuation of funding for agencies such as TETFUND,

NITDA, and NASENI, while extending the benefits of the 4% development levy fund to additional agencies.

The committee has also recommended that beneficiary agencies submit their income and expenditure reports to the National Assembly for appropriation.

Clarifications were made regarding VAT returns, with taxable persons now required to submit their returns on or before the 21st day of the following month, and attribution details adjusted to focus on consumption rather than location.

Furthermore, the process for Tax ID registration was revised to extend the notification period for refusals to five working days, with reasons provided.

The committee emphasized the need for a clearly defined Electronic Fiscal System (EFS) for recording and reporting taxable supplies along with a smooth transition arrangement, while also clarifying requirements for monthly returns and

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**Police scrap law dismissing unmarried officers over pregnancy**  
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**EFCC warns public against 58 illegal ponzi schemes, urges caution**  
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**US set to present 30-day ceasefire offer to Russia**  
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**CAF president Dr Motsepe and African Club Association (ACA) chairman sign historic MoU to strengthen African club football**  
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# Edo Poly waives exam fee proof for student loan beneficiaries

Edo State Polytechnic, Usen, has announced that students applying for loans through the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) will no longer be required to present proof of fee payment during examinations.

The institution's rector, Syl-

vester Omoruyi, made this known during a sensitization program organized by NELFUND at the polytechnic's main campus in Usen.

Omoruyi assured students that enforcement of fee payment checks during exams had been abolished, stating that

those registered on the NELFUND portal would not be barred from writing exams due to outstanding fees.

He commended President Bola Tinubu for initiating the loan scheme and acknowledged the Edo State government's support.

He also praised NELFUND's role in alleviating financial burdens by covering tuition and providing upkeep allow-

ances.

Meanwhile, NELFUND's Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, Akintunde Sawyerr, represented by the Director of Loan Allocation and Distribution, Lami Suwaid, raised concerns over the polytechnic's delay in submitting student data for the loan scheme.

He urged the institution to take advantage of the new

registration cycle for the 2024/2025 academic session to ensure mass student enrollment.

Sawyerr noted that while NELFUND had successfully enrolled 259 institutions and disbursed billions of naira during the 2023/2024 session, institutions in the South-South and South-East regions recorded the lowest registration rates, calling for improvement.

Edo State's Commissioner for Education, Dr. Paddy Iyamu, reaffirmed the state government's commitment to collaborating with NELFUND to expand the scheme's reach, ensuring every Edo child has access to education.

He emphasized that with this intervention, students would no longer need financial support from relatives abroad to continue their studies.

## Reps urge FG to provide relief materials to Edo flood victims

The House of Representatives has called on the Federal Government through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to provide relief materials to the Ekeke and Amoya-Otuo communities in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State, which were recently displaced by flooding.

The resolution of the House followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public importance sponsored by the House Leader, Prof Julius Ihonvbere, on Wednesday during plenary.

Drumming support for the motion, Prof Ihonvbere said, "The House noted with concern the unprecedented flooding disaster that affected Ekeke-Erah, and massive windstorm that affected Ake, Amoya-Otuo other communities in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State, resulting in widespread destruction of homes, infrastructure including a bridge in Ekeke, farmlands, and livelihoods.

"The House notes that the affected communities have been plunged into total darkness as a result of the flood that pulled

down electric poles and damaged solar streetlights

"We recognise that the affected communities are in dire need of emergency assistance, including relief food and medical materials, and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure."

He commended the Edo State Government, the Leader of the Edo State House of Assembly and the Local Government in responding to the disaster, stressing, however, "that the magnitude of the disaster requires additional support from the Federal Government."

The motion enjoyed overwhelming support from lawmakers present at Wednesday's plenary and was subsequently adopted.

The House thereafter urged NEMA to provide immediate relief materials to the affected communities, including food, water, blankets, mats, shelter, and medical supplies.

It also charged the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs to urgently respond to the needs of the people of Ekeke-Erah, Ake, Amoya-Otuo and other communities affected by the disasters.



**YAHAYA VISIT PATE:**

L-R: Senator Ita Giwa; Chairman, Board of Trustees, PANDEF, King Alfred Diète-Spiff; Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, and King Dandeson Douglas, the Jaja of Opobo, during a dinner organised by Akpabio in honour of Niger Delta Elders in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Police scrap law dismissing unmarried officers over pregnancy —AIG

The Nigeria Police Force has abolished regulations that previously mandated the dismissal of unmarried female officers who became pregnant while in service.

The Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Aishatu Baju, who is the most senior female officer in the Force, confirmed this development on Wednesday during an interview on Channels Television's The Morning Brief.

Baju explained that all dis-

criminatory sections of the Police Act, including Section 127, which was used to justify the dismissal of pregnant unmarried officers, had been expunged in line with ongoing police reforms.

She said, "That section, along with any other part of the Police Act that discriminates against female officers, has been removed under the Police Act 2020.

"The Inspector General of Police has also introduced the Nigeria Police Gender Policy to

ensure full inclusivity and equal opportunities for all officers."

When asked directly whether unmarried female officers would still be dismissed if they became pregnant, Baju responded firmly, "No."

The issue gained national attention in 2021 when a police corporal, Omolola Olajide, was dismissed from the Force in Ekiti State after she became pregnant.

The move sparked public outrage, prompting the Nigerian

Bar Association to challenge the regulation in court.

Although the Federal High Court in Abuja upheld the dismissal, ruling that officers were aware of the regulation before joining the Force, the NBA pursued the case to the Court of Appeal in Lagos.

In May 2024, the appellate court nullified Sections 126 and 127 of the Nigeria Police Act, effectively putting an end to the policy.

## Fubara denied entry into Rivers...

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price would be too much to pay for peace.

While acknowledging that the past 16 months had been rough for his government, he however stated that even though he will leave office one day, his good work will speak for him.

Governor Fubara therefore noted that since the crisis started, a lot of money and resources that should have been channelled to the development of the State had been wasted by both sides.

According to him, "It has not been easy these past sixteen months, but what is important is that the interest of our state must be above our personal interest.

"I want to say it here very clearly that the Supreme Court has given a judgment, my administration will implement the judgment to its fullest. The reason is clear, it is not about me, it is about the good of this state.

"I can assure you that any day, any time, I have not gone back on my statement that nothing is too big to pay for peace in this state, at the end of the day, it is about our people. It is not about me, because I will leave but the good that I have done will speak for my administration."

The governor who elaborat-

ed on the delivery of the judges quarters project as further proof that his administration took the issue of welfare seriously, recalled that the project was inherited from the former government.

"When we came on board this particular project was one of the projects that we inherited and after the reports we received from the ministry and some concerns that were made from the judiciary we felt it doesn't matter who started the project and it doesn't matter who the contractor is, but what is important is to complete this project because it is all about Rivers State."

He enjoined the Chief Judge to work with the government on the issue of maintenance of the new quarters to keep the facilities in a good shape

In his remarks, the Special Guest of Honour and Chief Judge of Rivers State, Hon. Justice Simeon Chibuzor Amadi, described the inauguration as another milestone and great accomplishment for Rivers judiciary.

"We are pleased with this landmark achievement which represents the continuation of the policy of providing befitting residential accommodations for the judges of Rivers State on owner occupier basis or monetary grant in lieu

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## Defections hit PDP, LP as APC takes majority lead...

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the APC offers the most promising path forward for Edo State and Nigeria.

They have seen the clarity of our policies, the integrity of Governor Monday Okpabholo's leadership, and his unwavering dedication to improving the lives of Edo people," Ten-

ebe stated.

He acknowledged the difficulty of switching political allegiance, emphasizing that it requires courage, conviction, and a belief in a better future.

"We commend these honorable members for their bravery and willingness to stand with us as we work with Governor Okpabholo to build a stronger

economy, improve education, promote social harmony, and secure the lives of Edo people.

"This is not merely about increasing our numbers; it is about strengthening our collective resolve. It is about bringing together individuals who share a common purpose and a desire to make a real difference.

"We value the contributions of every member, and we are confident that our new honorable members will play a vital role in our journey toward success," he added.

Earlier, Acting Chairman Jarret Tenebe presented brooms—the symbol of the APC—to each of the newly defected lawmakers.

## Reps C'ttee proposes key amendments to Tax...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

company tax rates.

Originally, small companies were to be taxed at 0% and other companies at 27.5% for the 2025 assessment year, with a reduction to 25% from 2026 onward; however, the revised proposal now recommends taxing most companies at 30%, except for those in priority sectors, which

would be subject to a 25% rate during the designated period.

Representative Bappah Aliyu Misau (PDP, Bauchi) remarked that over 90% of the contentious issues had been addressed, noting that public hearings provided a clear insight into the nation's sentiment regarding the bills.

He observed that the proposed VAT increase had been removed, that funding for key

agencies would continue, and that the inheritance tax provision had been revised so that taxation applies only to returns from business investments made with inherited assets.

Misau also highlighted that the allocation of VAT derivation had been adjusted to base calculations on consumption, rather than company location, and he noted that the composition of

the proposed Joint Tax Board had been restructured to include representatives from all 36 states, along with six executive directors representing the political zones, appointed by the President for renewable four-year terms.

He added that these revisions effectively addressed the previously contentious issues and mitigated concerns over excessive powers.

# Delta govt vows to punish nursing students involved in exam fraud

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State Ministry of Health has taken a firm stance against examination malpractice in nursing schools, warning that any student caught engaging in fraudulent activities during the upcoming Preliminary Training Studies (PTS) examination will face severe punishment, including expulsion.

The Commissioner for Health, Dr. Joseph Onojaeme, issued this warning while ad-

ressing students at the State Colleges of Nursing Sciences in Agbor and Asaba.

Represented by his Special Assistant, Dr. Omovigho Agbele, he urged students, parents, and educators to reject exam fraud and embrace hard work, integrity, and merit-based success.

Dr. Onojaeme revealed that reports had surfaced about fraudulent individuals and groups deceiving candidates with false promises of securing examination success in exchange for money.

He condemned such unethi-

cal practices, warning that they not only undermine the credibility of the nursing and midwifery profession but also pose a significant risk to public health by allowing unqualified individuals into the healthcare system.

"Nursing and midwifery examinations are designed to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and competency. Success can only be achieved through hard work, dedication, and adherence to ethical standards," he stated.

"Any attempt to manipulate

the system will result in severe consequences, including expulsion from the school."

The Commissioner encouraged students and the public to report any cases of exam fraud to the authorities, assuring them that their identities would be protected.

He reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to ensuring a transparent and merit-based examination process in collaboration with relevant agencies to uphold professional standards and safeguard public health.

# Edo Vigilante Chief assures residents of improved security

RAYMOND OSOGBE

The Chairman of Edo State Vigilante Network, Mr Friday Ibadin, has reaffirmed its commitment to tackling security challenges in the state.

Speaking on EBS Radio's "Waka About" program in Benin City, the retired Police Commissioner assured residents that ongoing security breaches would soon be brought under control.

Ibadin disclosed that one of his personnel was recently kid-

napped, but was successfully rescued through a coordinated effort with other security agencies.

He emphasized that no ransom was paid and credited the successful operation to strategic security measures.

He commended Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration for providing surveillance vehicles, which have significantly boosted security operations, assuring residents that with continued collaboration between security agencies, criminals would soon have no place to operate in Edo State.

# Edo govt intensifies efforts to recover stolen properties

RAYMOND OSOGBE

The Edo State Coordinator for the Protection of Government Property, Mr Eugene Okoloise has vowed to recover all stolen government assets and hold those responsible accountable.

Speaking on Ray Power Radio in Benin City, Okoloise reaffirmed his determination to retrieve encroached lands and unlawfully acquired state properties.

He lamented the increasing cases of land grabbing, particularly involving government-owned lands meant for secondary and primary schools.

He cited institutions such as Asoro Grammar School, Oka Primary School, and Idogbo Secondary School as examples of properties illegally occupied by individuals.

He also noted that some government reserved lands had also been affected by encroachments and therefore called on residents to cooperate by providing useful information that could aid in recovering stolen properties.

He acknowledged that previous state administrations had faced similar challenges, which necessitated the continuous formation of property recovery committees.



YAHAYA VISIT PATE:

Gombe State Governor, Inuwa Yahaya (left), and the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Mohammed Ali Pate, during the governor's visit to the Minister in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

# BHSF president commends Okpebholo's drug crackdown

LUCKY EFESE

The President of the Businesses and Hoteliers Stakeholders' Forum (BHSF), Edo State, Chief Bishop Omogiade Edokpolo, has praised Governor Monday Okpebholo's ongoing crackdown on drug use among youths and commercial sex workers, particularly in Benin City.

He, however, called for a more professional approach to enforcement to prevent human rights violations and negative economic impacts.

Speaking in an interview with The Nigerian Observer in Benin City after a series of raids by the government's task force, targeting drug hotspots, including hotels,

restaurants, and entertainment centers in the Government Reservation Areas (GRA), Edokpolo expressed full support for the initiative, but emphasized the need for strategic implementation.

According to him, "The policy is a good one, but my concern is that enforcement must be handled professionally. If done correctly, it will help make Edo a drug-free state."

As the CEO of Canada World Conglomerate, he urged the government to involve experienced professionals, including members of the BHSF, in the fight against drug abuse to ensure the best possible outcomes.

He also highlighted concerns raised by hotel owners and entertainment business operators

regarding the task force's methods, noting that some enforcement actions had not been conducted professionally.

Edokpolo acknowledged that people often resist government policies, but he advised affected stakeholders, including commercial sex workers, to seek legal redress if they felt unfairly targeted.

He suggested that rather than attempting to eradicate prostitution completely, the government should consider a structured approach, such as a licensing system similar to those in Amsterdam and other western countries.

He proposed that eligible sex workers undergo medical, criminal, and fitness examinations before being certified, ar-

guing that such a system would create a regulated and safer environment.

He linked youth drug addiction to corruption, alleging that influential figures were responsible for supplying these substances.

He called for collaboration between the state government, law enforcement agencies, and business stakeholders to address the issue effectively.

Additionally, he advocated for the establishment of rehabilitation centers and a dedicated commission to monitor and support at-risk youths, stressing that job creation is essential in preventing drug abuse, as idleness often leads to substance dependence.

# CPM Int'l crusade starts tomorrow, to feature healing, deliverance

The Christian Pentecostal Mission International, Idumwen Area Women holds a two-day crusade beginning from today.

The crusade with the theme; Jesus Power is expected to feature film show, salvation, healing and deliverance

Slated for Friday and Saturday March 14 and 15, 2025, commencing at 4pm daily, the crusade would attract notable

preachers including Rev. Dr Mercy Ezekiel, General Overseer, Rev Dr I M Itobiye, State Coordinator (Emeritus), Rev Fidelis Alenkhe, State Supervisor, Rev Theophilus Imoisili, Host and Rev Akeem Olayiwola, Guest Speaker.

According to the even notification flyer, the crusade will take place at opposite the CPM Camp, Egba Road, besides the CPM Church, Idumwen-Ehigie.

# Tinubu seeks Senate approval for 5 INEC commissioner nominees

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has nominated five individuals as Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and has requested the Senate's confirmation of their appointments.

In a letter to Senate President Godswill Akpabio on Tuesday, Tinubu stated that the nominations comply with Section 154(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), which requires Senate approval for such appointments.

The nominees include Umar Yusuf Garba for Kano, Saad Umar for Bauchi, Chukwue-meka C. Ibeziako for Anambra, Mohammad I. Ngoshe for Borno, and Dr. Owede Kosio-ma Eli for Bayelsa. Tinubu em-

phasized in the letter that their confirmation was necessary for the effective functioning of INEC. He urged the Senate to expedite the process.

In a separate correspondence, Tinubu also nominated Nwaku Sylvester Ndidi as the Controller-General of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS).

His appointment aligns with Section 3(1)(b) of the NCoS Act, 2019, which outlines the selection process for the head of the agency.

The president highlighted the critical role of the Correctional Service in the justice system and called for swift Senate approval. The Senate has referred the request to its Committee on Interior, instructing it to report back within a week.

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istration for providing surveillance vehicles, which have significantly boosted security operations, assuring residents that with continued collaboration between security agencies, criminals would soon have no place to operate in Edo State.

## NEWS

## Oil, gas investments won't inflate Africa's contribution to global emissions —FG

The Federal Government has allayed fears that its ongoing drive to attract investments in the oil and gas sector will result in a significant rise in Africa's contribution to global emissions.

It emphasised that such investments will not dramatically impact the continent's carbon footprint.

It also reaffirmed its commitment to creating an enabling environment for hydrocarbon investments to address energy poverty, emphasising that Africa is not a net contributor to global emissions.

The Special Adviser to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Energy, Olu Verheijen, gave the assurance on Tuesday during a session at CERAWEEK by S&P Global, themed "Policy and People: Pathways to a Just Transition."

A statement issued on Wednesday noted that the session, chaired by Vera Blei, Head of Market Report & Trading Solutions at S&P Global, featured key speakers including Scott Tinker, CEO of Tinker Energy Association, and Sunita Narain, Director-General of the Centre for Science and Environment.

Speaking during the panel session, Verheijen highlighted that Africa and other low-income countries contribute only about 3-4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, in contrast to China and the United States, which account for approximately 30 per cent and 13 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, respectively.

Together, both countries are responsible for nearly 40 per cent of global emissions.

Verheijen emphasised Nigeria's commitment to fostering a stable investment climate and addressing climate-related risks through clear and transparent policies.

"In Nigeria, we are ensuring that we create an enabling environment for investments.

On climate change, we recognise the importance of risk perception in our markets and are committed to transparent policies that stand the test of time, enabling the deployment of capital," she stated.

She also underscored the need for greater regional integration to attract capital and enhance market efficiency.

"We need to strengthen economic integration across African nations to create a larger, more attractive market for investment. By pooling resources, integrating markets, and leveraging collaboration across the continent and regional blocs, we can drive sustainable development," she added.

Verheijen stressed the importance of better data collection and analysis in Africa to support informed decision-making and policy development.

"Even if Africa experiences exponential economic growth and reaches middle-income status, the continent will still not be a major contributor to global emissions. The bulk of emission reductions will have to come from developed nations, which must diversify their energy sources and invest heavily in carbon removal and reduction technologies," she explained.

She further noted that a balanced approach is necessary to ensure that developing economies can utilize their natural resources to drive prosperity while also adopting climate solutions that enhance adaptability and sustainability.

Nigeria, along with other African and middle-income countries, continues to advocate for a just energy transition amid the global push for net-zero emissions.

Under its "Decade of Gas" initiative, the government has adopted natural gas as a transition fuel to support economic growth while reducing carbon emissions.

## Fubara denied entry into Rivers...

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thereof as backed by Rivers State law on State Housing Scheme for Judicial Officers number 10, 2021."

He then pointed out that having official residential accommodation is a necessity for any judicial officer in view of the sensitive and important duties of their office.

Justice Amadi further thanked Governor Fubara, for keeping faith in completing the legacy project for the enhancement of the judicial duties of judges of Rivers State just as he

noted that the policy of providing official accommodation for judges had greatly reduced the pressure on judicial officers, who hitherto struggled to build retirement homes while in service with limited resources.

The Chief Judge commended Governor Fubara for keeping up with the policy and delivering the project on record time and also told the governor that there is a need for construction of more quarters for judges to cater for future appointments, since having residential accommodation had become a mandatory re-

quirement by the NJC for the appointment of new judges.

While thanking the governor for his unflinching support for the Rivers judiciary, the Chief Judge said the judges will continue to remain committed to discharging their statutory duties for the peace, security and economic growth of Rivers.

On her part the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice and Rivers State Solicitor General, Mrs. Ibiwari Clapton Ogolo thanked Governor Fubara for completing the judges' quarters.

She said the Rivers State Government Housing Scheme for judicial officers Law No. 10, of 2021 establishes a housing scheme for judicial officers who are indigenes of Rivers State or married to indigenes of the State on owner occupier basis, adding that it can also be monetized sequel to government approval.

Mrs. Ogolo noted that the seven duplexes which are exquisitely furnished for the judges will not only serve as a residence, but homes where the judges will find peace and rest as they discharge their duties.



## INSPECTION:

The ag Secretary, Federal Capital Territory Development Authority (FCTA), Engr. Richard Dauda (left); FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, and Director, Development Control, FCTA, Mukhrar Galadima, at Gishiri village, during an inspection of obstructions to construction of the arterial road in Abuja.

PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Edo intensifies efforts to recover stolen properties

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He also noted that some government reserved lands had also been affected by encroachments and therefore called on

residents to cooperate by providing useful information that could aid in recovering stolen properties.

He acknowledged that previous state administrations had faced similar challenges, which necessitated the continuous formation of property recovery committees.

## Court adjourns suit against PSC, IGP over 'forceful retirement' of policemen

The National Industrial Court of Nigeria, Abuja, has adjourned ruling on the suit filed by Course 18, 19, and 20 (force entrants) of the Police Academy challenging their alleged forceful retirement from the Nigeria Police Force by the Police Service Commission (PSC), Inspector General Of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun; and the Force Secretary.

The court had earlier slated Tuesday to deliver the ruling but when the matter was called, the trial judge, Justice R. B. Hastrup announced that the ruling was not ready.

The judge consequently adjourned the ruling till March 17 and ordered that hearing notices be served on the 2nd and 3rd defendants in the matter.

However, counsel for the claimants, Goddy Uche (SAN), informed the court that the 2nd and 3rd defendants, who were not in court allegedly reduced the rank of some of the claimants and retired them from service while the case was still pending in court.

Although, the 2nd and 3rd defendants were not in court, neither were they represented in court, the judge noted that, at the last proceedings in the matter, the defendants told the court that they would not be in court on Tuesday for the ruling as they have other matter outside jurisdiction, which the court permitted.

The officers, ACP Chinedu Emengaha, ACP Victor Chilaka, ACP Egwu Otu, CSP Sylvester Ebosele, CSP Sunday Okuguni, CSP Asuquo Inyang, CSP

Kalu Chikozie, And CSP Adetu Omoteso had sued the PSC, IGP and the Force Secretary, Nigeria Police Force as 1st to 3rd defendants challenging their unlawful retirement from the Force without attaining the mandatory years required before retirement and non-implementation of court judgment.

The plaintiffs, who sued for themselves and as representing all members of Course 18, 19, and 20 (force entrants) of the Police Academy, in their motion on notice, are seeking an order of interlocutory injunction restraining the defendants from retiring or suspending any of the officers of the course who are yet to serve 35 years of pensionable service or reach the mandatory retirement age of 60 years from service of

the Nigeria Police Force pending the hearing and determination of their substantive suit.

They also want an order restraining the defendants from suspending the salary or posting of any of the officers of Course 18, 19, and 20 (force entrants) of the Police Academy.

The aggrieved officers had, in their suit, filed on their behalf by their counsel, Edwin Okoro esq, prayed the court to quash the injustice done against them and to determine, "whether taking into consideration, the judgments of the National Industrial Court, Abuja, delivered by Justice O. Oyewunmi in suit nos. NICN/ABJ./345/2019-ACP Chinedu Emengaha & ORS vs PSC & 2 ORS, and NICN/ABJ./353/2019 - CSP Sunday Okuguni & ORS vs

PSC & 2 ORS, resolving the issue of date of appointment of cadet officers (force entrants) as the dates of their first appointment, and the said judgments having been implemented by the defendants since July 29, 2021, the defendants are not estopped from reopening the issue of date of first appointment?"

Upon the determination of the above-stated question, the claimants are praying the court for "a declaration that the date of first appointment into service of the claimants as contained in their respective appointment letters are not subject to a review by the defendants.

"A declaration that members of Cadet ASP (force entrants) of Course 18, 19, and 20 who are yet to serve 35 years of pensionable service nor attained the age of

60 years, are by virtue of the said judgments of the National Industrial Court delivered by Justice O. Oyewunmi in Suit Nos. NICN/ABJ./345/2019 - ACP Chinedu Emengaha & ORS vs PSC & 2 ORS, and NICN/ABJ./353/2019 CSP Sunday Okuguni & ORS vs PSC & 2 ORS, excluded from the decision of the 1st defendant at her first extraordinary meeting of the 6th management board held on January 31, 2025, approving the immediate retirement of those officers who have spent 35 years in service or above 60 years in age.

"A declaration that by virtue of the said judgments of the National Industrial Court affirming the dates of appointment of claimants as cadet officers as fresh appointment, the said appointment is not a merger of service."

# EFCC warns public against 58 illegal ponzi schemes, urges caution

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has issued a public alert, warning Nigerians against investing in 58 fraudulent Ponzi schemes that are illegally operating across the country.

According to the EFCC, these companies pose as legitimate investment platforms but have been deceiving unsuspecting investors and siphoning their hard-earned money.

The Commission emphasized that these entities are

not registered with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) or the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which are the primary regulators of financial and investment activities in the country. Both regulatory agencies confirmed to the EFCC that these companies are unauthorized to operate.

The Commission further disclosed that some of these fraudulent companies have already faced legal action. Five have been convicted, while another five have pleaded guilty and are awaiting the review of facts.

The remaining cases are pending arraignment in court. The EFCC released the names of the 58 illegal Ponzi schemes, urging the public to avoid any dealings with them.

Some of the notable names include Wales Kingdom Capital, Bethseida Group of Companies, AQM Capital Limited, Titan Multibusiness Investment Limited, Brickwall Global Investment Limited, Farmforte Limited & Agro Partnership Tech, Green Eagles Agribusiness Solution Limited, Richfield Multiconcepts Limited, Forte Asset Management Limited,

Biss Networks Nigeria Limited, S Mobile Netzone Limited, Pristine Mobile Network, Letsfarm Integrated Services, Bara Finance & Investment Limited, Vicampro Farms Limited, Brooks Network Limited, Gas Station Supply Services Limited, Brass & Books Limited, Annexation Biz Concept & Maitanbuwal Global Ventures, Crowdyvest Limited, Jadek Agro Connect Limited, Adeeva Capital Limited, Oxford International Group and Oxford Gold Integrated, Skapomah Global Limited, MBA Trading & Capital Investment Limited,

ed, TRJ Company Limited, Farm4Me Agriculture Limited, Quintessential Investment Company, Adeprin Global Enterprises, Rockstar Establishment Limited, SU.Global Investment, Citi Trust Funding PLC, Farm Buddy, Eatrith 369 Farms & Food, Globberot Farmsponsors Nigeria Limited, Farm Sponsors Limited, Cititrust Credit Limited, Farm-funded Agroservices Limited, Adamakin Investment & Works Limited, Cititrust Holding PLC, Green Eagles Agribusiness Solutions Limited, Chinmark Homes & Shelters Limited, Emerald Farms & Consultant Limited, Ovaioza Farm Produce Storage Limited, Farm 360 & Agriculture Company, Requit Technologies Limited, West Agro Agriculture & Food Processing Limited, NISL Ventures Limited & Estate of Laolu Mar-

tins, XY Connect Investment Limited, River Branch Unique Investment Limited, Hallmark Capital Limited, CJC Markets Limited, Crowd One Investment, Farmkart Foods Limited, KD Likemind Stakeholders Limited, Holibiz Finance Limited, Ifeanyi Okpe Oil & Gas Services, Servapps Nigeria Limited, Barrick Gold Mining Company and 360 Agric Partners Limited.

The EFCC reaffirmed its commitment to protecting Nigerians from fraudulent investment schemes and maintaining the integrity of the financial sector.

It advised the public to verify any investment company's registration status with the CBN and SEC before investing and encouraged victims to report fraudulent schemes for investigation.



## SIGNING OF MoU:

Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy, Hannatu Musa Musawa Esq. (Right), and MD/CEO, Creative Park, Mr Bayo Omoboribo, during the signing of MoU between the Ministry and the Park at Idu, in Abuja. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Oborewori warns civil servants against age falsification

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, has condemned the fraudulent practice of age falsification among civil servants in the state, warning that those caught manipulating their ages to extend their service years will face strict penalties.

The Governor issued this warning on Tuesday evening during a dinner organized by the state government for the College of Permanent Secretaries, led by the State Head of Service, Mr. Reginald Bayoko, along with Heads of Extra-Ministerial Departments, Directors, and Deputy Directors in the state civil service.

Oborewori emphasized that civil servants who have reached the retirement age should step down to create job opportunities for younger generations.

He urged all employees to ensure that their official records reflect their true age, stressing that using the correct age is essential for the system to function properly.

He also expressed gratitude to state workers for their support of his administration and encouraged them to continue collaborating for the overall growth and development of Delta State.

The Governor also used the platform to address concerns raised by civil servants during a prior meeting on January 29.

Acknowledging issues such as poor telephone network at the Prof. Chike Edozien State Secretariat Complex, he assured that solutions were being implemented.

He announced that he had directed the Commissioner for Science and Technology and his Special Duties counterpart to ensure the issue was resolved be-

fore the end of March 2025.

Oborewori highlighted that Delta State has a workforce of over 60,000 employees, with a monthly wage bill exceeding ₦16 billion, and urged top civil servants to continue executing their duties with diligence and professionalism.

He reassured workers that due process would be followed in selecting a new Head of Service when necessary and noted that more Permanent Secretaries would be appointed based on merit and available vacancies.

Addressing concerns over project execution, the Governor emphasized his administration's commitment to transparency and accountability. He revealed that 40% mobilization funds had recently been paid to contractors but cautioned against substandard work, stating that local contractors must be held accountable for the quality of their projects.

He warned that any contractor delivering poor-quality work would be made to refund the money paid and announced plans to personally inspect projects across all 25 local government areas to ensure proper execution.

Speaking at the event, the State Head of Service, Mr. Reginald Bayoko, commended the Governor for his worker-friendly policies and assured him of the workforce's support in advancing his MORE Agenda for the state. Bayoko also advocated for strict enforcement of laws against public servants engaged in age falsification and other forms of misconduct.

The evening featured performances from the Delta Cultural Troupe, as well as music and comedy, providing a relaxed atmosphere for interaction between the Governor and senior civil servants.

## Experts urge Tinubu to address glaucoma crisis as a growing public health concern

Former Chairman of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Edo State Branch, Prof. Afekhide Omoti, has raised alarm over the increasing prevalence of glaucoma in Nigeria, revealing that eight in every 100 Nigerians above the age of 40 suffer from the disease.

Speaking in Benin City as part of activities marking the 2025 World Glaucoma Week, Omoti, who also serves as the Chairman of the National Eye Health Committee of the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, described glaucoma as the second leading cause of blindness worldwide, after cataracts.

He called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to prioritize eye health as part of national healthcare interventions to prevent irreversible vision loss among Nigerians.

"Globally, an estimated 78 million people are living with glaucoma, with projections indicating that the figure will rise to 95.4 million by 2030 and 111.8 million by 2040.

Omoti expressed deep concern over the increasing number of cases in Nigeria, describing it as a growing public health crisis.

He noted that glaucoma is more prevalent among older individuals, men, and the Igbo ethnic group, with 5.02% of Nigerians affected by the disease.

Alarming, up to 16.7% of blindness cases in the country are linked to glaucoma. Statistics reveal a dire situation, as nine out of 10 Nigerians with glaucoma are unaware they have the condition, leading to late-stage diagnoses.

"Of those diagnosed, five out of 10 present blindness in one eye, while two out of 10 suffer

total blindness. The data also shows that one in 200 individuals aged 40 has glaucoma, with the prevalence rising to one in eight by the age of 80.

"Currently, an estimated 1.2 million Nigerians aged 40 and above are completely blind due to the disease, while over 7.7 million suffer from moderate to severe distance visual impairment or blindness caused by glaucoma.

Omoti emphasized that early detection, regular eye screenings, and public education are critical in preventing vision loss. He stressed that the goal of the 2025 World Glaucoma Week is to raise awareness, promote early detection, and encourage Nigerians to seek routine eye examinations.


To mark the event, the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the National Eye Health Program (NEHP), and key med-

ical associations, including the NMA, the Ophthalmological Society of Nigeria (OSN), the Nigerian Optometric Association (NOA), and the Nigerian Ophthalmic Nurses Association, will organize nationwide activities, such as free eye screenings, awareness campaigns, and educational programs.

Omoti assured Nigerians that free eye tests will be available at designated centers across the country.

He also noted that this year's event will see active participation from the Nigerian Medical Association under the leadership of its President, Prof. Bala Audu.

He urged all Nigerians, particularly those over 40, to take advantage of these services, emphasizing that glaucoma is a leading cause of preventable but irreversible blindness worldwide.

 <p><b>The Nigerian Observer</b> ...That the people may know</p>	<h2 style="margin:0;">ADVERTISEMENT RATES (PRINT)</h2>
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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598	5 X 2	51,950	55,846	42,120	45,279
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768	2 X 2	18,680	20,081	15,600	16,770
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**EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023**

## Foreign

## News

# US set to present 30-day ceasefire offer to Russia

Ukraine has said it is ready to accept an immediate 30-day ceasefire with Russia proposed by the US, after a day of US-Ukraine talks in Saudi Arabia.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said he would present the offer to Russia and that "the ball is in their court" - Moscow is yet to publicly comment on the issue.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said it was now up to the US to convince Russia to agree to the "positive"

proposal.

Tuesday's talks in Jeddah were the first official meeting between the two countries since the extraordinary clash between Zelensky and US President Donald Trump in the Oval Office on 28 February.

In a joint statement, the US also said it would immediately restart intelligence sharing and security assistance to Ukraine, which Washington had suspended after the unprecedented public row at the White House.

"Both delegations agreed to name their negotiating teams and immediately begin negotiations toward an enduring peace that provides for Ukraine's long-term security," the US-Ukraine statement said.

Rubio told a press conference in Jeddah late on Tuesday that he hoped Russia would accept the proposal.

Ukraine was "ready to stop shooting and start talking," he said, and if Russia rejected the offer "then we'll unfortunately know what the impediment is

to peace here".

"Today we made an offer that the Ukrainians have accepted, which is to enter into a ceasefire and into immediate negotiations," he said.

"We'll take this offer now to the Russians and we hope they'll say yes to peace. The ball is now in their court," he added.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, who was at the Jeddah talks, is due to travel to Russia in the coming days, a source familiar with the planning told the BBC, although this could

change quickly.

The offer of a 30-day ceasefire goes beyond Zelensky's proposal for a partial truce in the sky and at sea.

The Ukrainian president thanked Trump for "the constructiveness" of the talks in Jeddah.

In a video message, Zelensky said Russia had to "show its willingness to stop the war or continue the war".

"It is time for the full truth," he added.

The Kremlin has not yet publicly responded. It said earlier on Tuesday it would issue a statement after being briefed by Washington on the outcome of the talks.

But influential Russian lawmaker Kostantin Kosachev said that any potential agreements would be "on our terms,

not American".

Kosachev, chairman of the Federation Council's international affairs committee, said "real agreements are still being written... at the front", stressing that Russian troops were advancing in Ukraine.

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Moscow currently controls about 20% of Ukrainian territory.

At the White House, Trump told reporters he would speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who would "hopefully" agree to the proposal.

"It takes two to tango, as they say," Trump said, adding he hoped the deal would be agreed in the next few days.

"We have a big meeting with Russia tomorrow, and some



**CONTROLLING LARGE PART:**  
Al-Shabab controls large parts of rural Somalia

## Greenland's opposition wins election dominated by independence and Trump

Greenland's centre-right opposition has won a surprise general election victory - in a vote dominated by independence and US President Donald Trump's pledge to take over the semi-autonomous territory.

The centre-right Demokraatit party - which favours a gradual approach to independence from Denmark - achieved around 30% of the vote, near-complete results show.

"Greenland needs us to stand together in a time of great interest from outside," party leader Jens Frederik Nielsen told local media. "There is a need for unity, so we will enter into negotiations with everyone."

His party will now have to negotiate with other parties in order to form a coalition.

Greenland - the world's biggest island, between the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans - has been controlled by Denmark, nearly 3,000km (1,860 miles) away, for about 300 years.

Greenland governs its own domestic affairs, but decisions on foreign and defence policy are made in Copenhagen.

Five of the six main parties in the election favour independence from Copenhagen, but disagree over the pace with which to reach it.

The Democratic party, whose vote was up by more than 20% on 2021, is considered a moderate party on independence.

Another opposition party, Naleraq, which is looking to immediately kick-off the independence process and forge closer ties with the US, was on course for second place with almost a quarter of the vote.

The two current governing parties, Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) and Siumut, are heading for third and fourth place - mark-

ing an upset for Prime Minister Mute B Egede.

About 44,000 Greenlanders out of a population of 57,000 were eligible to cast their votes to elect 31 MPs, as well as the local government. Six parties were on the ballot.

The voting took place at 72 polling stations scattered across the vast island.

Greenland's strategic location and untapped mineral resources have caught Trump's eye. He first floated the idea of buying the island during his

first term in 2019.

Since taking office again in January, Trump has reiterated his intention to acquire the territory.

"We need Greenland for national security. One way or the other we're gonna get it," he said during his address to the US Congress last week.

Greenland and Denmark's leaders have repeatedly rebuffed his demands.

Egede has made clear that Greenland is not for sale, and deserves to be "treated with respect".

## Thousands celebrate a chief who will only rule for eight years

Thousands of people have been gathering in southern Ethiopia for one of the country's biggest cultural events.

The week-long Gada ceremony, which ended on Sunday, sees the official transfer of power from one customary ruler to his successor - something that happens every eight years.

The tradition of regularly appointing a new Abbaa Gadaa has been practised by the Borana community for centuries - and sees them gather at the rural site of Arda Jila Badhasa, near the Ethiopian town of Arero.

It is a time to celebrate their special form of democracy as well as their cultural heritage,

with each age-group taking the opportunity to wear their different traditional outfits.

These are paraded the day before the official handover during a procession when married women march with wooden batons, called "siinqee".

The batons have symbolic values of protection for women, who use them during conflict. If a siinqee stick is placed on the ground by a married woman between two quarrelling parties, it means the conflict must stop immediately out of respect.

During the procession, younger women walk at the front, distinguished from the married women by the different colour of their clothing,

In this pastoralist society, women are excluded from holding the top position of Abbaa Gadaa, sitting on the council of elders or being initiated into the system as a child.

But their important role can be seen during the festival as they build all the accommodation for those staying for the week - and prepare all the food.

And the unique Gada system of governance, which was added to the UN's cultural heritage list in 2016, allows for them to attend regular community meetings and to voice their opinions to the Abbaa Gadaa.

Gada membership is only open to boys whose fathers are already members - young initiates have

## Is Trump mulling a minerals deal with conflict-hit DR Congo?

The Democratic Republic of Congo appears to be turning to the US in its latest efforts to find an ally in its fight against advancing M23 rebels.

Recognising that the White House of President Donald Trump is interested in transactional relationships - and seeing the proposed Ukraine-US mineral deal - the resource-rich DR Congo is hoping to strike its own agreement with Washington.

It has also been reported that Trump is soon to appoint the father-in-law of his daughter, Tiffany, to a key role in the region.

Congolese government spokesperson Patrick Muyaya confirmed to the BBC's Newsday programme that his country wanted to bring the US on board and supply it "with some critical minerals".

"Of course... we can also talk about security," he added.

Why is there talk of a deal now? DR Congo is in trouble militarily.

M23 fighters - backed by neighbouring Rwanda - have made major advances in parts of the mineral-rich east of the country.

Regional forces - first from east and then southern Africa - which were supposed to provide some help have failed to

hold back the rebels. The M23 has talked about advancing west in a bid to seize the capital, Kinshasa, even though it is 1,600km (1,000 miles) away.

Given the dangers, it is not surprising that President Félix Tshisekedi might be looking at ways to shore up his position.

On 22 February, Tshisekedi was reported by the New York Times to have said that the Trump administration had shown interest in a deal involving strategic minerals.

The day before, the Africa-USA Business Council - a lobby group - wrote to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on behalf of a Congolese senator describing a possible deal that included an "economic and military partnership".

What could be in it for the US? DR Congo is estimated to have \$24tn-worth (£19tn) of untapped resources - including cobalt, gold and copper.

The country is currently the world's largest supplier of cobalt - which has defence and aerospace applications as well as being essential for batteries in electric vehicles - but most of this goes to China. It also has significant lithium, tantalum and uranium deposits, which also have military uses.

Though the US is investing in a huge infrastructure project - the Lobito corridor - designed to transport goods out of central Africa to a port in Angola, its companies are not involved in mining in DR Congo.

As China dominates the Congolese mineral sector, there could be "a widening strategic gap, where adversarial nations continue to monopolise Africa's resources", the letter to Rubio said.

In theory, DR Congo could offer favourable terms to US companies to exploit the resources.

But, according to mining analyst Gregory Mthembu-Salter, as the US, unlike China, relies on private commercial companies to do the work, they may decide that it is too risky to do business there.

their heads shaven at the crown to make their rank clear.

The smaller the circle, the older he is.

As the global cultural body Unesco reports, oral historians teach young initiates about "history, laws, rituals, time reckoning, cosmology, myths, rules of conduct, and the function of the Gada system".

Training for boys begins as young as eight years old.

Later, they will be assessed for their potential as future leaders.

As they grow up, tests include walking long distances barefoot, slaughtering cattle efficiently and showing kindness to fellow initiates.

## News

## Foreign

## UK seeks trade deal as Trump metal tariffs take effect

The UK is pushing for a trade deal with the US as tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on imports of steel and aluminium take effect.

The import tax introduction sparked an immediate response from the European Union on Wednesday which said it will impose counter tariffs on billions of euros of US goods.

The UK did not announce any tariffs in response as it works towards "a wider economic agreement", but the Conservatives said Labour has "no plan".

Trump hopes the tariffs will boost US steel and aluminium production, but critics say it will raise prices for US consumers and dent economic growth, and US markets sunk on Monday and Tuesday in response to recession fears.

The tariffs mean US businesses wanting to bring steel and aluminium into the country will have to pay a 25% tax on them.

These costs will probably be passed on to US consumers.

The EU announced retaliatory tariffs on Wednesday in response on goods worth €26bn (£22bn).

They will be partially introduced on 1 April and fully in place on 13 April.

European Union President Ursula von der Leyen said she "deeply regrets this measure" adding that tariffs are "bad for business and worse for consumers".

"They are disrupting supply chains. They bring uncertainty for the economy. Jobs are at stake, prices up, nobody needs that, on both sides, neither in the EU or the US."

She said the EU's response was "strong but proportionate" and that the EU remains "open to negotiations".

The tariffs will be imposed on "products ranging from boats to bourbon to motorbikes" the EU said.

In the UK, Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said the tariffs were "disappointing" but the UK was "focused on a pragmatic approach" and was "rapidly negotiating" a US trade deal.

He said the UK is "working with affected companies" and will "keep all options on the table" to respond in the national interest.

But Conservative shadow business secretary Andrew Griffith said Labour "can't even get themselves in the room" to negotiate with the US.

The American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI), lobby group said the tariffs will create jobs and boost US steel manufacturing.

Its president Kevin Dempsey said the move closed a system of exemptions, exclusions and quotas that allowed foreign producers to avoid tariffs.

The US is a major importer of aluminium and steel, and Canada, Mexico and Brazil are among its largest suppliers.

On Tuesday, Trump u-turned on doubling the tariffs on Canada specifically in response to a surcharge Ontario had placed on electricity.

"No exceptions"

Other countries also responded immediately to the tariffs.

Australia's Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, said he levies were "entirely unjustified".

Albanese, who had been trying to secure an exemption to the tariffs, said Australia will not be imposing retaliatory duties because such a move would only drive up prices for Australian consumers.



## PEACE TALKS:

The 30 days cease fire move was announced by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio after peace talks between the US and Ukraine in Saudi Arabia

## Somali forces end deadly 24-hour hotel siege

Somali security forces have ended a deadly 24-hour siege by Islamist fighters who stormed a popular hotel in the central city of Beledweyne, authorities said.

The attack by al-Shabab began with a car bomb exploding, followed by gunmen entering the hotel, leading to intense clashes with security forces.

"The attackers have been neutralised. Some detonated themselves while others were killed by police forces," Omar Osman Calasow, the mayor of Beledweyne district, told the BBC.

The mayor said seven people had been killed in the attack but witnesses said the death

toll could be higher.

The raid at the Qahira Hotel took place as politicians, security officials and traditional elders were meeting to discuss plans for an offensive against al-Shabab in central Somalia.

Police officer Ali Mahad told AFP news agency that most of those in attendance had been rescued.

A federal lawmaker from Beledweyne, Dahir Amin Jesow, told the BBC that about seven gunmen had attacked the hotel.

It is unclear how many people have been wounded, but the lawmaker said they were trying to organise planes to fly

victims to Mogadishu for treatment.

Parts of the hotel were reduced to rubble as government forces and gunmen exchanged fire, shopkeeper Ali Suleiman, who witnessed the attack, told the Reuters news agency.

"We first heard a huge blast followed by gunfire, then another blast was heard," he said.

Calasow said the 24-hour siege ended on Wednesday morning, leaving "significant damage".

"Among those killed in the attack were military officers, traditional elders, and soldiers," Calasow added.

Al-Shabab said it had killed 20 people, including govern-

ment officials and leaders of a pro-government clan militia.

The federal government said it was still investigating and has not commented on the reported killing of the officials.

In a statement, Ali Abdullahi Hussein, the president of Hirshabelle state, praised the security forces for their bravery in neutralising the extremist militants.

"Let us unite to complete the elimination of these brutal extremists," Hussein added.

Beledweyne is about 335km (208 miles) north of the capital, Mogadishu, and is a strategic location in the campaign against al-Shabab.

## Portugal elections loom as PM loses confidence vote

The government of Portuguese Prime Minister Luís Montenegro has lost a vote of confidence, almost certainly pitching the country into its third general election in barely three years.

MPs voted against him by 142 to 88 with no abstentions, toppling his right-of-centre minority government.

While Portugal's President, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, is not obliged to dissolve the assembly, he had made clear that he would if the government lost Tuesday's vote, with fresh elections likely in May.

The confidence motion was tabled by the government itself, after the opposition Socialists announced plans for a parliamentary inquiry into Montenegro's business dealings.

A company called Spinumviva, set up by Luís Montenegro, continued to receive sizeable sums from clients he had previously secured, even after he was elected Social Democratic Party (PSD) president and leader of the opposition in 2022, and had transferred ownership to his wife and two sons.

The legality of the transfer to his wife was questioned by the opposition, given that the mar-

riage is one in which assets are jointly held; the couple have since made their sons sole owners.

But questions remain about the sources of the company's income - which until a few days ago included €4,500 (£3,800) a month from hotels and casino group Solverde, whose gambling concession is up for review - as well as the identity of other clients, which the prime minister has declined to reveal, and the services Spinumviva offers.

The prime minister, a trained lawyer, says the firm provides consultancy services relating to data privacy laws, outsourcing work to external experts - given that his wife is a childminder, one son a student and the other a new graduate.

The Bar Association is now looking into whether the company is illicitly offering services that only lawyers may offer.

In recent days, Montenegro's cabinet has approved a battery of spending and other measures, in what is being seen as a bid to show that it is working hard for the country.

The situation might seem to offer ideal conditions for far-right Chega, the third-largest party in parliament, to renew its

attacks on corruption in politics.

Chega also benefited from the resignation of Montenegro's Socialist predecessor, António Costa, who is now president of the European Council. His name had come up in a criminal investigation into government contracts, although he has never been made a suspect.

But in recent weeks, Chega has been hit by scandals of its own, with three of its MPs accused of crimes, including one charged with stealing suitcases at Lisbon airport.

Until recently, Luís Montenegro's coalition with the conservative People's Party was still ahead of the Socialists in the opinion polls, having narrowly won the 2024 general election a year ago.

However, they are now trailing the Socialists, led by Pedro Nuno Santos, who served as a minister under António Costa.

None of the major parties appear keen on a snap election - not least because they fear voters will not be enthusiastic at having to choose a new government when the current one has been in office for less than a year - and the timing is poor in geopolitical terms.

## At least 100 passengers freed from Pakistan train siege

Armed militants in Pakistan's Balochistan region have attacked a train carrying more than 400 passengers and taken a number of them hostage, military sources told the BBC on Tuesday.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) fired at the Jaffar Express Train as it travelled from Quetta to Peshawar.

The separatist group said it had bombed the track before storming the train in the remote Sibi district, claiming the train was under its control.

At least 16 militants have been killed and 100 passengers were freed as of Wednesday morning, local media reported. The BBC has not been able to independently verify those figures.

Among those released are 17 injured passengers, who have been admitted to hospital for treatment.

The militants had threatened to kill hostages if authorities did not release Baloch political prisoners within 48 hours, according to local reports.

The rescue operation is ongoing. There were reports of "intense firing" at the train, a Balochistan government spokesman told local newspaper

Dawn on Tuesday.

A senior police official said it "remains stuck just before a tunnel surrounded by mountains", AFP news agency reports.

A senior army official confirmed to the BBC that there were more than 100 army personnel travelling from Quetta on the train.

The Pakistani authorities - as well as several Western countries, including the UK and US - have designated the BLA as a terrorist organisation.

It has waged a decades-long insurgency to gain independence and has launched numerous deadly attacks, often targeting police stations, railway lines and highways.

On Tuesday, the group warned of "severe consequences" if an attempt was made to rescue those it is holding.

"I can't find the words to describe how we managed to escape. It was terrifying," Muhammad Bilal, one of the freed hostages, told AFP news agency.

Allahditta, another passenger, said he was allowed to go because of his heart condition. The 49-year-old recalled how people "began hiding under the seats in panic" when the attackers stormed the train.

A local railway official in Quetta earlier told the BBC that a group of 86 passengers - including women and children - had managed to disembark the train and walk to the nearest railway station, Panir.

The official said the group was made up of locals from the province of Balochistan.

One man, whose brother-in-law was still being held on the train, described an agonising wait. He said he had tried to drive to the area, but many of the roads were closed.

Meanwhile, anxious families of passengers were trying to get information about their loved ones from the counter at Quetta railway station.

The son of one passenger, Muhammad Ashraf, who left Quetta for Lahore on Tuesday morning, told BBC Urdu he had not been able to contact his father.

Another relative said he was "frantic with worry" about his cousin and her small child, who were travelling from Quetta to Multan to pick up a family member.

"No one is telling me what's happening or if they're safe," Imran Khan told Reuters news agency.

# Sports

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

## Athletics: Gov Okpebholo declares MTN champs open, says Edo open to grassroots sports initiatives



KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As the MTN CHAMPS Season 3 athletics championship begins in Benin City with over 2000 participants, the Governor of Edo State Senator Monday Okpebholo has stated that Edo will continue to position itself as a hub for sports development and excellence in Nigeria.

Towards this direction, the State will continue to provide solid infrastructure, as well as create an enabling environment that encourages grassroots sports.

The Governor gave the assurance while declaring open the MTN athletics championship during a Press Conference at Oti Hotels in Benin on Wednesday, March 12, 2025.

Represented at the conference by the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele, Governor Okpebholo who commended

the Nigeria Communication giants and their partners for the initiative, promised that the state is willing to sustain collaboration with MTN and remain host for the MTN athletics championship

He urges Edo children to take advantage of the opportunity created by MTN and strive to become future champions.

"We are committed to creating an enabling environment that encourages talent discovery and nurturing of future champions. I urge all participating athletes to seize this opportunity, give your best, and represent your schools and states with pride.

"The MTN CHAMPS Athletics Championship is a remarkable initiative aimed at discovering and nurturing young athletics talents across Nigeria. We must take advantage of it and continue to collaborate with MTN".

"The MTN CHAMPS ini-

ative is a significant platform for young athletes to showcase their talents and unlock their full potentials. By creating opportunities for secondary school students to compete at the highest level, this championship is not only promoting sports excellence but also instills discipline, teamwork, and resilience among our youth.

"I also want to specially commend MTN for their outstanding commitment to sports development in Nigeria. Their investment in athletics demonstrates a clear understanding of the critical role that sports play in youth empowerment and economic growth.

"I thank the Edo State Government, MTN, and all stakeholders involved in making this championship a reality in our state." Enabulele said.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Sports Commission chairman Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele has expressed his profound

appreciation to the Edo State Government under the visionary leadership of Senator Monday Okpebholo, and his deputy, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, for their unwavering commitment to the development of sports in Edo State. He said that the commitment of the state government to revitalizing athletics and empowering Edo youth through sports is truly commendable

Briefing the press ahead of the MTN Champs Season 3 in Benin City, the Chief Executive Officer of Making of Champions, Mr Bambo Akanni said that the MTN Champs is one of the biggest athletics championships in the world with a high level of consistency.

The championship which is being organized by MTN in partnership with the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN) and the Nigeria School Sports Federation (NSSF) is scheduled to run from the 13th to 16th of March, 2025 with over 2000 athletes.

According to Mr Akanni, the event is being staged at two venues, the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium and the University of Benin Sports Complex due to the record-breaking registration of over 2,000 applicants within 5 days of opening the portal.

He said that 20 athletes discovered in Seasons 1 and 2 who have been in MTN Athletics Academy in Lagos will be competing at the senior category in this 3rd season.



## Oleksandr Usyk vs Daniel Dubois undisputed title rematch

EDWARD OSEGHE

Daniel Dubois, who seeks to avenge his defeat to Oleksandr Usyk, is in talks to go straight into an undisputed heavyweight world championship fight with the Ukrainian unified world titlist, who holds the WBC, WBO and WBA belts.

Interesting, Wembley Stadium in London could host the blockbuster rematch.

It would be recalled that Dubois had to withdraw from his IBF title defence against Joseph Parker last month.

On his part, Ukraine's unified world titlist Usyk defeated Tyson Fury in May of last year to become boxing's first undisputed heavyweight world champion in 25 years, the first since Lennox Lewis and the first of the four-belt era.

But his commitment to a rematch with Fury meant he could not make a mandatory defence of the IBF title against Britain's Dubois.

That saw him vacate the

belt and Dubois was upgraded from IBF Interim titlist to full world champion.

Dubois defended that title when he knocked out former champion Anthony Joshua in front of a sold-out Wembley Stadium in September.

In December the IBF holder was ringside to see Usyk defend his unified WBC, WBO and WBA belts when he outscored Fury in their rematch.

After the result was announced, Dubois stormed into the ring to demand his own fight with Usyk.

Dubois challenged Usyk in 2023, losing inside nine rounds but only after sending Usyk to the canvas with a blow that the referee ruled low. Dubois and his team still consider that decision unfair and the British heavyweight wants his chance at revenge.

Dubois was due to make a defence of his IBF title against Joseph Parker in February, but an illness forced him to withdraw from that bout.

## Morocco 2025: Flamingos intensify training as South Africa's Bantwana land in Lagos

The delegation of South Africa's U17 girls, Bantwana, is scheduled to arrive in Lagos on Wednesday evening, ahead of Saturday's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup second round, second leg qualifying match against Nigeria's Flamingos.

A brace by Harmony Chidi, which followed Shakirat Moshood's goal, steered Nigeria to a 3-1 win over their hosts in Pretoria on Saturday, but the Bantwana have sounded a big warning that they will not be in Ikenne to lie down and be slaughtered.

Team captain Katleho Malebana, whose goal early in the second half raised the hopes of the Bantwana, before Chidi's second and Nigeria's third, has assured that the South Africans will contest every blade of the grass with their hosts at the Remo Stars Stadium on Saturday.

Saturday's encounter will kick off at 4pm, with Senegalese match officials in charge. CAF has appointed Aida Sy to serve as referee, while her

compatriots Ndeye Aissa Ndiaye, Ndeye Sarr Ndiaye and Fatoumata Sall Toure will be in the roles of assistant 1, assistant 2 and fourth official respectively.

Ghanaian Naa Odofoley Nortey will be the commissioner while Agar Mezing from Cameroon will be the referee assessor.

The winner on aggregate will progress to the final round of the qualification se-

ries, with this year's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup taking place in Morocco, 17 October - 8 November. Africa will present 5 teams (including host nation Morocco) at the finals, which has been expanded to a 24-nation championship.

The Flamingos have intensified their preparation with training sessions at the Remo Stars Institute, Ikenne-Remo ahead of Saturday's encounter.



## Bet9ja Foundation launches landmark U-20 Women's football competition in Ekiti State



The Bet9ja Foundation has ignited a wave of excitement across Ekiti State with the launch of a groundbreaking Women's U-20 Football Competition, set to kick off on March 17, 2025.

The competition, in which teams can register for free, aims to promote youth development by combining athletic excellence with comprehensive personal and professional growth.

"We are committed to using football as a tool to inspire and empower these young wom-

en, providing them with a platform to excel both on and off the field," stated Mr. Bayo Olanlege, the foremost Bet9ja Agent in Ekiti State and CEO of Phoenix Athletics Sports Limited, the event's consultant.

Under the visionary leadership of Governor Biodun Oyeibanji, we have reinforced our status as Nigeria's most women-friendly state, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to gender equity.

"We are inspired by the unprecedented female representation in governance within the Ekiti state

government. Just look around and see, especially the invaluable contributions of Dr. Olusola Osetoba, the Technical Advisor to Governor Biodun Oyeibanji, and Mrs. Peju Babafemi, the Commissioner for Women Affairs, championing women's development."

"This competition complements their ongoing initiatives, further strengthening the support system for empowering young women in Ekiti State. We're creating role models who will inspire the next generation of Ekiti women." Mr. Olanlege added.

# SPORTS

## CAF president Dr Motsepe and African Club Association (ACA) chairman sign historic MoU to strengthen African club football

The Confédération Africaine de Football (“CAF”) President Dr Patrice Motsepe and African Club Association (“ACA”) Chairman Hersi Said signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Cairo, Egypt on Tuesday, 11 March 2025.

The MoU strengthens the partnership between CAF and ACA and formalizes a number of strategic objectives.

ACA has commended CAF President Dr Motsepe for increasing financial support for Club Football. This includes the

USD 50 000 solidary fee given to all Clubs that participated in the preliminary stages of the CAF Interclub competition – marking it the first time Clubs are given financial assistance to participate in the CAF Interclub Competitions.

CAF has also increased the prizemoney in both TotalEnergies CAF Champions League and TotalEnergies CAF Confederation Cup by over 40%.

ACA was launched in November 2023 with the support of Dr Motsepe and recently announced it would be setting up offices at the world-class King

Mohammed VI National Football Academy in Sale, Morocco.

CAF and ACA have mutual aims that are crucial in growing Club Football on the continent, including to protect and develop a large and healthy professional football sector and invest in and promote the training of young talented players in the long-term interest of football.

They also seek to ensure players benefit from suitable education pathways throughout their sporting careers and to promote fair play and to fight against racism, doping, violence, match-fix-

ing and corruption in football.

CAF and ACA will work to ensure National Team and Club Football provides substantial benefits to players, Clubs, Leagues and Member Associations, and foster a closer working relationship.

They have also resolved that sports-related disputes shall be resolved within the appropriate resolution structures; and that strong national championships and international competitions organised by CAF are vital for the on-going and healthy development of football.



## Ola Aina named Europe’s top defensive ball-winner

Nottingham Forest defender Ola Aina has emerged as the best ball-winner in defensive areas across Europe’s top five leagues, according to statistics from WhoScored.

The Super Eagles defender has been a standout performer for Forest this season, playing over 2,500 minutes in all competitions and delivering his most impressive campaign yet at the top level.

“Aina has won the ball back in defensive areas a full 13 times more than any other player, putting Aina top of the list across the continent,” the club stated in a report on Tuesday.

His defensive dominance has been instrumental in Forest’s solid backline, contributing significantly to goalkeeper Matz Sels’ 12 Premier League clean sheets—the highest in the division this season and the joint-most of Aina’s career.

“The 28-year-old’s defensive prowess has helped Matz Sels to 12 Premier League clean sheets this season, the most in the division, and the joint-most of the full-back’s career to date,” the club noted.

The club added that Aina has also been a key disruptor in opposition attacks, leading the Forest squad with 30 interceptions in 2024/25—a stat that places him joint-26th across



the entire Premier League.

“In addition, the 28-year-old had made 30 interceptions in 2024/25, the most in the Forest squad and the joint-26th most across the Premier League,” the statement added.

Aina’s ability to win duels and stop opponents was evident in Forest’s recent 1-0 victory against Manchester City, where his crucial tackle on Omar Marmouh led to the game-winning goal.

“Indeed, his tackle on Omar Marmouh against Manchester City on Saturday put the ball back in the Reds’ possession to go and net the winner against the champions,” the club highlighted.

Facing City’s Jérémy Doku, Aina showed defensive resilience, winning four ground duels, making three clearances, including two-headed clearances, and recovering the ball four times.

“On Saturday, Aina won four ground duels against Jérémy Doku, who he lined up against from the start at The City Ground, making three clearances, two-headed clearances, and four-ball recoveries against City,” the club revealed.

## Pinnick loses re-election into FIFA council seat

EDWARD OSEGHE

Former President of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Amaju Pinnick, has lost re-election to the FIFA Council Seat at the extraordinary general assembly held in Cairo on Wednesday, with FIFA president Gianni Infantino in attendance.

Africa has seven seats at the FIFA Council, with CAF President Patrice Motsepe who was reelected, guaranteed a seat while a seat is reserved for a woman.

The Nigerian football administrator narrowly lost out in the election, scoring 28 votes, one short of 29 scored by Ahmed Yahya of Mauritania and Djibouti’s Souleymane Waberi.

Pinnick was first elected to the FIFA Council Seat in March 2021 during the 43rd CAF Ordinary

General Assembly which was held in Rabat, the Moroccan capital.

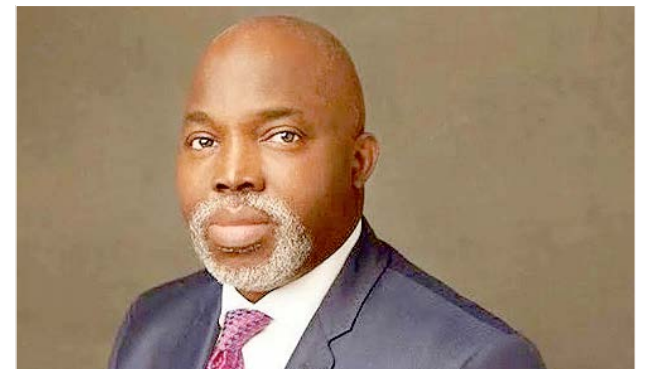
The elected FIFA Council Seat Members are:

- 1- Fouzi Lekja : 49 votes
- 2- Hani Abou Ridha : 35 votes
- 3- Djibrilla Hima : 35 votes
- 4- Ahmed Yahya : 29 votes
- 5-Souleymane Waberi: 29 votes.

Women slot:  
Kanozat Ibrahim: 30 Votes  
Those who lost out in the election are:

- Amaju Pinnick: 28 votes
- Andrew Kamanga: 19 votes
- Yacine Diallo: 18 votes
- Augustin Senghor: 13 votes
- Mathurin de Chacus Pulled out

Pinnick was first elected to the FIFA Council Seat in March 2021 during the 43rd CAF Ordinary General Assembly which was held in Rabat, the Moroccan capital.



## Motsepe re-elected CAF President

South African businessman Patrice Motsepe has secured a second term as the president of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) after being re-elected unopposed.

Motsepe, 63, who first assumed office in 2021, had announced his intention to seek re-election in October 2024.

His second four-year term was officially confirmed during CAF’s extraordinary general assembly held in Cairo on Wednesday, with FIFA president Gianni Infantino in attendance.

While his re-election was a

mere formality, elections were conducted for CAF’s executive committee, where Cameroonian football icon Samuel Eto’o secured a seat.

The continent’s representatives for the FIFA Council were also elected during the assembly.

No Interference In Super Eagles’ Final List – Eguavoen,

Technical Director of the Nigeria Football Federation, Austin Eguavoen, has said that the new head coach of the Super Eagles, Eric Chelle, had the final say on the final squad for this month’s crucial 2026 World Cup qualify-

ing matches, without interference from the technical committee.

Nigeria will face Rwanda in Kigali on Friday, March 21 before returning to the Godswill Akpabio Stadium in Uyo to face Zimbabwe on Tuesday, March 25, in a bid to revive their World Cup qualification bid.

After dropping a 39-man provisional list for his first set of assignments for Nigeria last week, the Franco-Malian coach named his final squad on Tuesday ahead of the team’s camping which begins in Kigali, Rwanda on Sunday.

## IHF Emerging Nations: Nigeria U23 handball team earn comfortable victory against Azerbaijan



Nigeria under 23 team, on Wednesday, defeated Azerbaijan, 29-17 with an excellent second half performance on day 2 of the 5th IHF Emerging Nations Championship in Varna, Bulgaria.

The Coach Solomon Yola tutored team went into the match better prepared follow-

ing their opening day 31-31 draw against the United States of America but somehow still find it hard to score goals despite taking a 4-1 lead and then having to hold their own to win the first half 9-8.

The second half stated and it seems Azerbaijan came smoking as they drew the first blood

in the half but that only awakened Nigeria and they match up as the Coach Solomon Yola’s team swiftly took advantage of Azerbaijan’s turnovers, Nigeria embarked on a 13:1 run, part of two runs which saw the African side enjoy a 6:0 and a 7:0 unanswered runs, between the 32nd and the 45 minutes, when they

were unstoppable especially on fast breaks, taking advantage of their opponents’ woes.

In fact, with Faruk Yusuf, Solomon Yusuf and Kareem Ajibike firing from all cylinders, Nigeria tied the number of goals scored in the first half after only 10 minutes and 53 seconds in the second part.