

Edo govt demolishes house owned by Italy-based woman over brother's role in kidnap gang

● Vows relentless war on cultism in Edo

The Edo State Government has demolished a residential property in Aduwawa, Benin City, after it was linked to a notorious kidnapping syndicate, despite the fact that the

house belongs to a woman currently residing in Italy.

The house, located on College Road, was used by members of the gang as a base for planning and carrying out kidnappings.

Investigations revealed that the property is owned by the sister of Osamede Asemota, one of the key suspects now in police custody.

Asemota confessed to being

involved in several abductions, including the kidnapping of a woman from her shop at Ramat Park, who was held in a forest along Agbor Road.

He said he received N350,000 from the ransom and admitted the gang often met at the house

to coordinate operations.

"I feel very sad and confused at this development," Asemota said. "The house belongs to my sister who lives in Italy. She's been supportive, sending me money. I don't know how she'll feel when she hears about this."

Another suspect, Michael Tare from Delta State, was also arrested. He admitted receiving N1 million from an earlier ransom and said he returned to Benin out of greed, which led

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Diaspora remittances: CBN unveils non-resident BVN platform

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Senate okays N1.8trn FCT 2025 budget for 2nd reading

● Confirms 5 INEC RECs

CAROLINE AMEH

The Senate on Wednesday passed the N1.8 trillion 2025 budget for the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) for second reading.

The appropriation bill, submitted by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, seeks to authorise the

withdrawal of funds from the FCT's statutory revenue fund.

Presenting the bill, Senate Leader Opeyemi Bamidele said the budget was aimed at improving services for residents and completing ongoing projects.

He said N150 billion was allocated for personnel costs, N343 billion for overheads, while N1.2 trillion was earmarked for capi-

tal projects.

Bamidele said although the focus was on projects already underway, a few new but necessary ones were also included.

He urged the Senate to ensure quick passage of the budget to maintain momentum on key infrastructure.

Senator Mohammed Monguno (APC-Borno) com-

mended the focus on existing projects, describing it as a responsible approach.

Senator Oyelola Ashiru (APC-Kwara) said the 70 percent capital allocation made the proposal balanced and growth-oriented.

Senator Adetokunbo Abiru (APC-Lagos) supported the bill but called for clarity on funding sources for the capital projects.

Senator Victor Umeh (LP-Anambra) praised visible im-

provements under FCT Minister Nyesom Wike, but urged government to extend development to surrounding areas to address high land costs.

Senate President Godswill Akpabio referred the bill to the Senate Committee on FCT and asked it to report back within one week.

Meanwhile, the Senate on Wednesday confirmed five nominees as Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The confirmation followed the presentation of a report by

the Senate Committee on INEC, chaired by Senator Simon Lalong (APC-Plateau).

Lalong said the nominees were thoroughly screened and met the required qualifications, integrity, and experience for the role.

He told the Senate that all five answered questions satisfactorily and were considered competent for the position.

The confirmed RECs are to serve in Kano, Bauchi, Anambra, Borno and Bayelsa states.

Their confirmation is expected to boost INEC's preparedness and operational strength ahead of future elections.



COURTESY CALL:

L-R: Chairman, Senate Committee on Navy, Gbenga Daniels; Chairman, National Population Commission, Nasir Isa Kwarrar; Senate President, Godswill Akpabio; Chairman Senate Committee on Population, Victor Umeh, and Chairman North Central Development Commission, Titus Zam, during a courtesy call on the Akpabio by the commission in Abuja yesterday. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

No fraud in NELFUND —Minister

The Minister of Education, Dr. Tunji Alausa, has dismissed reports of fraud in the Nigeria Education Loan Fund (NELFUND), saying there is no evidence to support such claims.

Speaking on Wednesday after a meeting with Vice Chancellors, officials of the National Universities Commission, NELFUND representatives, and staff of the Federal Ministry of Education, Alausa said the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) had reported incorrect information and that the real issues relate to timing delays rather than financial misconduct.

Recently, the ICPC announced that it had begun an investigation into alleged discrepancies in the disbursement

of student loans, stating that although the Federal Government had released N100 billion for the scheme, only N28.8 billion was distributed, leaving N71.2 billion unaccounted for.

The development sparked concern, with the National Association of Nigerian Students threatening to protest the situation, and the National Orientation Agency alleging that some institutions, in collusion with certain banks, delayed student payments for profit.

Media reports also alleged that unauthorised deductions ranging from N3,500 to N30,000 were made from students' fees that were funded by the loan scheme. In response, the ICPC said its Special Task

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Diaspora remittances: CBN unveils non-resident BVN platform

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), in partnership with the Nigeria Inter-Bank Settlement System (NIBSS), has launched the Non-Resident Bank Verification Number (NRBVN), a digital platform that allows Nigerians in the diaspora to obtain a BVN without being physically present in the country.

Launched on Tuesday, the platform is expected to help the CBN achieve its monthly diaspora remittance target of \$1 billion, amounting to about \$12

billion annually.

Speaking at the launch in Abuja, which was attended by top banking executives and other financial stakeholders, CBN Governor Olayemi Cardoso described the NRBVN as a major step towards deepening financial inclusion and creating stronger ties with Nigerians abroad.

He explained that the platform would reduce the cost of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, currently averaging over seven per cent, and help promote the use of formal channels

by making access to financial services easier and more secure for Nigerians abroad.

Cardoso said the NRBVN eliminates long-standing challenges faced by Nigerians overseas who previously needed to return home for physical verification.

He said the new system, which features secure digital identification and strict Know Your Customer (KYC) protocols, would make banking services more accessible, affordable, and transparent.

Describing the launch as the beginning of a broader journey, the governor noted that the NRBVN is part of a wider framework that includes the Non-Res-

ident Ordinary Account (NROA) and Non-Resident Nigerian Investment Account (NRNIA). These allow access to savings, mortgages, pensions, insurance, and investments in Nigeria's capital markets.

Under current regulations, diaspora Nigerians retain the right to repatriate the proceeds of their investments.

The NRBVN platform is built in line with global standards, incorporating strong Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and compliance protocols to maintain the integrity of the financial system.

Each enrolment is subjected to strict verification to prevent financial crimes, enhance trans-

parency, and build international confidence in the system.

Cardoso noted that remittances through formal channels grew from \$3.3 billion in 2023 to \$4.73 billion in 2024, driven by policy reforms such as the willing buyer, willing seller foreign exchange regime.

He expressed optimism that the introduction of NRBVN, along with other policy measures, would help the CBN meet its ambitious remittance goals.

He emphasised that collaboration and strict adherence to regulatory guidelines, including the Foreign Exchange Code, would be crucial to achieving this.

He also urged International

Money Transfer Operators (IMTOs) to integrate with the NRBVN platform, noting that a fully connected and compliant system would enable Nigerians abroad to contribute to national development through trusted, efficient, and cost-effective channels.

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), Abike Dabiri-Erewa, described the launch as a game changer. The event also featured a presentation by NIBSS Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Premier Oiwoh, and a panel discussion with key stakeholders from the financial industry.

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to his arrest.

Authorities said the gang initially demanded N8 million from their victim, before later threatening her with another abduction if she failed to pay an additional N3 million.

Security officials said the demolition was part of an intensified effort to eliminate criminal hideouts across the state.

They described the move as both punitive and symbolic, aimed at deterring others involved in kidnapping.

Despite the owner's apparent innocence and her absence from the country, the government maintained that properties linked to criminal operations would not be spared.

Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration has vowed to maintain a zero-tolerance stance on insecurity.

But the incident also underscores the wider consequences of criminality, where even those abroad may suffer losses due to the hidden actions of family members at home.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has reaffirmed his administration's determination to stamp out cultism, declaring that no amount of threats or intimidation would weaken the resolve.

Addressing youths who staged a peaceful rally to the Government House in Benin City on Monday, the governor said the fight against cult-related violence is personal, noting that every life lost to cultism is a loss to the state.

"If I had been killed by cultists as a young man, I would not be standing before you today as governor," he told the cheering crowd. "Every Edo life matters, and no amount of threat will deter us. This fight is total."

Okpebholo warned that the reign of cultism threatens not only the safety of residents but also the future of the state. He stressed that insecurity would drive away investors and hinder development.

"Edo must be safe for all of

us. If cult killings continue, investors will flee. We must cleanse our land and reclaim our future," he said.

Justifying the demolition of a property linked to a suspected cultist, the governor stated that due process was followed, and his administration will not hesitate to take further lawful actions.

"We are not demolishing buildings at random. We follow due process and we are ready to do more. I am not afraid of them. Edo people are not afraid. This war is for the soul of our state."

He praised the youths for their mobilisation and resolve, saying their support energises the administration's campaign.

"These cultists are enemies of the state. They want to kill the dreams of our young people. But we will not stop. We will do all that must be done to end cultism in Edo State," Okpebholo vowed.

Speaking on behalf of the demonstrators, Chairman of the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN), Edo Chapter, Comrade Moses Aguinde Joseph, expressed full support for the governor's actions.

He said the rally was the outcome of a youth summit held across the state's three senatorial districts, where students and youth leaders agreed on urgent action against cultism and drug abuse.

"We are tired of losing our peers. We are tired of watching the future bleed. The governor has our backing, and we believe that with collective effort, we can bring this menace to an end," Joseph said.

Also lending her voice, youth leader and human rights advocate, Comrade Precious Oruche, thanked the governor for his prompt intervention since assuming office.

"Before you came, cultism had become routine. Now, we are seeing action. We support every legal step you take," she said, urging the police to exercise diligence in identifying actual perpetrators.

The rally marked a symbolic show of unity by Edo youths, who say they are determined

"No fraud in NELFUND"

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Force had commenced investigations to examine the claims.

However, Dr. Alausa insisted there had been no fraud, clarifying that the delays in dis-

bursement were due to logistical issues related to timelines.

He assured that steps were being taken to address the matter and ensure transparency and efficiency in the operation of the loan scheme.



Minister of Education, Tunji Alausa

Tinubu's budgeting focuses on transformation, not mere survival —Shettima

Vice President Senator Kashim Shettima has said that the budgeting approach of President Bola Tinubu's administration is aimed at driving long-term economic transformation rather than focusing on short-term survival.

Speaking at the 15th Mechanical Engineering Distinguished

Lecture organised by the Nigerian Institution of Mechanical Engineers in Abuja, Shettima said the administration is institutionalising a new approach to budgeting that is driven by logic, precision, and long-term strategy.

He drew parallels between engineering and governance, explaining that budgets should

be designed like machines, with every bolt, nut, and component accounted for. According to him, each budget should be a deliberate technical operation in nation-building rather than a routine exercise or an emotional response to challenges.

Shettima stressed that budgeting must reflect a commit-

ment to productivity, sustainability, and progress.

He said the current administration is building systems that align with these principles, and that every naira allocated must be justified by its impact, just as engineers ensure that each component of a structure serves a purpose.

Edo Education Commissioner Paddy Iyamu appointed NEF Steering C'ttee chairman

The Edo State Commissioner for Education, Dr Paddy Iyamu has been appointed Chairman of the Steering Committee for the 2025 Nigerian Education Forum (NEF), a key national platform designed to address the country's educational challenges and advance forward-looking solutions.

The announcement of Dr Iyamu's appointment was jointly made by the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) and the Commit-

tee of States Commissioners for Education in Nigeria, underscoring the high level of trust placed in his expertise and leadership within the education sector.

The formal inauguration ceremony of the steering committee took place at the NGF Secretariat located in Abuja.

The event marked the official commencement of preparations for the NEF summit scheduled to hold in December.

As chairman, Dr Iyamu will

lead collaborative engagements involving stakeholders from across Nigeria's education sector, industry partners, and the private sector.

His role will be pivotal in shaping strategic discussions and facilitating actionable outcomes aimed at reforming and strengthening the nation's educational framework.

The Nigerian Education Forum serves as a vital platform for dialogue and policy formula-



IYAMU

tion, and this year's edition is expected to address critical issues, such as access to quality education, innovation in teaching and learning, and sustainable development goals within the sector.

NESREA seals 21 facilities in Abuja over persistent environmental violations

The National Environmental Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) on Wednesday sealed 21 facilities across the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, for failing to comply with existing environmental laws.

This was made known in a

statement issued by NESREA's Assistant Director of Press, Nwamaka Ejiofor.

According to the agency, the affected facilities and projects are: White Avenue Real Estate, Lugbe; CCECC-FIRS project, Abuja; Mo Mouna Construction, Katampe; Practis Project,

Abuja; Belmont Court, Idu; Istrom Construction, Abuja; Mab Global Estate, Idu; Ochacho Real Homes Limited, Idu; Constrix, Idu; Anarock Global Services Limited, Abuja; Quali Trends Nigerian Limited, Abuja; Boked International Limited, Abuja; and the CCECC site at the Cen-

tral Business District, Abuja.

Others include Matilda Rozi Limited, Abuja; Efedo Homes located in the Kukwaba District; T'lon Construction and Facilities Management, Abuja; Cosgrove's shopping mall project at Wuse II; Cosgrove Estate in the Central Business District; among others.

Education Ministry begins monitoring WAEC exams in Edo

FRIDAY OBANOR

BENIN CITY

In a determined effort to uphold transparency and integrity in the ongoing West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAS-SCE), the Edo State Ministry of Education has launched a

state-wide monitoring exercise across the 18 Local Government Areas of the state.

The initiative, spearheaded by the Commissioner for Education, Dr Paddy Iyamu, is a key feature of Governor Monday Okpebholo's educational agenda.

Teams of Ministry officials have been deployed to sec-

ondary schools throughout the state to observe the exam proceedings, prevent malpractices and assist schools facing logistics or administrative hurdles.

"Our mission goes beyond oversight," said the Director of Education, Mrs Ero. "We are here to safeguard the hopes and hardwork of thousands of students.

"By maintaining high standards, we reaffirm Edo's leadership in academic excellence."

Across various centres, candidates welcomed the presence of Ministry officials, describing it as a gesture of recognition for their academic efforts.

The monitoring is being conducted in collaboration with school principals, WAEC

supervisors, local education authorities, and security agencies, with early reports showing strong compliance with WAEC protocols.

In addition to overseeing the exams, officials are using the opportunity to evaluate school facilities, with a view to

recommending infrastructure upgrades after the examination period.

The Ministry has pledged to ensure that the process remains smooth and transparent, with outcomes used to enhance future assessment exercises, it was gathered.



TEACHERS:

Chairman, Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Barr. Mrs Onomen Briggs (arrowed), in a group photograph with some of the teachers trained in professional development.

Edo High Court declares Okundaye legal owner of disputed land ● Awards ₦500,000 in damages

Justice V.O.A. Oviawe of the Edo State High Court in Benin City has declared Mr Albert Azin Okundaye as the legal and beneficial owner of a disputed parcel of land located at Uyinmwendin community, along Benin/Abraka Road in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State.

Delivering judgment in suit No. B/636/2022, the court

held that the land in question measuring 1,000 feet by 1,000 feet is rightfully owned by Okundaye.

The property is covered by Survey Plan No. TNK/SURV/ED 17/089 dated 28 December 2017 and a Certificate of Occupancy registered as No. 179, page 1, volume 13 of the Certificate of Occupancy Digital Register at the EDOGIS Regis-

try on 23 April 2020.

The ten defendants in the suit were described as unknown developers who trespassed on the land without the claimant's consent.

Justice Oviawe, in affirming Okundaye's title, stated: "I am satisfied therefore upon the evidence proffered, that the claimant has proved his title to the land in dispute, as required by

law ... Accordingly, judgment is hereby entered in favour of the Claimant."

The court also issued a perpetual injunction restraining the defendants, their agents, servants, or privies from further trespassing or interfering with the claimant's rights.

In addition, it awarded general damages of ₦500,000 in favour of Mr Okundaye.

Edo assembly gets new PDP whip amid uproar

The Peoples Democratic Party on Wednesday nominated Mr Eugene Inegbeboh (PDP, Igueben) as the new Minority Whip of the Edo State House of Assembly.

His nomination came following the defection of the former Minority Whip, Mr Yekini Idiaye (Akoko-Edo I), to the All Progressives Congress.

At the plenary in Benin, the Speaker of the House, Mr Blessing Agbebaku, read a letter from the state PDP chairman, Dr Anthony Aziegbemi, officially nominating Inegbeboh for the position.

The announcement, however, triggered a rowdy session after Mr Addeh Isibor (APC,

Esan North-East I) challenged the legitimacy of the nomination, claiming that Aziegbemi's chairmanship was being contested in court.

His objection was quickly countered by other lawmakers, including Minority Leader Charity Aiguoabarueghian, who described Isibor's claim as misleading.

Agbebaku intervened to calm the situation, stating that the House had no authority over internal party matters and urged members to let the issue rest.

Meanwhile, the House also passed a bill to establish the Edo State Public-Private Partnership Agency, aimed at enhancing infrastructural development across the state

JTB hikes cost of vehicle number plates, driver's licences effective June 8

The Joint Tax Board (JTB), the top coordinating body for tax authorities across Nigeria has hiked the cost of vehicle number plates and driver's licences across the country.

The price hike which was contained in an advertorial published in a national newspaper will begin on Sunday June 8, 2025.

JTB attributed the increase to the addition of enhanced security features and a rise in production costs.

A standard motor vehicle driver's licence will now cost ₦15,000 for three years and ₦21,000 for five years. For motorcycles and tricycles, a three-year licence will cost ₦7,000 and the five-year option of ₦11,000.

The new pricing for number plates varies by category. Standard number plates for private and commercial vehicles are now fixed at ₦30,000. Articulated vehicles will attract a fee of ₦90,000, while dealer plates will cost ₦100,000.

Out-of-series number plates are now set at ₦150,000, and fancy number plates will go for as much as ₦400,000. Government vehicles will pay ₦80,000 for standard plates and ₦120,000 for the fancy version.

For motorcycles, a standard number plate now costs ₦12,000. The fancy version costs ₦50,000. Government motorcycles will be charged ₦20,000 for standard plates and ₦50,000 for fancy ones.

The JTB stressed that the new prices apply nationwide and directed all State Internal Revenue Services and Motor Vehicle Licensing Authorities to comply.

Nigerians have been advised to use official channels for their applications. These include the National Vehicle Identification System portal at nvis.frsc.gov.ng and state licensing offices.

The public is also warned to avoid touts and to ensure they pay only the approved fees. Further information is available on the Federal Road Safety Corps website at www.frsc.gov.ng and at licensing authorities across the country.

Mass failure: JAMB, VCs to review UTME results today

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board will on Thursday review the results of the 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination following what it described as "unusual" public complaints.

A notice in Abuja confirmed that the review meeting would bring together vice-chancellors, provosts, rectors, school principals, examiners, and technical experts to scrutinise the examination process and address the widespread dissatisfaction expressed by candidates and stakeholders.

This development comes in the wake of mounting protests from candidates and parents over the results released last Friday, with many alleging technical glitches and inconsistencies during the examination.

According to the official notice, the review panel, which includes members from the All Nigeria Confederation of Prin-

cipals of Secondary Schools, the National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools, Computer Professionals Registration Council of Nigeria, the Educational Assessment and Research Network, and top officials from Nigeria's tertiary institutions, will evaluate the conduct and outcome of the 2025 UTME.

"In furtherance of the commitment of the board to earn public confidence in its processes, the management of the board has approved your participation to be part of the review panel constituted to appraise the conduct of the examination with the mandate to identify challenges, if any, and proffer relevant recommendations to prevent a recurrence," the notice reads in part.

It added that the panel's assignment will be at no cost to the board.

The UTME is a critical prerequisite for admission into tertiary

institutions in Nigeria. It tests candidates in four subjects, including the compulsory Use of English, with the other three drawn from their proposed field of study.

Of the 1.9 million candidates who sat the UTME, over 1.5 million reportedly scored below 200 out of the maximum 400 marks, raising concerns across the education sector.

According to the examination agency, a total of 1,955,069 results were processed, out of which only 4,756 candidates (0.24 per cent) scored 320 and above, considered top-tier performance, while 7,658 candidates (0.39 per cent) scored between 300 and 319, bringing the total for those who scored 300 and above to 12,414 candidates (0.63 per cent).

Also, 73,441 candidates (3.76 per cent) scored between 250 and 299 while 334,560 candidates (17.11 per cent) scored between 200 and 249.

A total of 983,187 candidates (50.29 per cent) scored between 160 and 199, which is widely regarded as the minimum threshold for admissions in many institutions.

In the same vein, 488,197 candidates (24.97 per cent) scored between 140 and 159, 57,419 candidates (2.94 per cent) scored between 120 and 139, 3,820 candidates (0.20 per cent) scored between 100 and 119, and 2,031 candidates (0.10 per cent) scored below 100.

Over 75 per cent of all candidates (1.5 million) scored below 200, average score seeing as the examination is graded over 400.

Some affected candidates threatened to initiate a lawsuit against JAMB.

Responding to the controversy, JAMB's spokesman, Dr. Fabian Benjamin, on Monday said the board was accelerating its annual post-examination system review,

which typically assesses the registration, examination, and result phases months after the exercise.

"We are particularly concerned about the unusual complaints originating from a few states within the federation," Benjamin stated.

"We are currently scrutinising these complaints in detail to identify and rectify any potential technical issues."

According to the statement, the board is scrutinising these complaints in detail to identify and rectify potential technical issues.

JAMB said the annual review encompasses three key stages: registration, examination, and result release.

It explained that during the examination, JAMB ensures that every candidate is afforded the opportunity to sit the test, and should any technical issues arise, the board reschedules the examination for affected candidates.

NEWS

Foreign

Israeli strikes in northern Gaza kill at least 50, hospital says

At least 50 Palestinians have been killed in a series of Israeli air strikes in northern Gaza, a local hospital says.

The Indonesian hospital reported that 22 children and 15 women were among the dead after a number of homes in Jabalia town and refugee camp were hit overnight. A video shared online appeared to show at least a dozen bodies on the floor there.

The Israeli military said it

was looking into the reports. It had warned residents of Jabalia and neighbouring areas to evacuate on Tuesday after a Palestinian armed group launched rockets into Israel.

It came as the UN's humanitarian affairs chief urged members of the UN Security Council to take action to "prevent genocide" in Gaza.

Speaking at a meeting in New York on Tuesday, Tom Fletcher accused Israel of "de-

liberately and unashamedly imposing inhumane conditions on civilians".

He also called on Israel to lift its 10-week blockade on Gaza and criticised the Israeli-US plan to take over the distribution of humanitarian aid by using private companies, saying it was a "fig leaf for further violence and displacement" of Palestinians.

Israel's envoy to the UN, Danny Danon, said the accusations were "baseless and outrageous".

He insisted the existing system for aid was "broken" because it was being used to help Hamas's war effort - an allegation both the UN and the armed group have denied.

Local health officials said a total of 70 people were killed in Israeli strikes across Gaza on Wednesday, most of them around Jabalia.

Residents of the northern area reported hearing multiple explosions overnight, and videos shared by activists showed flames lighting up the sky.

As he clambered over the rubble of a collapsed building, Hadi Moqbel, 42, said several members of his family were killed.

"They fired two rockets, they told us the house of Moqbel [had been hit]," he told Reuters news agency.

"We came running, we saw body parts on the ground, chil-

dren killed, [a] woman killed and a baby killed... He was two months old."

On Tuesday night, the Israeli military issued what it described as a "final warning" to residents of Jabalia town, Jabalia camp and five neighbouring areas.

It ordered them to evacuate immediately to shelters in Gaza City, saying Israeli forces would "attack with great force any area from which rockets are launched".

Earlier, the military said three rockets launched from Gaza crossed into Israeli territory, triggering sirens in Israeli border communities and the town of Sderot. Two of the rockets were intercept-

ed by the Israeli air force and the third fell in an open area, it added.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an armed group allied to Hamas, said it launched the rockets in response to what it called "Zionist massacres".

Israel cut off all deliveries of aid and other supplies to Gaza on 2 March and resumed its offensive against Hamas on 18 March after the collapse of a two-month ceasefire.

The UN says 20% of the 2.1 million population has been displaced again, and that 70% of Gaza is now either within Israeli military "no-go" zones or under evacuation orders.

White South Africans going to US are cowards, Ramaphosa says

President Cyril Ramaphosa has called a group of 59 white South Africans who have moved to the US to resettle "cowards", saying "they'll be back soon".

The group of Afrikaners arrived in the US on Monday after President Donald Trump granted them refugee status, saying they faced racial discrimination.

But Ramaphosa said those who wanted to leave were not happy with efforts to address the inequities of the apartheid past, terming their relocation a "sad moment for them".

"As South Africans, we are resilient. We don't run away from our problems. We must stay here and solve our problems. When you run away you are a coward, and that's a real cowardly act," he added.

Trump and his close ally, South Africa-born Elon Musk, have said there was a "genocide" of white farmers in South Africa - a claim that has been widely discredited.

The US has also accused the South African government of seizing land from white farmers without paying compensation.

More than 30 years after the end of decades of rule by South Africa's white minority, black farmers own only a small fraction of the country's best farmland, with the majority still in white hands, leading to anger over the slow pace of change.

In January President Ramaphosa signed a controversial law allowing the government to seize privately owned land without compensation in certain circumstances, when it is deemed "equi-

table and in the public interest".

But the government says no land has yet been seized under the act.

Trump has offered to resettle the white Afrikaners, descendants of mostly Dutch settlers, saying they were fleeing a "terrible situation" in South Africa.

Speaking on Monday at an agricultural exhibition in the Free State province, Ramaphosa said the Afrikaners were moving to the US because they were not "favourably disposed" to efforts aimed at addressing the country's challenges.

"If you look at all national groups in our country, black and white, they've stayed in this country because it's our country and we must not run away from our problems. We must stay here and solve our problems," Ramaphosa said.

"I can bet you that they will be back soon because there is no country like South Africa," he added.

His "coward" remark angered some social media users, who condemned it as an insult to aggrieved white South Africans.

The group of Afrikaners were welcomed by top US officials who claimed they had been "living under a shadow of violence and terror" in South Africa.

"Welcome to the land of the free," Deputy Secretary of State Chris Landau said as he received the South Africans who landed at Dulles airport near Washington DC on Monday.

Some held young children and waved small American flags in the arrival area adorned with red, white and blue balloons on the walls.



ABOUT 59 WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS ARRIVED IN THE US ON MONDAY

Peru's prime minister resigns ahead of no-confidence vote

The prime minister of Peru, Gustavo Adrianzen, has resigned hours before he was due to face a no-confidence vote in Congress.

Members of Peru's Congress had called for the no-confidence vote after the recent kidnap and killing of 13 mine workers, which shocked the country.

Adrianzen's resignation is another blow to the embattled president, Dina Boluarte, who has seen her approval ratings plummet as crime rates in the

country have soared.

The resignation of the prime minister - the third to serve under Boluarte - forces the president to replace her entire cabinet, adding to Peru's political upheaval.

Under Peru's constitution, all ministers have to step down if the prime minister quits.

While the president can rename the same people to the posts they resigned from, she can only do so once a new prime minister is in place.

The collapse of the cabinet

comes at an already rocky time in Peruvian politics.

Shortly before Prime Minister Adrianzen announced his resignation, Boluarte had reshuffled her existing cabinet, announcing new ministers of finance, interior, and transport.

All three will now have to step down, just hours after being sworn in by the president.

The already low approval rating of President Boluarte - who was sworn in when the previous president, Pedro Castillo, was impeached - have

fallen further as Peruvians grow increasingly impatient at what they say is her failure to tackle crime.

In recent months, hundreds of people have taken to the streets in protest at the growing problem of extortion, as gangs increasingly demand payments even from the smallest businesses, including transport workers.

Dressed in white, they demanded "an immediate answer to combat extortion and targeted killings".

Military rulers in Mali dissolve all political parties

Mali's military junta has dissolved all political parties in the country amid a growing crackdown on dissent since the army seized power.

"All meetings of members of political parties and organisations of a political character are dissolved across the national territory," according to a presidential decree read out on state TV on Tuesday.

It was signed by military leader Assimi Goita, who seized power after coups in 2020 and 2021 and is due to stay in pow-

er for at least another five years despite pledges to hold elections.

The move is expected to spark fresh resistance by political parties who have been demanding the country returns to democratic rule.

Since last year, the military authorities have intensified a crackdown on political activity.

Last week, following a rare pro-democracy protest, two opposition leaders were abducted by armed men saying they were police officers. The authorities have not commented on the reported arrests.

A national conference organised by the regime - but boycotted by leading opposition parties - last month recommended naming Gen Goita as president until 2030.

The move sparked condemnation from opposition figures and human rights groups. The junta originally committed to holding elections in February 2022.

The presidential decree warned Malians not to ignore the dissolution of political parties but did not outline any penalties.

It said that anyone working

in a political or administrative role could "continue their duties without party affiliation".

The order follows the suspension of all political activity - another recommendation from the national conference - which sparked uproar among the opposition.

A coalition of a hundred parties had planned a protest against the transitional authorities last week but postponed it following the suspension of political activities.

Opposition leaders have condemned the dissolution of polit-

ical parties.

"No matter how hard they try to make you invisible, your value doesn't depend on their recognition," Nouhoum Togo, president of the Union for the Safeguarding of the Republic (USR) party, posted on social media.

Moussa Mara, a former prime minister and leader of the Yelema Party, described the junta's restrictions as dealing "a severe blow to the reconciliation efforts initiated last year".

Analyst Ulf Laessing said the country's military leaders were trying to "break with old elites

who had been in charge since independence and were seen as very close to former colonial power France".

Since taking power, the junta leader has formed an alliance with coup leaders in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, pivoting the region towards Russia after drastically reducing ties with former colonial power France.

Gen Goita has also withdrawn Mali from the regional grouping Ecowas over its demands to restore democratic rule. Burkina Faso and Niger have also left the grouping.

Foreign

NEWS

Human rights groups warn of 'surge' in migrant worker deaths in Saudi Arabia

Human rights groups are warning of a "surge" of deaths of migrant construction workers in Saudi Arabia, as it prepares to host the World Cup in 2034.

Labourers are already dying from preventable workplace accidents in the country, according to Human Rights

Watch and FairSquare which have both published reports.

Many such deaths are wrongly classified as having occurred due to natural causes and the families of workers are not compensated, the reports say.

Both groups have called on the Saudi Authorities to ensure basic safety protections for the coun-

try's huge migrant work-force.

"The 2034 Saudi World Cup will be the largest and most expensive ever, but it could also have the highest cost in human lives, as millions of migrant workers build infrastructure, including 11 new stadiums, a rail and transit network, and 185,000 hotel rooms," Minky Worden,

director of Global Initiatives at Human Rights Watch, said.

The warnings come a day after the President of FIFA, Gianni Infantino, visited the country along with Donald Trump - attending a US-Saudi investment forum.

FIFA - football's global governing body - says it has a "steadfast commitment to the

protection and promotion of human rights in the context of its operations."

But Human Rights Watch has accused FIFA of failing to learn lessons from migrant worker deaths in the lead-up to the World Cup in Qatar in 2022.

Data on migrant deaths is hard to come by in a country where human rights groups have very limited access and labour unions are banned.

But Human Rights Watch interviewed the families of 31 workers from Bangladesh, India and Nepal who fell from heights, were crushed or decapitated by heavy machinery or were electrocuted.

Heat is another major concern, as Saudi Arabia ramps up construction work in preparation for hosting the 2034 tournament.

In March, a Pakistani foreman, Muhammad Arshad, was reported to have fallen from a construction site at a stadium being built in the eastern city of Al Khobar - the first death related to the World Cup.

Last year, the Saudi government said that there had been "tangible achievements" in occupational health and safety,

with rates of deaths and injuries decreasing.

FIFA also praised "significant steps" taken by Saudi Arabia to reform its labour laws since 2018.

But the global construction worker's union, BWI, said there had been an "alarming rise" in accidents that could have been prevented.

"These are the result of systematic negligence, corruption and inadequate oversight and accountability," said BWI General Secretary, Ambet Yuson.

And Saudi medical authorities rarely conduct autopsies to establish the exact cause of migrant workers' deaths, according to FairSquare.

"Hundreds of thousands of young men, many of whom have young families, are being pitched into a labour system that poses a serious risk to their lives, a medical system that doesn't have the capacity to determine the cause of their deaths, and a political system that doesn't appear to either protect them or find out how they died, let alone compensate the families shattered by Saudi Arabia's negligence," FairSquare co-director James Lynch said.



The Saudi government says there have been improvements to its occupational health and safety, but rights groups are sceptical of the changes.

Plane crash victims' families file complaint against Jeju Air CEO

Some families of those killed in a Jeju Air plane crash last December have filed a criminal complaint against 15 people, including South Korea's transport minister and the airline's CEO, for professional negligence.

The 72 bereaved relatives are calling for a more thorough investigation into the crash, which killed 179 of the 181 people on board - making it the deadliest plane crash on South Korean soil.

The crash was "not a simple accident", they allege, but a "major civic disaster caused by negligent management of preventable risks".

Nearly five months on, authorities are still studying what may

have caused the plane to crash-land at Muan International Airport and then burst into flames.

The police had already opened a criminal investigation before this latest complaint, and barred Jeju Air CEO Kim E-bae from leaving the country, but no one has been indicted over the incident.

One of the relatives, Kim Da-hye, denounced the "lack of progress" in investigations.

"We are filled with deep anger and despair. Having taken this extraordinary measure of filing a criminal complaint, we will not give up and will continue to pursue the truth," Mr Kim said

in a statement to the media.

Among the 15 people named in the complaint were government officials, airline officials and airport staff responsible for construction, supervision, facility management and bird control.

The complaint filed on Tuesday raises questions around the circumstances of the crash, including whether air traffic control responded appropriately and whether the reinforcement of a mound at the end of the runway violated regulations.

The aircraft, a Boeing 737-800, took off from the Thai capital of Bangkok on the morning of 29 December, and was flying

to Muan in South Korea.

Five minutes after the pilots made contact with Muan International Airport, they reported striking a bird and declared a mayday signal.

The pilots then tried to land from the opposite direction, during which the aircraft belly-landed without its landing gear deployed. It later overran the runway, slammed into a concrete structure and exploded.

Earlier this year, investigators said they found bird feathers in both engines of the jet, but did not conclude the extent to which the bird strike was a contributing factor.

What did Erik and Lyle Menendez do and when could they be released?

In 1989, brothers Lyle and Erik Menendez killed their parents by shooting them multiple times at close range at their mansion in Beverly Hills.

They were found guilty of first-degree murder and conspiracy to murder in 1996, and sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

On Tuesday, a Los Angeles judge reduced their sentence, making them eligible for parole.

There has been renewed public interest in the case after a new Netflix drama, *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story*, was released in September.

Why was there a hearing to resentence the brothers?

Last year, the previous district attorney of Los Angeles, George Gascón, requested a change to the brothers' sentence from life without the possibility of parole to 50 years to life.

The hearing was put to Los Angeles County superior court Judge Michael Jesic on Tuesday who resentenced the brothers. "I do believe they've done enough in the past 35 years that they should get that chance," he said, concluding a day-long hearing.

The brothers are eligible for parole under California's youthful offender law which allows individuals who committed crimes before the age of 26 to seek a reduced sentence.

The siblings were aged 18 and 21 at the time. They are now aged 54 and 57.

What happened at the hearing? During the hearing, family

members and a former fellow inmate were among those who testified in support of the resentencing.

People who worked with the brothers in prison spoke about the educational courses they had completed and how they created a hospice initiative for the elderly and sick.

The district attorney's office, which fiercely opposes a lower sentence, said the brothers have continued to "make excuses" for their conduct instead of taking full responsibility and were not rehabilitated.

The brothers spoke to the court via video and apologised for their actions.

They also spoke about their hopes of working with sex abuse victims and helping those incarcerated if they were given a second chance outside prison.

Three possible paths to freedom: What's next for the Menendez brothers?

Menendez brothers feel 'hope' for parole after decades in jail

What happens next? The California parole board will now decide whether to release the brothers from prison.

Separately, the state's governor, Gavin Newsom, is considering a request from the brothers for clemency. If approved, it could lead to a reduced sentence or a pardon.

Governor Newsom requested that the parole board conduct a risk assessment that examines whether the brothers pose a risk to the general public if released.

European Commission wrong to deny release of von der Leyen messages, court says

The European Commission was wrong to refuse to release text messages sent by Ursula von der Leyen to the head of Pfizer during negotiations to secure Covid-19 vaccines, the EU's top court has ruled.

The General Court said the commission had not given a plausible explanation as to why the exchanges between its president and Pfizer's Albert Bourla could not be made public when an investigative journalist requested them in 2021.

That year, Pfizer signed billions of euros in vaccine contracts with the EU, including a

deal for 1.8bn extra doses.

The content of the messages between von der Leyen and Mr Bourla remains secret, in a simmering case that has become known in Brussels as Pfizergate.

Anti-corruption group Transparency International has hailed the European Court's ruling as a "landmark victory for transparency in the EU", adding that it should serve as a catalyst to put an end to a "restrictive attitude to freedom of information".

Von der Leyen became Commission president in 2019, and within a year faced the task of leading the EU's response to the

Covid pandemic.

She won a second five-year term late last year. Wednesday's ruling threatens to damage her reputation, because of the apparent lack of transparency surrounding the Pfizer vaccine deal, in which she played such a significant role.

The Commission said it would closely study the ruling and consider its next steps, but it insisted that transparency had "always been of paramount importance".

The controversy erupted in April 2021, when New York Times journalist Matina Stevis revealed how Ursula von der

Leyen had negotiated privately with the Pfizer boss after his German partner BioNTech won regulatory approval for its Covid drug.

The article spurred investigative journalist Alexander Fantar, who worked for a German publication, to use a Freedom of Information request to see the exchange of messages between January 2021 and May 2022. But the European Commission turned him down, saying it did not have the documents.

Under the Commission's transparency rules, all staff including the president, have to archive their documents.

Sports

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

NPFL: Apugo congratulates Abia Warriors on continental ticket

Abia Warriors over the weekend defeated Elkanemi Warriors by 2-1 thus securing ticket to play in the CAF Confederation Cup.

Interestingly, this would be the first time the Umuahia based team will be campaigning in the continent for the first time after gaining promotion into the Nigeria top flight league since 2013.

Speaking on the feat, Apugo said he is proud of his hometown club, Abia Warriors and the club president, John Obuh, who he described as one who has a lot of passion for the round leather game.

"This is a big win for all Abians, a big congratulations to the team and am confident they would make a mark in their debut season on the continent."



Morocco's clash with Egypt 'early continental final' Egypt U-20 coach, Osama Nabih

Egypt U-20 coach Osama Nabih has described his side's Africa U-20 Cup of Nations semi-final against Morocco as a "North African derby" and an "early continental final."

The two teams, that have already secured qualification for the FIFA U-20 World Cup in Chile this October, will meet on Thursday at the Air Defense Stadium in Cairo.

"Securing a World Cup ticket has given us stability and eased a lot of pressure," Nabih told the pre-match news conference on Wednesday.

"Our match with Morocco is a tough North African derby and an early continental final. We are facing a strong and organized opponent that has shown its strength on both the African and global stage," he added.

Nabih stressed his team's determination to advance to the final, promising a committed performance.

"We aim to deliver a match worthy of Egypt's name. We will defend our legitimate dreams with strength and determination and fight to keep our African

ambitions alive," he stated

The Egypt coach highlighted the competitiveness of the tournament, noting the presence of Nigeria, South Africa, and Morocco alongside Egypt in the last four.

"This shows how balanced the competition is. If these four had been in the same group, two would have exited early," he said.

He concluded by praising his squad's mentality, saying they had shown character throughout the tournament and calling on them to maintain their fighting spirit against Morocco.

Nigeria will confront South Africa in the other semi-finals encounter tagged battle of the West against South.

Nigeria eliminated the defending champions Senegal while South Africa stopped Sierra Leone in the quarter finals stage.

Coach Aliyu Zubairu has assured that the Nigeria U20 squad will be even better when they take on South Africa's Amajita in the first semi-final of the

CONTINUES ON PG 7 >>>

National Sports Festival: 100-man contingent to represent niger state in ogun state

Niger state Commissioner for Youth and Sports, Alhaji Yahya Ibrahim Gulbin-Boka has said that, a 100-man contingent, including coaches and officials will be representing Niger State at the 22nd edition of National Sports Festival (NSF) taking place in Ogun state.

The Commissioner disclosed this when officials of the Sports Writers Association of (SWAN), visited his office for an up-date on preparations and readiness of the state to participate in this year's sports fiesta.

Gulbin-Boka who told the SWAN officials that Niger state will feature in 13 different sporting events also hinted that the state performed creditably well in the zonal eliminations which took place in Jos, Plateau state and is good to go for the annual sports festival.

The Commissioner told the Sports Writers, "I can confirm to you now that we have 100-man contingent, including coaches and officials representing to represent Niger state in the multi-sport events".

"Niger State will feature 13 different sports, including lawn tennis, athletic, Squash, Scrabble, Table tennis, Badminton, Taekwondo, handball and few others", he said.

Gulbin-Boka told the SWAN officials, "As you can see, we are on making final arrangements for the contingent to start taking off any moment from now".

Meanwhile, the Commissioner has expressed appreciation to sports philanthropists and stakeholders, including SWAN for

supporting the overall growth and development of sports.

Though there were noticeable hitches in the overall preparations, Gulbin-Boka expressed optimism that Niger state would make impressive outing in the fiesta.

Nigeria to Host World Athletics Africa Road Running Conference, as NSC Formulates Organizing Committee

As part preparation for Nigeria's hosting of the upcoming World Athletics Africa Road Running Conference, the National Sports Commission (NSC) has constituted the event's Organizing Committee, naming Chief Solomon Ogba, First Vice President of the Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC), as the Chairman.

The Committee comprises distinguished sports administrators and seasoned professionals drawn from both the sports industry and corporate sector.

Chairman of the NSC, Malam Shehu Dikko, emphasized the careful selection process behind the committee's composition.

"The members of the Committee were meticulously selected because of their professionalism and tested qualities, and I have no doubt that they will all bring their wealth of experience to bear to ensure we stage a befitting Road Running conference which will be the first of its kind in the country," he said.

Director General of the Commission, Hon. Bukola Olopade, added that hosting the conference will open doors for more international events in Nigeria.

"This is another milestone for refocusing and resetting our Sports developmental goals, and I have no doubt that we have picked a good team to achieve the successful hosting of the Conference," the DG stated.

Full list of committee members:

1. Chief Solomon Ogba – Chairman
2. Mr. Segun Ogunleye – Member (Corporate Nigeria)
3. Mrs. Oge Kasie-Nwachukwu – Member (Corporate Nigeria)
4. Mr. Danladi Verheijen – Member (Corporate Nigeria)



5. Ms. Aku Aghazu – Member
6. Ms. Otonye Iworima – Member
7. Mr. Travih Nunayon – Member
8. Mr. Yusuf Ali – Member
9. Mr. Femi Adeniran – Member (Corporate Nigeria)
10. Ms. Aisha Shuaibu – Member
11. Mr. Salihu Abubakar – Member
12. Mr. Kunle Solaja – Member
13. Mr. Dare Esan – Member
14. Ms. Tayo Popoola – Member
15. Mr. Israel Iwang – Secretary

Rwanda kicks out Zimbabwe from 2026 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup race to the finals

● To confront Nigeria in the next round in September

Rwanda held Zimbabwe to a goalless draw at Kigali Pele Stadium on Wednesday, to advance into the second round of the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup 2026 qualifiers.

The Ladies from the 'Land of a thousands hills' had beaten Zimbabwe 2-1 in the first leg on May 11, and a draw in the second leg at the same ground was enough to qualify for the next round where they will face Nigeria in September.

Both matches were played at in Rwanda as Zimbabwe failed to present a stadium that meets standards required by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and FIFA.

During the second leg, both teams stuck with a more cautious approach while also creating a host of scoring oppor-

tunities but neither side could find the back of the net.

Zimbabwe piled pressure on Mbungo's girls in the final 10 minutes but Rwandan young goalkeeper Joana Maombi held on to keep a clean sheet.

QUALIFICATION FORMAT

After four qualifying rounds,

the top four teams out of the 38 which started the qualifying campaign will represent Africa in the 12th edition of the U-20 Women's World Cup in Poland from September 5-27, 2026.

Cameroon, Ghana, Morocco and Nigeria represented Africa in the last edition in Colombia in 2024.



Sports

The Nigerian
Observer
...that the people may know

Osimhen fires Galatasaray to Turkish Cup title with brace against Trabzonspor

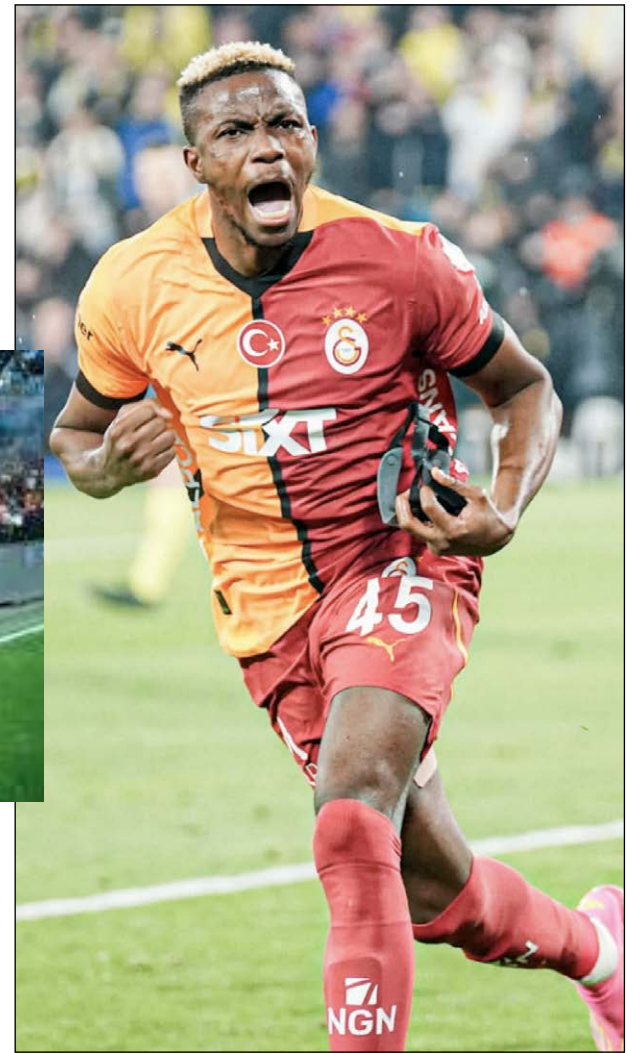
Super Eagles striker Victor Osimhen scored an impressive brace to lead Galatasaray to a thrilling 3-0 win over Trabzonspor at the Gaziantep Stadium, securing their 19th Turkish Cup title and their first since 2019.

Osimhen had played a key role in Galatasaray's journey to the final, netting both goals in their hard-fought 2-1 quarter-final win against Fenerbahçe, and contributing a goal and an assist in the commanding 5-1 semi-final victory over Konyaspor.

Galatasaray, however, needed

to defeat a determined Trabzonspor side aiming to go one better after finishing as runners-up last season, having lost the cup to Besiktas. The match also featured Osimhen going head-to-head against fellow Nigerian Anthony Nwakaeme, who was eager to mark his return to Trabzonspor with silverware.

Galatasaray wasted no time in taking control of the cup final, as Yunus Akgün's cutback picked out Baris Alper Yilmaz, who fired home a superb first-time strike to put his side ahead in the fifth minute



Nigeria, Cameroon made it to the round of NPFL 25: Remo Stars set to hold champions parade

The 2024/2025 Nigeria Premier Football League, NPFL, champions, Remo Stars, have mapped out plans to organise a champions parade, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

A statement by the club said that a massive celebration is on the horizon for a champions parade through key towns in Remo land after clinching a historic league title – the club's first top-flight championship.

The parade will take place on Friday, May 16, 2025, beginning at 9AM, as thousands of fans will line the route to celebrate this landmark achievement in Nigerian football.

According to the club, the victory route is designed to touch the heart of Remo communities, starting from: Our Saviour's Anglican Church, Aiyeye Junction, Gateway International Stadium, Sagamu, Isale Oko, Ita Oba, Ijoku Road, Akarigbo Palace, Remo Sec-

ondary School, Sagamu/Iperu Road, Iperu/Ilishan Road, Ilishan Roundabout, Obafemi Awolowo Avenue and ending at Remo Stars Stadium, Ikenne.

The statement further urged fans to plan, arrive early, and line the entire route to create an unforgettable atmosphere for the players, technical team,

and supporters, adding that local security agencies will be on the ground to maintain a peaceful and celebratory environment



Morocco's clash with Egypt 'early continental final'...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 6

ongoing CAF U20 Cup of Nations in the city of Ismailia on Thursday.

"I believe we are going to have a great semi-final against the South Africans. I can guarantee that our approach will be much better, as the anxiety of whether or not we will earn a FIFA World Cup ticket is no longer there. It was a tense 120 minutes for ourselves and the defending champions on Monday.

"We have the World Cup ticket now and are quite happy. Against South Africa, we will play with great determination and composure, as we aim for

the trophy, but without the tense atmosphere around the last match. Of course, we know the little matter of the rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa and what the game means, and we will go in there to do a real battle," Zubairu said.

The man who led El-Kanemi Warriors of Maiduguri to win last year's President Federation Cup competition believes his team has improved considerably since the first match against Tunisia on the first day of May.

"We can all see that the team has improved, and actually getting better with each match. We will go all out against the South Africans."

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 Captain's 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 Eba-retonbofa by Professor Waziri

Erameh, underscoring the initiative's alignment with top-level golfing leadership.

Another key moment came when the overall men's tournament winner, Hon. Andy Momodu, 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 Basse, Lead Consultant for the AutoVi-

sion 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 intro-

duced to more courses and more players, the game's future looks not only sharper, but smarter.



FEATURE

Six months of Okpebholo's common sense governance

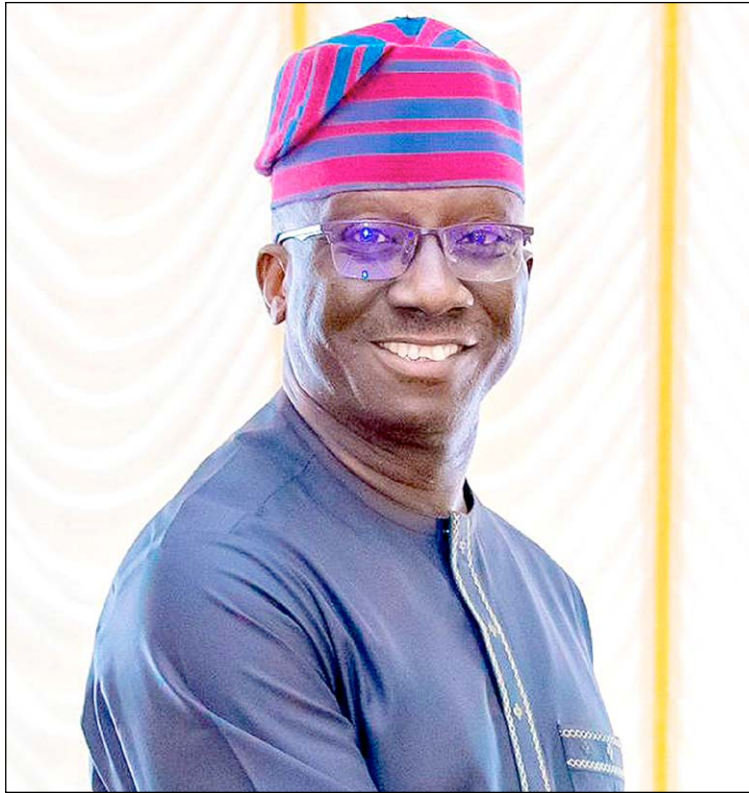
ARTICLES BY: FRED ITUA

It is often said that "when the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind." Six months after stepping into the stormy shoes of governance, Senator Monday Okpebholo has proven that leadership is not about noise but about substance. He did not come in as a messiah with lofty promises wrapped in sweet speeches. Instead, he came with a broom, a hoe, and a plan—to clear the debris of the past and rebuild Edo State with his hands in the soil and his ears to the ground.

To understand the significance of Okpebholo's leadership, one must revisit where Edo has come from. For eight years, the people of Edo were like tenants in their own house. Governance became a monologue—a conversation among the elite, with little regard for the voices of ordinary citizens. Development was spoken of in press conferences but absent on the streets. Roads were death traps. Civil servants were demoralized. Food became gold in the market. Schools were in ruins. Hospitals were gasping for breath. Security became a private affair. The people were left holding the empty shell of promises.

But Governor Monday Okpebholo came in like a farmer who understands that no matter how lush a forest looks, it cannot feed a hungry man. He is going back to the basics—fixing what matters. In just six months, a fresh wind of responsible governance is blowing through the state. The drums of disconnected leadership have gone silent, and the rhythm of accountability has taken over.

Governor Okpebholo has chosen the narrow path—a path often ignored by those who prefer skyscrapers in the sky to pothole-free roads. He understands that no man eats blueprints. The real test of governance is not in ribbon-cutting ceremonies but in whether a farmer in Irukpen can get his produce to



OKPEBHOLO

the market without getting stuck in the mud, or whether a civil servant in Ikpesi can afford a meal after salary.

From day one, Governor Okpebholo made it clear that he would not be governed by ego or revenge. Unlike his predecessor, who often seemed more interested in vendettas than value, the current governor has shown maturity. He is fixing roads, not picking fights. He is restoring dignity, not renaming institutions to settle political scores.

One of the greatest indicators of a functioning government is the strength of its civil service. For years, Edo's civil service was reduced to a ghost town. The previous administration preferred

consultants who drained the system without transferring knowledge. The state became a feeding ground for outsiders while the real engine room of governance—the civil servants—were sidelined and starved of opportunities.

Governor Okpebholo saw the rot and went to work. He began recruiting qualified personnel, reversing the decay. The handover chaos with the state's IT systems is a metaphor for how broken things were. Obaseki's IT consultant refused to release login details and digital assets of the state, exposing a system built on control rather than continuity. But Okpebholo's team rolled up their sleeves and began the slow but steady

process of digital recovery. "When a pot breaks, you don't cry over the clay—you mold another one."

When Okpebholo said during his campaign that "Edo will become a construction site," many dismissed it as political talk. But he has matched words with action. Roads that had become symbols of abandonment are being rehabilitated. He is not waiting for the federal government to fix federal roads. He understands that a bad road doesn't ask if it's federal or state before it kills.

In Esanland, in Edo South, and in Edo North—construction is ongoing. Rural communities are being reconnected. Markets are springing to life. Mobility is no longer a punishment. The difference is as clear as day. "A man who repairs the path to his neighbor's farm is planting goodwill for the next harvest."

Perhaps the most shameful chapter of the past government was its treatment of education. Tertiary institutions were reduced to battlegrounds. Ambrose Alli University (AAU), once a proud academic citadel, became a theater of strikes. Lecturers became street protesters. Monthly subvention were slashed from respect to ridicule—down to 41 million naira. A governing council was denied the school; instead, a so-called Special Intervention Team (SIT) took over, adding insult to injury.

Governor Okpebholo walked into that mess and began cleaning house. He restored funding and upped it. He listened to stakeholders. He gave AAU a chance to breathe again. Today, lecturers are in their classrooms, not on the streets. The ghost of vendetta is giving way to the light of vision. "When a leader fights knowledge, ignorance wins." Okpebholo knows better.

In a time when the cost of living is squeezing the average Nigerian, food security cannot be treated as a campaign slogan. Okpebholo has backed his words with action. Over N70 billion

was earmarked in the state budget for agriculture. Thousands of hectares of arable land have been acquired across Edo North, Central, and South. Farmers are being empowered. Food production is being scaled.

This is not trial and error. It is intentional policy. He understands that "he who controls the seeds controls the stomachs." The government is partnering with stakeholders to ensure that Edo does not just survive but thrives as a food-producing state.

A governor's most sacred duty is the safety of his people. Insecurity had eaten deep into Edo's peace—cultism, kidnapping, herdsmen encroachment. But Governor Okpebholo did not sit behind a desk issuing statements. He signed laws. He enforced them. Houses linked to cultism and kidnapping were demolished. Arrests were made. Awareness campaigns were launched. Citizens began to feel the presence of government again.

With the Anti-Cultism and Anti-Kidnapping Laws in place and their enforcement in motion, a new message has been sent to criminal elements: "Edo is no longer a safe haven for evil."

Six months may seem short in the life of a government, but it is enough to take a bearing. Governor Okpebholo is not performing magic. He is simply returning to common sense governance—listening, acting, and staying connected to the people. He is proving that "you don't need a megaphone to build a legacy—just results."

Edo State is not perfect. There are still battles to fight, holes to fill, and dreams to fund. But one thing is clear: the train has left the station, and it is headed in the right direction. For the first time in years, Edo people are beginning to believe again—not in empty slogans, but in the power of sincere, focused leadership.

And that, in itself, is a victory worth celebrating.

Oba ghatto kpere, Ise!

Debunking Ifaluyi-Isibor's criticism of Okpebholo's first 6 mths in Office

It is unfortunate, though not surprising, that Ogbuide Ifaluyi-Isibor, a former commissioner under the immediate-past administration, has once again chosen the path of bitter rhetoric and false commentary in his latest publication, "Six Months With Plenty Movement(d) With No Tangible Thrust Applied (f) and So, Zero Work (W) Done." His attempt to discredit Governor Monday Okpebholo's focused, people-centered governance within just six months reveals either a lack of sincere engagement with the current realities or an intentional display of political mischief.

We wish to remind Mr. Ifaluyi-Isibor that governance is not about noise-making or desperate media shows. It is about measurable impact, people-centered reforms, and a deliberate push to correct years of administrative misalignment—especially in a state where consultants took over core civil service functions and demoralized career civil servants.

Unlike the administration that Mr. Ifaluyi-Isibor served—which outsourced key roles in the civil service to external consultants who earned more and delivered less—Governor Okpebholo has brought relief and dignity back to the Edo workforce.

1. Prompt Payment of Salaries: Under this administration, workers receive their salaries on or before the 26th of each month. April 2025 salaries were even paid early before Easter.

2. 13th Month Salary: In a bold and generous move, the Governor paid a 13th month salary to all civil servants in December—a gesture that has not only boosted morale but also demonstrated a genuine interest in workers' welfare.

3. Merit-Based Appointments: For the first time in many years, Permanent Secretaries have been appointed from within the civil service, not parachuted from private interests. This has restored faith, loyalty, and upward

mobility within the service.

4. Removal of Suffocating Consultants: The Governor has ended the reign of consultants who exploited the system and stifled innovation. Today, civil servants are doing the work they were trained to do, and they're doing it proudly and efficiently.

5. Salary Upgrade to N75,000: Edo State is among the very few states in Nigeria to increase its minimum wage to N75,000. While others are still debating wage adjustments, Governor Okpebholo acted. Talk, they say, is cheap; leadership is action.

6. Employment of 1,000 Cleaners: Rather than outsource sanitation to middlemen who paid peanuts, this government employed 1,000 cleaners directly into the civil service at full minimum wage. No more job insecurity. No more exploitation.

7. Filling of Critical Vacancies: In the last six months, this government has

initiated mass recruitment into essential sectors. Teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, and administrators are being recruited. Over 2,000 Edo citizens are gaining meaningful civil service employment. That is not "zero work"—that is transformation in motion.

Ogbuide's description of a comatose civil service is both insulting and misleading. Contrary to his claims, the civil service has witnessed a revival in work ethics, punctuality, and efficiency. What was "paperless" before was merely a PR gimmick cloaked in elite exclusion. Governor Okpebholo has matched digital innovation with human capacity development, ensuring that digital tools are actually improving service delivery—not just serving as window-dressing.

Edo's position in national examination ranking is not determined by one man's opinion in six months. Declines, where they exist, are the results of years of policy gaps that the present government is

now fixing. With new teachers employed, and infrastructural upgrades being made, Edo's education sector is rising again.

On health, the recruitment of doctors and nurses, as well as the ongoing rehabilitation of primary healthcare centers across the state, shows clearly where this government's priorities lie—in saving lives, not scoring political points.

The only reference Ogbuide could make to any current economic success is to attribute it to the past administration. But he fails to mention that the current administration has taken deliberate steps to retain and expand investment portfolios in agriculture and oil palm development. Rather than destroy what was built, Governor Okpebholo is consolidating gains and creating room for more private-sector partnerships across agro-processing, infrastructure, and small business support.

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