

\$552m HOPE-EDU programme targets 29m pupils, 500,000 teachers nationwide

LAGOS
The Federal Government has unveiled a \$552.18 million HOPE-EDU programme aimed at transforming Nigeria's basic education system, boosting learning outcomes and expanding access for millions of children across the country. The initiative, a collaboration between the Federal Ministry

of Education, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), is supported by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). It is projected to benefit more than 29 million children, strengthen the capacity of 500,000 teachers and deliver 13,000 new classrooms nationwide.

Unveiling the programme on Wednesday in Lagos during a three-day sensitization workshop for Commissioners for Education, SUBEB chairmen and frontline implementers, UBEC Executive Secretary, Dr Aisha Garba, described the intervention as a historic opportunity to tackle long-standing challenges in the basic education sector. She said the programme aligns with President Bola

Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and prioritises foundational learning, teacher development, provision of quality instructional materials and improved access for vulnerable groups. "These are not abstract goals; they are actionable interventions. While the Federal Ministry of Education and UBEC will provide resources and technical support, the real work lies with

states and communities, which will drive needs assessments, community engagement and implementation," she said. Garba stressed the need for transparency and accountability, disclosing that UBEC would deploy digital dashboards to monitor spending, track implementation progress and ensure delivery of set milestones. She reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to

inclusive education, particularly for children with special needs, girls, those from poor households and learners in conflict-affected areas. "Their education is not charity; it is the cornerstone of our democracy and economy," she said, urging stakeholders to develop actionable plans capable of delivering measurable

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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IPAC rejects Electoral Act 2026

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N'Central APC backs Tinubu as sole presidential candidate

● **As APC Forum endorses Tinubu, Mutfwang for 2nd term**

LAFIA
In a decisive show of unity, the All Progressives Congress (APC) North Central Zone yesterday adopted President Bola Tinubu as its sole candidate for the 2027 general elections. The endorsement came at the party's zonal congress in

Lafia, Nasarawa State, following a motion moved by Senator George Akume, Secretary to the Government of the Federation. Akume hailed the North Central as a unifying force in Nigeria, pivotal to national stability and the APC's electoral success. "With the calibre of politi-

cians and grassroots support I have seen here, I am confident that the North Central will deliver the highest number of votes for President Bola Tinubu in 2027," Akume said, urging party members to intensify voter registration and mobilisation efforts. He also cited ongoing economic reforms and national development as

hallmarks of Tinubu's administration. The motion was seconded by Governor Abdullahi Sule of Nasarawa State, who credited the President's economic policies with enabling some state governments to implement projects without resorting to borrowing. "For that reason, I second

the motion for the North Central Zone to adopt President Tinubu as our sole candidate," Sule said. Earlier, Sule praised the APC national leadership for promoting unity and growth, highlighting that the party continued to attract more governors nationwide. He noted that the successful conduct of ward, local government, and state congresses reflected the party's internal cohesion.

Representing APC National Chairman Professor Nantawe Yilwatda, Deputy National Secretary Professor Abdulkarim Kana described the North Central as a "political bridge" and urged newly inaugurated zonal officers to deepen grassroots engagement and prepare for the 2027 elections. Yilwatda also invited party members to the APC National Convention scheduled for March 26-28 at Eagle Square, Abuja. Funsho Olumoko, Chairman of the North Central Zonal Congress Committee, assured delegates that the exercise was conducted transparently and in line with party guidelines and

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APC SOUTHWEST ZONAL CONGRESS:
L-R: Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Dr Obafemi Hamzat; Governor Biodun Oyebanji of Ekiti State, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State; APC National Vice Chairman, South-West, Isaac Kekemeke; Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun State; Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa of Ondo State; Senate Leader, Opeyemi Bamidele and others, during the APC Southwest Zonal Congress in Lagos on Wednesday.

The Nigerian Observer comeback: Staff get one-week ultimatum as mgt pushes for return to newsstand

BENIN CITY
As momentum builds for the return of The Nigerian Observer to newsstands, the General Manager of Bendel Newspapers Corporation (BNC), Hon. Peter Odiboh, has issued a one-week ultimatum to staff to resume duties or face sanctions. At a strategic meeting held at the corporation's conference room, Odiboh charged Heads of Department (HODs) to immediately reactivate their units and mobilise staff towards ensuring

that the hardcopy of the newspaper hits the newsstand next week. The meeting comes on the heels of the successful test run of the organisation's high-capacity printing press, signalling what management describes as the final phase of preparations for the paper's relaunch. Odiboh assured workers of the full backing of the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo, stressing that government remains committed to reviving the newspaper and

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CAROLINE AMEH

ABUJA

The Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) has slammed the Electoral Act 2026, describing it as a major setback to Nigeria's democratic progress and demanding immediate amendments ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Speaking at a stakeholders' meeting with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and political party leaders in Abuja, IPAC National Chairman, Yusuf Mamman Dantalle, warned that the current law could "impede,

weaken, and destabilise" the country's democratic gains if left unchanged.

Dantalle expressed disappointment that, despite widespread public participation during reform hearings, the final legislation failed to reflect Nigerians' expectations.

He criticised provisions mandating direct primaries, arguing they infringe on party autonomy, and called for the reinstatement of indirect primaries.

The council also raised concerns over the tight April 2026 deadline for political parties to submit membership registers,

IPAC rejects Electoral Act 2026

● Calls for urgent reforms ahead of 2027 polls

including National Identification Numbers (NIN), calling the directive unrealistic and exclusionary.

On electoral transparency, IPAC insisted that election results must be electronically transmitted immediately at polling units through the IReV

portal, highlighting issues observed in the 2023 polls.

The council also faulted weakened penalties for vote buying and renewed calls for an Electoral Offences Commission to prosecute offenders.

IPAC disclosed that it has formally petitioned the Na-

tional Assembly to repeal the Electoral Act 2026 and urged international partners to support democratic reforms.

The council also called on INEC to enhance operational readiness ahead of upcoming governorship elections in Ekiti and Osun states, particularly

in deploying BVAS and IReV technologies.

Dantalle stressed that restoring public trust in the electoral system is critical to curbing voter apathy and ensuring credible elections, reaffirming IPAC's commitment to political stability and democratic development.

The Nigerian Observer comeback: Staff...

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sustaining its operations.

He commended staff for their resilience in keeping the publication alive through online and electronic editions despite difficult working conditions, expressing optimism that the organisation was on the verge of a turnaround.

"We need all departments to collaborate to achieve our common goal of returning our newspaper to the newsstand next week," he said.

"The machines have been tested for over one hour and are in good condition. Now is the time for full mobilisation."

The BNC boss directed all HODs to recall their staff and brief them on the new developments, warning that continued absence from duty would no longer be tolerated.

"The government will not continue to pay salaries without corresponding output. Any staff who fails to return to work will have their salaries stopped," he warned, adding that while management would not victimise anyone, it would not condone redundancy or indiscipline.

He emphasised that restoring salaries after suspension would be more difficult than stopping them, urging workers to take the directive seriously and justify the wages they receive from the Edo State Government.

Odiboh disclosed that he had held extensive consultations with Governor Okpebholo, who granted approval for the revival strategy and pledged necessary support.

According to him, the governor's response has rekindled hope for the organisation, its workforce, and loyal readers across the state.

He further revealed that the newspaper would initially resume publication twice weekly — on Mondays and Thursdays as part of a phased relaunch plan.

Odiboh also assured that the newspaper would undergo restructuring, reorganisation and a comprehensive relaunch aimed at restoring its pride of place in the media industry.

In his remarks, the Editor of The Nigerian Observer, Mr Andy Egbon, praised the General Manager's proactive leadership, noting that tangible progress had already been recorded since his assumption of office.

"Your strategic engagements have yielded results. From meeting staff to bringing in engineers and contractors to revive the machines, we are now at the stage of cleaning up for full production," he said.

Other staff members, including Reymond Osogbe, Hameed Braimah and Roland Osakue, also commended the renewed drive within the organisation, describing it as a breath of fresh air.

They, however, appealed for the recruitment of additional personnel to address manpower shortages.

Ijioma Umeh, on his part, called attention to the inactivity of labour unions within the organisation and urged management to take steps to revitalise them, noting that only the cooperative society remains functional.

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improvements in foundational learning.

The sensitization exercise, designed to align states with the programme's implementation framework as contained in the Programme Appraisal

Document and Operational Manual, is being conducted in phases across the country, beginning with the South-South and South-East in Uyo, followed by sessions in Lagos for the South-West and North-Central, and concluding in Kano for the North-West and North-East.

N'Central APC backs Tinubu as sole presidential...

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the Electoral Act.

The congress concluded with the affirmation of zonal officers, including Alhaji Mu'azu Bawa Rijau as Zonal Chairman, Dr Esther Alu as Zonal Woman Leader, Yakubu Adamu as Secretary General, and Zubair Aliyu Rogun as Zonal Youth Leader. Governors, lawmakers,

and delegates from all six states and the Federal Capital Territory were in attendance.

Also, the All Progressives Congress (APC), Plateau State Forum has endorsed President Bola Tinubu and Governor Caleb Mutfwang for second term in office, saying they deserve to be re-elected.

Chairman of the forum, Hon. Yakubu Sakondong, said this at

a news conference conveyed on Tuesday in Abuja to address developments within APC.

He expressed the forum's confidence in the duo's ability and commitment to continuing doing things right in the party and in Nigeria generally.

Sakondong appreciated Tinubu for his visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to strengthening APC and

improving the lots of Nigerians. He noted that the party had continued to grow in structure, inclusiveness and national appeal under Tinubu's leadership.

He said that a clear example of the renewed strength was the election of Prof. Nentawe Yilwatda as APC's National Chairman in July 2025.

Sakondong noted that since assuming office, Yilwatda had introduced several innovative reforms aimed at modernising

and consolidating the party.

The forum's chairman listed the introduction of electronic registration of party members and promotion of youth-friendly policies as pointers to the assertion.

He also mentioned the implementation of stronger women and people with disabilities (PWDs) inclusion initiatives within the party's structure.

Sakondong commended Yilwatda's commitment to party re-

conciliation and unity, demonstrated by his personal and proactive championing of internal reconciliation of aggrieved members.

He also commended Yilwatda for his open-door approach in welcoming defectors from other political parties into the APC family, especially Mutfwang.

"This movement represents a new chapter of political collaboration and unity, not only in Plateau but across Nigeria," the chairman said.



A STRATEGIC MEETING:

General Manager, Bendel Newspapers Corporation, publisher of *The Observer* titles, Hon. Peter Odibo (left), addressing staff of the company during a strategic meeting held yesterday as part of the process of ensuring the return of the newspaper to the newsstand. With him is the newspaper Editor, Andy Egbon (2nd left) and other staff of the company. The General Manager of Bendel Newspapers Corporation, publisher of *The Observer* titles, Hon. Peter Odibo (left) addressing staff of the company, during a strategic meeting held yesterday as part of the process of ensuring the return of the newspaper to the newsstand. With him is the newspaper Editor, Andy Egbon (2nd left) and other staff of the company.

COAS urges unified security strategy to tackle Nigeria's threats

ABUJA

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, has emphasised the need for a coordinated approach among security agencies to address Nigeria's evolving security challenges.

Shaibu made the call while receiving the Inspector Gen-

eral of Police (IGP), Olatunji Disu, on a familiarization visit to Army Headquarters in Abuja on Wednesday.

The army's Acting Director of Public Relations, Col. Apolonia Anele, confirmed the meeting in a statement.

Congratulating Disu on his appointment as the 23rd IGP, Shaibu reaffirmed the army's

commitment to inter-agency cooperation, recalling their joint experience in the United Nations Mission in Darfur as a foundation for continued collaboration.

He highlighted police support for army operations in Kogi, Kwara, and Niger states, stressing that only a unified, well-coordinated framework can secure lasting peace nationwide.

Disu, in turn, called for stronger collaboration and

sustained synergy between the Nigerian Army and the Nigeria Police Force.

He commended the army's role in training Police Mobile Force personnel, noting it has significantly enhanced operational effectiveness across multiple security theatres.

Both security chiefs pledged continued intelligence sharing and joint operational coordination to strengthen national security.

Microbial innovations could solve Nigeria's health, energy challenges —Don

ILA-ORANGUN (OSUN)

Prof. Simiat Jimoh of the Federal University of Health Sciences, Ila-Orangun (FUHSI), has highlighted the potential of microbial systems to address Nigeria's pressing challenges in health, agriculture, and energy.

Delivering FUHSI's inaugural lecture on Wednesday, titled "Fermenting the Future: Harnessing Microbial Metabolism for Sustainable Biotech-

nological Innovations," Jimoh said microbes have evolved from laboratory research tools into strategic instruments for sustainable development.

"The same microbial systems that generate high-value molecular intermediates and industrial bioproducts also offer practical solutions for health, agriculture, energy, and materials science," she explained.

Jimoh noted that Nigeria's dependence on imported pharmaceuticals and bio-based

chemicals strains the economy and hinders industrial independence.

She added that microbial bioprocessing could convert agro-waste into bioethanol, diabetic-friendly sweeteners, biosurfactants, and biodegradable plastics, while supporting pharmaceutical production, including anti-inflammatory drugs.

Speaking to newsmen, she said her research on metabolite synthesis, particularly bioethanol, could contribute to tack-

ling climate change.

The Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Akeem Lasisi, described inaugural lectures as bridges between academia and the public, enlightening citizens on research impacts and societal development.

He praised Jimoh as an accomplished researcher and administrator.

Attendees, including her husband, Mr Fatai Jimoh, lauded her achievements and the successful delivery of the university's first inaugural lecture.

Edo varsity targets 800 residents in free multi-community medical outreach

IYAMOH (EDO)

No fewer than 800 residents across five communities in Etsako West Local Government Area

of Edo State are set to benefit from a three-day free medical outreach organised by Edo State University, Iyamoh.

Vice-Chancellor of the institution, Prof. Victor Adetimirin,

disclosed this on Wednesday at the flag-off of the programme themed "Bringing Quality Healthcare to Your Doorstep."

He said the initiative forms part of the university's corporate social responsibility aimed at improving access to healthcare for underserved populations.

According to him, the outreach will cover Iyamoh, Ogbido, Iyora, Elele and Uluoke communities, with a focus on providing essential medical services to indigent residents within and around the university environment.

Adetimirin noted that the pro-

gramme symbolises the institution's commitment to promoting the well-being of host communities by bridging gaps in access to basic healthcare services.

"This initiative is targeted at improving the health of indigent members of our host communities. It is our modest contribution to ensuring that those who cannot afford medical care still have access to quality services," he said.

Head of the medical team, Dr Isaac Omoregbe, a public health physician, said beneficiaries would receive free screening, treatment and medical consultations during the outreach.

He listed conditions to be addressed to include hypertension, diabetes, malaria, hepatitis B and C, upper respiratory tract infections, arthritis and other common ailments, add-

ing that basic health checks such as blood sugar level tests would also be conducted.

Omoregbe said that the exercise was designed to take healthcare services directly to the people, particularly those who would otherwise be unable to afford them, while also promoting preventive health practices.

He urged residents to embrace good personal hygiene and maintain clean environments as part of efforts to prevent disease outbreaks.

Some beneficiaries who spoke at the event commended the university for the initiative, describing it as timely and impactful.

One of them, Osagie Moses, said the outreach would significantly improve the health and well-being of community members.



OFFICIAL RECEPTION OF LAWAL:

Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle; Governor Dauda Lawal of Zamfara State; Vice President Kashim Shettima; former Governor of Zamfara State, Sen Abdulaziz Yari and Aminu Jaji during the official reception of Governor Lawal into the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Gusau, Zamfara State. Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle; Governor Dauda Lawal of Zamfara State; Vice President Kashim Shettima; former Governor of Zamfara State, Sen Abdulaziz Yari and Aminu Jaji, during the official reception of Governor Lawal into the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Gusau, Zamfara State.

Preparations intensify for Lions Int'l Multiple District 404 Convention 2026 in Asaba

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

BENIN CITY

As preparations for the Multiple District 404 Convention 2026 of Lions International, themed "Asaba Amaka," gain momentum, organisers have assured that all arrangements are on course.

Speaking to the newsmen, Lion (Dr) Ibrahim Jide Bello, Multiple Council Chairperson,

described the annual convention as a premier event that unites Lions globally to inspire, serve, and foster community development.

Past District Governor and Chairperson of the Multiple District Convention Committee (MDCC), Lion Patricia Udeme, said, "We're thrilled to host the Lions International Convention 2026, Asaba Amaka! Our team is working tirelessly to ensure

a seamless experience. Venue preparations, logistics, and programming are well underway.

"Registration across the six districts of Multiple District 404 is gaining traction," according to Lion Sylvia Effah, Chairperson of the Registration Committee.

Host District Governor, Lion (Dr) Robinson Omonigbo-Okoro, added, "Asaba, our vibrant host city, is ready to

welcome Lions from around the world. With its rich culture, scenic views, and warm hospitality, it is the perfect backdrop for this convention."

The convention will feature a variety of activities, including competitive football matches between districts, novelty matches for District Governors and Past District Governors, 4x100m relay races, aerobics sessions, cultural nights, banquets, and sight-seeing tours, said Lion Sandra Onianwa, Chairperson of the Sports Sub-Committee.

Benin's Edo Vintage Lions Club to honour humanitarian Lion Olore Evelyn Imokhe

BENIN CITY

Lion Deaconess Olore Evelyn Imokhe will be honoured by the Edo Vintage Lions Club on March 28 for her outstanding service to humanity.

The award, conveyed in a letter signed by Lion (Barr) Isoken Eki Abohi and Lion Caroline Oziengbe Aikorio, Chairperson of the Awards Committee, celebrates Imokhe's contributions as Second Vice District Governor ticket contender, District 404-A4,

particularly in feeding the hungry, environmental conservation, youth empowerment, vision care, diabetes support, and childhood welfare.

Other Lions to be honoured include, Lion Taiye Ose-Ighile, Chairperson on Environment; Lion Patience Orobosa Ugbo, Coordinator, New Voices, District 404-A4; and Lion Engr Abdulrazak Adedio Aleakhue, Past President of Benin Metropolitan Lions Club and Zone 4B Chairperson, who won the Club Excellence Award for 2023/2024.

Ernest Ikoli celebrated as crusader of truth, anti-discrimination icon

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

The Ernest Sisei Ikoli Foundation has hailed Chief Ernest Ikoli, Nigerian politician, nationalist, and pioneering journalist, as a crusader of truth and a symbol of the struggle against oppression and discrimination in Nigeria.

In a statement released Wednesday to mark his birthday, the foundation praised Ikoli for mentoring journalists, shaping political thought, and driving Nigeria's independence from colonial rule.

"Chief Ernest Ikoli reformed, led, and inspired. He campaigned for the birth of the Second Republic and declared his work complete once Nigeria achieved political independence," the statement said.

Ikoli, who served as assistant editor of the Lagos Weekly Record, first editor of the Daily Times of Nigeria, and publisher of the African Messenger, also helped establish the Marcus Garvey Universal Negro Improvement Association, People's

Union, Nigeria Youth Movement, and the Action Group.

The foundation emphasised Ikoli's vision of a united Africa, saying, "He saw no Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, or Ijaw—only one Nigeria, one Africa, and one destiny."

Chief Anthony George-Ikoli (SAN), Executive Vice Chairman of the foundation, praised Ikoli for shaping politicians and labour leaders, inspiring journalists, and improving workers' conditions through advocacy and legislation.

"Chief Ernest Ikoli wanted a united, industrialised, and economically self-reliant nation," the statement noted, highlighting his intellectual depth, leadership, Christian values, moderation, and commitment to representative democracy.

Ikoli fought alongside nationalists Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello in Nigeria's struggle for independence.

Born on March 25, 1893, in Nembe, he passed away on October 21 at age 67 and was buried at Ikoyi Cemetery.

2027 polls: Media executive charges reporters on ethics

LAGOS

The Editor-in-Chief of the NewsNow, Mr Taiwo Olapade, on Wednesday advised news reporters to ensure professionalism, balance and other components of journalism ethics ahead of Nigeria's 2027 general elections.

Olapade said in Lagos that strict adherence to journalism's ethical standards would help to safeguard Nigeria's democracy.

The Editor-in-Chief at the 2026 Annual Press Week Lecture of the Lagos State Governor's Office Correspondents (LAGOCO), at Alausa, Ikeja.

He spoke on: "Election and Ethical Journalism: The Role of the Media in Safeguarding Democracy."

Olapade said that the mass media had much power to shape public perception.

He warned that irresponsible journalism could have grave consequences for the entire Nigerian society.

"The media has enormous power to shape public perception and national stability. If not properly guided, that power can become dangerous.

"Journalists must remain professional and balanced in their reportage especially as we approach the 2027 elections," he said.

Olapade urged journalists to avoid partisan reporting and exercise caution in handling sensitive issues, particularly those bordering on national security.

The Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr Gbenga Omotoso, said that factual and responsible journalism was crucial to the development of democracy.

He described elections in Nigeria as serious national exercises.

"While some people see elections as war, we (journalists) should see them as a tool for progress, a tool for moving the society forward," he said.

Omotoso said that democracy remained the best means of effecting change in government.

"It allows people to make choices without trouble, without shedding blood," he said.

Omotoso praised members of LAGOCO for what he described as their constructive and professional engagement with the state government.

He said that LAGOCO members had consistently demonstrated partnership in progress through constructive criticisms.

"Whenever you want to criticise, you do so constructively, not destructively.

"You do not criticise in order to bring the roof down on all of us, but to ensure that we

all make progress," he said.

On concerns in some quarters over defection of many politicians to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Omotoso dismissed fears that Nigeria would drift toward a one-party state.

"People are saying so many things about Nigeria becoming a one-party state, but I do not see it that way.

"If a political party is better organised and has a stronger structure and politicians decide to join it, that does not make the country a one-party state.

"There are still many people who are not members of APC," he said.

Earlier, the Chairman of LAGOCO, Mr George Okojie, said the 2026 Press Week was aimed to remind journalists in Nigeria of their critical role in preserving democratic values ahead of the 2027 general elections.

NEWS

NDDC rallies communities to tackle vandalism, boost project ownership

BETTY IDIALU

WARRI

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) has urged communities in Delta State to take ownership of its development projects as part of efforts to curb vandalism and ensure long-term sustainability.

The call was made during a capacity-building seminar held in Warri, where stakeholders from across the state converged to deliberate on strategies for safeguarding public infrastructure.

The commission expressed concern over the persistent destruction of projects, despite ongoing interventions aimed at developing the region.

Speaking at the seminar, Assistant Director, Engr. Sweet Odulami, who represented the Delta State Director of NDDC, emphasised the need for communities to see the projects as collective assets and take responsibility for their protection. She highlighted key inter-

ventions by the commission, including the installation of solar-powered streetlights, noting that such projects can only be sustained with active community support and vigilance.

Other speakers at the event observed that several projects had been damaged due to igno-

rance and inadequate engagement with host communities.

They noted that the initiative was designed to deepen community participation and shift public perception from viewing government projects as distant assets to shared community property.

The commission further assured that the sensitization programme would be sustained, with continuous engagement of stakeholders, particularly youths to foster a culture of ownership and responsibility in protecting public infrastructure across the state.

Police detain village head over alleged possession of AK-47 in A'lbom

EKET

The Akwa Ibom State Police Command has detained the village head of Asik Ubofa in Effiat Clan, Mbo Local Government Area, over alleged unlawful possession of an AK-47 rifle.

Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Timfon John, disclosed in Uyo on Wednesday that the arrest followed credible intelligence indicating that the traditional ruler was in possession of illegal firearms.

Acting on the information, the Commissioner of Police, CP Baba Azare, ordered a coordinated operation, leading to the storming of the suspect's residence by detectives on Tuesday.

The operation resulted in the recovery of one AK-47 rifle

and two empty magazines.

According to the police spokesperson, the suspect is currently in custody as investigations continue to determine the source of the weapon, the motive for its possession and possible accomplices.

"The command is committed to uncovering the full circumstances surrounding the case and bringing all those involved to justice," she said.

The command reiterated its zero-tolerance stance on illegal arms possession, warning individuals in unlawful possession of firearms to surrender them or face the full weight of the law.

John also commended members of the public for providing useful information and urged continued cooperation with security agencies to enhance public safety.

Rising hypertension among youths sparks concern in Nigeria

AWKA

Medical experts have raised alarm over the growing incidence of hypertension among adolescents and young people in Nigeria, warning that the trend poses serious long-term health risks.

Chief Medical Director of Rock Foundation Hospital, Awka, Dr Chukwudi Njelita, expressed concern in an interview on Wednesday, noting that high blood pressure, once largely associated with older adults, is now increasingly common among people below 20 years.

He said the traditional medical advice recommending regular blood pressure checks mainly for individuals aged 40 and above was no longer sufficient given the current realities.

According to him, hypertension is a major underlying factor in the rising cases of stroke and kidney failure, both of which are now being recorded among younger populations.

"The worrisome aspect is that young people below 20 years now make up a significant proportion of those affected, which was quite rare in the past," he said.

Njelita explained that early onset hypertension damages

vital organs, particularly the kidneys, thereby contributing to the increasing incidence of renal failure among youths.

He further clarified that stroke, medically referred to as a cardiovascular accident, should be treated as a medical emergency, stressing that "there is nothing like partial stroke."

The medical expert attributed the trend partly to poor dietary habits, especially the consumption of junk foods and beverages high in refined sugar, which he said disrupt normal metabolic processes and harm overall health.

He urged Nigerians, especially young people, to adopt healthier lifestyles, reduce sugar intake and prioritise regular medical check-ups to detect and manage hypertension early.

BLIOD PRESSURE CATEGORIES		
According to ESC Guidelines		
CATEGORY	SYSTOLIC (mmHg)	DIASTOLIC (mmHg)
Normal	< 120	< 80
High Normal	120-129	80-84
Grade 1 Hypertension	130-139	85-89
Grade 2 Hypertension	≥ 140	≥ 90

*Source: ESC Guidelines



VISIT OF LEGION TEAM:

L-R: Commissioner, Nigerian Legion (NL), Jibbuna Joel; Chairman, NL, Morenike Grace-Henry and former Head of State, Abdusalam Abubakar, during the visit of the Legion team to the former Head of State in Abuja.

EDOGIS strengthens land administration, expands digital registry in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Geographic Information Service (EdoGIS) said it has emerged as a central institution in land administration, consolidating processes for land documentation, surveys and geographic data management across the state.

In a statement by Muyiwa Akinsanya, Acting Media Officer of the Edo State Geographic Information Service (EdoGIS), the agency said it has intensified efforts to reform land adminis-

tration in the state, with a focus on improving documentation, transparency and access to services for residents and investors.

The statement noted that, from the agency's headquarters on Sapele Road in Benin City, EdoGIS manages land administration for individuals, developers, and corporate entities.

According to the statement, its responsibilities include, issuing land titles, registering land instruments, handling acquisitions and compensation, managing master plans, and collecting land-based taxes.

The agency is transitioning to a digital, cashless system, having digitised over 30,000 legacy records to enhance title security.

It also offers a structured search system that allows buyers and investors to verify ownership, check encumbrances, and confirm title status before transactions, according to the statement by EdoGIS.

This process, it added is intended to reduce disputes arising from multiple claims to a single parcel of land.

In a bid to decentralise its services, the agency has established additional offices in Ekpoma and Auchi, extending access to residents in Edo

Central and Edo North senatorial districts who previously had to travel to Benin City for land-related transactions.

Officials emphasise the importance of formal land documentation, noting that Certificates of Occupancy remain the primary legal instrument for establishing ownership and facilitating the use of land assets in financial transactions.

The agency maintains that ongoing reforms, including improved technology and expanded operational capacity, are aimed at strengthening land governance and enhancing investor confidence in Edo State's property sector.

NCF trains 640 farmers, restores 120htr of forest in C'River

CALABAR

The Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) has trained no fewer than 640 farmers and women in Cross River State on sustainable agriculture and green enterprise development as part of efforts to promote environmental conservation and livelihoods.

Director-General of the foundation, Dr Joseph Onoja, disclosed this on Wednesday at the close of a project workshop in Calabar, noting that the beneficiaries were drawn from eight communities in Akamka and Yakurr Local Government Areas.

He said the trainees comprised 240 farmers and 400 women equipped with skills in Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) value chains and other environmentally friendly enterprises.

The intervention, tagged "Iko Esai" and themed Community Forest Management and Livelihood Improvement in the Buffer Region of the Cross River National Park, also recorded the restoration of 120 hectares of degraded forest.

Onoja explained that the project, which commenced in 2022 with funding support from the German government, was designed to strengthen community-based forest man-

agement systems while promoting sustainable, high-yield agricultural practices.

According to him, the initiative has also facilitated the establishment of forest governance structures in the benefiting communities, thereby creating alternative and sustainable sources of livelihood.

"Cross River has one of the largest forest expanses in Nigeria, and there is a need for collective action to preserve these resources not just for the state, but for the country and the West African sub-region," he said.

Chairman of the Cross River Forestry Commission, Mr George Oben-Etche, urged

host communities to take ownership of forest resources, noting that sustainable livelihoods remain key to curbing deforestation.

Also, Vice President of the Calabar Chamber of Commerce, Mrs Christabel Ndubisi, commended the initiative and pledged support in linking beneficiaries to viable markets.

The State Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr Johnson Ebokpo, represented by the Director of Crops and Trees, Mr Omini Eyong, called for the adoption of traceability systems to safeguard forest resources, warning that forest encroachment remains a major driver of climate change.

Power crisis hits water supply chain, prices soar in Abuja, Edo

ABUJA

Mounting electricity instability is crippling sachet water and ice block businesses in Kpeyeyi and Kurudu communities of the Federal Capital

Territory (FCT), with traders warning of sharp price increases and declining patronage as production costs spiral.

In Benin City, the prices of ice block has risen from N500 to between N700 and N800 per package, a marginal increase of

between 40 to 60 percent, while a bag of water increased from about N330 to N400 to between N400 and N500 whole sale price, a marginal increase of between 14 to 25 percent.

Sachet water now sells for N50 per one, as against three

or four for N100

A cross-section of operators who spoke to our correspondent on Wednesday said erratic power supply had disrupted operations and forced many to rely on expensive alternatives, particularly petrol and diesel

generators, thereby pushing up the cost of basic commodities.

Mrs Victoria Alizi, a sachet water trader, lamented that unstable electricity had significantly raised her operating expenses, leaving her with no option but to increase prices.

She explained that a bag of sachet water she previously sold at N400 now costs her N500 to purchase and is sold at N600.

According to her, the ripple effect has also altered retail pricing, as she now sells a sachet for N50, compared to three sachets for N100 in the past, largely due to the rising cost of ice blocks used in preservation.

"Before now, I bought ice blocks for between N500 and N700, but the price has surged to as high as N1,500," she said, adding that shrinking profit margins and reduced patronage were threatening the survival of small-scale traders as

consumers increasingly seek cheaper alternatives.

She appealed to relevant authorities to urgently address the electricity challenge to ease production bottlenecks, lower costs and safeguard livelihoods.

Also speaking, an ice block producer, Mr Simon Boss, said the persistent power outages had severely disrupted production cycles, forcing operators to depend heavily on generators.

He noted that the high cost of fuel had further compounded operational expenses, with producers inevitably transferring the burden to consumers.

"We are feeling the impact, especially at the peak of the dry season when demand is highest. Some of us are recording losses due to partially frozen or melted products caused by unstable electricity, while others can no longer meet customer demand consistently," he said.



NATIONAL THANKSGIVING CONFERENCE:

National President, National Union of Pensioners, Comrade Godwin Abumisi (R), presenting an award to the President, Nigerian Union of Pensioners Contributory Pension Scheme (NUPCPS), Comrade Sylva Nwaiwu, during the National Thanksgiving Conference of the NUPCPS in Abuja.

NDLEA links drug abuse to rising HIV cases, seeks unified response

ABUJA

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has identified drug abuse as a significant driver of HIV transmission in Nigeria, calling for a coordinated and integrated response to tackle both public health challenges.

Chairman of the agency, retired Brigadier-General Buba Marwa, made the assertion on Wednesday in Abuja at the inauguration of the National HIV Prevention Plan, stressing that efforts to combat HIV must go hand in hand with strategies to curb substance abuse.

Marwa highlighted the dangers associated with injectable drug use, noting that the sharing of contaminated needles significantly increases the risk of HIV infection. He further explained that substance abuse often impairs judgment, leading to risky sexual behaviour that accelerates the spread of the virus.

He also drew attention to correctional facilities, describing them as high-risk environments where addiction, overcrowding and limited access to prevention services create a cycle of vulnerability and infection among inmates.

"For too long, drug control

and public health responses have been treated separately. Today, we recognise that they are interconnected and must be addressed together," he said.

The NDLEA boss noted that while the agency remained committed to curbing the supply of illicit drugs, it was also intensifying efforts to reduce demand and promote harm reduction as part of a broader public health strategy.

He disclosed that the agency would strengthen collaboration with the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), the Federal Ministry of Health and civil society organisations to expand HIV prevention education nationwide, particularly among young people.

Marwa reaffirmed NDLEA's commitment to supporting the implementation of the National HIV Prevention Plan, with a focus on protecting the health and well-being of Nigerians.

In his remarks, Brigadier-General Idris Solebo, Director-General of Programme at the Ministry of Defence Health Implementation Programme (MODHIP), commended NACA for its leadership in advancing Nigeria's HIV response.

He noted that the agency had played a critical role in expanding access to treatment, care and support services, thereby contributing to a reduction in new infections and improved health outcomes for persons living with HIV.

Group demands overhaul of INEC guidelines to reverse voter apathy

LAGOS

A civil society organisation, the Movement for Credible Elections, has called for an urgent overhaul of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) guidelines to tackle persistent voter apathy ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The group's spokesman, Mr Olawale Okunniyi, made the call in a statement issued on Wednesday, warning that Nigeria's democracy faces a critical test if declining voter participation is not addressed.

Citing data from the 2023

general elections, where less than 30 percent of registered voters turned out, Okunniyi described the trend as a serious threat to the legitimacy of elected governments and the stability of democratic institutions.

He argued that the current electoral guidelines fall short of the structural reforms needed to restore public confidence in the system, insisting that voter apathy is not merely a behavioural issue but a rational response to widespread perceptions of electoral compromise.

According to him, Nigerians will only be motivated to participate in elections if they

are assured that their votes will count and be protected through a transparent and credible process.

While acknowledging INEC's efforts to improve transparency, particularly in the conduct of party primaries, Okunniyi stressed that more must be done to enhance election-day logistics, improve voter experience, strengthen voter education, especially among young people and guarantee security while eliminating voter intimidation.

He warned that Nigeria stands at a democratic crossroads, where the credibility of

the 2027 elections will depend not on the volume of regulations issued, but on the integrity, inclusiveness and transparency of the entire electoral process.

Okunniyi maintained that public trust cannot be commanded but must be earned through consistent and verifiable actions, urging INEC to go beyond cosmetic adjustments and undertake bold reforms that will ensure the will of the electorate prevails.

He cautioned that failure to act decisively could further deepen electoral distrust and entrench voter apathy across the country.

Crime 'll find no safe haven in FCT —New Police Commissioner

ABUJA

The newly deployed Commissioner of Police in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mr Ahmed Sanusi, has declared an uncompromising stance against criminality, vowing that crime will not thrive under his watch.

Sanusi made the pledge on Wednesday during his maiden press conference in Abuja, assuring residents of a proactive, intelligence-driven and relentless policing strategy aimed at rooting out criminal elements.

"Many of you are familiar with my professional approach. Crime does not thrive where I serve. Under my leadership, the command will leave no stone unturned in identifying, pursuing and flushing out criminals from the FCT," he said.

He emphasised that his approach would go beyond responding to crime to preventing it, through strategic deployment of intelligence and enhanced operational efficiency.

The police commissioner also issued a stern warning to officers and men of the command, stressing that indiscipline and unprofessional conduct would not be tolerated.

"All personnel must remain civil in their dealings with members of the public and uphold the highest standards of professionalism in the discharge of their duties," he said, adding that he expected total commitment from all officers.

Sanusi warned criminal elements to either desist from unlawful activities or leave the FCT, declaring that the territory was no longer a safe haven for crime.

Army moves to stem medical brain drain with training, welfare boost

LAGOS

The Nigerian Army has intensified efforts to curb the growing exodus of medical personnel by prioritising training, improved welfare and enhanced working conditions within its medical corps.

Commander of the Corps of Medical (CCM), Brigadier-General Innocent Enwuchola, disclosed this on Wednesday at the Corps' First Quarter Conference 2026 held at Bonny Cantonment, Victoria Island, Lagos.

The conference, themed "Optimising NA Resources for Excellent Healthcare Delivery Within a Joint Environment," brought together commanders and stakeholders to deliberate on strategies to strengthen healthcare delivery across the military.

Enwuchola said the Army leadership was already reviewing salary structures for medical personnel, following resolutions reached at the December 2025 annual conference, with the aim of boosting morale and improving service delivery.

He explained that better remuneration and improved working conditions were critical to retaining skilled professionals, noting that brain drain was largely driven by the search for better pay and opportunities abroad.

"Once salaries are enhanced and the working environment improved, our personnel will be encouraged to stay," he said.

The commander noted that since assuming office on October 31, 2025, he had prioritised engagement with field commanders to address operational challenges and chart a clear path forward for the corps.

NEWS

Teen tech prodigy wins N2.7m, Varsity celebrates AI breakthrough

ENUGU

Peaceland University has honoured its 18-year-old Software Engineering student, Godspower Ojini, after he emerged overall winner of the N2.7 million grand prize at the recently concluded Enugu State Tech Festival.

The festival, held from February 24 to 27, attracted young innovators from across the state, showcasing cutting-edge ideas and solutions aimed at addressing real-world challenges through technology.

Ojini, a 300-level student, led his team to victory with the development of an innovative Artificial Intelligence (AI) platform designed to automate tasks for individuals and businesses.

The project stood out among numerous entries, earning both top honours and a substantial cash reward.

Speaking during a celebration held on Wednesday in Enugu, the Vice-Chancellor, Leonard Ilechukwu, described the feat as a validation of the institution's commitment to excellence and quality training.

"We feel very proud, but more importantly, it speaks to our work, our commitment and our excellence in service. This did not come from nowhere; it reflects the quality of training and dedication we invest in our students," he said.

Ilechukwu added that while the university was celebrating Ojini's brilliance, it also recognised its role in shaping his success, noting that the victory belonged to both the student and the institution.

Also speaking, the Pro-Chancellor, Felix Ugwuozor, said the achievement did not come as a surprise, revealing that the

student had previously won the same competition.

"I am very impressed, but not surprised. This is the second time our student has won this award. He is focused, hard-working and knows where he is going," he said, adding that the university's emphasis on practical learning and innovation had continued to produce

globally competitive graduates.

In his remarks, Ojini attributed his success to dedication, mentorship and continuous learning, explaining that his AI-powered solution is capable of handling a wide range of tasks efficiently.

"The dedication of our lecturers inspired me, and I always strive to give my best and not miss any opportunity that

comes my way," he said.

He disclosed that beyond classroom activities, he invested heavily in personal development through books and online courses, adding that his team was already working towards scaling the project into a globally accessible product.

"We want to build something that will be used not just in Ni-

geria but around the globe," he said, while acknowledging the university's support, including access to facilities and flexibility during the development process.

He advised fellow students to remain consistent and collaborative, urging them to "keep building, keep sharing your work, connect with others, and never give up."

APC returns Kekemeke as S'West chair, targets 2027 sweep

LAGOS

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has re-elected Dr Isaac Kekemeke as its South-West Zonal Chairman, as the party positions itself for a strong showing in the 2027 general elections.

Kekemeke emerged by consensus alongside seven other zonal executives at the APC South-West Zonal Congress held on Wednesday in Lagos, in a process party leaders described as peaceful and exemplary.

Chairman of the Zonal Congress Committee, Jide Jimoh, disclosed that 1,398 delegates from across the six South-West states participated in the exercise.

According to him, Lagos recorded 337 accredited delegates, followed by Ondo (245), Oyo (243), Ekiti (211), Ogun (206) and Osun (156).

Other executives elected unopposed include Alfred Aluko (Secretary), Ismail Majaro (Legal Adviser), Lateef Ibirogba (Organising Secretary), Ayobami Afolabi (Publicity Secretary), Mrs Oyetunde Adesanya (Woman Leader), Mr Daramola Adesuyi (Youth Leader) and Mr Dayo Ishola (Representative of Persons with Disability).

Jimoh described the congress as historic, noting that the South-West had consistently remained a stronghold of progressive politics and leadership.

Speaking on behalf of governors in the zone, Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, hailed the exercise as a model for internal party democracy.

He commended delegates for their discipline and loyalty, while also praising the congress committee for conducting what he described as one of the best intra-party elections.

Don seeks TETFund reform to accommodate private universities

ABUJA

University don, Peter Onwualu of the African University of Science and Technology (AUST), has called for a review of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Act to include private universities in its funding framework.

Speaking with journalists in Abuja on Wednesday, Onwualu argued that the current structure, which excludes private institutions, is inequitable and limits the growth of research and infrastructure development in the sector.

He explained that TETFund, established under the 2011 Act, was designed to provide supplementary funding, infrastructure support and research

grants exclusively to public tertiary institutions.

According to him, while private universities contribute significantly to human capital development, they are denied access to these critical resources despite being part of the broader education ecosystem.

"TETFund intervenes directly only in public universities. There is hardly any public university where you will not find that about 80 per cent of the infrastructure is funded by TETFund," he said.

He noted that although private institutions could sometimes access TETFund support through collaborations with public universities, such arrangements often place them at a disadvantage, as principal investigators must come from the public institutions.



AFRICA GAMING EXPO 2026:

L-R: Former Nigeria Super Eagles player, Augustine Okocha; Co-founder, Betconstruct, Vigen Badalyan; Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Lottery and Gaming Authority, Mr Are Bashir; representative of the Governor of Lagos State, Bimbola Salu-Hundeyin; Head of Service of the State, Mr Olabode Agoro; Deputy Chief of Staff to the Governor, Mr Sam Egube and Lagos State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Lawal Pedro, during the Africa Gaming Expo 2026 in Lagos on Wednesday.

Navy, Police deepen alliance on intelligence, joint operations

ABUJA

The Nigerian Navy and the Nigeria Police Force have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening collaboration in training, intelligence sharing and joint operations as part of efforts to tackle Nigeria's evolving security challenges.

This formed the crux of discussions during a courtesy visit by the Inspector-General of Police, Olatunji Disu, to the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Idi Abbas, at Naval Headquarters on Wednesday in Abuja.

Speaking during the meeting,

Abbas stressed that inter-agency synergy remained indispensable in addressing complex security threats, noting that no single agency could effectively tackle them in isolation.

"Our institutions must work together and conduct operations based on intelligence. No single agency can do it alone," he said, describing collaboration as a central pillar of the Navy's operational strategy.

The naval chief assured the police of sustained support in joint operations and capacity building, while proposing enhanced training opportunities for Marine Police personnel at naval facilities,

including the Gunnery Maintenance and Support Development Centre in Lagos.

He also underscored the need for improved intelligence sharing through existing platforms such as the Maritime Crime Investigation Desk to strengthen responses to maritime threats.

In his remarks, Disu said the visit was to appreciate the Navy's continued cooperation with the police, particularly in maritime security and joint operations across difficult terrains.

"We are here to say thank you for the cooperation you have extended to the Nigeria Police

Force. We have no alternative but to work together," he said.

The IGP disclosed plans to expand training opportunities for naval personnel in police institutions, especially in advanced detective courses, to deepen professionalism and inter-agency understanding.

He also reiterated the police's commitment to intelligence-led policing, stressing that future deployments would be strictly guided by credible intelligence.

"We will not deploy without intelligence. That era is over. We are ready to share intelligence with you," he said.

BPP posts 97 procurement officers, rolls out AI system to boost transparency

ABUJA

The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) has deployed 97 senior procurement officers across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as part of efforts to strengthen transparency, efficiency and accountability in public procurement.

The development was disclosed in a statement issued on Wednesday in Abuja by the agency's Head of Press and Public Relations, Zira Nagga.

According to the statement, the deployment aligns with a directive by President Bola Tinubu in a May 13, 2025 cir-

cular mandating the reversion of the mobility and career management of procurement officers to the BPP.

Nagga explained that the directive was further reinforced by a communication from the Secretary to the Government of the Federation dated December 9, 2025, which outlined modalities for implementation.

He disclosed that the Director-General of BPP, Adebowale Adedokun, issued a circular on March 23 titled "Deployment of Procurement Officers on Salary Grade Levels (SGLs) 15-17 in the Federal Civil Service."

As part of the reform, the

bureau has introduced an Artificial Intelligence-driven web-based platform known as the National Procurement Officers Management System (NAPOMS) to manage postings.

According to Nagga, the system uses intelligent algorithms and historical data to determine the most suitable placements for officers, thereby enhancing efficiency and transparency in deployment processes.

He added that full details of the affected officers, including their current and approved postings, were contained in a ten-page circular, with instructions for officers to download

posting details via their registered emails on the NAPOMS platform.

The statement emphasised that all deployed officers must comply fully with the directives, including uploading their Assumption of Duty Certificates and other required documentation, while MDAs are mandated to accept and properly document them.

It warned that rejection of posted officers would not be tolerated and that all handover processes must be completed on or before March 31, with non-compliance attracting sanctions in line with Public Service Rules.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Alleged \$1.5m oil fraud: Defendant's absence stalls bail hearing

IKEJA

The bail application of businessman Joseph Ufoma, accused of a \$1.5 million fraud, was stalled on Wednesday at the Ikeja Special Offences Court due to his

absence.

Ufoma, standing trial alongside Intermediate Investment Holdings Ltd., faces a two-count charge of obtaining by false pretence and forgery.

He had pleaded not guilty when arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on March 11.

At Wednesday's resumed hearing, defence counsel, Mr Olawale Akoni (SAN), informed the court of two pending applications, noting that the first, seeking abridgement of time, was now redundant. He sought to move the bail application.

Prosecution counsel, Mr Babatunde Sonoiki, opposed the

move, citing Ufoma's absence and multiple pending cases in Lagos and Abuja.

He added that the defendant might soon face arraignment by the Nigeria Police Interpol Department, and administrative hurdles could prevent an earlier court appearance.

"My Lord, the defendant is currently in Abuja and has

multiple cases.

He will soon be arraigned by Interpol. Administrative bureaucracy may make it difficult to bring him to court," Sonoiki said.

The prosecution alleged that Ufoma failed to honour conditions of administrative bail previously granted by the EFCC and became a fugitive, adding that attempts to contact him and his sureties were unsuccessful.

These allegations were supported by a counter-affidavit sworn by EFCC investigator Mr Idi Musa.

Justice Mojisola Dada adjourned the bail application hearing to March 31.

The prosecution noted that the offences contravene provisions of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Offences Act, 2006, and Section 363 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.



AN ADVOCACY MEETING:

Senior Advocacy and Marketing Manager, AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) Nigeria, Steve Aborisade, making a case for increased budgetary allocation for HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB) to the members of the Kogi State House of Assembly, with the State Civil Society Organisations partners, during an advocacy meeting towards increased local funding for HIV/AIDS and TB.

Court dismisses lawyer's suit against political parties' exorbitant nomination fees

ABUJA

The Federal High Court on Wednesday dismissed a suit by human rights lawyer Ejime Okolie challenging the high expression of interest (EoI) and nomination fees charged by political parties.

Justice Binta Nyako ruled that the matter falls within the internal affairs of political parties and does not amount to a constitutional wrong. Only a few of the 19 political parties sued responded, while the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP)

were unrepresented.

Okolie had sought to restrain political parties from imposing fees that exclude qualified citizens from contesting in elections, urging INEC to issue guidelines on reasonable maximum thresholds.

The judge dismissed the application, but commended his efforts for democracy.

Uche-Levis Abonyi, National Legal Adviser of the Young Progressives Party (YPP), described the judgment as "sound," noting that parties rely on nomination fees to fund activities and members can freely switch parties if dissatisfied.

Court questions El-Rufai's N1bn rights suit against ICPC, I-G

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Wednesday criticised former Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai's N1 billion fundamental rights enforcement suit against the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other

Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and four others.

Justice Joyce Abdulmalik raised concerns after El-Rufai's lawyer, Ugochukwu Nnakwu, admitted that a magistrate named as the 2nd respondent had not been served.

The judge adjourned the matter to March 31 for regular-

ization of service and hearing of pending motions.

El-Rufai filed the suit over the alleged unlawful search of his Abuja residence on February 19 by ICPC and the Inspector-General of Police, claiming violations of his fundamental rights, including personal liberty, fair hearing, and privacy.

He demanded N1 billion in

general, exemplary, and aggravated damages.

The ICPC, in a counter-affidavit, stated that it acted on a petition and executed a valid search warrant on February 19, accompanied by police personnel.

The police, through Insp. Ewa Anthony, asserted their statutory powers to investigate and prosecute offenders.

Judge calls for end to practices fueling violence against women

ABUJA

Justice Angela Otaluka of the Federal Capital Territory High Court has called for the elimination of cultural and societal practices that encourage violence against women nationwide.

Speaking at a keynote address for International Women's Day

2026, organised by the United Nations Gender Theme Group Nigeria, Otaluka highlighted the need for gender-responsive justice systems under the theme "Equal Justice for Women and Girls in Nigeria: Strengthening Inclusive Gender-Responsive Justice Systems."

She noted that despite progress in legal reforms, many wom-

en still face barriers to justice, including entrenched cultural norms, economic dependence, and delayed judicial processes.

"GBV remains a grave concern, violating human rights and undermining the dignity of women and girls," she said.

Other speakers, including Mrs Yewande Gbola-Awopetu (Federal Ministry of Justice),

UN Resident Coordinator Mohamed Fall, and UNFPA Representative Ms Muriel Mafico, emphasised legal reform, gender-sensitivity training, and strengthened legal aid services. They called for collaborative efforts across government, civil society, and traditional institutions to ensure justice for all women and girls.

Court orders accelerated trial as terror suspect admits spying on US, Israeli interests

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Wednesday granted an accelerated hearing in the trial of three terror suspects accused of spying on American and Israeli embassies in Nigeria for individu-

als linked to Iran.

Justice Emeka Nwite issued the order following an oral application by prosecuting counsel, Bello Abu, which was not opposed by defence lawyers.

The defendants, Haruna Ali Abbas, Ibrahim Hussaini Musa and Adam Suleiman were arrested

in Kano and Lagos states in 2013.

At the resumed hearing, a prosecution witness told the court that Abbas admitted being recruited to spy on the interests of the United States and Israel in Nigeria, particularly their embassies.

The witness, a senior official of the Department of State Ser-

vices (DSS), identified as James Simon, disclosed that one of the suspects confessed to the operation and detailed how he recruited others.

Simon, the first prosecution witness (PW-1), had been cross-examined on Tuesday by Abbas' counsel, Aliyu Yauri.

Man, 42, in court over alleged N37.5m fraud

BADAGRY (LAGOS)

A 42-year-old man, Isika Adesiyen, appeared on Wednesday before a Badagry Chief Magistrates' Court over alleged N37.5 million fraud.

The defendant, whose address was undisclosed, faces charges of forgery, fraud, and stealing.

He pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutor ASP Edet Ekpo told the court that the offences occurred in January and March in Badagry, involving forged Turkish Airline tickets presented to complainants including Julius Emmanuel, Segun Here, Ofurum Christiana, Eleto Afeez, and Eleto To.

The trial continues as the court examines evidence and hears witnesses.

Man gets 21yrs for attempted sexual assault of 2 minors in Lagos

IKEJA

An Ikeja Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court on Wednesday sentenced a 40-year-old man, Ita Love, to 21 years' imprisonment for attempting to sexually assault two young sisters.

Justice Rahman Oshodi handed down the sentence following a plea bargain agreement with the Lagos State Government.

The convict was tried on an amended two-count charge of attempted assault by penetration and indecent treatment of a child.

Love was subsequently re-arraigned before Justice Oshodi

on October 15, 2021, where he again pleaded not guilty.

However, upon a fresh amended charge filed on February 1, 2024, he changed his plea to guilty.

Delivering judgment, Justice Oshodi held that the convict fully understood the nature and consequences of his guilty plea.

The court sentenced him to 14 years' imprisonment on count one and seven years on count two, ordering that the sentences run consecutively.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **EHIGIE ANDERSON OSASUMHEN**, now wish to be known and address as **OSAZUWA TILIA OSASUMWEN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

NEWS

Foreign

UN votes to recognise slavery as 'gravest crime against humanity'

The United Nations General Assembly has voted to recognise the slave trade as "the gravest crime against humanity", a move advocates hope will pave the way for healing and justice.

The resolution - proposed by Ghana - called for this designation, while also urging UN member states to consider apologising for the slave trade and contributing to a reparations fund. It does not mention a specific amount of money.

The proposal was adopted with 123 votes in favour and three against - the United States, Israel and Argentina.

Fifty-two countries abstained, including the United Kingdom and European Union member states.

Countries like the UK have long rejected paying reparations, saying today's institutions cannot be held responsi-

ble for past wrongs.

Before the vote, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Ghana's foreign minister, told the BBC's Newsday programme: "We are demanding compensation - and let us be clear, African leaders are not asking for money for themselves."

"We want justice for the victims and causes to be supported, educational and endowment funds, skills training funds."

The campaign for reparations has gained significant momentum in recent years - "reparatory justice" was the African Union's official theme for 2025 and Commonwealth leaders have jointly called for dialogue on the matter.

Ablakwa also said that, with the resolution, Ghana was not ranking its pain above anyone else's, but simply documenting a historical fact.

Between 1500 and 1800, around 12-15 million people

were captured in Africa and taken to the Americas where they were forced to work as slaves. It is estimated that over two million people died on the journey.

The resolution, backed by the African Union and the Caribbean Community, states that the consequences of slavery persist in the form of racial inequalities and underdevelopment "affecting Africans and people of African descent in all parts of the world".

Ablakwa told the BBC: "Many generations continue to suffer the exclusion, the racism because of the transatlantic slave trade which has left millions separated from the continent and impoverished."

The Elmina slave fort is among many historical trading points still standing in Ghana

Ghana, one of the main gateways for the trade, has long been a leading advocate for

reparations.

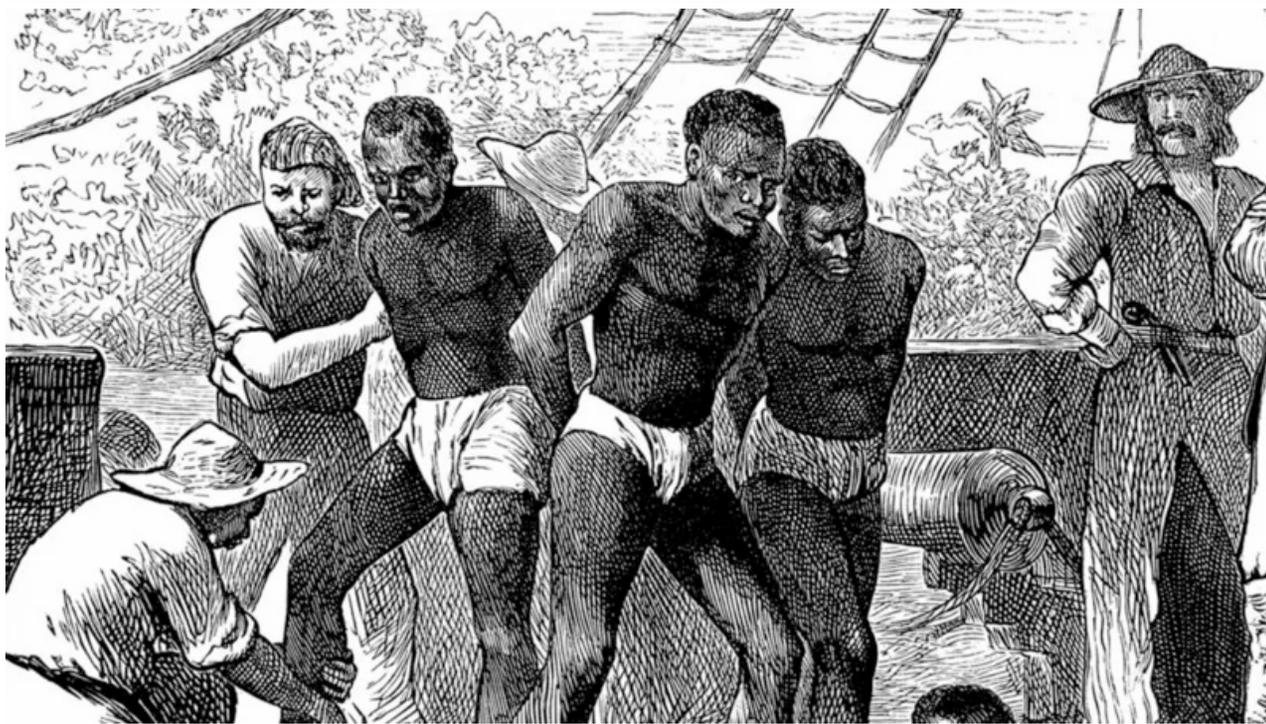
Forts, where tens of thousands of enslaved Africans were once held under inhuman conditions, remain standing along the West African country's coast.

The resolution also calls for cultural artefacts stolen during the colonial era to be returned to their countries of origin.

"We want a return of all those looted artefacts, which represent our heritage, our culture and our spiritual significance. All those artefacts looted for many centuries into the colonial era ought to be returned," Ablakwa said.

Ghana's President John Dramani Mahama told the UN on Tuesday that the resolution was "historic" and "a safeguard against forgetting".

He also criticised Donald Trump's administration for "normalising the erasure of black history".



AFRICA SLAVE TRADE:

Around 12-15 million Africans were captured during the slave trade.

Democrats flip Florida state seat that includes Trump's Mar-a-Lago home

Democrats are projected to win a special election for a Florida legislative district that includes Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, marking another upset in the president's backyard.

Democrat Emily Gregory, a first-time candidate, defeated Trump-backed Republican Jon Maples in a race for the open Florida District 87 state House seat.

The result is a reversal from 2024, when a Republican won the district by 19 percentage points.

Democrats have performed well in special elections during Trump's second term, and Gregory's victory could indicate momentum for the party heading into this year's con-

gressional midterm elections.

"When I started this nine months ago, I obviously thought it was possible," Gregory told MSNBC on Tuesday night.

"I might have done some crazy calculus to decide that this was a flip opportunity, but it was," she later added. "And we did it. So my math worked."

When asked about Trump being her constituent, Gregory said she didn't really think about it.

"He's one of 115,000 registered voters in District 87," she said.

Ken Martin, the chair of the Democratic National Committee celebrated the victory on X, saying voters had "sent a message".

"If Democrats can win in

Trump's backyard, we sure as hell can win anywhere across the country. Onward to November!" Martin wrote.

The Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC), which helps Democrats in state level races, also celebrated the victory.

Gregory's win "proves Republicans are vulnerable everywhere," DLCC President Heather Williams said in a statement. "If Mar-a-Lago and Tampa are vulnerable, imagine what's possible this November."

Trump himself backed Maples, endorsing him in a Truth Social post and urging "great patriots" to vote in the special election.

THE MAR-A-LAGO ES-TATE IN 2025

Marcos promises 'flow of oil' as Philippines declares energy emergency

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos says he is working to secure new sources of oil after he placed the country under a state of national energy emergency in response to the war in Iran.

Marcos told Filipinos in a televised address that the government would procure one million barrels of oil to add to the current stock, which is good for 45 days.

"We will have a flow of oil. Not just one delivery, not two deliveries, but a flow of oil-related products," he said.

The Philippines, which imports 98% of its oil from the gulf, became the first country to declare an energy emergency after local diesel and petrol prices more than doubled in the country since the war broke out on 28 February.

The US-Israel war with Iran and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz - a key shipping route - have sent shock waves through global energy markets, causing shortages and price rises.

Marcos said the emergency declaration late Tuesday would give the government the legal

authority to impose measures to ensure energy stability and protect the broader economy.

"Nothing is off the table. We are looking at everything we can do, whatever suggestion, whatever idea," he said.

Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez had told Reuters that Manila was working with Washington to secure exemptions that would allow the country to import oil from US-sanctioned countries.

The Philippines is one of the US' closest allies in the Pacific.

Under Marcos' order, a committee has been formed to oversee the orderly distribution of fuel, food, medicines, and other essential goods.

The government has also been empowered to directly purchase fuel and petroleum products to shore up supplies.

The declaration will remain in place for one year, unless it is extended or lifted by the president.

It follows calls from several senators, who urged Marcos to acknowledge the "emergency-level" hardship faced by Philippine families due to soar-

Danish PM fails to secure majority in party's weakest election showing since 1903

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's Social Democrats won the most votes in Tuesday's Danish general election but slumped to its weakest performance since 1903, as her coalition bloc failed to secure a majority.

With 21.9% of the vote, Frederiksen's party still has by far the most seats, but her left-wing grouping has fallen well short of the 90 seats needed to form a majority.

The Social Democrats have been in power since 2019, and Frederiksen told cheering supporters she was "sorry that we did not get more votes".

In a message of defiance, she added: "There is nothing today that can make me sad that the Social Democrats have once again become the Danes' absolute favourite political party."

The Social Democrats' main right-wing rival, the Liberal party Venstre, also had its worst showing for a century, with just 10.1%, falling behind the Green Left SF.

Frederiksen still has a chance to stay in power for a third term, however Denmark is typically run by coalition governments, and so tough negotiations - which could take days or weeks - now loom.

Twelve different political parties were on the ballot paper, and this tightly contested race has come right down to the wire.

Claiming a total of 84 seats, the "red bloc" of left-wing par-

ties have clinched a small lead over the "blue bloc" on the right, who have 77 seats combined.

Both blocs have fallen short of the 90 seats that are needed for a majority in Denmark's 179-seat parliament.

It is not yet clear which bloc will be able to build a majority.

"I have been responsible for this wonderful country for almost 7 years," Frederiksen continued. "I am still ready to take on responsibility as Denmark's prime minister."

However, the Moderates, a small party holding 14 seats in the middle, now have the power to act as kingmaker, and all eyes are on its leader, former Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

Party leader Lars Løkke Rasmussen arrives at the Moderates' election celebration for the 2026 Parliamentary Election at Pakhus 11 in Oesterbro, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 24, 2026.

He took the lead in handling the Greenland stand-off with the United States, and went viral for his fist-bump following a meeting with Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington.

With his signature pipe in hand, and surrounded by supporters on Tuesday night, Rasmussen told the crowd he favoured forming a government across the centre.

"We're standing in the middle," he said. "We're ready."

Foreign

NEWS

Dozens of bodies, mostly infants, discovered in Kenya mass grave

About 32 bodies, mostly children, have been dug up from a mass grave in the western Kenyan town of Kericho as investigations continue into the shocking discovery.

The exhumation was done after the police obtained a court order to retrieve 14 bodies that were initially believed to have been buried at the site.

Government pathologist Richard Njoroge told journalists on Tuesday evening that what they found was "quite unusual" with bodies "stacked in gunny bags", after a day-long process that was interrupted by heavy rains.

A post-mortem examination is expected to begin on Wednesday, amid calls to promptly identify the bodies and investigate the circumstances of the deaths.

Njoroge said there were "seven adults and 25 children", with the children being infants and fetuses. A number of body parts were also retrieved.

The pathologist added that some of the bodies appeared to have originated from hospitals and mortuaries but that would be further determined after autopsies.

He noted that the adult remains were highly decomposed, with those of the children less so, which he said indicated that they died at different times.

On Tuesday, homicide detectives and forensic teams, wearing white protective suits, gloves and face masks, worked

under tight security as they dug at the site.

Some bodies were recovered intact, while others were found as partial remains and bones, and placed in evidence bags.

Police sealed off the area while a crowd of residents gathered nearby. Some appeared visibly shaken as investigators documented each stage of the exhumation.

A screengrab from footage shows a crowd that gathered near the burial site as exhumation was going on in Kericho, western Kenya.

The exhumation followed a tip-off from a whistleblower, which prompted police to launch an investigation.

On Monday, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) said their initial findings indicated that 13 unclaimed bodies had officially been released from a hospital in neighbouring Nyamira county and transported to Kericho for burial last Friday.

However, many questions remain about the additional bodies and the manner of burial.

It is also not clear how the bodies came to be buried at the site that belongs to the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), which has denied links to the secret burial.

An official of the organisation told the local Daily Nation news website that the burial was conducted without their approval and caught NCCCK officials by surprise.

Estonia and Latvia say territories hit by stray Ukrainian drones

Ukrainian drones entered Estonian and Latvian air spaces from Russia overnight, with one hitting infrastructure and another crashing on land, Tallinn and Riga have said.

One struck the chimney of a power plant in Auvere, Estonia, while another exploded in the southern Kraslava region of Latvia.

No major damage or injuries were reported.

The incident occurred around the same time as Ukraine launched a massive drone attack on the Russian port of Ust-Luga on the Baltic Sea, some 25km (15 miles) away from the Estonian border.

Estonian Prime Minister Kristen Michal said Ust-Luga was attacked in three waves between 03:00 and 08:00 local time. Baltic air patrols were activated and Estonians received notifications on their phones warning of a "drone threat".

The country's security police chief, Margo Palloson, said it was "a Ukrainian drone that deviated from its course, which was possibly affected in Russian airspace."

Latvian Prime Minister Edgars Rinkevics also confirmed the drone that hit its territory

was Ukrainian.

Latvia's Defence Minister, Andris Spruds, cut short a visit to Ukraine and returned to Latvia in the wake of the incident.

Egils Lescinskis, Latvian deputy chief of the Joint Staff, said the drone "most likely veered off course or was affected by electromagnetic warfare measures protecting some technically important objects".

Drones can sometimes miss their targets when drone jamming systems interfere with their GPS signal.

When asked whether local residents could feel safe, Lescinskis admitted no-one could "feel completely safe when military operations are taking place in neighbouring countries".

He refrained from blaming Ukraine for the accident, and said the drone that crashed into the power plant's chimney was one of "the effects of Russia's full-scale war of aggression".

Palloson of Estonia's security police warned that the country was likely to see "more such incidents", while the country's leader Michal said it was "pointless to create the illusion that we can build a wall on the border with Russia".



IRAN DAMAGE SITE:

A lot of damage has been caused across Iran.

Iran rejects US 15-point peace plan, state media report

Iran has rejected US President Donald Trump's reported 15-point plan to end the war, according to state-run Press TV.

It cited an unknown "senior political-security official" laying out five Iranian conditions for the conflict to end, including paying reparations for damage.

The White House has not confirmed the contents of the plan - published by Israel's Channel 12 network - only admitting "elements of truth" in it. It is said to include a commitment from Iran not to build nuclear weapons and to reopen the strategically important Strait of Hormuz.

The war began on 28 February with US and Israeli air strikes, after which Iran widened hostilities by targeting American allies in the Gulf.

On Tuesday, Trump said

Iran was "desperate" for talks and that Iranian negotiators had given the US a "very significant prize".

The "present" was related to oil and gas, and the Strait of Hormuz, the US president said, without providing further details.

But Iran's parliament speaker has dismissed any suggestion of talks altogether.

"No negotiations have been held with the US, and fakenews [sic] is used to manipulate the financial and oil markets and escape the quagmire in which the US and Israel are trapped," Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf wrote on X.

However, when asked by reporters at a White House briefing on Wednesday, Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt said talks were "ongoing" and "productive".

What does Trump's plan

contain?

According to Israel's Channel 12, Iran must fulfil a number of demands for the war to end.

They mostly centre on the main rationale US officials have given for starting the war: to stop the country building nuclear weapons - an allegation that has not been supported and which Iran has always rejected - and to eliminate the threat of its missile programme.

The proposals request that Iran must "commit never to pursue nuclear weapons", pledge to dismantle nuclear facilities and hand over the enriched amounts of uranium it possesses to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog, which is to monitor the issue going forward.

According to the proposals, Iran would agree to limit its

missile programme in range and quantity.

Additionally, Iran would stop funding regional proxies - Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and the Houthis in Yemen.

Iran would also be required to reopen the Strait of Hormuz so it could function as a "free maritime corridor". Closure of the strait - through which a fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies pass - has sent prices spiking and led to fears of recession in the world economy.

All international sanctions would be lifted on Iran, the reported plan says.

Full sanctions were reimposed last November after Iran suspended inspections of its nuclear facilities in the wake of Israeli and US bombing of several of its nuclear sites and military bases.

Meta and YouTube found liable in landmark social media addiction trial

A Los Angeles jury has handed down an unprecedented win for a young woman who sued Meta and YouTube over her childhood addiction to social media.

Jurors found that Meta, which owns Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp, and Google, owner of YouTube, intentionally built addictive social media platforms that harmed the 20-year old's mental health.

The woman, known as Kaley, was awarded \$3m (£2.2m) in a result that is likely to have implications for hundreds of similar cases now winding their way through US courts.

Lawyers for Meta argued that while Kaley had suffered in her life, her use of Instagram did not cause or meaningfully contribute to those struggles.

In a statement, Meta said: "We respectfully disagree with the verdict and are evaluating our legal options."

Google has been approached for comment.

Jurors found Meta to be 70% responsible for the plaintiff's harm and YouTube was responsible for 30% of the total, meaning Meta will pay the majority of Kaley's award.

Another form of damages, punitive damages, are still to be determined by the court. Under state law, this could reach up to \$30m.

Parents of other children, who are not part of Kaley's lawsuit but claim they were also harmed by social media, were outside the courthouse on Wednesday, as they had been many days throughout the five-week trial.

When the verdict came through, parents like Amy Neville were seen celebrating and hugging other parents and supporters who had been waiting for a decision.

The LA verdict came a day after a jury in New Mexico found Meta liable for the way in which its platforms endangered children and exposed them to sexually explicit material and contact with sexual predators.

Mike Proulx, a research director for Forrester, said the back-to-back verdicts underline a "breaking point" between social media companies and the public.

"Negative sentiment toward social media has been building for years, and now it's finally boiled over," Proulx said.

During his appearance before the jury in February, Mark Zuckerberg, Meta's chairman

and chief executive, relied on his company's longstanding policy of not allowing users under the age of 13 on any of its platforms.

When presented with internal research and documents showing that Meta knew young children were, in fact, using its platforms, Zuckerberg said he "always wished" for faster progress to identify users under 13. He insisted the company had reached the "right place over time".

While Google, as the owner of video-sharing site YouTube, was also a defendant in the case, most of the trial proceedings focused on Instagram and Meta.

Snap and TikTok were also initially defendants, but both companies reached undisclosed settlements with Kaley prior to trial.

Feature

BANDITRY AND COST OF SILENCE

How security collapsed in rural Kwara

USMAN ALIYU (NAN)

At the dawn of Aug. 8, 2025, the village of Babanla in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara stirred into the familiar rhythms of another day.

Roosters crowed and the first call to prayer drifted across the settlement. Thereafter, traders lifted shop shutters while farmers prepared motorcycles for distant fields.

Smoke curled gently from cooking fires. Then gunshots erupted.

Saadat Alabi had just arranged provisions outside her roadside shop when armed men emerged from the thick forest corridor linking Baba-Sango to neighbouring settlements. Within seconds, panic spread across the community.

"They came from the forest shooting everywhere. People were running without knowing where to go."

Residents fled into bushes as attackers moved house-to-house. Some victims were shot while attempting escape; others were trapped indoors.

A statement from the police confirmed that five persons, including a police officer, Adejumo Wasiu, were killed during the attack.

Alabi's teenage son, Kamal, was among those killed.

"He was running ahead of me. When I heard people shouting his name, I knew something terrible had happened."

What shocked many residents more than the violence itself was recognition.

"The attackers were people who lived around us for years. Everybody knew their leader," she said.

Many residents confirm that one of the leaders of the bandits grew up in the area and moved freely for years in spite of widespread suspicion about his criminal links.

"He knew every path; he knew who had motorcycles, who had money, who lived where," said Ibrahim Abdulrashied, a youth volunteer who helped evacuate victims during the attack.

The attack on Babanla was only one chapter in a longer story of fear unfolding across Ifelodun Local Government Area.

Long before gunmen stormed the town, several neighbouring settlements had already fallen silent.

Communities such as Eka, Upper Eka, Lower Eka, Kudagbari, Gbanmu, Oloruntele, Baba-Sango, Ibudo Idowu, Ibudo Olosun, Ayetoro and Apata Olosun had gradually been deserted as repeated attacks forced residents to abandon homes, farms and ancestral lands in search of safety.

Empty compounds, overgrown pathways and abandoned farmlands became quiet evidence that insecurity had been creeping closer for years.

Then, on Sept. 28, 2025, the violence returned; this time to Oke-Ode, a once peaceful agrarian town in the same local government area. Residents woke before sunrise to the sharp, continuous crack of gunfire.

"It sounded like war. People ran without even knowing where their children were," a resident, Ibrahim Ishola recounted.



L-R Gov. AbdulRahman AbdulRasaq of Kwara and the Chairman of Ifelodun Local Government Council, Femi Yusuf being briefed by a senior security officer during one of the attacks.

When the shooting stopped and the smoke cleared, grief settled heavily over the town.

No fewer than 17 persons were confirmed dead; among them hunters, vigilantes, traders and young men who had attempted to defend their community.

Also killed was Abdulwasii Abdulkareem, the Baale (village head) of Ogba Ayo, alongside his brother, Fatai Abdulkareem.

Both men had served as part of the community's first line of defence against earlier threats.

Local sources identified other victims as Ishola Muhammed, a prince from Agunjin; Abdulfatai Elemosho and Salaudeen Bashir from Babaloma; Saheed from Abayan; Olowo-Ila from Oke-Ode; as well as Oluode Ologomo, Oji and Saheed Matubi.

This scale of violence reflected a troubling trend already captured by data.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), an independent conflict monitoring platform, recorded at least 93 conflict-related deaths in Ifelodun Local Government Area between August and October 2025.

The incident was one of the deadliest insecurity spikes ever documented in Kwara South, a region once considered relatively safe from Nigeria's expanding banditry crisis.

These fatalities represented only those who never returned home.

They did not include the hundreds of villagers abducted across Ifelodun's rural settlements between 2024 and 2025; men taken from farms, women seized along footpaths, traders intercepted on lonely roads, and children dragged from sleeping homes under cover of darkness.

In many families, survival comes at a devastating price.

Relatives sold inherited farmland that had sustained generations. Livestock meant for harvest seasons disappeared overnight into emergency markets.

Motorcycles, household belongings and savings carefully built over years were traded away in desperate negotiations with kidnappers operating deep inside surrounding forests.

Across Ifelodun's rural landscape, thick forests separate farming communities.

For generations, those forests provided firewood, game and fertile land. But over time, they also became safe havens for armed groups.

Residents said the men who later turned into bandits did not arrive as enemies. They first appeared as hunters and migrant settlers.

They bought food freely in local markets; they greeted elders respectfully; some married within the communities.

"They lived among us; we never believed they would become our problem," Sulaiman Issa, a resident of Babanla said quietly.

Over the years, the strangers blended into daily life while establishing camps deep inside surrounding forests.

Because attacks were happening in distant towns, many locals assumed an unspoken understanding existed — that their own communities would be spared.

That belief proved dangerously wrong.

Chief Oyin Zubair, Coordinator of Joint Security Watch, Kwara South and an indigene of Oke-Ode, said the tragedy did not begin with gunshots but with decisions made years earlier.

According to him, what began as hospitality slowly created vulnerability.

"They came peacefully at first. But gradually, they became a nuisance, and later a threat," the security watch coordinator explained.

By the time violence finally reached home, the networks had already taken root, the forests already mapped, and the communities already exposed.

What followed, residents admitted was not entirely unexpected, but only delayed.

"We have told our fathers (traditional rulers) that most of these problems

started from them; strangers were accommodated without proper checks. Gradually, they became a nuisance."

According to him, communities tolerated suspicious elements under an informal survival logic — as long as attacks happened elsewhere.

"People believed if they stayed quiet, the bandits would not attack them. Unfortunately, that silence later costs lives."

He confirmed that the leader of the attackers had longstanding ties within the community before turning fully to criminality.

"He grew up around Babanla; he knew everything about the area; now he is on the run," Zubair said.

The aftermath remains severe. The coordinator regretted that many communities in the area were now ghosts of their former selves.

"We have villages today that are empty; many people have not returned home; the trauma is deep."

Zubair described the experience as a painful awakening.

"We have learnt that security is not the government's job alone. It is everybody's responsibility," he said.

Security authorities say the Ifelodun attacks illustrate a recurring pattern in rural insecurity; criminal groups thriving through community intelligence failures.

The Commissioner of Police in Kwara, Adekimi Ojo, said armed groups rarely operate successfully without insider information.

"The bandit cannot operate without information; they know the terrain because some grew up there or received support from locals," Ojo said.

According to him, collaboration occurs in complex ways — through fear, financial inducement or ignorance.

"Some residents are threatened; others are rewarded; some believe the criminals are fighting security forces elsewhere," Ojo explained, saying they forgot, eventually, those same criminals return.

Police investigations, the police

commissioner said, revealed that information often leaked unintentionally. Traders disclosed travel patterns. Residents discussed wealthy households. Transporters unknowingly supplied logistics.

He asserted, also, that trust deficits between communities and security agencies further worsened intelligence gaps.

"Without trust, people will not give information. That is why we are strengthening community engagement," the police chief said.

At the local government level, officials acknowledge that informant networks had already taken root before authorities intervened.

Chairman of Ifelodun Local Government Council, Femi Yusuf, said insecurity persisted partly because communities underestimated early warning signs.

"Honestly, anyone who says they didn't know insecurity existed is deceiving himself," he said.

He bemoaned how efforts by the council to introduce resident registration and visitor documentation met resistance from locals unwilling to submit personal details.

"Many refused to register strangers living with them. But later we discovered that some communities had already been infiltrated."

The council chairman disclosed that some residents unknowingly shared sensitive information with suspicious visitors through routine commercial interactions.

"A stranger buys goods at high prices and begins asking questions, and people talk freely without knowing they are giving intelligence," he said.

According to him, dismantling such entrenched networks remains difficult because informants were recruited both voluntarily and under coercion.

Retired Superintendent of Police Ajayi Okasanmi, a security expert and former Police Public Relations Officer in Kwara, described the attacks as a failure of community policing fundamentals.

He said community policing collapsed when citizens withhold intelligence.

"The police are not magicians. They work on information given by the people."

According to him, rural residents possess the strongest surveillance advantage because they understand local terrain and social networks.

"If strange faces appear, the community should notice first. Failure to report early allows criminals to establish themselves," he noted.

Okasanmi explained that many communities unknowingly aid criminal logistics.

"A stranger buys goods at inflated prices, asks questions, and people respond freely because they see business.

"Without knowing, they are already giving intelligence," he said.

The security expert stressed that patriotism and vigilance, not weaponry, remained the first defense against insecurity.

He emphasised early reporting, youth surveillance groups and emergency alert systems as critical preventive measures.

FEATURE

Corruption as an endemic challenge

RAYMOND OSOGBE

Corruption is one of the most serious challenges facing Nigeria today. It has deeply affected the country's political, economic, and social systems, making it difficult for meaningful development to take place.

Corruption refers to the dishonest or illegal use of power for personal gain. It includes practices such as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, favoritism, and abuse of office. Over the years, corruption has become a major burden that continues to slow down Nigeria's progress.

One of the major causes of corruption in Nigeria is greed and selfishness among leaders and citizens. Many individuals in positions of authority focus more on enriching themselves than serving the public. In addition, weak institutions contribute greatly to corruption. Agencies responsible for enforcing laws are sometimes ineffective or influenced by powerful individuals, making it difficult to punish offenders.

Poor salaries and lack of incentives for workers also play a role, as some employees resort to corrupt practices to survive.

Furthermore, the lack of accountability and transparency in governance allows corruption to thrive. In some cases, society even tolerates or encourages corrupt behavior, seeing it as a normal way of life.

The effects of corruption in Nigeria are widespread and damaging.

Economically, corruption leads to



the mismanagement and loss of public funds. Money meant for important projects such as roads, hospitals, and schools is often diverted into private pockets. As a result, infrastructure development remains poor, and foreign investors are discouraged from doing business in the

country. This weakens the economy and limits job opportunities.

Corruption also increases poverty and inequality.

When resources are stolen, fewer funds are available for social services like education and healthcare. This affects

the poor the most, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Unemployment is another serious consequence, as funds meant for job creation are misused, and businesses struggle in an unfair environment where bribery and favoritism determine success.

In addition, corruption leads to poor governance and loss of public trust. Citizens begin to lose confidence in their leaders when they see them engaging in corrupt practices. This can result in political instability and lack of cooperation between the government and the people.

Corruption also contributes to insecurity, as funds meant for security agencies may be misappropriated, weakening efforts to combat crime and terrorism.

Despite these challenges, corruption can be reduced through several measures. First, there must be strong laws and strict enforcement to punish corrupt individuals regardless of their status. Transparency and accountability should be promoted in all sectors of government. Improving workers' salaries and welfare can also reduce the temptation to engage in corruption. Public awareness and education are important in changing people's attitudes toward corruption.

Additionally, the use of technology, such as digital payment systems and e-governance, can help reduce opportunities for corruption.

In conclusion, corruption is a heavy burden on Nigeria because it affects every aspect of national development. It leads to economic decline, poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. However, with strong commitment from both the government and citizens, corruption can be minimized, paving the way for growth and development in the country.

Society: Five valuable words with Tom Clark

Hello Grace, When you were a kid, did your parents or grandparents work hard to teach you to use what were called good manners? These include things like saying "please," "thank you" and "I'm sorry."

I remember both my mother and my grandmother telling me I needed to use these words and reminding me when I forgot—quite regularly! At the time, I really didn't give it much thought beyond the fact that it was what I was supposed to do, and there would be unpleasant consequences if I didn't.

Then as a young adult I discovered it was easy to identify the children who had been taught those good manners because they were friendly, polite and pleasant to be around. They had an awareness of the world beyond themselves, and they cared about those around them.

The children who were rude were very much the opposite—seemingly

totally consumed by themselves and what they wanted at the moment.

I knew which of those I wanted my kids to be like one day!

A handful of short years later, my wife and I started a family of our own. We both wanted to teach our children these good manners, to have children who would automatically stop to say "please," "thank you" and, when needed, "I'm sorry."

We wanted well-behaved children that people wouldn't dread to see coming. And we hoped that would translate into well-behaved adults who people wouldn't dread to see coming!

Sociologists have written about the power of these words and the attitudes behind them. They can literally be life-changing!

Please is a word that automatically shows respect. "May I have another cookie, please?" "Would you please help me lift this?"

Saying "please" helps gear children's

minds to the fact that other people are not there just to serve them or fill their desires. To say "please" is to acknowledge you are asking someone to alter what they are doing for something you requested. With saying "please" comes the understanding that we need to be grateful when someone helps us.

Which leads to "thank you." Whether it was for something you requested or simply for a kind or thoughtful deed or gesture offered to you, expressing gratitude is emotionally healthy and biblical!

To confirm this, all you need to do is a brief Bible study on gratitude, perhaps aided by one of the following articles from our Life, Hope & Truth website:

How to Show Appreciation

Something to Be Thankful for This Thanksgiving

Unthankfulness: A Sign of Perilous Times

The third part my parents taught me was to apologize when needed. I

was required to tell others "I'm sorry" if I bumped into them, forgot something, was late or created some other kind of problem for them.

This also taught me a level of empathy and understanding of the feelings of others. Even though so many people today are quite rude, the ability to be empathetic and understanding is very important for social creatures like human beings. We wanted our children to learn that too!

It would be good for us all to read the following LHT articles:

How to Apologize

Learning to Say "Sorry"

Six Essential Elements of an Effective Apology

Perhaps you've heard the old saying, "Monkey see, monkey do." It is



Even though so many people today are quite rude, the ability to be empathetic and understanding is very important for social creatures like human beings.

often used regarding children, in that they will mirror the examples they see around them.

The more respected and adored the person, the greater the impact of the example. That's why it is so important that we parents consciously and continuously model each of these things, showing by our example that gratitude and empathy are very valuable and important traits to have.

The place to start is with our spouses. How much good might it do for your marriage to make it a practice, starting right now, to deliberately use these words with your husband or wife? And just as important, what will your children learn by seeing your example?

Many of us no longer have small children at home. Maybe they are all grown and hopefully teaching our grandchildren these things. In some cases, grandchildren are also grown and now we want them to teach our great-grandchildren the same thing.

So, what can or should we still do?

I think it's important for every member of a family to practice these good manners as a way of life.

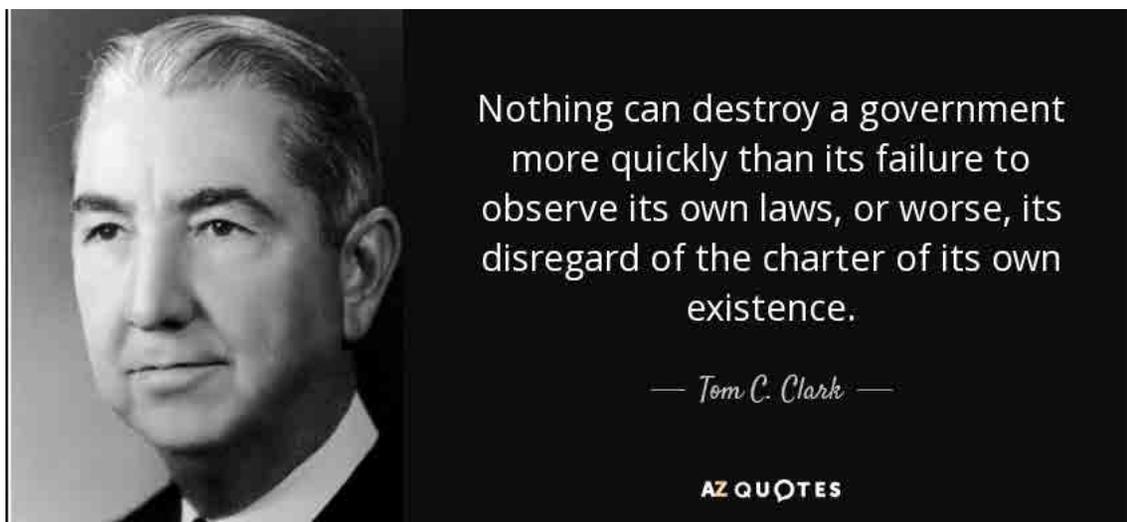
God called His Church to be a family as well. He grafts us into a wonderful collection of family members from all over the globe! With everything we do and say we are setting an example, either a good one or a bad one.

Just as these elements of good manners can improve a marriage and family, so can they improve a congregation. Everyone benefits!

I encourage you to give some thought to how often you say "please," "thank you" and "I'm sorry." Consider how valuable these five words are.

Kind regards, and have a great rest of your week,

Tom Clark, for Life, Hope & Truth



Struggling to survive: How rising costs, youth unemployment, and healthcare gaps threaten a generation worldwide

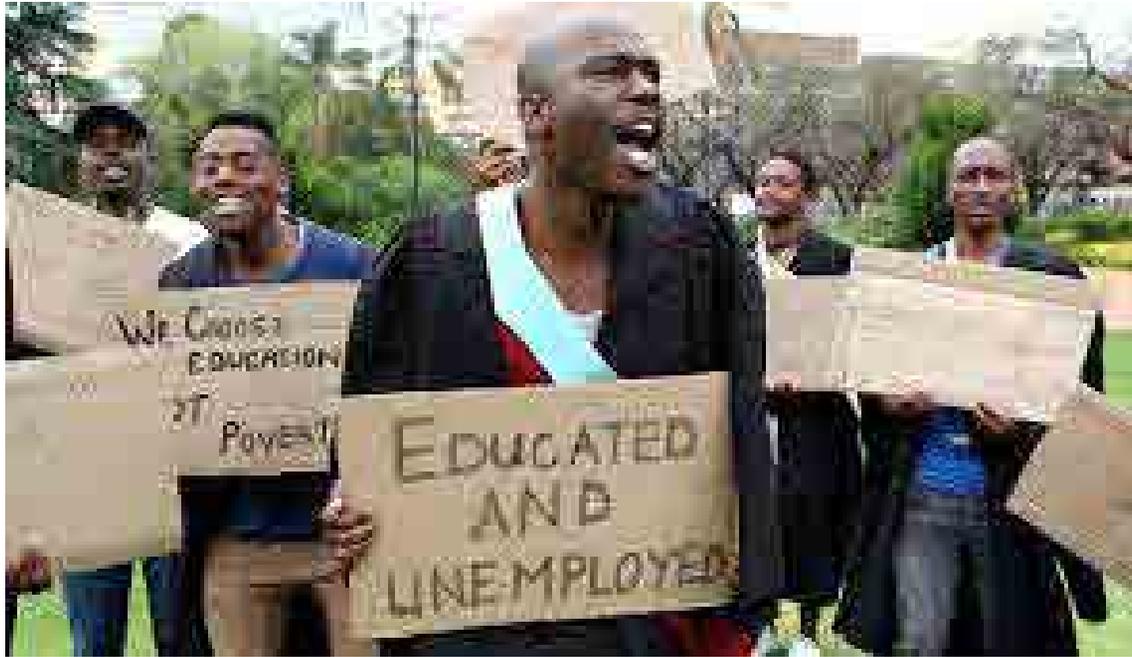
GENERAL IWU COSMOS JP

Across the globe, millions of young people are facing an unprecedented challenge: the struggle to survive in a world where economic hardship, unemployment, and insufficient healthcare intersect.

From the crowded cities of Lagos and Dhaka to the streets of Buenos Aires and Manila, families are stretching every dollar—or naira, peso, or taka—to cover food, rent, and medical expenses, while young graduates wander in search of meaningful work. The result is a generation under pressure, with social, economic, and health consequences that resonate far beyond national borders.

Rising costs of living are a shared global crisis. In the United States, inflation reached historic highs in 2022, forcing families to spend more on groceries and utilities. In Lebanon, years of economic collapse have rendered basic necessities unaffordable for millions. Similarly, in South Africa, soaring energy prices have combined with food inflation to strain households. The global trend is clear: basic needs are becoming increasingly difficult to meet, and ordinary citizens everywhere feel the pinch.

These economic pressures are closely linked to youth unemployment, a global concern affecting both developing and developed nations. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than 70 million young people worldwide are unemployed, with rates particularly high in Africa, the Middle East, and Southern Europe. In countries like Spain and Greece, graduates



with advanced degrees struggle to find permanent employment, while in Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Egypt, millions of young adults are limited to informal or low-paying work. The consequences are severe: financial instability, delayed family formation, and increased migration as youth seek opportunities abroad.

Healthcare challenges compound the problem. In Yemen and Syria, ongoing conflict has decimated healthcare systems, leaving millions without access to essential services.

In Haiti, hospitals remain underfunded and overcrowded, while in India, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic weaknesses that continue to strain resources. Across na-

tions, insufficient healthcare provision interacts with poverty and unemployment, creating a cycle where illness reduces productivity, medical costs increase household debt, and families are trapped in vulnerability.

The interconnectedness of these crises is evident everywhere. In Lebanon, youth unemployment and economic collapse have left many families unable to afford medicines for chronic conditions.

In South Africa, rising living costs mean parents must choose between feeding their families and covering healthcare expenses. In Nigeria and Bangladesh, informal workers are particularly vulnerable, often losing jobs without compensation or social

safety nets. Globally, these pressures are fueling social unrest, protests, and migration, as young people demand better opportunities and protection.

The implications for the world are significant. Economically, a generation unable to work or contribute effectively reduces human capital, innovation, and productivity. Socially, widespread youth disenfranchisement threatens stability and community cohesion.

Health crises, left unchecked, can accelerate the spread of infectious diseases across borders, as the COVID-19 pandemic starkly demonstrated. International investors and development organizations are paying attention: countries struggling with

combined economic, employment, and healthcare challenges risk falling further behind in a globally competitive environment.

Yet, amid this global crisis lies opportunity. Countries that invest in healthcare, support youth employment, and implement measures to control living costs can transform these challenges into growth. Initiatives such as vocational training programs, microfinance support, and universal healthcare pilots show promise in countries from Rwanda to Brazil. Renewable energy investments, affordable housing programs, and targeted subsidies can also relieve the pressures faced by families worldwide.

For policymakers and the international community, the message is clear: the struggles of youth, families, and healthcare systems are interconnected, and solutions must be integrated. Ignoring these challenges anywhere risks consequences everywhere, from economic stagnation to migration pressures, and from social unrest to global health risks.

As cities around the world light up at night, the roar of generators, the long queues at hospitals, and the silent frustration of unemployed youth remind us that resilience has limits. Without immediate, coordinated action, the combined pressures of cost of living, youth unemployment, and healthcare gaps could define an entire generation.

The stakes are global, and the opportunity is universal: invest in people, stabilize economies, and strengthen healthcare systems. Only then can the generation struggling today hope to thrive tomorrow.

Why Okigwe must stand by truth and not propaganda

CHINEDUM ANAYO

In politics, noise is cheap. Results are not. And in Okigwe Zone today, the widening gap between both has become impossible to ignore.

The push to normalize a return ticket for a sitting senator must not become an escape route for underperformance.

It is important to highlight that representation is not ceremonial, it is measurable.

Representation is reflected in bills sponsored, motions moved, and the visible impact on constituents.

So the question remains unavoidable:

Where are the results?

Under the watch of Senator Patrick Ndubueze, a troubling pattern has emerged—one where claims are loud, but impact is faint.

Okigwe people are increasingly confronted with a narrative that credits one man for nearly every development in the zone.

This is not just exaggerated, it is rather misleading.

What is clear remains; No one-term senator builds an entire zone.

From roads to institutional projects, there has been a persistent attempt to appropriate achievements that belong elsewhere.

The most striking example is the claim of bringing the Federal University Okigwe, Imo State, which was approved alongside other new federal institutions in June 2025—a project widely known to have been initiated by the administration of Governor Hope Uzodinma.

You cannot inherit credit and call it performance. Politics doesn't work like that.

Even more telling is the contrast across Imo State.

When Governor Hope Uzodinma facilitated the upgrade of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education to a university, Senator Ezenwa Onyewuchi did not claim it as his personal achievement.

Likewise, major projects such as the Owerri-Orlu Road, the Orashi Power Plant, and the gas refinery, critical developments within Imo State—have not been appropriated by Senator Osita Izunaso, despite his representation of Orlu Zone.

Yet, in Okigwe, even projects like the Owerri-Okigwe Road have been

publicly claimed as personal legislative achievements.

This raises fundamental questions: Why is one senator claiming everything, while others allow their work to speak for itself?

Why is it that virtually every development in Okigwe Zone is being claimed by one individual?

Why is it that one senator appears to have "done everything," while others across Imo State do not make such sweeping claims?

Leadership is not a monopoly of credit—it is a responsibility of service.

Evidently, there appears to be an unchecked pattern of exaggerated and, in some cases, false claims.

For supporters of the status quo, the answer is simple: If the achievements are real, let them speak.

Propaganda is only necessary where performance is completely compromised or lacking.

Even more concerning is the reality on the ground.

Okigwe was meant to be elevated—to gain visibility, influence, and security.

Instead, questions around insecurity and political disconnect have

grown louder.

While Governor Hope Uzodinma continues to push aggressively to stabilize and develop Imo State, legislative representation in Okigwe has not matched that urgency.

Representation must complement progress—not compete with it or distort it.

Politics Without People Cannot Survive. Politics, at its core, is about people. No leader can thrive while alienating constituents and sidelining key stakeholders.

You cannot antagonize the people and still claim to represent them. Such political ideology cannot be sustained.

At this critical moment, Okigwe stands at a crossroads. The choice is not complicated.

The future of Okigwe Zone cannot be built on inflated claims or political propaganda.

It must be anchored on truth, performance, and collective progress.

Between noise and results, choose results.

• Chinedum Anayo is a Political Commentator and can be reached at nedu-um@aol.com



Politics

*Without People
Cannot Survive.
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constituents and
sidelining key
stakeholders.*

Sports

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

Team Nigeria targets world relay qualification as Okon, athletes express strong confidence ahead of Lefika relays

Team Nigeria departed Lagos on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, for the Lefika International Relays in Gaborone, Botswana, as the country intensifies its push for qualification to the World Relay Championships later this year.

The contingent of 15 athletes and three officials will travel aboard Ethiopian Airlines, with a scheduled stopover in Addis Ababa before arriving in Gaborone on March 26.

The Secretary General of the

Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN), Israel Inwang, told the media shortly before departure that the team is in high spirits ahead of Saturday's all-important races.

Inwang, further noted that a key member of the team Enoch Adegoke will be joining the team. "Adegoke will be flying straight to Gaborone from Germany," the scribe added.

Nigeria will compete in four events at the meet, the men's 4x100m, men's and women's 4x400m, and the mixed 4x400m

relay, with a clear objective of securing qualification slots for the World Relay Championships slated for May, also in Gaborone.

AFN Technical Director, Gabriel Okon, expressed confidence in the team's ability to qualify in multiple events, stressing the importance of synergy between home-based and overseas athletes.

"We need to build a strong blend of athletes at home and those abroad. Together, they can strengthen the team and deliver better results," Okon said.

He added that the team is well-prepared and capable of competing at the highest level.

"With all things being equal, we will pick up qualification slots. The athletes have trained well, and I can confidently say they are ready," he stated.

Notably, the women's 4x100m and mixed 4x100m relay teams have already secured qualification for the global event, leaving the remaining squads to battle for available slots.

One of the most experienced athletes in the team, George

Patience Okon, is optimistic about a strong performance.

"This race means a lot to me and the team. We are going there to give our best, and with that, we believe we will qualify for the World Championships later this year," she said.

Her optimism is shared by Victor Ime, who believes this presents a crucial opportunity for the team.

"It's a big task for us. We made an attempt in Calabar and ran 3:04, but this is another big opportunity. With the team we have now, I believe we can secure qualifications," he said.

The team boasts a blend of youth and experience, with athletes such as Enaruna Anita Itohan, Badmus Gafari Atanda, Ezeakor Chidera, Emmanuel James Taiwo, Ojeli Ifeanyi Emmanuel, and George Patience Okon expected to play key roles.

Others on the roster include Nathaniel Samson, Adeyemi Sikiru Adewale, Sampson Victor Ime, Godwin Tejiri, Jecinter Lawrence, Chukwuka Obi Jennifer, and Omokwe Maria Thompson.



GABRIEL OKONAWA LEADS NIGERIA'S ATHLETICS TEAM

PUMA becomes official outfitter of Basketball Africa League

Three days before the start of the 2026 season, the Basketball Africa League (BAL) has announced a multi-year partnership with German sportswear giant PUMA.

Under the agreement, which takes effect from March 27 in Pretoria, PUMA will serve as the official outfitter for players, referees, and fans.

The deal represents a strategic move aimed at boosting the growth of basketball across the continent by blending high-performance gear with African cultural identity.

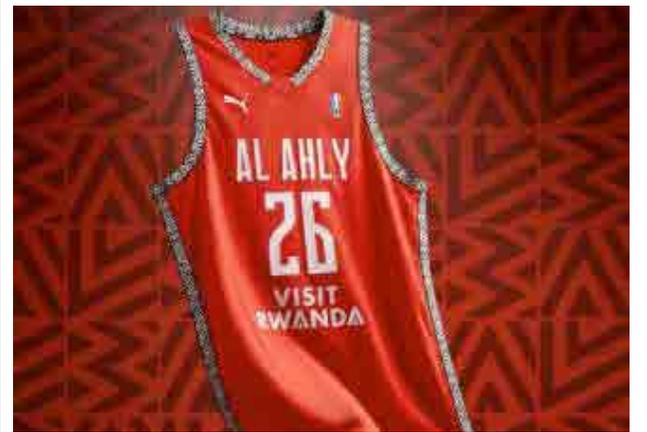
The newly unveiled BAL merchandise will be available online and in official retail stores across South Africa from

the start of the season.

BAL President Amadou Gallo Fall described the partnership as a significant milestone in the league's development.

"Our collaboration with PUMA reflects our shared commitment to elevating the sports industry in Africa, and basketball in particular," he said. P

"PUMA's innovation, creativity, and deep connection to the continent's sports ecosystem and our sport make them an ideal partner to help us continue raising the bar for African basketball, enriching the experience for teams, players, and fans, and supporting the BAL's continued growth."



New era for women in sports: Dr. Aluko urges bold leadership and athlete welfare reforms

Sports administrator and advocate Esther Oluwatoyin Aluko has called on women serving on national sports federation boards to take active leadership roles in advancing gender-inclusive governance and improving athlete welfare across Nigeria.

Speaking in an interview on the opening day of the Olympic Solidarity/NOC Sports Administration Course organised by the Nigeria Olympic Committee, Dr. Aluko emphasised that the programme is designed to empower participants to become strong voices for female athletes within their respective federations.

According to her, the responsibility of former athletes extends beyond competition, stressing the need to educate, mentor, and inspire the next generation.

"As former athletes, it is our responsibility to discover, educate, empower, and mentor younger ones. We are role models, and when athletes see the benefits of sports through us, it encourages them not to give up," she said.

Dr. Aluko highlighted the importance of advocacy, noting that women now occupying positions on federation boards must champion issues affecting female athletes, including safeguarding and welfare.

"They need to be the voice for female athletes on the

board, talking about safeguarding, welfare, and all the rest," she added.

She further explained that participants are expected to replicate the knowledge gained from the course within their states and associations, particularly those who are also coaches, by preparing young athletes for future success.

Describing the initiative as a turning point, Dr. Aluko noted that the programme represents a shift from traditional approaches to sports administration.



ESTHER OLUWATOYIN ALUKO

World Cup: Morocco unveil new 2026 kits blending tradition, modern designs

Morocco have officially unveiled its new national team kits for the 2026 international season, with manufacturer PUMA combining cultural heritage with modern design in a collection that reflects the country's

growing global football stature.

The launch forms part of a wider global release by PUMA, which introduced new kits for several national teams across multiple continents. However, Morocco emerged as one of the standout highlights,

underlining both its football progress and rich cultural identity.

The new home kit retains Morocco's iconic red base, symbolising passion, strength and national pride. It is complemented by green accents along the sides, inspired by the star on the Moroccan flag. The collar and sleeves feature patterns influenced by traditional Moroccan embroidery, giving the shirt a distinctive cultural finish.

In contrast, the away kit adopts a clean white design, enhanced with subtle geometric patterns rooted in Moroccan craftsmanship. Red and green details remain visible, maintaining a strong connection to national identity while offering a more minimalist look.



MOROCCAN NATIONAL TEAM

Execution of Iranian wrestler sparks global outcry, renewed criticism

The execution of Iranian wrestler Saleh Mohammadi has triggered widespread international condemnation, raising fresh concerns over human rights and the treatment of athletes in Iran.

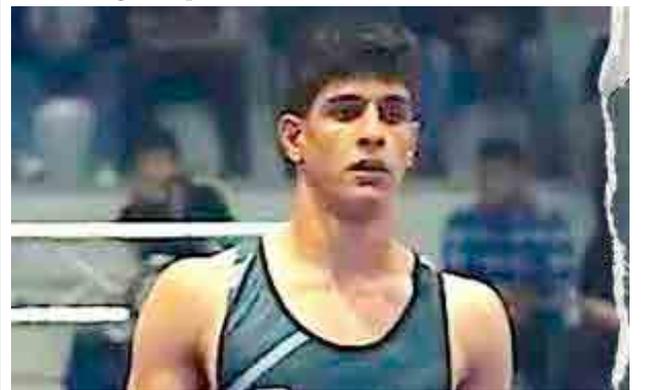
Mohammadi, who had represented his country on the international stage, was executed on Thursday alongside two other Iranian citizens, Mehdi Ghasemi and Saeed Davoudi, following a controversial judicial process linked to anti-government protests earlier this year.

Iranian authorities allege that the three men were responsible for the killing of two police officers

during demonstrations in the city of Qom on 8 January. According to official accounts, the incident formed part of a coordinated violent response during a period of heightened social tension.

Human rights organisations have strongly disputed the official narrative, describing the trial as deeply flawed.

Groups including Amnesty International and Iran Human Rights claim Mohammadi was denied adequate legal defence and forced to confess under coercion. They also allege that the court dismissed claims of torture and ignored the athlete's retraction of his confession.



SALEH MOHAMMADI

Sports

NWFL MD 12: Edo Queens spank Ekiti Queens 2-0 as team maintains impressive run



EDO QUEENS

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

As predicted by many football followers in Benin, Edo Queens Football Club of Benin, yesterday secured a comfortable 2-0 home victory over Ekiti Queens FC as they continued with their impressive run in the Nigeria Women Football League.

Rebecca Adegbemile broke the deadlock for Edo Queens in the 26th minute of action after the visitors had showed some strong resistance. Atume Doosuur sealed victory for the Benin based team in the 45th minute shortly before half-time whistle with a fine header.

It was a comfortable and dominant performance for Edo

Queens FC in the second half of the match as they dictated the pace, leaving their opponents Ekiti Queens FC helpless.

Recall that Edo Queens pipped Ekiti Queens 1-0 in front of their home fans in the first leg in a highly tensed match, played at the Oluyemi Kayode Stadium Ado-Ekiti.

The 2-0 victory over struggling Ekiti Queens has sustained Edo Queens in sitting second in group A table with 27 points after 12 matches. Ekiti Queens on the other hand sit on the seventh position with 10 points before the match day 12 encounter in Benin, with six matches remaining in the current regular season before the prestigious Super six showdown.

Organisers announce new date for sportville Awards

Organizers of the annual Sportville Special Recognition Award has announced a new date for this year's edition. The new date is April 3rd, 2026 as against the earlier advertised date of March 28th.

The postponement, according to a statement issued by the Chief Executive Officer of Sportville, Frank Ilaboya, is to allow for full attendance following some awardees and dignitaries' engagement in the nation's capital on the same 28th.

"We realize that the earlier March 28th date is no longer feasible due a pressing nation-

al assignment in Abuja which most of the awardees and invited dignitaries are also involved.

"To give opportunity to most of the dignitaries invited for the ceremony, we have to move our date forward by one week," Ilaboya further explained.

The annual award which enters its 6th edition this year, is a gathering of sports personalities, journalists and the crème de la crème of the society.

The event comes up at the Prestigious Lagos Country Club, Ikeja Lagos under the Chairmanship of Dr Larry Izamoje, the Chairman of Brila Media Group.

World Cup: European fans file complaint over World Cup ticket prices

European soccer fans have lodged a formal complaint over the high cost of tickets for this summer's FIFA World Cup in North America.

Football Supporters Europe (FSE) and the consumer rights organisation Euroconsumers filed an 18-page complaint on Tuesday with the European Commission in Brussels.

"FIFA holds a monopoly over ticket sales for the 2026 World Cup and has used that power to impose conditions on fans that would never be acceptable in a competitive market," FSE and Euroconsumers said in a joint statement.

They argue that ticket prices are significantly higher than at any previous World Cup. Tickets for the final at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on July 19 start at \$4,185 — seven times the cost of the cheapest ticket at the 2022 World Cup final in Qatar.

The complaint accuses FIFA of engaging in "bait advertising," "uncontrolled" dynamic pricing, "pressure-selling tactics" and a lack of transparency about seat locations and refund policies.

"Dynamic pricing turns fans' loyalty into a bidding war, inflates costs without added value and locks out many supporters," said Els Bruggeman, head of policy and enforcement at Euroconsumers, per ESPN.

The allegation of bait advertising, which is illegal under European Union consumer laws,

is a reference to FIFA's claim in October that group-stage ticket prices started at \$60. However, after fans' groups across Europe complained about the lack of availability at that price, FIFA had to release more tickets at that price in December.

"Football is a universal passion but FIFA is treating it like a private luxury by exploiting its absolute monopoly over World Cup ticketing," said Marco Scialdone, head of litigation at Euroconsumers, per The Athletic.



Senegal moves swiftly after CAS denial, sends appeal on AFCON 2025 decision

The Senegalese Football Federation has officially filed an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport, challenging the recent decision by the Confederation of African Football to strip the country of the Africa Cup of

Nations title.

CAF's appeal committee last week ruled to overturn Senegal's triumph, awarding the title instead to Morocco in a decision that has since generated widespread debate across the African football landscape.



SENEGAL PALYERS

According to official confirmation, the Senegalese FA lodged their appeal on Tuesday, March 24, seeking a review and possible reversal of CAF's verdict.

Meanwhile, CAS on Monday had denied receipt of any appeal from Senegal before the country responded it has submitted on the following day (Tuesday).

The case will now be handled by CAS, football's highest arbitration body, which is expected to announce a hearing date in the coming weeks.

Senegal's move signals their determination to contest the ruling through legal channels, as the dispute over the 2025 AFCON title heads into a new phase.

World Cup 2026 spots as play-offs kick off

The race for the final places at the FIFA World Cup 2026 enters its decisive phase this week, with six nations set to compete in the intercontinental play-off tournament beginning on 26 March.

Bolivia, DR Congo, Jamaica, Iraq, New Caledonia and Suriname will battle for just two remaining tickets to the expanded 48-team global finals, bringing years of qualification campaigns down to a handful of decisive matches.

The tournament will be staged in Mexico, with matches played at Guadalajara and Monterrey, where semi-finals will take place on 26 March before the finals on 31 March.

Pathway One: DR Congo Await Opponent

In Guadalajara, New Caledonia face Jamaica in the opening semi-final, with the winner advancing to meet DR Congo in the decisive clash.

For DR Congo, this represents a chance to return to the World Cup for the first time since 1974, when they compet-

ed as Zaire. Their journey to this stage has been remarkable, having eliminated continental heavyweights Cameroon and Nigeria in African qualifying.

Jamaica, seeking a first World Cup appearance since France 1998, will rely on the attacking threat of players such as Leon Bailey, while New Caledonia are chasing a historic debut on the global stage.

The winner of this pathway will advance to a challenging group featuring Colombia, Portugal and Uzbekistan at the World Cup.

Pathway Two: Bolivia, Iraq Eye Return

In Monterrey, Bolivia take on Suriname in the second semi-final, with Iraq awaiting the winner in the final.

Bolivia, who last appeared at the World Cup in 1994, are aiming for a return after an encouraging qualifying campaign that included a notable victory over Brazil.

Suriname, meanwhile, are targeting a historic first qualification, having already reached unprecedented heights by making the play-off tournament.

World Cup: Italy risk third straight World Cup absence as 2006 winners lament two-decade decline

Italy's failure to develop and trust young players lies at the heart of a 20-year decline, 2006 World Cup winners Massimo Oddo and Marco Amelia told Reuters, as the Azzurri head into another playoff at risk of missing a third successive finals.

After lifting the trophy 20 years ago, Italy crashed out at the group stage in the next two editions, winning just one

game. They have since missed the last two World Cups, losing out in the playoffs.

Former goalkeeper Amelia says those results were not isolated setbacks.

"The victory in 2006 covered and hid the limits that the national system already had in terms of structures and preparation," Amelia said.

"We didn't put enough faith

in promising young players, and clubs invested too little in long-term planning.

"In Serie A there's a very high percentage of foreign players. The only way to change this is for clubs to invest more in young Italians, knowing that some of those investments might fail."

According to former defender Oddo, Italian football has been left behind.

"Other leagues have overtaken Serie A, due to economic and infrastructural factors," Oddo said.

"Before, Italian players never went abroad. Now they do, and mediocre players arrive in Italy, taking space away from Italians. Italian football should modernise the youth sector, because the talent exists, but is not well supported."



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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

OPINION

Nigeria on the brink: Currency collapse, talent flight and rising hunger deepen a national emergency



GENERAL IWU COSMOS JP

Nigeria is running out of time. What was once dismissed as temporary economic turbulence has evolved into a full-scale national emergency—one that is steadily draining the country of its strength, its people, and its future.

Across Nigeria, the warning signs are no longer subtle. The naira is in freefall, the nation's brightest minds are leaving in record numbers, and millions are struggling to afford their next meal. This is not just a crisis; it is a convergence of failures that threatens to push Africa's largest economy to the edge.

At the heart of the storm is the rapid collapse of the naira. Once a symbol of national economic identity, the currency has become a source of daily anxiety. Its persistent decline against global currencies has triggered a chain reaction that is rippling through every sector. Businesses dependent on imports are suffocating under rising costs, inflation is surging beyond control, and the average citizen is being priced out of basic living.

For ordinary Nigerians, the effects are immediate and unforgiving. Food prices change almost overnight, transportation costs climb without warning, and essential goods—from

medicine to fuel—are increasingly out of reach. The purchasing power of households is shrinking at an alarming rate, forcing many into survival mode. This is not just economic hardship; it is economic erosion.

Yet, as the currency weakens, another crisis is quietly intensifying—the mass departure of Nigeria's skilled workforce. Popularly known as the "Japa" phenomenon, this wave of migration has transformed into a national hemorrhage of talent. Doctors, engineers, academics, and young professionals are leaving not out of luxury, but out of necessity.

The consequences are severe. Hospitals are losing experienced hands, classrooms are being emptied of qualified teachers, and industries that depend on innovation are struggling to function. The very people needed to fix the system are the ones exiting it. What remains is a widening gap between potential and reality.

This exodus reflects more than personal ambition; it signals a deep loss of confidence in the system. When a nation cannot provide opportunity, security, or stability for its citizens, migration becomes not just an option, but an escape. And as more people leave, the burden on those who remain becomes heavier, further weakening the system.

Compounding these challenges is a growing and deeply troubling food crisis. Despite its vast agricultural resources, Nigeria is facing rising levels of hunger. The cost of staple foods has surged beyond the reach of many households, turning what should be basic nutrition into a daily struggle.

The causes are clear but complex. Insecurity in farming regions has forced many farmers off their land, reducing food production. Poor infrastructure and weak supply chains result in significant post-harvest losses. Storage facilities are inadequate, transportation is unreliable, and market access remains limited. The result is a system where scarcity drives prices higher, and hunger spreads wider.

What makes this situation particularly dangerous is the way these crises reinforce one another.

A falling currency fuels inflation, which drives migration as citizens search for stability. The loss of skilled workers weakens productivity and slows economic recovery. At the same time, insecurity and economic strain disrupt agriculture, leading to food shortages and rising hunger. It is a cycle that feeds itself—and one that grows more dangerous with time.

Breaking this cycle will require more than promises. It demands ur-

gent, coordinated action.

Stabilizing the naira must be treated as a national priority, supported by disciplined fiscal policies and a serious commitment to boosting local production. Confidence in the economy cannot be restored without a stable currency.

Equally critical is the need to retain talent. Creating an environment where professionals can thrive—through fair wages, improved working conditions, and real opportunities—is essential. Without people, no nation can develop.

Food security must also move to the center of national strategy. Protecting farmers, investing in infrastructure, modernizing agriculture, and strengthening distribution systems are no longer optional—they are necessary for survival.

Above all, leadership must be defined by transparency, accountability, and results. Nigerians are not just looking for policies; they are looking for proof that those policies work.

Nigeria's challenges are immense, but they are not beyond solution. What is required now is urgency, courage, and commitment.

Because if nothing changes, the warning is clear: a nation once full of promise risks becoming a nation in decline.



Poor infrastructure and weak supply chains result in significant post-harvest losses. Storage facilities are inadequate, transportation is unreliable, and market access remains limited