

Deploy security personnel to Edo communities, Reps tell IGP

● As Edo govt demolishes houses linked to kidnappers

The House of Representatives has called on the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, to deploy additional security personnel to the Okpeke community, Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State, given the recent killings of innocent persons by suspected herdsmen.

The resolution of the Committee followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public

importance, sponsored by a member of the Peoples Democratic Party, representing Esan West/Esan East/Igubeben Federal Constituency, Edo State, Mr Marcus Onobun.

Drumming support for the motion on Wednesday, Onobun lamented that Edo State, hitherto known for its peaceful ambience, is gradually becoming a troubled spot owing to the violent campaign of herdsmen.

He said, "The House is disturbed that the heartbeat of the nation is losing its rhythmic pulse as the state has in recent times been clobbered by dire insecurity challenges.

"According to a report published in the online Leadership Newspaper on 26th February 2025, over 32 persons have lost their lives in the state due to the activities of marauders, popularly referred to as killer herdsmen.

"The House notes that the report alleged that two Indigenous individuals in the Okpeke community in Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State were gruesomely murdered on Monday, 24th February 2025, by suspected killer herdsmen.

"Similarly, the report also alleged that no fewer than 28 persons were left dead after a violent clash between cocoa farmers and Ijaw militants in

Ovia South-West Local Government Area of Edo State."

He said, "The House is worried that this series of bloodbaths in Edo State has created an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear among the people of the state, affecting the socio-economic lives of the people.

"We are disturbed that the Government of Edo seemed to have been overwhelmed by the spate and frequency of these

killings, hence the need for the Federal Government to lend a helping hand to the state to curb this ugly menace."

Following the adoption of the motion, the House urged the Inspector General of Police to deploy additional security personnel and intensify intelligence gathering and surveillance operations in identified

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...that the people may know

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Road projects: Adhere to specifications or be sacked, Okpebholo warns contractors

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has warned contractors handling various road and drainage projects across the state to adhere strictly to specifications and agreed timelines or risk contract termination.

Governor Okpebholo gave the directive while inspecting ongoing projects, where he expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of work and deviations from approved standards.

During his visit to Orior-Ozolua Community, the

Governor was visibly displeased with the contractor's slow pace of work, following residents' complaints about the firm's inconsistent presence on-site.

"Why did you reduce the width of the drain? You altered it on both sides. If you are not

working according to specifications, I will not hesitate to revoke this contract," the Governor warned, emphasizing his commitment to ensuring quality infrastructure for Edo people.

The Governor and his en-

tourage also inspected projects at Orior Uteh Palace Road, New Uteh Road, Ekiuwa Quarters, and Upper Ekenhuan, where residents welcomed him with excitement and gratitude for prioritizing their long-ne-

glected communities.

Governor Okpebholo reaffirmed his administration's resolve to deliver people-centered projects, stressing that public resources must be used efficiently for the benefit of all.



PROJECT INSPECTION:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, inspecting road projects in Benin City on Wednesday.

Ex-immigration officer arrested for selling arms to bandits

The Federal Capital Territory Police Command has intercepted a former immigration officer who was attempting to sell sophisticated firearms to bandits operating in the Abuja-Kaduna forests.

The dismissed officer whose name was not disclosed was arrested following an intelligence-led operation by the police.

Speaking to journalists in Abuja on Wednesday, the Officer in Charge of the Anti-Kidnapping Unit, Mustafa Mohammed, said the operation prevented the arms from reaching criminal elements who he said could have made them deadly.

Mohammed said, "Acting on intelligence, the command intercepted these guns from a dismissed immigration officer attempting to sell them to bandits terrorising the Abuja-Kaduna forest.

"The intelligence was received in time, and the arms were intercepted while he was trying to make the delivery."

Mohammed said among the recovered weapons was a Scor-

pion CZ EVO3, an advanced, fully automatic firearm with an inbuilt silencer.

"This is the latest model, the 2022 version of the Scorpion series. It can be used in single, automatic, or burst mode. It is a highly sophisticated weapon, and its magazine can hold between 20 to 30 rounds, depending on the configuration. We also recovered 52 rounds of ammunition which could have posed a severe threat had they fallen into the hands of criminals."

On his part, the FCT Commissioner of Police, Tunji Disu, said a total of 300 suspects were arrested between January and February 28, 2025.

Disu said, "In its sustained effort to rid the Federal Capital Territory of crime and criminal elements, the FCT Police Command has intensified its operations, carrying out a series of high-impact raids from January 1st to February 28th, 2025.

"These decisive actions, driven by intelligence and executed with tactical precision, have led to the arrest of 300 suspects

and the recovery of a significant cache of arms, ammunition, and illicit substances. Total number of armed robbers arrested: 59.

"Total number of kidnappers and informants arrested: 10. Total number of armed robbers neutralized: nine. Total number of kidnappers neutralized: seven. Total number of cultists arrested: 16."

He also said targeted raid and clearance operations were conducted in identified criminal hideouts.

Disu said, "Demonstrating an unwavering commitment to the safety of residents, the Command deployed specialized tactical teams to raid identified criminal hideouts and black spots across the FCT. These operations covered high-risk areas, including Dei-Dei, Karu, Gwarinpa, Jikwoyi, Karimo and Maitama.

"Additionally, abandoned buildings across the city, frequently used as hideouts and bases for planning illicit activities, have been identified and will be subject to continuous monitoring and raids."

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Sapele residents urge lawmakers to introduce scholarship scheme

AJUWA VICTOR

Residents of Sapele, Delta State, have lauded Honourable Perkins Umukoro, the Chief Whip of the Delta State House of Assembly, for his dedication to education and youth empowerment through the Sheriff/Perkins Foundation.

During a recent community engagement, beneficiaries and concerned parents called on the

lawmaker to expand his efforts by introducing a scholarship scheme to cover crucial examination fees, including those for the West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), and Primary 6 assessments.

Mr. Godwin Ufuoma, a resident, commended Hon. Umukoro's commitment but stressed the need for direct financial support for students.

"Many youths have benefited

from his empowerment programs, and we are truly grateful.

"However, covering WAEC, NECO, and Primary 6 examination fees for underprivileged students would prevent school dropouts due to financial struggles," Ufuoma said.

Mrs. Florence Igho, a widow and mother of three, shared her financial difficulties in ensuring her children complete their education.

"My first son almost missed

his WAEC exams due to a lack of funds. If Honourable Perkins can introduce scholarships for WAEC and NECO, it will be a great relief for struggling parents," she stated.

The Sheriff/Perkins Foundation has supported youths through vocational training, skill acquisition programs, and financial assistance for small businesses. It has also provided free educational materials and sponsored school renovations.

Mr. Joseph Akpojotor, a secondary school teacher, emphasized that many bright students are unable to sit for crucial exams due to financial constraints.

"A scholarship initiative would ensure that no child is denied education due to hardship. This would further strengthen Honourable Perkins' legacy in education," he said.

A close associate of Hon. Umukoro, speaking anonymously,

assured residents that their request would be considered.

"Honourable Perkins listens to his people, and his passion for education is clear. There is a strong possibility that he will expand the foundation's programs to accommodate this appeal," the source said.

Residents remain hopeful that the scholarship initiative will be introduced, easing the financial burden on parents and promoting education in Sapele.

Rivers govt hands over helicopter to Nigerian Air Force for security operations

The Rivers State Government has officially handed over an AW139 helicopter to the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) to enhance security operations in the Niger Delta region.

The aircraft, which had been grounded since 2020, is expected to bolster tactical airlift, search and rescue missions, and the protection of oil facilities in the state.

During the handover ceremony at the Airforce Base in Port Harcourt, Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, described the move as a demonstration of the government's commitment to safeguarding the state and Niger Delta at large.

He noted that as a member of the Governors' Forum Committee on the Protection of Oil

Assets, it is his responsibility to support effective security operations in the region.

Governor Fubara explained that the helicopter had remained grounded due to contractual issues, as the company managing it failed to remit funds to the state government.

However, upon receiving a request from the Nigerian Air Force to use the aircraft for security purposes, the state executive council deliberated on it and approved the transfer without hesitation.

"This is not about politics; it is a sincere move to improve national security and protect critical assets," Fubara stated.

"Our only request is that this

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OBASANJO'S 88TH BIRTHDAY:

Ogun State governor, Prince Dapo Abiodun (left); Nigeria's former President and celebrant, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (middle); former governor of Anambra State, Mr Peter Obi (2nd right), and other well meaning Nigerians, during some of the activities marking Obasanjo's 88th birthday celebration in Abeokuta, Ogun State, yesterday.

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flashpoints within Edo State.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Government has begun the demolition of buildings used as hideouts for kidnapping, in line with its commitment to securing lives and property.

The exercise, which took place in Illeh, Esan West Local Government Area, and Uromi, Esan North East Local Government Area, was led by security personnel in compliance with the state's recently passed kidnapping and anti-cultism laws.

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Security, Mr. Akhere Paul, stated that the demolition was necessary to deter criminals and prevent the use of residential properties for illegal activities.

He warned landlords to properly screen their tenants before renting out their properties, urging them to seek police assistance in verifying identities.

"This house has been used for criminal activities. Kidnapped victims were kept here, and during a police raid, dangerous weapons were recovered.

According to the new law on kidnapping signed by Governor Monday Okpebholo, any house found to be used for such activities will be demolished," Akhere said.

He assured residents that the

government would continue the crackdown on criminals and would not hesitate to destroy any property linked to kidnapers or cultists.

He emphasized that the administration of Governor Okpebholo is determined to rid the state of criminal elements and create a safer environment for all.

Commander of the Special Task Force, SP Michael Anetor, reiterated that the demolition exercise was in line with the law and aimed at discouraging criminal activities.

He called on Edo citizens to be vigilant, report suspicious movements, and support the government's efforts in making the state crime-free.

During the operation, two suspects, Utubor Uchenna and Felix Ebama, who belong to a seven-man gang, confessed that the demolished properties served as their hideouts.

They admitted to being involved in several kidnappings in Edo Central, with their last operation earning them a ransom of ₦10 million.

Utubor Uchenna, the gang leader, revealed that their most recent victim was targeted because of the luxury car he drove.

The victim and a lady who was with him were kidnapped and later released unharmed after the ransom was paid.

Edo govt seals Oredo borrow pit, moves against illegal occupation

In a determined effort to reclaim state-owned assets, the Edo State Government has sealed a borrow pit in the Lagos Street area of Benin City, Oredo Local Government Area, until further notice.

The operation, carried out by the Coordinator of the Taskforce for Protection of Government Property, Hon. Okoloise Eugene, and his team,

aimed to prevent further illegal occupation of the site.

The borrow pit, which is meant to generate revenue for the state, had been unlawfully taken over by individuals who constructed shops on the premises. Investigations revealed that during the previous administration, these occupants allegedly bribed officials responsible for reporting such encroachments.

Determined to ensure that public assets serve the interests of all citizens rather than a select few, the state government has taken steps to reclaim the encroached area.

The task force emphasized that sealing the borrow pit marks a crucial step in protecting government property and ensuring proper utilization. This action, they stated, reflects

the government's commitment to transparency, accountability, and good governance.

The Edo State Government continues to take decisive measures against corruption and the mismanagement of public resources. "The people of the state can expect a new era of transparency, accountability, and good governance," the task force affirmed.

Delta christian pilgrims depart for 2024 journey to Israel, Jordan

AJUWA VICTOR

The Delta State contingent for the 2024 Christian Pilgrimage has officially departed for the Holy Land, with visits planned to Israel and Jordan.

Addressing the pilgrims at Unity Hall, Government House, Asaba, before their departure, Governor Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwori emphasized that Delta is a praying state that has endured both challenges and triumphs. He urged the pilgrims to see themselves as intercessors for the state and nation.

Represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Kingsley Emu, the Governor highlighted the signifi-

cance of sponsoring 272 Delatans for the spiritual journey, especially at a time when the state is investing in massive development projects across its three senatorial districts. He described it as a demonstration of the government's commitment to its citizens.

The Governor reminded the pilgrims that the trip was neither an avenue for drug trafficking nor an opportunity to abscond, addressing concerns about the "Japa Syndrome." He reaffirmed the state's zero tolerance for abscondment and emphasized that the whistle-blowing policy extends beyond governance issues.

Each pilgrim, he stated, is expected to report any suspi-

cious activities to safeguard the state's reputation.

State Commissioner for the Bureau for Special Duties, Mr. Ejiro Etagherure, urged the pilgrims to uphold dignity and decorum as representatives of both the state and the nation.

Chairman of the Delta State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board, Senior Apostle Sylvanus Okorotie, disclosed that the 10-day pilgrimage will cover various historical and religious sites, including Macherus—where John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded—Mount Nebo, Galilee, and Bethlehem.

Executive Secretary of the Delta State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board, Rev. Father Christopher Ekabo, noted that

out of the numerous applications received for the pilgrimage, 272 candidates were carefully selected after undergoing rigorous screening.

He also pointed out that Delta was the only state in the South-South region to sponsor its citizens for the 2024 spiritual exercise.

Permanent Secretary of the Delta State Bureau for Special Duties, Prince Gregory Ejohwomu, assured that adequate measures had been put in place to ensure a smooth and hitch-free pilgrimage.

Several pilgrims expressed gratitude to Governor Sheriff Oborevwori for facilitating the journey, pledging to conduct themselves responsibly and adhere to all guidelines.

Rivers Electoral Commission fixes Aug 9 for fresh LG poll

The Rivers State Independent Electoral Commission (RSIEC) has fixed August 9, 2025, to conduct a fresh Local Government (LG) poll in the state.

The Chief Electoral Commissioner, Justice Adolphus Enebeli (rtd), announced this at a stakeholders meeting for Wednesday, March 5, 2025.

This followed the Friday judgment of the Supreme Court, which declared the LG election conducted in the state on October 5, 2024, as invalid.

On Sunday, Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara,

assured the people of the oil-rich state that his administration will implement the Supreme Court's verdict after carefully reviewing its Certified True Copy (CTC).

In a state broadcast on Sunday, Fubara revealed that he has met with his legal team, who expect to obtain the CTC by Friday, March 7, 2025.

He emphasised that his government is committed to upholding constitutional principles and will act in line with the law.

The governor also directed the Heads of Local Government Administration (HLGAs)

to take immediate control of the 23 local government councils across the state, following the Supreme Court's ruling that nullified the October 5, 2023, local government elections.

Fubara stated that the civil servants would oversee affairs until fresh elections are conducted by the State Electoral Commission.

The Supreme Court, in another judgment on Friday, barred the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Accountant General of the Federation and other agencies from releasing funds to the government of Rivers State

until it purges itself of what the court described as flagrant disobedience to court orders.

In the judgment delivered by Justice Emmanuel Akomaye, the five-man panel of the court unanimously dismissed the cross-appeal filed by Fubara challenging the validity of the House of Assembly presided over by Martin Amaewhule as the Speaker.

In dismissing Fubara's appeal, the court ordered Martin Amaewhule to resume sitting immediately with other elected members of the Rivers State House of Assembly.

Court orders interim forfeiture of ₦1.37bn allegedly diverted under El-Rufai govt

A Federal High Court sitting in Kaduna State has ordered the interim forfeiture of the sum of ₦1.37bn, allegedly diverted from the coffers of the state government into a private account during the administration of former Governor Nasir El-Rufai.

The money allegedly diverted into an account belonging to Indo Kaduna Marts JV Nigeria Limited, was part of the funds released for a botched light rail project in Kaduna State during the past administration.

The presiding Judge, Justice H. Buhari, issued the forfeiture order on February 28, 2025, following an ex parte application brought before the court by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), which traced the diverted fund to a private bank account.

The judge also directed ICPC to publish a notice in two national newspapers, calling for persons, whether human, juristic or artificial having interest in the property to show cause in court why the aforesaid movable property should not be permanently forfeited to the Federal

Government.

ICPC had on February 14, 2025, filed an ex parte application to the Federal High Court, seeking the recovery of the money. The commission argued that the light rail project was never executed under the El-Rufai administration, thereby depriving the people of Kaduna State of the benefits of the rail transportation system, which the fund was meant for.

In the ex parte application filed by its lawyer, E.O Akponi-misingha on February 28, ICPC alleged that the Kaduna State Government officials diverted the money through the Indo Kaduna MRTS JV Nig Limited, a joint venture entity set up in 2016 by the state government and Indian businesspeople.

While ruling on ICPC's application, the judge ordered the interim forfeiture of the money, and also directed the Commission to publish a notice in any two national newspapers, requesting any person with interest in the property to present their claim and show cause in court why the asset should not be permanently forfeited to the federal government.



HAND OVER CEREMONY:

Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara (seating 4th right), and some top state government officials, as well as Nigerian Air Force officers, at a ceremony marking the hand over of Rivers State owned AW139 Helicopter to the Nigerian Air Force to bolster their operations in protecting critical national assets in the Niger Delta, yesterday.

Sanwo-Olu grants First Bank approval to build HQ in Eko Atlantic

The Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, has presented a certificate of approval to First Bank Group to commence construction of its eco-friendly headquarters in Eko Atlantic City.

Sanwo-Olu made the presentation during his speech at the ground-breaking ceremony held on Wednesday.

The bank has announced that

it is constructing a 40-storey edifice, set to be the tallest building in Nigeria. It described the project as an engineering and environmental marvel, featuring technologically advanced, eco-friendly, and sophisticated construction that will set a new standard for the financial services sector in Africa.

He said, "FirstBank, as always, has taken the lead. I want to thank the visionaries who

have created a new city that will serve as Africa's model city — one we will all be proud of. Mr Femi Otedola, well done. Well done to your board and well done to your management. CBN Governor, thank you for the approval. We hope you extend similar approvals to other financial institutions, as there is space for them too.

"I am now handing over a certificate of approval for them to

commence work immediately."

The ceremony was attended by Vice President Kashim Shettima; the governors of Ogun and Ondo states, Dapo Abiodun and Lucky Aiyedatiwa; the founder of Dangote Industries, Aliko Dangote; the co-founders of the Chagoury Group, Gilbert and Roland Chagoury; Dr Deji Adeleke; Tunde Folawiyi; Bukola Saraki; and other dignitaries.

Rivers govt hands over helicopter...

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helicopter be used primarily for the security of Rivers State and the entire Niger Delta. We are not giving this in exchange for anything, but in support of the President's efforts to improve security in the country."

Governor Fubara also voiced concerns about past instances where security assets meant for Rivers State were deployed elsewhere.

He described as embarrassing a recent donation of gunboats by the Inspector-General of Police for operations in Rivers, despite similar investments already made by both his administration and previous governments.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Hasan Abubakar, commended the Rivers State Government for its longstanding partnership with the Air Force, dating back to the civil war era.

He praised Governor Fubara for approving the ongoing reconstruction of the runway and other facilities at the Air Force base in Port Harcourt.

"The security landscape in the

country now demands a dynamic approach to achieve success," Abubakar noted.

"This donation is not just an addition to our fleet but a bold statement of commitment to security. It will aid in tactical airlift, search and rescue, and humanitarian operations."

He further revealed that the Air Force has already commenced training pilots and engineers to maintain the helicopter.

Abubakar also emphasized the importance of curbing oil theft, stating that increased security efforts have already contributed to a rise in crude oil output.

Air Vice-Marshal Elijah Ebiowe, the Air Officer Commanding Tactical Air Command, expressed appreciation for the Rivers State Government's support.

He highlighted that partnerships like these have strengthened the Air Force's operational capabilities over the years, particularly as they expand infrastructure and acquire new hardware.

Court orders INEC to recognise NRM's leadership led by Edozie Njoku

Justice Obiora Ekwuatu of the Federal High Court Abuja has ordered the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to recognise the leadership of the National Rescue Movement (NRM) that emerged from the party emergency national convention held in Abuja on January 17.

The emergency convention held to fill vacant positions in the party's National Exec-

utive Committee (NEC) and correct lopsidedness in its composition, produced Edozie Njoku as NRM's National Chairman.

Since the convention was held, INEC refused to accept the outcome of the convention on the grounds that it did not monitor the exercise, a position Justice Ekwuatu faulted in a judgment delivered this Wednesday.

The judgment was on a suit

filed by the NRM, with INEC as sole respondent.

Justice Ekwuatu held that there was evidence that NRM served on INEC, a valid notice of its emergency national convention, and that it was wrong for the electoral body to have refused to monitor the exercise as the law mandates it to do.

The judge further held that the notice from the NRM, not being short of the required 21 days, INEC had no reason not

to have monitored the emergency convention.

The judge said he was convinced that the NRM effectively made out a case to warrant the grant of the reliefs sought.

Justice Ekwuatu declared that pursuant to the provisions of Sections 82(1) and 83 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2022, the respondent is under a constitutional obligation to accept and monitor the emergency

convention of the applicant (NRM). to fill vacancy and correct lopsidedness in its National Executive Committee (NEC).

He also declared that failure of the respondent (INEC) to accept and monitor the emergency convention of the applicant, to fill vacancy and correct lopsidedness in its NEC amounted, to a refusal/failure to discharge its constitutional and/or public duty contrary

to the provisions of Sections 82(1) and 83 (1) of the Electoral Act, 2022, and therefore unconstitutional and unlawful.

The judge proceeded to issue an order of mandamus compelling INEC "to accept and monitor the emergency convention of the applicant to fill a vacancy, and correct lopsidedness in its NEC and recognise the decision or outcome of the convention."

NEWS

LAPO announces leadership change

LAPO Microfinance Bank has announced the appointment of Dr. Godwin Ehigiamusoe as the new Chairman of its Board of Directors.

The appointment, which was disclosed in a statement, marks a leadership transition as he succeeds Mrs. Osaretin Demuren, who has been cred-

ited with strengthening the institution's position in Nigeria's microfinance sector.

According to the statement, the bank expressed confidence in Dr. Ehigiamusoe's ability to build on past achievements and further drive financial inclusion efforts in the country.

"He brings into the position his rich experience and institutional memory that will be of immense benefit to LAPO Microfinance Bank and national financial inclusion efforts," the statement read.

Ehigiamusoe, a renowned microfinance expert, has been instrumental in pioneering several initiatives aimed at expanding financial access in Nigeria and beyond.

In the late 1980s, he founded Lift Above Poverty Organisation as a response to the rising poverty levels triggered by the Structural Adjustment Programme. Over the years, LAPO has evolved into a group of institutions providing services in microfinance, health-care, insurance, micro-leasing,

technology, and agriculture.

With a doctorate in policy and development studies, specialising in policy instruments and financial inclusion, Ehigiamusoe is also a chartered microfinance banker and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria.

Speaking on his appointment, he expressed his commitment to strengthening LAPO's mission and expanding access to financial services for underserved populations.

"This is an opportunity to



EHIGIAMUSOE

build on the achievements of LAPO Microfinance Bank and contribute to deepening financial inclusion," he said.

Akpabio denies sexual harassment allegations as Senator Natasha submits fresh petition

Senate President Godswill Akpabio has denied allegations of sexual harassment brought against him by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

He reacted to the allegations on Wednesday at the resumption of plenary in the Senate, after a week's recess.

Dismissing the allegations, Senator Akpabio said, "At no time did I ever harass any woman. I was raised very well by my late single mother, and I have always upheld respect for women. I was even awarded the most gender-friendly governor in Nigeria."

The Senate President, who said he had been inundated with calls on the matter since February 25, and that he was aware of the growing social media discourse, urged Nigerians, the media, and social media users to refrain from drawing conclusions and instead await the court's decision on the matter.

However, immediately after his remarks, Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan raised a petition under Order 40, accusing the Senate President of sexual harassment and abuse of office.

She requested permission to step forward and formally lay the petition before the cham-

ber.

The Senate subsequently referred the petition to the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Code of Conduct, directing it to review the matter as soon as practicable.

The Senate was hit by controversy in February when a seat rearrangement escalated into a confrontation between Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan and the Senate President.

The dispute over the seat has sparked tensions within the Senate, leading to the allegation of sexual harassment by Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan, and raising fresh concerns about decorum and conduct within the legislative body.

On Wednesday, Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan arrived at the Senate Chamber in the company of her husband amid the controversy.

In a brief but affectionate moment, the Senator shared a kiss with her husband before proceeding into the chamber to take her seat.

After taking her place in her newly assigned seat, she, however, refused to stand upon the arrival of Akpabio for the commencement of plenary, a deviation from the customary show of respect for the presiding officer.



88TH YEAR BIRTHDAY:

President Bola Tinubu (left), during his visit to ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo, at his Ogun residence on the occasion of Obasanjo's 88th year birthday.

Tinubu celebrates Obasanjo at 88, acknowledges his controversial, but influential legacy

President Bola Tinubu has paid tribute to former President Olusegun Obasanjo on his 88th birthday, acknowledging his significant contributions to Nigeria's development while noting his sometimes controversial role in national affairs.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, Tinubu described Obasanjo as an "extraordinary leader" whose influence remains deeply embedded in the nation's history.

Tinubu highlighted Obasanjo's frequent interventions in national discourse, which, despite being occasionally contentious, have shaped public policies and served as a check on leadership.

He commended Obasanjo's unwavering commitment to national unity, peace, and progress, emphasizing his lasting impact on governance. The President also prayed for Obasanjo's continued strength and wisdom, noting that even at 88, he remains an active voice in national and global affairs.

Recounting key moments in Obasanjo's career, Tinubu pointed to his role in ending the Nigerian Civil War when, as a colonel in the Nigerian Army, he accepted the surrender of Biafran forces in 1970.

He also praised Obasanjo's leadership in stabilizing Nigeria after the assassination of General Murtala Muhammed in 1976, as well as his commitment to democracy by overseeing the country's transition to civilian rule in 1979.

The President further described Obasanjo as an "ambassador of global peace and a troubleshooter," lauding his contributions to conflict resolution, governance advocacy, and Pan-Africanism through institutions such as the African Union and the United Nations.

According to Tinubu, even in retirement, Obasanjo continues to wield considerable influence both within Nigeria and internationally, earning him widespread respect for his efforts in promoting good governance and stability.

Tinubu appoints new aides on health, job creation for Shettima

President Bola Tinubu has approved the appointment of Mr. Temitola Adekunle-Johnson as Special Adviser to the President on Job Creation & MSME and Mrs. Uju Anwuka as Senior Special Assistant to the President on Public Health, both in the Office of the Vice President.

The appointments take immediate effect.

Senior Special Assistant to the VP on Media and Com-

munication, Stanley Nkwocha, disclosed this in a statement on Wednesday titled 'President Tinubu Approves Appointment of Special Adviser, Senior Special Assistant In VPs Office.'

According to Nkwocha, the appointments "are in continuation of efforts to actualise the Renewed Hope Agenda of the Tinubu administration, especially in the respective sectors."

Both officials had previously served in similar capacities,

with Adekunle-Johnson as Senior Special Assistant and Anwuka as Special Assistant, all within the Vice President's office.

"As Senior Special Assistant, Mr Adekunle-Johnson has diligently driven some of the administration's policies and programmes in areas of job creation and development in the micro, small and medium enterprises space in Nigeria," the statement read.

Key initiatives implemented under his supervision include

the Expanded National MSME Clinics, and the Shared Facility Initiative, among others.

"Mrs Onwuka, on the other hand, has industriously anchored the administration's vision in combating malnutrition and hunger, especially in vulnerable communities across the country, while serving as Special Assistant," said Nkwocha.

A key programme under her watch is the recently launched Nutrition 774 Initiative.

Cross River state gov't revokes Obudu cattle ranch concession

Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River has revoked the concession agreement granted to CIBA Construction Company Limited for managing the Obudu Cattle Ranch.

The termination was communicated through a letter signed by the state's Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Mr Ededem Ani.

The letter detailed CIBA's material breaches and justified the state's decision.

According to Ededem, the company neglected key development obligations, particularly those outlined in Sections 5.0, 6.0, and 14.0(b) of the

agreement.

"These violations include the failure to invest in the renovation of the resort's hotel and other essential components.

"In spite of multiple breaches, CIBA continued to fall short, prompting the Cross River Government to terminate the agreement with immediate effect," he said.

In revoking the concession, the governor directed the Special Adviser and Chief Executive Officer, Obudu Ranch Resort, Sunday Michael, alongside other key stakeholders, to implement measures to revamp the facility.

Michael, who also con-

firmed the termination of the 25-year agreement that the state entered into with CIBA in 2017, attributed the company's failure to fulfilling its contractual obligations to the reason for the development.

The concession, granted during the administration of Sen. Ben Ayade, tasked CIBA with designing, financing, building, operating, maintaining, and ultimately transforming the ranch under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

The Obudu Cattle Ranch, also known as Obudu Mountain Resort, was developed in 1951 by a Scottish rancher named M. McCaughley.

The Ranch was, however, re-modeled and made a tourist attraction by the Donald Duke-led administration between 1999 and 2007.

The Ranch was one of Duke's numerous iconic tourism projects in Cross River.

He fixed the twisting road network to the hilltop, built stunning chalets and aerial tramways (cable cars), and generally upgraded its infrastructure.

However, successive administrations in the state failed to build on Duke's legacy, which subsequently led to a huge decline in terms of patronage and deteriorated facilities.

Trump will 'probably' cut Mexico and Canada tariffs —US commerce chief

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has said President Donald Trump will "probably" announce a deal to reduce tariffs on Canada and Mexico on Wednesday.

"Both the Canadians and Mexicans were on the phone with me all day today trying to show that they'll do better" on reducing the flow of the synthetic opioid fentanyl into the US, Lutnick said in an interview with Fox Business Network.

But Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly

told the BBC's Newsnight that her office had not been contacted about the plan.

Canada and Mexico announced retaliatory import levies on the US after Washington's 25% tariffs on its two neighbours came into effect on Tuesday.

Lutnick made clear that he expected the US tariffs to be lowered rather than paused.

"I think [Trump's] going to figure out, 'you do more, and I'll meet you in the middle some way.' And we're probably going to be announcing that

tomorrow."

US officials "can say many things" but "the only one that really takes a decision is President Trump," Joly said.

Lutnick did have a call with Ontario Premier Doug Ford, according to sources who told the Globe and Mail that he had delivered a warning about Canadian retaliation and what was seen as personal attacks against Trump.

The US president used a large part of his speech to Congress on Tuesday outlining his trade pol-

icies, but he did not say whether he planned to cut the tariffs that came into effect this week.

Trump said he would move ahead on 2 April with plans for reciprocal tariffs on countries around the world that he sees as treating the US unfairly.

Earlier on Tuesday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau slammed Trump's sweeping tariffs on his country, calling it a "very dumb thing to do" and vowed to conduct a "relentless fight" to protect its economy.

Trudeau announced retalia-

tory tariffs on US exports and warned that a trade war would be costly for both countries.

But Trump pushed even further in a post on his Truth Social platform, saying: "Please explain to Governor Trudeau, of Canada, that when he puts on a Retaliatory Tariff on the U.S., our Reciprocal Tariff will immediately increase by a like amount!"

Trudeau accused the US president of planning "a total collapse of the Canadian economy because that will make it easier to annex us".

"That is never going to happen. We will never be the 51st state," he told reporters.

Washington also ramped up its trade war with Beijing on Tuesday as a new 10% levy on Chinese imports that came into effect - which adds to existing levies from Trump's first term and those announced last month.

"China will fight to the bitter end of any trade war," a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said after their country announced tit-for-tat tariffs on agricultural imports from the US.



RECEIVING FOOD: Palestinian children in Gaza gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen

Gaza food aid scarce after Israel halts entry

Food prices in Gaza have spiked and aid food parcels could soon run out after Israel blocked the entry of humanitarian aid, the UN's humanitarian agency said.

OCHA's partners reported that flour and vegetable prices more than doubled in some cases, with Gazans telling the BBC the same.

If the block continues, "at least 80 community kitchens may soon run out of stock" and remaining food parcels that "will support 500,000 people, will soon run out", OCHA said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chose to stop aid at the weekend, accusing Hamas of stealing supplies and refusing a US proposal to extend the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. A Hamas spokesman said the halt was "cheap blackmail".

Thousands of aid trucks had surged into Gaza each week under the ceasefire that started on 19 January.

After the ceasefire's first phase expired on Saturday, Netanyahu's office accused Hamas of stealing aid "to finance its terror machine".

Hamas has previously denied stealing humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Netanyahu also said Hamas was refusing to accept a six-week ceasefire extension, under different terms from those previously agreed, as proposed by US President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff.

After the halt of aid in response, OCHA said on Tuesday that some community kitchens

which remain operational "will need to start to adjust meal content or reduce the number of meals prepared to cope with anticipated shortages".

Partners would also "be forced to reduce food rations". While they are distributing previously dispatched food parcels, remaining supplies are expected to run out soon.

As a result, Abu Qais Aryan, from Khan Younis, told BBC Arabic the cost of basic goods doubled over Sunday night. Prices had already doubled or tripled since the war began, he said.

Other residents said the price of a kilo of tomatoes rose overnight from five shekels (£1) to ten, and a kilo of cucumbers from six to 17 shekels.

"We could barely afford to buy a kilo of tomatoes just to satisfy our hunger," said one man, Issam, adding that people could not buy food "because there is no cash liquidity".

Issa Meit, a resident of Gaza City, said there was a shortage of goods and very high consumption, and he was "very afraid that prices will increase again".

"The recent decision is unfair as it wrongs our children. How will our children live in light of these high prices that will increase in an arbitrary way?" he said.

Some blamed merchants for hiking prices, saying they were exploiting the situation.

Merchant Mahmoud Abu Mohsen told BBC Arabic he raised prices because the wholesalers he purchases from did as well.

"For example, I used to buy sugar for five shekels, three shekels, or four shekels, but now I buy sugar for six shekels, meaning I don't make more than a small profit," he said. "The news that Netanyahu announced is what caused a stir among the people."

Doctors Without Borders (MSF)'s spokeswoman Caroline Seguin said in a statement the "news has created uncertainty and fear, causing food prices to spike".

"Israel is once again blocking an entire population from receiving aid, using it as a bargaining chip," Seguin said. "This is unacceptable, outrageous, and will have devastating consequences."

Six takeaways from Trump's speech to Congress

President Donald Trump declared "the American Dream is unstoppable" as he addressed a raucous joint session of the US Congress for the first time since he returned to power.

In the longest presidential speech to lawmakers on record, he outlined his vision for his second term, as Republicans applauded a high-octane six weeks that has reshaped domestic and foreign policy.

Trump was heckled by Democrats and he goaded them in turn during the rowdy primetime address.

The Republican president has moved to slash the federal workforce and crack down on immigration, while imposing tariffs on America's biggest trading partners and shaking up the transatlantic alliance over the war in Ukraine.

Here are six of the key takeaways.

Trump predicts a bumpy ride ahead on tariffs

Following a second day of market turbulence, Trump played down the potential economic fallout from a trade war he ignited this week, including 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10% on Chinese imports.

But in contrast with the ovations that greeted his other policy objectives, many Republi-

cans remained seated, a sign of how Trump's import taxes have divided his party.

"Tariffs are about making America rich again and making America great again," he said.

"And it's happening. And it will happen rather quickly. There'll be a little disturbance, but we're okay with that. It won't be much."

Trump added that reciprocal tariffs tailored to US trading partners would "kick in" on 2 April.

Earlier in the day, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told Fox Business that Trump could announce a trade

deal with Mexico and Canada as soon as Wednesday.

A minerals deal with Ukraine looks back on

Trump said he had received an "important letter" from Ukraine's leader earlier in the day, which appeared to match what Volodymyr Zelensky posted publicly on social media.

Ukraine's president had said he was now ready to work under Trump's "strong leadership" to end the war and "come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer".

"I appreciate that he sent this letter," Trump told lawmakers.

Zelensky offered the olive branch a day after Trump paused all military aid to the beleaguered US ally.

It followed an acrimonious Oval Office meeting last week when the two leaders argued in front of TV cameras, before cancelling plans to sign a minerals deal that would allow the US to profit from an economic partnership involving Ukraine's resources.

Trump was reportedly hoping to announce during his speech to Congress that the deal had finally been sealed. But it did not materialise.

Arab leaders approve \$53bn alternative to Trump's Gaza plan

A \$53bn (£41.4 billion) reconstruction plan to rival President Donald Trump's idea for the US to "take over Gaza" and move out more than two million Palestinians has been approved by Arab leaders at an emergency summit in the Egyptian capital Cairo.

"The Egypt plan is now an Arab plan," announced the secretary general of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit at the end of this hours-long gathering.

Without referring specifically to President Trump's ideas, he underlined that "the Arab stance is to reject any displacement, whether it is voluntary

or forced".

Egypt had produced a detailed blueprint, with a 91-page glossy document including images of leafy neighbourhoods and grand public buildings, to counter a US scheme labelled as a "Middle East Riviera" which shocked the Arab world and beyond.

What sets this new plan apart is it is not just about property development; its banners are politics and the rights of Palestinians.

In his opening remarks, Egypt's President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi also called for a parallel plan alongside the physical reconstruction to move towards

what is known as the two state solution - a Palestinian state alongside Israel. This is widely seen by Arab states, and many others, as the only lasting solution to this perpetual conflict, but it is firmly ruled out by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies.

This new plan proposes that Gaza would be run, temporarily, by a "Gaza management committee under the umbrella of the Palestinian government" comprised of qualified technocrats.

It glosses over the issue of what role, if any, Hamas, will play. There is a vague reference to the "obstacle" of militant groups and

said this issue would be resolved if the causes of the conflict with Israel were removed.

Some Arab states are known to be calling for the complete dismantling of Hamas; others believe those decisions should be left up to the Palestinians. Hamas is said to have accepted it will not play a role in running Gaza but has made it clear that disarming is a red line.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has described President Trump's plan as "visionary", has repeatedly ruled out any future role for Hamas, but also for the Palestinian Authority.

News

Foreign

China says it is ready for 'any type of war' with US

China has warned the US it is ready to fight "any type" of war after hitting back against President Donald Trump's mounting trade tariffs.

The world's top two economies have edged closer to a trade war after Trump slapped more tariffs on all Chinese goods. China quickly retaliated imposing 10-15% tariffs on US farm products.

"If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end," China's embassy said on X, reposting a line from a government statement on Tuesday.

It is some of the strongest rhetoric so far from China since Trump became president and comes as leaders gathered in Beijing for the annual National People's Congress.

On Wednesday, China's Premier Li Qiang announced that China would again boost its defence spending by 7.2% this year and warned that "changes unseen in a century were unfolding across the world at a faster pace." This increase was expected and matches the figure announced last year.

Leaders in Beijing are trying to send a message to people in China that they are confident the country's economy can grow, even with the threat of a trade war.

China has been keen to portray an image of being a stable, peaceful country in contrast to the US, which Beijing accuses of being embroiled in wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

China may also hope to capitalise on Trump's actions relating to US allies such as Canada and Mexico, which have also been hit by tariffs, and will not want to ramp

up the rhetoric too far to scare off potential new global partners.

The Premier's speech in Beijing on Tuesday emphasised that China would continue to open up and hoped to attract more foreign investment.

China has, in the past emphasised that it is ready to go to war. Last October, President Xi called for troops to strengthen their preparedness for war as they held military drills around the self-governing island of Taiwan. But there is a difference between military preparedness and a readiness to go to war.

The Chinese embassy in Washington's post quoted a foreign ministry statement in English from the previous day, which also accused the US of blaming China for the influx of the drug fentanyl.

"The fentanyl issue is a flimsy excuse to raise US tariffs on Chinese imports," the foreign ministry spokesperson said.

"Intimidation does not scare us. Bullying does not work on us. Pressuring, coercion or threats are not the right way of dealing with China," he added.

The US-China relationship is always one of the most contentious in the world. This post on X has been widely shared and could be used by the China hawks in Trump's cabinet as evidence that Beijing is Washington's biggest foreign policy and economic threat.

Officials in Beijing had been hopeful that US-China relations under Trump could get off to a more cordial start after he invited Xi to his inauguration. Trump also said the two leaders had "a great phone call" just a few days before he entered the White House.



COURTESY VISIT:

Sir Keir Starmer received President Zelensky at Number 10 the day after Oval office showdown

'I risked drowning to flee conscription by Congolese rebels'

Jordan Bita preferred to risk his life swimming across a roaring river than stay at home and be conscripted by rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The 25-year-old clung on to a black bin bag with some possessions as he used the strong currents to navigate his way across the Rusizi river, which forms the border between DR Congo and Burundi.

This was the last stage in a desperate journey to escape to safety in Burundi as the conflict in eastern DR Congo escalates, with M23 rebels capturing the cities of Goma and Bukavu in the last five weeks.

"I managed to flee safely... because I was crossing through the forest and moving along the bushes instead of the main road," he told the BBC after climbing up the bank on the Burundian side and wiping the water from his face.

"This is because M23 fighters are everywhere and they are forcing us to join them to fight against the government," he said.

Burundian troops are monitoring the riverbank in Cibitoke province in the north-west where Congolese families are crossing.

They are among nearly 70,000 people who have sought refuge here over the last month

as the M23 rebels - backed by Rwanda, Burundi's neighbours to the north - continue to advance south in DR Congo.

At the end of January they took the major hub of Goma in DR Congo's North Kivu province and in mid-February Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, fell.

Mr Bita's luggage was thoroughly checked on the orders of Burundian troops - no weapons are allowed in.

Afterwards, he picked up his bag and carried it on his head, making his way up a steep hill to the nearest refugee camp about 12km (seven miles) away in the town of Rugombo.

He is bringing with him desperately needed food - maize meal, peanuts and beans - for his family who are already at a makeshift camp set up in the town's football stadium.

Another man, Amani Sebakungu, looked exhausted and was trying to catch his breath as he emerged from the Rusizi: "In the river you just have to take heart and say if I die or survive so be it. God willed I crossed safely."

As the BBC team was inter-

viewing Mr Sebakungu, the Burundian military ordered us all to vacate the area as M23 rebels had been spotted marching towards the river on the other side.

Later, looking over from a nearby hill, we could see the rebels in military fatigues walking in single file and stopping the people on the Congolese side from making the crossing.

The dangers those fleeing face are real.

Over the last two weeks, at least 20 people have been swept away as they attempted to swim the 300m (984ft) across the river, which at certain points is 10m deep. It is thought many other drownings have gone unreported.

Clarice Kacindi lost her three-year-old child while crossing the Rusizi 10 days ago.

"One of my children was lying on the raft in front of me while I held three others beside me. We had many other people in the raft and when we reached the middle of the river the raft broke into two and my child was swept away," she told the BBC at Rugombo's football stadium.

Germany's Merz promises to do 'whatever it takes' on defence

Friedrich Merz, who's expected to become Germany's next chancellor, has announced a political deal to raise hundreds of billions of euros in extra spending on defence and infrastructure.

"In view of the threats to our freedom and peace on our continent, the rule for our defence now has to be 'whatever it takes,'" he said.

Merz, whose conservatives won Germany's election last month, said he and his likely coalition partners from the centre left would put new proposals to parliament next week.

He has spoken of a need for urgency on German spending in light of "recent decisions by the American government".

Merz, 69, did not elaborate but he has been outspoken in his criticism of President Donald Trump's treatment of Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office.

Earlier this week he said European leaders had to show "we are in a position to act independently in Europe".

At a news conference on Tuesday, alongside leaders from the Social Democrats and his conservative sister party in Ba-

varia, Merz said Germany was counting on the US to stand by "mutual alliance commitments... but we also know that the resources for our national and alliance defence must now be significantly expanded".

Merz said, in English, he would do "whatever it takes" to protect freedom and peace - a reference to Mario Draghi's vow to save the euro in 2012 when he was European Central Bank president.

At the heart of his proposals is a special €500bn (£415bn) fund to repair Germany's creaking infrastructure, as well as loosening stringent budget rules to allow investment in defence.

In the wake of Europe's financial crisis, Germany imposed a "debt brake" or Schuldenbremse, limiting the budget deficit to 0.35% of national economic output (GDP) in normal times.

The new defence proposal recommends that "necessary defence spending" above 1% of GDP should be exempt from debt brake restrictions, with no upper limit.

Although Germany has provided more aid to Ukraine than any other European country, its military is notoriously underfunded.

Olaf Scholz's Social Democrat-led government set up a €100bn fund after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but most of that has already been allocated.

Germany will have to find an extra €30bn a year just to meet the current Nato target of 2% of GDP on defence, and security experts believe it will need to

raise its target closer to 3%.

Scholz was due to meet Friedrich Merz and Social Democrat leaders on Wednesday on the eve of an EU summit devoted to Ukraine and European defence. His government fell apart late last year because the three parties in coalition could not agree to reforming debt restrictions.

Katya Adler: Fractured Europe seeks credible answers on Ukraine

It's certainly one way of focusing our minds — and wallets! Donald Trump is doing us a favour, if we choose to think about it that way. And we may as well look on the bright side. Otherwise these times are too dark."

The words of a diplomat from a major European country, speaking after Donald Trump turned off the military aid tap to Ukraine on Monday. He asked not to be named, so he can share his thoughts more freely.

The relentlessness, and pace, of change in Washington, can be dizzying. Not only for consumers of news but politicians as well.

Europe is scrambling to react effectively.

There has been a frenzy of

diplomatic activity: bilateral, late-night leader phone calls, European huddles in London and in Paris, meetings of Nato defence ministers in Brussels. An emergency security summit of EU leaders is also scheduled this Thursday.

It is a huge moment in European history.

Most European countries believe the security of all of Europe, not only the sovereignty of Ukraine, is at stake — with Russia looking to dismantle the western-facing balance of power, in place since the end of the Cold War.

Washington, which has had Europe's back in terms of security and defence since World War Two, now appears "not to care about the fate of Europe", according to the man poised to

be the next leader of the continent's biggest economy, Friedrich Merz of Germany.

But what are all the big-name European meetings and summits actually achieving?

Just a few hours prior to Washington halting military aid to Kyiv, UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, who is taking a lead in Europe over Ukraine, announced it was time for "action not words". The European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, meanwhile, said Europe must turn Ukraine into a "steel porcupine", with urgent, extra arms deliveries.

Can the continent really act as one, though? Europe is a sum total of different countries with different-sized budgets and diverse

domestic politics and priorities.

Europe's aim in taking this defence action is two-fold:

First, to show Donald Trump that — in the words of the UK prime minister — Europe will now do the "heavy lifting" to defend itself. Europe hopes to persuade Trump to restart his military support of Ukraine, and to keep in place the current US security back-up for Europe as a whole, if he believes they are no longer "freeloading" off the United States.

But also, Europe's leaders will need to urgently boost their own defences and support for Kyiv anyway, if Donald Trump turns away from Ukraine, and further down the line, from Europe more broadly in security terms.

Sports

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

NPFL25: Edo Sports Commission Chairman salutes Bendel Insurance FC coaches, management

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission (ESSC), Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele has commended the coaches and players of Bendel Insurance Football Club on their ability to effect a turn around in the ongoing 2024/25 Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

The Benin Arsenal's we're battling to survive in the relegation waters towards the end of first round of the league in December when Hon Amadin Enabulele assumed office as the Executive chairman of the Edo State Sports Commission.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss gave the commendation during a meeting with the coaches and management team of Bendel Insurance FC today at the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium, Benin.

According to Hon. Enabulele, the management of the Benin Arsenal's need to strategize on enhancing the team's performance in the ongoing season and beyond.

● charges team to beat Remo



He specially commended the Head Coach Greg Ikhenoba for his dedication, stressing the importance of proper data for players and recruitment process, as well as technical depth, and teamwork among the coaching crew and management team of Bendel Insurance FC.

"My priority is to build a strong Bendel Insurance FC, as the Governor is keen on improving the team's performance by providing the necessary resources and enabling environment for the club to thrive" Enabulele stated.

"Our objective is to bring glory to the state and, in return, boost internally generated revenue (IGR) through Bendel Insurance FC. Since the state government is making significant investments in the team, it is imperative that we reciprocate by finishing among the top three in the league. Football should be seen as business"

"Our Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo is passionate about sports, and we must encourage him with victories. We should have won our last away match against Bayelsa

United, but the result was disappointing. The team must strive to secure victories, particularly in our upcoming home game against Remo Stars on Saturday."

"Let me commend the head coach Greg Ikhenoba and his team for the good job they have been doing so far. When I came to the Edo State Sports Commission, I met Insurance at the rock bottom of the league table, precisely in the 20th position and it was a big concern for us. We only encouraged them. So, the ability of the team to fight for their way out of the relegation zone and now sitting comfortably in the 8th position is really commendable irrespective of the result posted in Yenagoa on Sunday." He said.

While acknowledging the past achievements of the club, Hon Enabulele stressed the need to pursue new goals and set agenda: "We have surpassed our initial targets of fighting to survive in the premier league, our next focus is securing a top-four finish to qualify for continental football.



Slavia Prague congratulates Ogbu on Super Eagles call-up

Czech Republic Premier League club Slavia Prague has congratulated Nigeria defender Igoh Ogbu on his invitation to the Super Eagles.

Ahead of Nigeria's World Cup qualifying matches against Rwanda and Zimbabwe, Super Eagles coach Eric Sekou Chelle released a provisional squad list, which includes Ogbu among the newly invited players.

Celebrating the milestone, Slavia Prague took to social media to praise the defender's achievement.

"Igoh Ogbu earns his first senior Super Eagles call-up! Nigeria will face Rwanda and Zimbabwe in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers. Congratulations, Iggy! We are so proud of you!" the club posted.

[3/5, 7:02 PM] Kenny: AFCON Controversy: I Was Misinterpreted - Carragher

Former England international Jamie Carragher has clarified his comments about the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), stating that his words were misinterpreted.

Carragher faced backlash after referring to AFCON as a "small tournament," but he has now sought to clear the air, emphasizing that he did not intend to undermine the competition.

phasizing that he did not intend to undermine the competition.

"I love debates, but what I would never want to be described as is ignorant or disrespectful. That was never my aim—whether regarding a team, a player, a continent, or a tournament,"

"Where I went wrong was in the way I phrased it. I was clumsy in describing AFCON as not a major tournament. My point was about Mo Salah's Ballon d'Or chances, and I felt that—not just AFCON, but also the Asian Cup and Gold Cup—are not always considered on the same level as other tournaments. There are five continental competitions besides the World Cup, but not all of them carry the same weight with Ballon d'Or voters. That's not an opinion; it's a fact when you look at past winners over the last 40-50 years.

"I've always supported Salah in his quest to become the first African Ballon d'Or winner since George Weah in the mid-1990s. However, I should have been more careful with my wording. The European Championship, for example, resonates more with the journalists, national coaches, and captains who vote for the award.

EPL: Referee Michael Oliver suspended after red card debacle

Referee Michael Oliver has not been assigned a Premier League match this weekend.

Oliver last officiated the FA Cup fifth-round tie between Crystal Palace and Millwall.

He failed to stop play after Palace striker Jean-Philippe Mateta was kicked in the head and suffered an injury.

Oliver only showed a straight red card to Millwall goalkeeper Liam Roberts after being asked to review the incident on the

VAR pitchside monitor.

Mateta was stretchered off the field after receiving lengthy treatment.

The 27-year-old was assessed for a head injury and required specialist care, receiving 25 stitches to patch up a severe laceration to his left ear at St George's Hospital.

Former Premier League referee and PGMOL chief Keith Hackett criticized Oliver's initial decision.

Hackett said: "What an ap-



palling challenge, and I have to ask the question—why did one of the world's top referees fail to

immediately show a red card? "It is, frankly, an absolute no-brainer."



Rangers confirm Kazeem Ogunleye's departure to Albanian top side

R reigning NPFL champions Rangers International has confirmed the departure of midfield maestro Kazeem Ogunleye to Albanian league top side FK Partizani Tirana in the Southeastern Europe's Balkan Peninsula.

A club statement disclosed that the deal, which is a beneficial

one to the 'Flying Antelopes', will also open doors for future collaborations between both clubs as the NPFL champions let the player go for a good price and a better future sale-on clause.

The fleet-footed Kazeem is joining the Albanian side with a lot of playing experience which he hopes to bring to bear in the

club that was formed in 1946 and prosecutes its matches at the 5,000 capacity Arena e Demave and currently placed 4th on the Albanian Superliga with 40 points from 27 matches behind Egnatia Rrogozhine, 49 points, Dinamo City, 47 points, and Vilaznia Shkoder, 46 points.

Kazeem played a major role

in helping Rangers emerge champions of the NPFL in the 2023/2024 season with his breathtaking goals and numerous assists which he continued this term with a Home-Based Super Eagles invitation extended to him for the qualifiers for next CHAN tournament before this deal came through

AFCON 2025: Morocco's coach Regragui seeks friendly against Nigeria

As part of preparations for the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, Morocco's head coach, Walid Regragui, has requested a friendly match against Nigeria's Super Eagles.

With Morocco set to host the prestigious tournament, the France-born tactician is eager to strengthen his squad and increase their chances of retain-

ing the trophy on home soil.

On Wednesday, Regragui highlighted the importance of facing a strong team like Nigeria, seeing it as a valuable test for his players ahead of the competition [3/5, 6:57 PM] Kenny: U17 Women's World Cup Qualifier: SAFA Opens Gates For Fans Against Nigeria

In anticipation of the crucial

first leg of the U17 Women's World Cup qualifier, the South African Football Association (SAFA) has announced free entry for fans.

South Africa's Bantwana will face Nigeria's Flamingos in the opening leg of the second qualifying round.

SAFA took to social media on Wednesday to encourage supporters to rally behind the

team, confirming that entry to the match will be free.

"Come show your love and support the team in this crucial World Cup qualifier—entry is free," SAFA stated.

Bantwana heads into the fixture with momentum, having secured a dominant 21-2 aggregate victory over Gabon in the first round.



SPORTS

NSC DG Olopade receives ex-Super Eagles star Martins, urges young players on patriotism

The Director General of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Hon. Bukola Olopade, on Tuesday, received former Super Eagles striker Obafemi Martins, popularly known as the "Weapon of Mass Destruction," at his office in Abuja.

Hon. Olopade expressed his delight at welcoming the former Nigerian international, describing him as a legend whose contributions to Nigerian football will always be remembered.

"I was very delighted to receive our former Super Eagles star, Obafemi Martins, in my office. So glad to see him around, and Nigerians cannot forget in a hurry all his exploits for the national team and in Europe, playing for some of the biggest clubs like Inter Milan, Newcastle United, and Wolfsburg, just to mention a few," Olopade said.

During their meeting, they had an engaging discussion about the future of Nigerian football, with Martins express-

ing optimism about the Super Eagles' chances of bouncing back and securing qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Hon. Olopade used the opportunity to call on young Nigerian footballers to emulate Martins' dedication, patriotism, and commitment to the national team.

He emphasized that Martins' career serves as a blueprint for aspiring footballers, showing the importance of hard work, discipline, and a strong sense

of duty to the country.

Martins, known for his blistering pace and thunderous strikes, remains one of Nigeria's most iconic strikers, having represented the Super Eagles at multiple international tournaments, including the FIFA World Cup and the Africa Cup of Nations. His contributions to club football saw him excel in some of the world's top leagues, leaving a lasting legacy in European and Asian football.

Steven Gerrard set to return to Liverpool

Liverpool legend Steven Gerrard will once again play on the Anfield pitch and renew his rivalry with Chelsea in a charity game alongside Peter Crouch.

The match has been scheduled for March 22 and will see Gerrard line up with several former teammates.

The 44-year-old has been out of management since leaving Al-Ettifaq in January.

Gerrard left the Saudi Ara-

bian outfit struggling in 12th place.

He is now set to return to Anfield, a more familiar setting for the ex-England midfielder.

Former teammates Sami Hyypia, Martin Skrtel, Dirk Kuyt and Peter Crouch are all confirmed to take part.

A part of the proceeds will also go to the Chelsea Foundation and, in particular, the Chelsea Players' Trust.

Peseiro aims for first victory as Zamalek manager in Egyptian league



EDWARD OSEGHE

José Peseiro, the newly appointed Head Coach of Zamalek, is eager to kick off his tenure with a win as his team prepares to face ENPPI in the Egyptian Premier League.

The match, set to take place this week, marks a critical opportunity for the Portuguese tactician to secure his first triumph since taking the helm at the Cairo-based club.

Peseiro, who previously

coached Nigeria's Super Eagles, has been tasked with revitalizing Zamalek's campaign in the highly competitive Egyptian League. Despite his wealth of experience, the 64-year-old manager is still searching for his maiden victory with the White Knights, adding extra significance to the upcoming fixture.

Zamalek, one of Egypt's most storied football clubs, will look to their seasoned roster to outmaneuver ENPPI, a side known for its resilience.



£2.5bn Chelsea sale money still frozen in UK bank three years on

The £2.5 billion generated from the sale of Chelsea Football Club remains frozen in a UK bank account—three years after it was announced that the funds would be used to support humanitarian causes following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Roman Abramovich, the former owner of Chelsea, was compelled by the UK government to sell the Premier League club in May 2022, following Russia's invasion in February. On March 2, 2022, Abramovich released a statement pledging that "all net proceeds from the sale will be donated for the benefit of all victims of the war in Ukraine."

government due to his close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

When asked about the status of the money on Monday, a spokesperson for the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) stated: "This government is working hard to ensure the proceeds from the sale of Chelsea FC reach humanitarian causes in Ukraine as quickly as possible."

"The proceeds are currently frozen in a UK bank account while a new independent foundation is established to manage and distribute the money.

UK officials continue to hold discussions with Abramovich's representatives, experts, and international partners, and we will double down on our efforts to reach a resolution."

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Charlotte and Israel Adesanya's relationship came into the spotlight in 2019 when they were seen together at public events. She was also spotted cheering for Adesanya during his fight against Robert Whittaker at UFC 243.

Powdrell: Biography, career and relationship with Israel Adesanya

Charlotte Powdrell is a New Zealand real estate agent who gained public attention due to her past relationship with Nigerian-born New Zealand UFC fighter Israel Adesanya. Despite being in the spotlight for her connection with Adesanya, she has built a career in real estate and healthcare.

Charlotte Powdrell was born in 1995 in Wairoa, New Zealand. She gained public recognition due to her past relationship with Israel Adesanya. She currently resides in Auckland, New Zealand.

Charlotte's mother is Helen, but details about her father and siblings remain unknown, as she has not publicly shared information about them.

Charlotte Powdrell has worked as a real estate agent for

several years, helping clients buy and sell properties in the Auckland region. Before transitioning to real estate, she had experience in nursing and healthcare. She is also a fitness enthusiast.

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Owen reveals two 2024-2025 UEFA Champions League frontrunners



Former England striker Michael Owen believes that four clubs possess a "real chance" of lifting the 2024-2025 UEFA Champions League trophy this season.

With the eagerly awaited Champions League Round of 16 set to kick off on Tuesday, fans across Europe are gearing up for thrilling matchups.

Among the highlights, Premier League teams Arsenal and Aston Villa will be facing off against the Dutch side PSV Eindhoven and Belgian champions Club Brugge, respectively.

Meanwhile, a highly anticipated Madrid Derby will see the fierce rivals Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid clash in a battle for supremacy. Additionally, Borussia Dortmund will host French team Lille as they vie for a place in the next round.

The action continues on Wednesday, with Premier League leaders Liverpool travelling to Paris to take on the formidable PSG.

In another exciting matchup, Spanish giants Barcelona will go head-to-head with Portuguese club Benfica. The knockout stage also features a domestic showdown in Germany, where Bayern Munich will face their league rivals Bayer Leverkusen, and in Italy, Feyenoord will host the seasoned campaigners Inter Milan.

Owen shared his insights during an interview with BoyleSports, stating, "In my opinion, Liverpool are at the

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