

Edo govt dismisses "Under Siege" claims as misleading

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has refuted claims that the state is facing widespread lawlessness, calling such assertions exaggerated and misleading. In a statement issued by the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Fred Itua, the government reaffirmed its

commitment to maintaining security and order.

Acknowledging existing security challenges—an issue common to many societies—Itua rejected any notion of chaos.

He highlighted Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration's proactive efforts, including restructuring the Edo Security Network, strengthening

collaborations with law enforcement, and investing in modern security infrastructure.

These measures, he stated, are already yielding results, equipping security personnel to respond effectively to emerging threats.

The government also addressed concerns over market disruptions and illegal revenue

collection.

Itua pointed out that reforms in the transport and revenue sectors aim to eliminate extortion and intimidation of traders. Unlike past administrations that tolerated multiple taxation and illegal tolls, the current government is actively working to end such practices.

As part of these efforts, At-

alakra Recovery Concept Ltd. has been engaged as an enforcement compliance consultant.

Reaffirming the administration's dedication to security, Itua detailed ongoing initiatives, including the procurement of modern security equipment, deployment of personnel to high-risk areas, and the establishment of a rapid response mechanism.

These efforts, he said, contrast sharply with the past when kidnappings and cult-related violence were rampant.

Governor Okpebholo welcomes constructive criticism and values diverse perspectives on governance, but the government urged that public dis-

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Over 2m candidates register for 2025 UTME —JAMB

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 957

TUESDAY 11TH MARCH, 2025.

₦200

Nigeria lost \$40bn to illicit financial flows —Rev. Ugolor

EUBALDUS ENAHORO

Rev. David Ugolor, the Executive Director of the Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEJ), has revealed that Nigeria lost nearly \$40 billion to illicit financial flows between 2001 and 2010, contributing to the \$148 billion stolen annually across Africa.

He warned that without

stronger asset recovery measures, robust legal frameworks, and active Civil Society oversight, recovered funds could be mismanaged, depriving citizens of much-needed development and infrastructure.

Speaking at the Civil Society Summit on Asset Recovery and Management in Abuja, Ugolor commended Nigeria's progress in recovering stolen assets but cautioned that loopholes still exist.

He cited major repatriation, including the \$322.5 million Abacha loot in 2017, which was allocated to investment programs benefiting citizens, and the \$311.8 million recovered in 2020, earmarked for key infrastructure projects.

However, he criticized the lack of transparency in the handling of the recently repatriated Diezani loot, stressing

that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must be included in the monitoring process to ensure accountability.

"The challenge before us remains vast," Ugolor said. "The United Nations and African Union estimate that nearly \$40 billion left Nigeria through illicit financial flows in just a decade, and across Africa, the figure stands at \$148 billion annually. These losses

significantly hinder development and deepen poverty.

"We must institutionalize best practices in asset recovery and management to ensure that stolen funds, once recovered, are used effectively."

He emphasized that while Nigeria has taken steps to comply with the Global Forum on Asset Recovery (GFAR) principles, focusing on transparency,

accountability, and public benefit, more work is needed to institutionalize these principles and prevent future mismanagement of recovered assets.

Dr. Femi Ajayi, representing the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), reinforced the need for a multi-faceted approach to tackling

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US to cancel 83% of USAID programmes

US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, said on Monday that the United States was cancelling 83 per cent of programmes at the US Agency for International Development.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order in January demanding a freeze on all US foreign aid to give his administration time to assess overseas spending, with an eye to gutting programs not aligned with his "America First" agenda.

"After a six-week review we are officially cancelling 83% of the programmes at USAID," Rubio said on social media platform X.

"The 5,200 contracts that are now cancelled spent tens of billions of dollars in ways that did not serve, (and in some cases even harmed), the core national interests of the United States," he added.

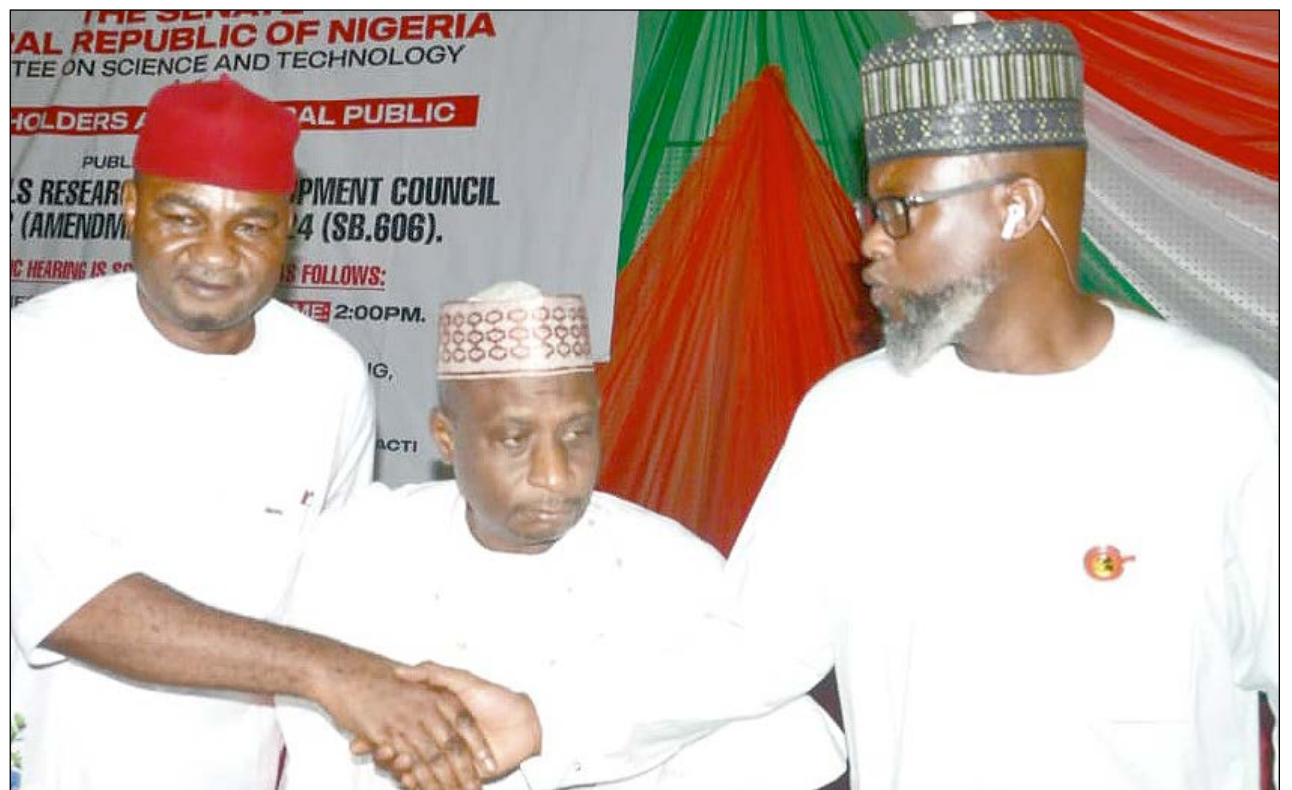
USAID distributes US humanitarian aid around the world, with health and emergency programs in around 120 countries.

The State Department, which oversees USAID, announced on February 26 its intention to cut 92 per cent of the agency's program funding, identifying 5,800 grants to be eliminated.

Rubio on Monday notably thanked the Department of Government Efficiency, which billionaire Elon Musk is leading in a drive to slash costs and cut jobs across government departments.

Trump and his allies have argued that foreign assistance is wasteful and does not serve US interests.

But aid groups argue much of the assistance supports US interests by promoting stability and health overseas, and warn that cutting aid threatens the lives of vulnerable people.



PUBLIC HEARING:

Deputy Chief Whip, Peter Onyekachi Nwebonyi (left); Senator Mustapha Kalid, and Senator Sani Zango Daura, during public hearing on Raw Material, Research and Development Council at the National Assembly, Abuja, recently. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

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Glitz, glamour as 13th ECOWAS African Wrestling tournament ends in Abuja —Pg 7

Over 2m candidates register for 2025 UTME —JAMB

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) said it has concluded the registration process of over two million candidates for the 2025 Unified Tertiary

Matriculation Examination (UTME) holding in April. The update contained in JAMB's weekly bulletin, said the registered number of candidates was as of March 8, 2025.

The Board also noted that this figure excludes candidates registered for the examination at foreign centres.

The registration process, which began on February 3,

2025, saw a total of 2,030,627 candidates successfully complete their registration, allowing them to participate in the UTME scheduled for April 25, 2025," they stated.

Additionally, 200,115 candidates have indicated interest in taking the optional mock UTME slated for April 5, 2025. "200,115 candidates expressed interest in taking the optional mock UTME, which is set for April 5, 2025.

Among these, 630 candidates have also registered for the trial mock examination, which will take place on the same date," the board noted.

With registration now closed, JAMB has shifted focus to examination security, implementing new anti-cheating measures to ensure the integrity of the test.

According to the bulletin, these measures have already

resulted in the arrest of multiple candidates attempting to gain admission using forged A-level results.

JAMB cautioned candidates against engaging in any form of malpractice, emphasising that strict monitoring systems have been put in place to detect and penalise fraud.

The Board warned all candidates to strictly adhere to examination guidelines and refrain from any dishonest practices.

It emphasised that UTME registration is separate from school-based exams like WAEC and NECO, urging stakeholders to acknowledge this distinction and adhere to its registration protocols.



44TH ANNIVERSARY:

Secretary to the Edo State Government, Barr. Umar Musa Ikhilor (left); BoT Chairman, Ujemen Secondary School Old Students Association (USSOSA), Mr. Johnson "Inegbedion" Dion (right), and others, during the 44th anniversary celebration of Ujemen Secondary School and commissioning of N122 million ultramodern classrooms block built by USSOSA, in Ujemen, Edo State.

IPC, ElectHER demand action on women's rights in Nigeria

To mark International Women's Day (IWD) 2025, the International Press Centre (IPC) and ElectHER are calling on the Nigerian government and stakeholders to take urgent action in advancing women's rights, empowerment, and well-being.

The organisations warn that Nigeria is falling behind in gender equality and urge swift reforms to boost women's representation in leadership.

With the theme "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment" set by UN Women for IWD 2025, IPC and ElectHER stress that Nigeria must accelerate efforts to close

gender gaps, particularly as the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) deadline nears.

They emphasize that achieving SDG 5 on gender equality is crucial for national development, as it has a direct impact on the country's economic growth, political stability, and social progress.

Nigeria continues to struggle with low female representation in leadership roles. As of February 2024, women occupy just six out of 34 ministerial positions, six deputy governorships, and only 3.9% of parliamentary seats.

The country ranks 116th out of 190 in UN Women's global rankings for women in executive positions, highlighting a signifi-

cant gender gap in governance.

Lanre Arogundade, Executive Director of IPC, pointed to the media's role in shaping public perception and advancing democratic values. "The media's influence in driving gender equality is undeniable.

IPC remains committed to empowering female journalists and supporting female candidates with essential media skills.

However, achieving real change requires continued collaboration and policy reforms to ensure women's active participation in leadership," he said.

Similarly, Ibijoke Faborode, Founder and CEO of ElectHER, emphasized the urgent need for

gender-responsive reforms.

"Studies show that countries with higher female representation in government experience stronger economic growth, better social investment, and greater stability.

"ElectHER remains committed to equipping Nigerian women with the resources, skills, and opportunities they need to succeed in politics and leadership," she stated.

To close the gender gap, IPC and ElectHER are urging the Nigerian government to pass key legislation, including the Additional Seats Bill and the Independent Candidacy Bill, which would increase women's representation in politics.

Itsekiri community mourns Iyoba Omo N'kuoyemwen

The Itsekiri community in Benin City has expressed profound sorrow over the passing of Queen Mother, Iyoba Omo N'kuoyemwen Iyoba Ewuare II.

In a heartfelt condolence message, Chief J.T.Y. Pesu (JP), the Ojomo of Warri Kingdom and Chairman of the Itsekiri Community, along with Secretary Aboyowa Okotie, extend-

ed their deepest sympathies to His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Ewuare II, Oba of Benin, and the entire Benin Kingdom.

The community emphasized their solidarity with the Oba and the people of Benin during this period of mourning, stating, "We wholeheartedly identify with Your Royal Majesty and the entire Benin Kingdom in this period of

mourning to commemorate the Queen Mother's transition to the realm of ancestors."

They acknowledged the significant legacy of the late Iyoba Ewuare II, highlighting her "exalted, unique and distinct honour and status" in the history of the Great Benin Kingdom.

The statement further noted, "The pain of her demise can never be erased completely, but she

occupies an exalted, unique and distinct honour and status as the Iyoba Ewuare II in the annals of the Great Benin Kingdom."

Offering prayers for the Oba and the Royal Family, the Itsekiri community sought divine guidance, wisdom, and strength for a long and historic reign.

The community also expressed hope that the spirit of the Queen Mother, in harmony

Edo govt dismisses "Under Siege"...

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course be based on facts rather than politically motivated misinformation. Itua emphasized that Edo residents can see tangible improvements and that attempts to discredit the progress will not

change the state's forward momentum.

With continued investment in security, economic development, and governance reforms, the government reassured residents that Edo State is on a path to lasting stability and prosperity.

Court adjourns Natasha's suit against Senate probe to March 25

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Monday adjourned the suit filed by the Senator representing Kogi Central Senatorial District, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, to March 25, 2025.

The adjournment followed a submission by the respondents, who informed the court that they had not been served with the necessary documents.

Akpoti-Uduaghan had approached the Federal High Court seeking an order restraining the Senate Committee on Ethics and Privileges from investigating her.

Delivering a ruling on the application on March 5, 2025, the trial judge, Justice Obiora Egwuatu, barred the committee from proceeding with the probe.

The court ordered the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions to halt the disciplinary action instituted against Akpoti-Uduaghan.

Specifically, Justice Egwuatu gave the National Assembly a 72-hour ultimatum to justify why it should not be restrained from probing Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan over alleged misconduct.

While ruling on the ex-parte

application brought before the court by Akpoti-Uduaghan's legal team, led by Mr Sanusi Musa (SAN), Justice Egwuatu ordered the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Senate, and the committee to, within 72 hours of receiving the court's order, show cause why an interlocutory injunction should not be issued to stop them from probing the plaintiff for alleged misconduct without affording her the privileges stipulated in the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the Senate Standing Order 2023, and the Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act.

The court also granted Akpoti-Uduaghan permission to serve the originating summons and all accompanying processes on the defendants through substituted means — either by handing them to the Clerk of the National Assembly, who was cited as the first defendant, or by pasting them on the premises of the National Assembly and publishing them in two national newspapers.

Justice Egwuatu noted that he had taken judicial notice of an affidavit of urgency attached to the application, as well as depositions personally made by Sena-

tor Akpoti-Uduaghan.

The ex-parte injunction stated: "It is hereby ordered as follows: An order of this Honourable Court is made granting leave to the Plaintiff/Applicant to serve the 2nd-4th Defendants/Respondents with the originating summons and all other accompanying processes in this suit by substituted means, to wit: by serving same through the 1st Defendant (Clerk of the National Assembly) or pasting same on the premises of the National Assembly and publishing same in two national dailies.

"An order of interim injunc-

tion of this Honourable Court is made restraining the 2nd Defendant/Defendant's Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Code of Conduct, headed by the 4th Defendant, from proceeding with the purported investigation against the Plaintiff/Applicant for alleged misconduct, following the events that occurred at the plenary of the 2nd Defendant on February 20, 2025, pursuant to the referral by the 2nd Defendant on February 25, 2025, pending the hearing and determination of the motion on notice for an interlocutory injunction."

NEWS

Edo, NELFUND partner to provide subsidized fees, loans, stipends to students

In a bid to make tertiary education more accessible and affordable, the Edo State Government has partnered with the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) to extend student loan services to students in state-owned tertiary institutions.

This initiative will enable students to pursue higher education without the immediate burden of tuition fees, while also receiving a monthly stipend to help cover their living expenses.

Consequently, the State Ministry of Education, led by Commissioner Dr. Pally Iyamu, has launched a two-day sensitization program to inform students across the state's three senatorial districts about the new scheme.

Dr. Iyamu urged students to take advantage of the oppor-

tunity, emphasizing the state government's commitment to easing financial pressures on parents, who previously had to pay hundreds of thousands of naira in tuition fees.

He expressed appreciation for the leadership of Senator Monday Okpehlo and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in creating an education financing framework that ensures that all students, regardless of their background, can complete their studies.

The partnership is expected to significantly reduce drop-out rates and remove financial barriers that prevent students from attaining higher degrees.

The sensitization program is scheduled for March 11-12, 2025. Edo South students will gather at Edo State Polytechnic, Usen, on March 11, while students from Edo Central and

Edo North will attend sessions at the AAU Student Conference Centre, Ekpoma, and Edo University, Iyamho, respectively, on March 12.

NELFUND, an initiative of the Tinubu administration, launched its loan portal for students of federal tertiary institutions in May 2024.

The scheme offers interest-free loans for higher education, vocational training, and skills acquisition, along with a N20,000 monthly stipend.

Beneficiaries are expected to begin repayment two years after completing the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme).



NEWS CONFERENCE:

The Delta State Commissioner for Works (Rural Roads) and Public Information, Mr. Charles Aniagwu (right), and Chief Press Secretary to the governor, Sir Festus Ahon, at a news conference in Asaba, Delta State.

EDOGIS opens new offices In Ekpoma, Auchi

MONDAY OISE

BENIN CITY

As efforts to get its services closer to the grassroots, the Edo State Geographic Information Service (EDOGIS) has opened two new offices in the State.

A press release signed by the Director of Information, Edo State Geographic Information Service (EDOGIS), Tunde Egbiemolen indicated that the offices are located in Ekpoma, Edo Central Senatorial district and Auchi in Edo North Senatorial district.

According to the Director of

Information, the agency is mandated to administer land resources in the state through computerizing land across the state.

He noted that Governor Monday Okpehlo's administration has found it necessary to take the services to the grassroots, because of his desire to reduce land crisis amongst the citizenry.

The Edo State Geographic Information Service (EDOGIS) office in Ekpoma is located in the premises of Esan West Local Government Council Secretariat, while that of Auchi is at the Etsako West Local Government Council Secretariat building.

FG extends civil service recruitment deadline to March 17

The Federal Government has extended the deadline for applications into the Federal Civil Service to March 17, 2025.

The Federal Civil Service Commission initially announced the recruitment exercise on January 27, 2025, offering over 70 positions across various ministries, departments, and agencies.

However, many citizens lamented difficulties accessing the recruitment portal, prompting widespread calls for an extension.

FCSC spokesperson, Hassan Taiwo acknowledged that some applicants encountered technical issues, but maintained that others could register successfully.

In an advertisement published in two national dailies and shared by Taiwo on Monday, the commission announced that the new deadline supersedes the previous one, which was initially set for March 10, 2025.

It read, "The Federal Civil Service Commission has extended the closing date for receiving applications for various vacancies in the Federal Civil Service to Monday, March 17, 2025, to allow more eligible candidates to participate in the exercise."

This announcement supersedes the previous advertisement of Monday, January 27, 2025, in some national dailies, as well as the FCSC website (www.fedcivilservice.gov.ng), where the deadline was initially Monday, March 10, 2025.

"The updated information is now available on the FCSC website and in The Sun and The Nation newspapers of Monday, March 10, 2025, as well as Daily Trust of Tuesday, March 11, 2025.

"Qualified Nigerians are urged to take advantage of this extension and apply for the available vacancies.

"The Commission assures a applicants of a merit-driven and transparent recruitment process," it concluded.

Pilgrimage: Oborevori assures unbroken spiritual bond between Israel, Jordan, Delta

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Dr. Sheriff Oborevori has assured that the long standing and highly rewarding spiritual bond existing between the holy lands of Israel, Jordan and Delta State shall be sustained and deepened by his administration.

The Governor gave the assurance at the presentation of JP (Jerusalem Pilgrimage) Certificates and badges to the 272 Delta State pilgrims to the Holy Lands of Jordan and Israel, at Tabar Hotel in the City of Nazareth, Israel, urging all the pilgrims to deploy the spiritual uplift gained in their private and public lives to improve the State's economy.

The Governor who was represented by the Commissioner, Bureau for Special Duties, Hon Terry Etagherure, praised

the pilgrims for their peaceful conduct and for being true ambassadors of Delta state during their stay in Jordan and Israel, emphasizing the need for all Christians to be hearers and doers of the word of God.

The Governor affirmed his administration's efforts in enhancing the spiritual well-being of Deltans and commended the pilgrims for their corporate and individual prayers at many Holy sites in Israel and Jordan.

He noted that the prosperity of Delta and success of his administration since May 29, 2023, has been by the grace, love and mercies of God.

In the same vein, the Executive Secretary of Delta State Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board, Very Rev Fr Christopher Ekabo said that God shall continue to be in charge of the affairs of Delta State, pointing out

that the speed of development under Governor Sheriff Oborevori cannot be overemphasized. Ekabo, urged all the pilgrims to continuously pray for the socio-economic, infrastructure and spiritual growth and development of Delta State, and for God to grant the governor good health, divine inspiration and the needed resources to execute all the projects encapsulated in the MORE Agenda.

Earlier, the Charge D' Affairs from Nigeria Embassy in Israel, Ambassador Ode Ezekiel Ikwe, President Tabar Tour, Mr Joseph Tabar, NCPC Executive Secretary, represented by Mr Nkaisu, Chairman, Delta State Christian Pilgrims Board, Senior Apostle Sylvanus Okorotie, and the Board Executive Secretary, Rev Father Christopher Ekabor, thanked the State Governor, for his commitment to the spiritual

upliftment of the people.

They congratulated the pilgrims for their conduct, and also for the Award of Jerusalem Pilgrimage Certificates, reminding them that they are now true Ambassadors of God.

Some of the pilgrims who spoke at the event expressed gladness over their decoration as JPs, and also, for the opportunity to visit the holy land.

The high point of the ceremony was the decoration of the pilgrims and the cutting of a cake to celebrate the pilgrims.

While in the Holy land, the pilgrims visited a lot of holy sites, including mount Zion, Mount Tabor, the mount of transfiguration, Mount of temptation, the Church of Annunciation, the Nativity Church, Shepherd's field, the wailing Wall, River Jordan, the Dead Sea and other holy sites.

EDSG refutes media reports on lassa fever handling

MONDAY OISE

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has refuted media reports alleging that the state government is not doing enough in eradicating the spread of Lassa Fever in the state.

The Director of Public Health, Ministry of Health, Edo State, Dr Ojeifo Stephen during a press conference in Benin City, said that the

state government is not only concentrating on checking the spread of lassa fever, but also eradicating the carrier (rat).

According to Dr Ojeifo, the present administration has immensely supported the ministry with timely release of funds to tackle the spread of lassa fever, adding that the Edo State government is not taking health issues lightly.

He urged Edo people not to panic, but to be vigilant and report any suspected case of pro-

longed fever, emphasizing that testing and treatment for lassa fever is free.

While noting that Etsako West, Esan East and Esan West are the three hotspot local government areas, the director noted that the state government has put measures in place to halt the spread of lassa fever in the localities with the help of a very efficient surveillance team.

The director warned that any clinician or private hospital caught managing lassa fever pa-

tients, instead of referring them to Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, the only accredited health facility to handle such cases would be closed down.

On Mpox cases in the State, Dr Ojeifo said that eleven suspected cases have so far been recorded, with five positives that were treated and reunited with their families.

He however advised journalists to verify information on health issues before publishing or going on air.

Foreign

News

Carney talks tough on Trump threat, can he reset relations?

Mark Carney's thumping victory in the race to succeed Justin Trudeau makes him not only leader of the Liberal Party but, by default, the next Canadian prime minister.

It's an extraordinary result for a man with very little political experience. He has never been elected as an MP, let alone served in a cabinet post.

What Carney does have though - as Governor of the Bank of Canada during the global financial crisis and Gov-

ernor of the Bank of England during the Brexit negotiations - is a long track record in global finance during times of economic turbulence.

And at a moment like this, Carney has been arguing, that could prove invaluable.

Politics in this country has been turned on its head as a result of what's happening south of the border, with US President Donald Trump launching a trade war and threatening to make Canada the 51st state of America.

Addressing a crowd of Lib-

eral supporters after the result of the leadership contest was announced on Sunday evening, Carney promised to face down the threats from Trump, over the tariffs and the claims on Canada's sovereignty.

"Canada never, ever, will be part of America in any way, shape or form," he said. "We didn't ask for this fight, but Canadians are always ready when someone else drops the gloves.

"Americans should make no mistake," he warned. "In trade, as in hockey, Canada will win."

He repeatedly referred to the US president by name and said his government would keep retaliatory tariffs in place until "America shows us respect".

How he will translate his strong language on the stage in Ottawa into practical solutions to those twin challenges was, however, far less clear.

Liberals might hope that Trudeau's exit from the stage will, in itself, help clear the air.

Instead of the frequent mocking of Trudeau by Trump as a "weak" leader, they might

dare to believe that Carney will at least be able to reset the personal chemistry.

On the other hand, if he has to push hard in an attempt to win concessions, will he also risk incurring the wrath of a man who uses unpredictability as a political art form?

Much of that will depend on how serious the US president is in his insistence that he wants to impose real economic pain on Canada and annex its territory.

And that's a hard question to answer.

After Carney had accepted the party's nomination, I caught up with former Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, who served for a decade from 1993 and who'd taken to the stage earlier in the evening.

Did he think Trump was being serious?

"You know, I don't know," he told me. "Do you know? Does anyone know? I'm not a medical doctor or a psychiatrist. He changes his mind every two or three hours. So [for him] to be leader of the free world, it is preoccupying for everybody."

While the US threat is dominating Canadian politics - Carney described the current situation as "dark days brought on by a country we can no longer trust" - there are still domestic political matters to focus on too, not least the prospect of a general election.

Once sworn in as prime minister in the coming days, Carney will have to decide whether to call a snap election. If he doesn't, the opposition parties in parliament could force one later this month through a no-confidence vote.



CARNEY ARRIVES TO ADDRESS:

Liberal Party of Canada leadership candidate Mark Carney arrives to address supporters in Calgary, Alberta.

US says Ukraine 'ready to move forward' on truce demand

The Trump administration believes Ukraine's leadership is "ready to move forward" with the US's demand for a ceasefire process with Russia, according to a senior US state department official.

The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Adviser Mike Waltz are due to arrive in Saudi Arabia for Tuesday's talks with their Ukrainian counterparts.

US President Donald Trump has stepped up pressure on his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky to accept his demands for a quick ceasefire with Moscow - but without any immediate pledge of a US security guarantee.

Ten days ago the two publicly clashed at the White House, with Trump claiming Zelensky was not ready to end the fighting.

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and Moscow currently controls about 20% of Ukrainian territory.

"The fact that they're coming here at senior levels is a good indication to us that they want to sit down and they're ready to move forward," said the state department official, speaking on condition of anonymity in order to discuss the talks with Ukraine in Jeddah.

While Zelensky is also due in the Gulf kingdom to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the former is not expected to play any formal role in the talks with the Americans.

The Ukrainian team will be represented by Zelensky's head of office Andriy Yermak, the country's national security adviser as well as foreign and defence ministers.

Zelensky wrote on social media on Monday that Ukraine "has been seeking peace since the very first second of the war, and we have always said that the only reason that the war is continuing is because of Russia".

A short while later, during a daily briefing, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that it was important to determine whether Ukraine really wanted peace or not. Zelensky has on numerous occasions been accused by US officials of not wanting peace.

The Ukrainian leader has been under strong US pressure to make concessions ahead of any peace talks, while he has been pushing for firm security guarantees for Kyiv, stressing that Putin violated previous ceasefire deals.

On Friday, Trump issued a rare threat of further sanctions against Moscow in a push for a deal. Russia is already heavily sanctioned by the US over the war.

Trump said he was contemplating the move because "Russia is absolutely 'pounding' Ukraine on the battlefield right now".

Soon after the White House row, Zelensky expressed regret about the incident and tried to repair relations with the US - the country's biggest military supplier.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, later said that Trump had received a letter from Zelensky that included an "apology" and "sense of gratitude".

Witkoff said that in Saudi Arabia the US team wanted to discuss a "framework" for peace to try to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

Hundreds of flights cancelled as strikes hit German airports

Hundreds of flights have been cancelled across Germany as airport workers stage a nationwide strike over pay, posing a major disruption for air travellers.

The industrial action, led by the trade union Verdi, began unexpectedly on Sunday at Hamburg Airport, before expanding to a nationwide strike.

Passengers at Frankfurt, Munich, Berlin and other major hubs have been urged not to travel to airports, with operations severely disrupted. Frankfurt, Germany's busiest airport, said passengers would be unable to board flights and transfer would "almost certainly" be affected.

Verdi, which represents public sector and transport workers, is in an ongoing dispute over wages and working conditions.

German media reports thousands of flights could be cancelled across the day, disrupting travel for more than 500,000 passengers.

Lufthansa, whose main hub is in Frankfurt, confirmed "delays and extensive cancellations" across all its airlines, while Munich Airport warned of a "greatly reduced flight schedule."

Katja Bromm, spokeswoman for Hamburg Airport, where all 143 departures scheduled on Monday have already been

cancelled, said Verdi was "dishonourable" to call a strike without notice at the start of the holiday season.

She said that Sunday's walkouts were "excessive and unfair to tens of thousands of travellers who have nothing to do with the disputes".

A spokesman for Verdi accepted that the strike would affect many, but told German media that causing disruption was necessary to extracting a better offer from employers.

Many of Frankfurt Airport's 1,770 scheduled flights have already been cancelled, while the

majority of Munich's 820 flights are expected to be cancelled.

Hundreds more cancellations are anticipated across Stuttgart, Dusseldorf, Cologne and Berlin.

Many passengers had already checked in their luggage and were having problems getting it returned, according to public broadcaster NDR. It also reports that the strike has brought air traffic at Hanover Airport to a standstill.

Beyond airports, Verdi has also called for strikes in waste collection across several German cities, including Berlin,

Essen and Kiel, where bins have gone unemptied since last week.

The union is demanding an 8% pay increase for airport workers, or at least €350 more per month, along with higher bonuses and extra time off. Employers have so far rejected these demands as unaffordable.

Further strikes were expected to go ahead this week in facilities operated by the federal government and local authorities, news agency DPA reported, citing a Verdi spokesperson.

The next round of talks is set to take place on Friday in Potsdam.

Explosive-laden caravan plot was a hoax, say Australian police

A caravan found packed with explosives in outer Sydney earlier this year was part of a "fabricated terrorism plot" concocted by criminals, Australian police have said.

The caravan, which was found in northwestern Sydney on 19 January, contained enough explosives to produce a 40m-wide blast, along with a note displaying antisemitic messages and a list of Jewish synagogues.

Its discovery, following a spate of antisemitic attacks in Australia, triggered widespread panic.

But on Monday, Australian Federal Police (AFP) revealed

that they knew "almost immediately" that the caravan was "essentially a criminal con job".

AFP's deputy commissioner of national security, Krissy Barrett, said investigators within the New South Wales Joint Counter Terrorism Team believed that the caravan was "part of a fabricated terrorism plot".

Authorities arrived at that belief based on information they already had, the ease with which they found the caravan and the visibility of the explosives contained inside - as well as the fact that there was no detonator.

Yet police refrained from telling the public that they be-

lieved the plot was fake "out of an abundance of caution", as they continued to receive tip-offs about other related terror plots. They are now confident that these tip-offs were also fabricated, Ms Barrett said.

The fake caravan plot involved several people with different levels of involvement, according to police. Between them, they had planned to purchase a caravan, load it with explosives and antisemitic materials and leave it in a specific location, before informing law enforcement about "an impending terror attack against Jewish Australians".

News

Foreign

Athol Fugard: Death of a great South African playwright

Athol Fugard, who has died aged 92, was widely acclaimed as one of South Africa's greatest playwrights.

The son of an Afrikaner mother, he was best known for his politically charged plays challenging the racist system of apartheid.

Paying tribute to Fugard, South Africa's Arts and Culture Minister Gayton McKenzie hailed him as "a fearless storyteller who laid bare the harsh realities of apartheid through his plays".

"We were cursed with apartheid, but blessed with great artists who shone a light on its impact and helped to guide us out of it. We owe a huge debt to this late, wonderful man," McKenzie added.

Fugard wrote more than 30 plays in a career that spanned 70 years, making his mark with *The Blood Knot* in 1961.

It was the first play in South Africa with a black and white actor - Fugard himself - performing in a front of a multiracial audience, before the apartheid regime introduced laws prohibiting mixed casts and audiences.

The *Blood Knot* catapulted Fugard onto the international stage - with the play shown in the US, and adapted for British television.

It led to the apartheid regime confiscating his passport, but it strengthened Fugard's resolve to keep breaking racial barriers and exposing the injustices of apartheid.

He went on to work with the *Serpent Players*, a group of black actors, and performed in black townships, despite harassment from the apartheid regime's security forces.

Fugard's celebrated plays included *Boesman and Lena*, which looked at the difficult

circumstances of a mixed-race couple. Having premiered in 1969, it was made into a film in 2000 starring Danny Glover and Angela Bassett.

His novel, *Tsotsi*, was made into a film, winning the 2006 Oscar for best foreign language movie.

Other well-known plays by him include *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* and *The Island*, which he co-wrote with the actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

In a simple tribute on X, Kani posted: "I am deeply saddened by the passing of my dear friend Athol Fugard. May his soul rest in eternal peace. Elder"

Fugard won several awards for his work, and received a lifetime achievement honour at the prestigious Tony awards in 2011, while *Time* magazine described him in the 1980s as the greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world.

"Apartheid defined me, that is true... But I am proud of the work that came out of it, that carries my name," Fugard told the AFP news agency in 1995.

Fugard feared that the end of apartheid in 1994 could leave him with little to do, but he still found enough material to write.

In a BBC interview in 2010, he said that he shared the view of the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu that "we have lost our way" as a nation.

"I think the present society in South Africa needs the vigilance of writers, every bit as much as the old one did.

"It is a responsibility that young writers, playwrights, must really wake up to and understand that responsibility is theirs, just as it was mine and a host of other writers in the earlier years."

**BURNING RUBBISH:**

Nearby roads were blocked by piles of burning rubbish and littered with rocks

Vanuatu revokes citizenship of fugitive Indian ex-IPL cricket boss

The prime minister of Vanuatu has ordered the cancellation of a passport issued by the island nation to fugitive Indian businessman Lalit Modi, who is wanted by Delhi in a corruption case.

The order came three days after India confirmed that Mr Modi had got citizenship of Vanuatu, a string of more than 80 islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Mr Modi, the former chief of the Indian Premier League (IPL), is wanted for allegedly rigging bids during his tenure as the head of the world's richest cricket tournament.

Mr Modi, who has been living in the UK since 2010, has always denied the allegations.

India has made several unsuccessful attempts to extradite him.

On Friday, India's foreign ministry spokesperson Randeep Jaiswal told reporters that Mr Modi had applied to surrender his Indian passport in London.

"We are also given to understand that he has acquired citizenship of Vanuatu. We continue to pursue the case against him as required under law," Jaiswal had said.

The news of Mr Modi becoming a Vanuatu citizen had made headlines in India, where he was once the face of the glamorous, cash-rich IPL tournament. He was a regular presence on the social scene,

rubbing shoulders with Bollywood stars and India's elite.

But on Monday, Vanuatu's Prime Minister Jotham Napat announced that his country had decided to cancel Mr Modi's citizenship.

Napat said a Vanuatu passport was a "privilege" and that "applicants must seek citizenship for legitimate reasons".

"None of those legitimate reasons include attempting to avoid extradition, which the recent facts brought to light clearly indicate was Mr Modi's intention," a media release quoted Napat as saying.

He said that background checks and Interpol screenings conducted during Mr Modi's application for a passport had shown no criminal convictions.

But, he added, that in the past 24 hours, he had been made aware that Interpol had twice rejected India's requests to issue an alert notice on Mr Modi, citing a lack of "substantive judicial evidence".

"Any such alert would've triggered an automatic rejection of Mr Modi's citizenship application," the release added.

The move is likely to bring relief to Indian authorities. Unlike the UK, Vanuatu does not have an extradition treaty with India.

Extradition treaties allow repatriation of people accused of crimes between countries.

A day earlier, Mr Modi wrote in a post on X (formerly Twitter) that there were no cases pending against him in any court in India and accused the media of peddling "fake news" about him.

Mr Modi was instrumental in founding the IPL in 2008, which has now become a multi-billion-dollar industry.

The main accusations against Mr Modi relate to rigging bids during the auction of two team franchises in 2010. He was also accused of selling broadcasting and internet rights without authorisation.

In 2013, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) banned Mr Modi from any involvement in cricket activities for life.

President's church donation sparks Kenyan clashes

Police in Kenya have fired tear gas to disperse protesters who tried to occupy a church that was recently given a substantial donation by President William Ruto.

The gift to the Jesus Winner Ministry in the Roysambu suburb of Nairobi of 20m shillings (\$155,000; £120,000) drew criticism from some young Kenyans struggling with the high cost of living.

Ruto has defended his donation and has offered a similar gift to another church in Eldoret.

Last year, both Kenya's Catholic and Anglican leaders rejected donations, arguing that there was a need to protect the church from being used for political purposes.

At least 38 people were arrested during the clashes before being released without charge.

The clashes saw protesters try to get into the church and light fires and use rocks to block nearby roads.

But the church service went ahead with tight security for worshippers, local media reported.

Bishop Edward Mwai said that unnamed people had mobilised "thugs" to disrupt the church service, reports the Star website.

Ruto, an evangelical Christian, defended the donation, saying it was an attempt to address the country's moral decay.

"Kenya must know God so that we shame the people who are telling us that we cannot as-

sociate with the church," the Nation site quoted him as saying at another church, in Eldoret.

Kenyans have been angered by a series of tax rises introduced since Ruto was elected in 2022.

He says they were needed to pay off the huge debts he inher-

ited from the previous government but many Kenyans argue that he should first tackle public waste and corruption.

Last year, a wave of nationwide protests forced Ruto to withdraw his Finance Bill, which contained a series of tax rises.

US orders non-emergency staff to leave South Sudan as tensions rise

The United States has ordered all its non-emergency staff in South Sudan to leave, amid rising tensions in the country.

Fighting in recent days has threatened an already fragile peace deal between President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar.

The two leaders signed a peace agreement in 2018 to end a five-year civil war that killed hundreds of thousands of people, but their relationship has remained fraught.

On Sunday, the US State Department said that fighting was ongoing in South Sudan between various political and

ethnic groups and that "weapons are readily available to the population".

"Due to the risks in the country, on March 08, 2025, the Department of State ordered the departure of non-emergency US government employees," it said.

The UN human rights commission for South Sudan on Saturday warned of an "alarming regression" that threatened to undo years of progress towards peace.

President Kiir has called for calm and made an assurance that the country would not return to war.

In an escalation of the tensions, a UN helicopter that had been evacuating members of the national army was shot at on Friday, killing several people, including one crew member.

Earlier in the week, the deputy chief of the army and two ministers allied to Machar were arrested by security forces, which an opposition spokesman termed a "grave violation" of the peace deal.

The arrests of the Machar-allied officials followed clashes in the country's Upper Nile state between government forces and a militia known as the White Army, which had fought alongside Machar during the civil war.

South Sudan, the world's newest nation, gained independence in 2011 after seceding from Sudan.

But just two years later, following a rift between Kiir and Machar, the country descended into a civil war, in which more than 400,000 people were killed.

Russia expels two more British diplomats

British diplomat and the spouse of another diplomat are being expelled from Russia, the country's domestic security service has said, in what is being seen as the latest tit-for-tat escalation.

The two men are accused of "intelligence and subversive work" by the Federal Security Service (FSB) which said they

had been stripped of their accreditation and ordered to leave Russia within two weeks.

The UK Foreign Office said: "This is not the first time that Russia has made malicious and baseless accusations against our staff."

Last month, the UK expelled a Russian diplomat - an action taken in response to Moscow's expulsion of a British diplomat

in November 2024.

The Russian Foreign Ministry had said then that it intended to retaliate to the expulsion.

In the past year alone, there have been seven British diplomats expelled from Russia with Moscow accusing them of espionage - allegations denied by the UK.

Relations between the UK and Russia have deteriorated

to post-Cold War lows in the years following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In Monday's reported action, Moscow said it was expelling the diplomats on grounds of espionage.

In a statement the FSB said the two had declared "false information about themselves when receiving permission" to enter Russia.

Sports

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

Glitz, glamour as 13th ECOWAS African Wrestling tournament ends in Abuja

The 13th edition of the ECOWAS African Wrestling Tournament co-hosted between ECOWAS and National Sports Commission ended at the Velodrome MKO Abiola National Stadium, Abuja on Saturday with panache. Scintillating, well-choreographed cultural displays and breathtaking traditional wrestling bouts highlighted the glitzy evening.

Senegal emerged overall winners with three gold and one silver while Nigeria (two gold and one silver) and Benin Republic (one silver, one bronze) finished second and third respectively.

Nigeria's second-place was down to gold medals won by Ebipatei Lienbofa and Ebi Bigos in the women's 66kg and 76kg respectively, a development which did not go unnoticed by the National Sports Commission Chairman Mallam Shehu



Dikko. While declaring the tournament closed, Mallam Dikko noted the fact that female athletes had contributed immensely to the nation's past sporting exploits and had taken that trend to the ECOWAS African Wrestling Tournament.

He said, "Today is women's day and we are proud as a Commission and, indeed the entire country, of the doggedness and resilience of our female wrestlers in this tourna-

ment. Over the years, the women have always come through for our sports in winning medals and have done the same at this tournament. We salute our sports women. Where could we have been without them?"

He emphasized that the performance of those female wrestlers is a clear testament to the Renewed Hope Agenda and shared prosperity vision of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR in sports.

The NSC Chairman further

assured of a well sustained collaboration with all stakeholders in every aspect of sports adding particularly buttressing the preparedness of the National Sports Commission to synergize with the Ministry of Youth Development in engaging the youths positively through sports.

"Mr President has given us a clear directive that there should be proper collaboration within agencies of government which has to do with developing youths, culture, women and sports. We will put our energy together so as to get our youths productively engaged in sports, so that we can have that feel-good factor of doing sport and also staying healthy as well as earning revenues. You can see the money the people participating in the tournament are earning. We can really empower our youths through sports", he pointed out.



EPL: Liverpool switches back to Adidas from Nike for next season

Premier League leader Liverpool is reuniting with Adidas as its uniform supplier for the first time in 13 years, starting from next season. It will be the third time that Liverpool teamed up with the German sportswear firm after previous partnerships from 1985-96 and 2006-12. Since then, Liverpool has worn jerseys from Warrior, New Balance and most recently Nike.

The new agreement covers all men's, women's and youth teams at the club. Liverpool did not disclose financial de-

tails of the deal.

"The jerseys worn during previous partnerships are some of the greatest ever created," Adidas chief executive Björn Gulden said in a statement. "We are honored to once again provide the players with cutting-edge technology to perform at the highest level and are looking forward to creating more classics for the fans."

Liverpool has a 15-point lead over Arsenal at the top of the Premier League and is on course for its first league title in five years

Table Tennis: Assar, Aruna lead African charge at WTT champions Chongqing 2025

The 2025 ITTF Africa Cup champion, Omar Assar of Egypt, and his continental rival, Quadri Aruna of Nigeria, are among the top 32 players in the world set to compete for glory at the \$800,000 prize money WTT Champions Chongqing 2025 in China.

The tournament also features Africa's top female players, Hana Goda and Dina Meshref of Egypt, who will battle against 30 other elite players, including the world No. 1 from China, in the first WTT Champions event of 2025.

WTT Champions Chongqing 2025 marks the season's inaugural WTT Champions event, showcasing 32 Men's Singles and Women's Singles in electrifying action under the purple lights from March 11 to 16.

Assar will face German pen-holder Dan Qiu in the first round on Wednesday, March 12, while Aruna faces his biggest challenge yet against world No. 2, Wang Chuqin of China, in their first-ever competitive match on the same day.

For the first time in the WTT series, Chuqin and Aruna will go head-to-head in an intriguing first-round encounter.

Aruna, a seasoned com-

petitor, brings experience and tactical versatility to the table, while Wang, backed by his ice-cold composure and a roaring home crowd, will aim to dictate the tempo. With no past meetings to reference, both players will step into uncharted waters in this Chongqing showdown.

Goda, who recently reclaimed her ITTF Africa Cup title after a

4-2 comeback against Meshref, will face South Korea's sensation Shun Yubin in a battle of wits between two of the brightest stars in the world on Thursday, March 13.

Goda, a former quarterfinalist at this level, made history with her Top 8 finish last season in Montpellier, France.

The 17-year-old ace arrives in Chongqing on a mission, look-

ing to bounce back from consecutive round of 32 exits at WTT Champions Frankfurt 2024 and Singapore Smash 2025.

For Meshref, it is another challenge for the nine-time Africa Cup champion as she confronts Korean star Kim Nayeong in the first round of the Women's Singles on Tuesday, March 11.

Serie A: After 3 years of suspension, Pogba sees the light



Paul Pogba can return to competition as his 18-month doping ban ends on Tuesday, with the 2018 world champion hoping to leave behind three cataclysmic years also marked by injuries and a kidnapping case of which he was the victim.

The long penance of the French international (91 caps), one of the biggest stars in the world of football, is coming to an end and the midfielder will be able to draw a line under what seems like a slow descent into hell.

Suspended for four years after

testing positive for non-endogenous testosterone metabolites (DHEA) at the end of the Juventus-Udinese match on August 20, 2023, Pogba saw his sanction reduced to 18 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the CAS considering that the "ingestion" of the substance "was not intentional and resulted from taking a food supplement prescribed by a doctor in Florida."

Based in Miami, the native of Lagny-sur-Marne, east of Paris, is now ready to bounce back, his Instagram account still very popular (62.7 million followers) multiplies photos of intensive training, with a few fashion shots, another of his passions.



Dele Ajayi reelected as chairman Ondo State Football Association

Dele Ajayi has been reelected as the Chairman of the Ondo State Football Association.

The election that took place at the Police Officers Mess in Akure saw Ajayi defeating his closest rival, Dele Ologbese by 3 votes.

Dele Ajayi polled 12 votes while Ologbese had 9 votes.

Barrister Remi and Henry Abiodun failed to earn a vote.

Demeji Abimbola emerged as the Vice-Chairman of the association with 10 votes while Henry Akingboju had 9 votes.

From the southern district

Babatunde Igbanan, and Akin-dipe Akisola were elected to the board.

Aladetoyinbo and Isaac Olagunju were elected to the board to represent central senatorial district.

The trio of Aborowa Gabriel, Daodu Alexander and Mohammed Abiodun were elected to the board to represent North senatorial district.

Sportsgister reports that Ameenu Mohammed represented Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) while Ekiti FA chairman Oluwole Oloworemo represented South-west at the event.

Italy: Lookman fires warning to Rwanda, nets 4th goal as Atalanta hammer Juventus

Ademola Lookman netted fourth goal as Atalanta thrash Juventus 4-0.

The reigning African footballer of the year has now four goals in four appearances since returning from injury.

Mateo Retegui put Atalanta ahead in the 29th minute from the penalty spot before Marten de Roon made it 2-0 on 46 minutes.

Former Chelsea defender

Davide Zappacosta was also on the score sheet for Gianpiero Gasperini side.

Lookman then scored the fourth goal which was deflected in by a Juventus defender

He has scored 13 league goals this season surpassing last season feat where scored 11 goals.

Atalanta are in third position on 58 points, and are just three points behind leaders Inter Milan in the league table.



Actions begin in Bayelsa Governor's Prosperity Cup tournament

ODIE RAMON, YENAGOA

Preliminary round matches in season seven of Nigeria's biggest grassroots football spectacle, the Bayelsa Governor's Football Tournament christened the Prosperity Cup got off to a flying start in Brass and Nembe local government areas over the weekend.

Playing at the Nembe City stadium on Sunday, Nembe FC outclassed Fantuo FC by 2 goals to -nil to qualify for the next round of the competition. Goals from Jackson Idubamo and Clement Bruno in each

half was all the Nembe side needed to oust Fantuo FC.

Earlier at the same venue, Okoroba FC triumphed over Etie FC 7-6 on penalties after a 1-1 draw in regulation time. Samuel David put Etie FC ahead on 57 minutes from a long range effort but Okoroba FC restored parity on 88 minutes from Benjamin Okatubo's well taken spot kick.

On Saturday at the Sangana Centre in Brass Local Government Area, Sangana FC humbled Blue Sea Strikers 2-0 with the Speaker of the Bayelsa State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Abraham Ingobere taking the

ceremonial kick off.

Substitute, George Super netted the first brace of season seven scoring in 66 and 77 minutes, ensuring that his Sangana FC side advanced to the next round of the competition. In the second game of the same centre Kamatoru FC defeated Ogidi United also by two unreplyed goals.

Fielding questions from newsmen after the encounter Ekwere Ito, coach of Okoroba FC, attributed the victory to his lads' determination and commitment, stating that their target was to win the game in regulation time.

One of the goal scorers for Nembe City FC, Clement Bruno, boasted that their target is to lift the trophy and smile home with the prize money at the end of the tournament.

Action shifts to Ekeremor and Sagbama Local Government Areas this coming weekend

It will be recalled that, Governor Douye Diri had last month performed the symbolic kick-off of the tournament at the Samson Siasia Stadium, Yenagao to herald the official commencement of this year's showpiece, which is featuring 231 teams.



EPL: 'We made a mistake' – United Co-owner Ratcliffe on sacking Ten Hag

Manchester United co-owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe has acknowledged that keeping Erik ten Hag as manager last summer was a mistake.

In an interview with Sky Sports, Ratcliffe praised current head coach Rúben Amorim for the "excellent job" he has been doing.

Despite signing a contract extension after leading United to a 2-1 FA Cup final victory over Manchester City, Ten Hag was dismissed just nine matches into the new season.

Ratcliffe revealed that he, along with chief executive Omar Berrada, INEOS director of sport Sir Dave Brailsford, and technical director Jason Wilcox, misjudged the situation when

deciding to retain Ten Hag.

Currently, United sits 14th in the Premier League, trailing leaders Liverpool by 36 points, as the Reds aim to match United's record of 20 league titles.

Although Amorim has won only five of his 17 league games in charge, Ratcliffe remains optimistic about the team's progress under the Portuguese coach.

Reflecting on last summer's decision, Ratcliffe admitted: "It was too soon for us to make such a major call. We hadn't been working together as a team for long just a few weeks. It was a big and challenging decision, especially considering how difficult it was to separate Erik's individual performance from the overall club structure at the time."

World Cup Qualifiers: Super Eagles to open camp on Sunday

The Super Eagles of Nigeria will commence preparations for their crucial 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifier against Rwanda's Amavubi.

The team is set to arrive in Kigali on Sunday, March 16, ahead of their much-anticipated fixture at Amahoro Stadium on Friday, March 21.

Head coach Eric Chelle has named a provisional squad of 39 players, featuring a mix of domestic and international talents. These players will report to camp from their respective clubs as they vie for a spot in the final squad for the match.

Following the Rwanda clash, the Super Eagles will shift their focus to their next qualifier against Zimbabwe's Warriors. This encounter is scheduled to take place at the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium in Uyo on Tuesday, March 25. By the end of the week, the coaching staff will finalize the squad, reducing it to 23 players.

Currently, Nigeria is yet to secure a victory in the World Cup qualifying campaign. After four matches, they have recorded three draws and one defeat, leaving them in fifth place in Group C with just three points.

With their World Cup hopes at stake, the Super Eagles must capitalize on these

upcoming matches to improve their standings and boost their chances of qualification.



Quadri chases 800K dollars to WTT champions Chongqing 2025

Quadri Aruna of Nigeria, are among the top 32 players in the world set to compete for glory at the \$800,000 prize money WTT Champions Chongqing 2025 in China, Sports247 reports.

The tournament also features the 2025 ITTF Africa Cup champion, Omar Assar of Egypt, as well as Africa's top female players, Hana Goda and Dina Meshref of Egypt, who will battle against 30 other

elite players, including the world No. 1 from China, in the first WTT Champions event of 2025.

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while Aruna faces his biggest challenge yet against world No. 2, Wang Chuqin of China, in their first-ever competitive match on the same day.

For the first time in the WTT series, Chuqin and Aruna will go head-to-head in an intriguing first-round encounter.

Aruna, a seasoned competitor, brings experience and tactical versatility to the table, while Wang, backed by his ice-cold composure and a roaring

home crowd, will aim to dictate the tempo. With no past meetings to reference, both players will step into uncharted waters in this Chongqing showdown.

Goda, who recently reclaimed her ITTF Africa Cup title after a 4-2 comeback against Meshref, will face South Korea's sensation Shun Yubin in a battle of wits between two of the brightest stars in the world on Thursday, March 13.

UCL: PSG can eliminate Liverpool —Kvaratskhelia

Paris Saint-Germain forward Khvicha Kvaratskhelia has expressed confidence in his team's ability to eliminate Liverpool from the UEFA Champions League.

PSG is set to face Liverpool in the second leg of their Champions League Round of 16 clash on Tuesday night at Anfield.

The French champions head into the fixture looking to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg, which took place in Paris last week. However, they gained momentum with a command-

ing 4-1 victory over Rennes in their most recent Ligue 1 outing.

Liverpool, meanwhile, secured a 3-1 win against Southampton in the Premier League ahead of their European showdown.

Speaking about PSG's upcoming challenge, Kvaratskhelia, as quoted by Fabrizio Romano, stated: "We are confident. We believe we can achieve this and will fight for our dream. I've adapted well in Paris, and I feel great with my teammates and coach Luis Enrique. We want to create something special."



Musa stresses importance of beating Rwanda in World Cup qualifiers

Super Eagles captain Ahmed Musa has emphasized the necessity of securing a win against Rwanda's Amavubi in their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign.

The Nigerian team has struggled in Group C, failing to register a victory in their first four matches, recording three draws and one loss.

On Friday, March 21, the three-time African champions will take on Rwanda in a crucial matchday five fixture at Amahoro Stadium in Kigali.

Musa highlighted the significance of the game, stating

that earning all three points is vital for the team's qualification hopes. Speaking at a press conference in Ilorin, where he was also preparing for Kano Pillars' league match against Kwara

United, the former Leicester City forward said, "Right now, the most important game for us is against Rwanda."

He further explained, "A win in this match could change the

course of our campaign. But it's not just about the Super Eagles it's about all Nigerians coming together to support the team."

Musa also stressed the importance of unity and national backing in ensuring success.

Following their encounter with Rwanda, the Super Eagles will return to Nigeria to face Zimbabwe's Warriors at the Godswill Akpabio International Stadium in Uyo on March 25. With their qualification hopes hanging in the balance, the upcoming fixtures are crucial in determining their path to the World Cup.



Morocco 2025: Flamingos must improve —Coach Olowookere

Nigeria's Flamingos head coach, Bankole Olowookere, has acknowledged the need for further improvement despite their strong performance, BSNSports.com reports.

The team secured a convincing away victory against Bantwana in the first leg of the

second qualifying round.

While praising his players, Olowookere emphasized the importance of refining certain aspects of their game.

"We got a good result, but there are still areas we need to improve before the next match. I know South Africa will also make adjustments," he stated.



FEATURE

Edo's security challenges: PDP's desperation and politics of blame

EDO OSAHO

The recent press release by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is yet another attempt to politicize the security challenges in Edo State, a move that underscores their lingering frustration over their loss in the governorship election. Rather than presenting constructive solutions, the PDP and its spokesperson, Chris Nehikhare, have chosen to stage an unnecessary political combat instead of collaborating with the current administration to address the state's security concerns.

While Senator Adams Oshiomhole's concerns about security should not be dismissed, it is essential to recognize that Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration has been making concerted efforts to tackle insecurity in Edo State. Security issues are not peculiar to Edo but are a nationwide concern, and the state government has taken definitive steps to address them.

A key example is the recent signing of the Secret Cult and Similar Activities Prohibition Bill, 2024, into law. This legislation enforces stricter pen-

alties against cultists and their sponsors, demonstrating the government's commitment to eradicating criminal elements. Additionally, in December 2024, Governor Okpebholo signed the Kidnapping Prohibition Amendment Law, 2025, which strengthens existing laws against kidnapping, ensuring severe sanctions against perpetrators. To show that these actions are not merely symbolic, the governor went a step further by demolishing

properties belonging to convicted kidnappers—an unprecedented move that underscores his commitment to making Edo safer.

The newly amended laws prescribe severe consequences, including the death penalty for convicted kidnappers, confiscation and demolition of their properties, and stringent punishments for their accomplices. This firm stance on security is a direct contrast to the lackluster approach taken

by the previous administration under former Governor Godwin Obaseki. Yet, the PDP shamelessly attempts to rewrite history by portraying Obaseki as having built an effective security framework—an assertion that does not align with the facts.

If Chris Nehikhare insists on glorifying Obaseki's tenure, he should answer a few critical questions. Where was he when, in January 2023, bandits stormed a train station in Edo and abducted 32 people, including two railway workers? What about the gruesome attack on Apostle Johnson Suleman's convoy on October 21, 2022, along the Benin-Auchi Road, which resulted in the deaths of six of his aides? Has he forgotten the incident in January 2024 when kidnappers brazenly took over a police checkpoint in Edo? Does he remember the kidnapping of Edo State's Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, who was held captive for weeks?

If security was indeed robust under Obaseki, why did he himself flee from an office near the Civil Service Club due to security concerns and relocate to the Government House towards the end of his tenure? Why were daring kidnappers able to attack police-

men on patrol during the last administration, with Nehikhare playing a prominent role in governance? These incidents expose the PDP's hypocrisy and their attempt to manipulate the narrative for political gain.

It is clear that Nehikhare, having lost his position in government, is struggling to remain relevant within the PDP. With nothing productive to do, he spends his days idling at the party secretariat, which now resembles a crumbling fortress awaiting its inevitable collapse. The activities of Governor Okpebholo's administration have become a nightmare for him and his party, which finds itself politically suffocated.

Rather than engaging in baseless criticism and political distractions, the PDP should embrace collaboration and support the current administration's efforts to address the inherited security challenges. The safety and well-being of Edo people should take precedence over political point-scoring. It is time to move beyond the blame game and work towards a more secure and prosperous Edo State.

Rather than engaging in baseless criticism and political distractions, the PDP should embrace collaboration and support the current administration's efforts to address the inherited security challenges. The safety and well-being of Edo people should take precedence over political point-scoring. It is time to move beyond the blame game and work towards a more secure and prosperous Edo State.

Edo Osaho, writes from Benin.

Edo State's security and governance: Separating facts from fiction

FRED ITUA

Recent claims that Edo State is "under siege" and that "lawlessness is now the order of the day" are exaggerated and misleading. While no society is entirely free from security challenges, it is important to distinguish between genuine concerns and politically motivated narratives. The administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo remains committed to ensuring the safety of all residents and has taken decisive steps to enhance security across the state.

Key initiatives include the reorganization of the Edo Security Network, improved collaboration with law enforcement agencies, and increased investment in modern security infrastructure. These measures are already yielding positive results, as security personnel are better equipped to tackle emerging threats and ensure peace in Edo communities.

Additionally, concerns about market disruptions and illegal revenue collection are being addressed through structural reforms in the transport and revenue sectors. Unlike previous administrations that tolerated extortion and intimidation of traders, this government is actively working to eliminate multiple taxation and illegal toll collection. To ensure proper enforcement, the state government has engaged Atalakpa Recovery Concept Ltd. As an enforcement compliance consultant, reinforc-

ing its commitment to transparent and lawful revenue collection.

It is also worth noting that Edo State has made significant progress in curbing insecurity. The current administration has procured modern security equipment, deployed personnel to identified hotspots, and established a rapid response mechanism to address security concerns swiftly. These proactive measures contrast sharply with the past, when crime rates, including kidnappings and cult-related violence, were at alarming levels.

Governor Okpebholo welcomes constructive criticism and values diverse perspectives on governance. However, public discourse should be grounded in facts rather than politically driven misinformation. Edo residents can see the tangible improvements taking place, and efforts to discredit the progress made will not alter the reality of a state moving towards greater security, economic stability, and improved governance.

The administration remains focused on fostering a safe and conducive environment for businesses and residents alike. With continued commitment to security, economic development, and accountability, Edo State is on the path to lasting progress.

Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor.

