

APC adopts final written address at Edo election tribunal

● **Pushes for dismissal of PDP's petition** ● **Raises alarm over planned PDP protest** ● **As tribunal reserves judgment**

The All Progressives Congress (APC), through its lead counsel, Emmanuel Ukala, SAN, has formally adopted its final written address at the Edo State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal, urging the panel to dismiss the petition filed by the Peoples Dem-

ocratic Party (PDP). Ukala contended that the PDP had failed to present credible and substantial evidence to support its claims of electoral malpractice, including over-voting and non-compliance with electoral laws. Also, the tribunal has reserved

judgment to later date after parties to the suit adopted their final written addresses in the petition filed by Asue Ighodalo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), challenging the declaration of Senator Monday Okpebholo of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as the winner of the 2024

governorship election. It will be recalled that the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, had declared that Okpebholo of the APC secured a total of 291,667 votes to defeat his closet rivalry, Ighodalo of the PDP, who got a total of 247,655 votes

The tribunal was convened to hear the petition challenging the declaration of Senator Monday Okpebholo of the APC as the winner of the Edo State Governorship Election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The PDP and its candidate

had alleged widespread irregularities, claiming that the election was tainted by over-voting, the improper use of election materials, and INEC's failure to comply with electoral guidelines in key areas across the state.

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The Nigerian Observer



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Okpebholo reverses Obaseki's land revocations, restores property to Ibori, others
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Rivers crisis: Fubara braces for possible ouster

● **Declares 'I am not scared'**

The political crisis in Rivers State has deepened as Governor Siminalayi Fubara openly acknowledged the possibility of his removal, but remained resolute, declaring that no amount of pressure will force him to abandon his principles or commitment to governance.

Speaking on Monday at the inauguration of the newly reconstructed Government

House Staff Quarters in Port Harcourt, Fubara told supporters that while his adversaries may push for his exit, it will not define his legacy or stop him from fighting for the people of Rivers State.

"The worst that will happen is for me to leave the office. Am I leaving the earth? Is it going to stop me from existing?" Fubara said, reflecting on the mounting opposition against him.

His comments come in the wake of a Supreme Court judgment that reportedly dampened the morale of many Rivers residents, reinforcing speculation that the governor's tenure is under serious threat.

However, Fubara urged his supporters to remain steadfast, stressing that the battle ahead is even more critical than what has already transpired.

"No matter how we've been fooled in this state, it has gotten to a point where the people must take their destinies into

their own hands," he declared, hinting at an imminent political showdown.

Despite his defiance, Fubara maintained that he does not support violence, but warned that his administration will not remain passive while forces work to destabilize the state.

"In as much as I don't subscribe to violence, when the time comes for us to take a decision, I will lead that course," he stated.

The governor emphasized that his faith lies in God and

the people who believe in the state's progress. Quoting Philippians 3:18-19, he criticized those who prioritize personal gain over the welfare of the people, stating, "We are not after our stomachs; we are after the joy of our people."

Fubara also reassured Rivers residents of his commitment to good governance.

"I will lead you with honour, respect, and integrity, knowing that when I leave here, I will have questions to answer. I want to be proud to defend my

position," he affirmed.

At the event, Chief of Staff, Government House, Edison Ehie, commended the governor for prioritizing workers' welfare.

Permanent Secretary, Government House, Chukwuma Ndudi Augustine, described the newly completed staff quarters, which include six two-bedroom apartments, 11 one-bedroom apartments, Boys' Quarters, hostels, a cafeteria, a gym, a basketball court, and a power plant

Nigeria, UK strengthen ties

CAROLINE AMEH

Senate President Godswill Obot Akpabio has reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to deepening its partnership with the United Kingdom, emphasizing democracy, trade, and international cooperation as key pillars of their relationship. Welcoming a delegation from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) UK Branch to the National Assembly, Akpabio highlighted the enduring ties between both nations, shaped by shared struggles, mutual aspirations, and a dedication to democratic values.

"You come to us not as strangers, but as brothers and sisters bound by the indelible ties of history. The relationship between our nations was not born in ease but was forged in the fires of struggle and strengthened by our resolve to build a freer, better, and fairer world," he said.

Akpabio commended the CPA's role in promoting legis-

lative excellence and good governance, stressing that a nation's strength lies in the credibility of its democratic institutions and the freedoms enjoyed by its people. He also underscored Nigeria's growing economic ties with the UK, noting that trade between the two nations has surpassed £7.5 billion. The recently signed Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), he said, presents new opportunities for commerce and development.

"But let no one think that trade alone defines our bond," he remarked. "Our connection is broader and more profound—it is woven into our institutions, schools, and leadership corridors where destinies are shaped."

Discussing Nigeria's legislative progress, Akpabio outlined the 10th National Assembly's commitment to crafting impactful laws, promoting inclusive governance, strengthening international engagements,

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TINUBU WELCOMES BIO:

President Bola Tinubu (right), welcoming the Sierra Leone President, Julius Bio, at the Aso Rock Presidential Villa, Abuja on Monday

NNPCL slashes petrol price to N860/litre
—Marketers
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Meranda resigns as Lagos Speaker, re-elected Deputy Speaker
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ECOWAS mission to Guinea-Bissau to resolve dispute leaves after threats
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IFAB approves new rule change from next season for goalkeepers
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Okpebholo reverses Obaseki's land revocations, restores property to Ibori, others

IDAHOSA MUSA

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has reinstated ownership of a prime parcel of land in the Government Reservation Area (GRA) of Benin City to former Delta State Governor, Mr. James Onanefe Ibori. The land's Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) had been revoked by the previous administration of

Governor Godwin Obaseki.

This development was announced in a statement by the Edo State Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Paul Ohonbamu, on Monday in Benin City.

According to the statement, the land had allegedly been reallocated by Obaseki's administration to a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) chieftain, Matthew Iduoriyekemwen.

Similarly, Governor Okpebholo also restored land ownership to Captain Nogie Megison, another individual whose C of O had been revoked under Obaseki's tenure.

Governor Okpebholo viewed the previous administration's actions as politically motivated and unjust. The statement emphasized his commitment to fairness, stating: "For the Governor, such actions are repug-

nant to civility, natural justice, equity, and good conscience and cannot be allowed to stand.

"There are several other lands revoked by Obaseki that follow the same pattern and are altogether ineffectual and barren.

"This is Governor Monday Okpebholo's position that public goods cannot be sacrificed at the altar of political considerations."



INAUGURAL MEETING:

L-R: Senator C. C. Clark; Senator Dike Plank, and Chairman Senate Committee on Local Content, Joel Onowakpo, during their inaugural meeting at the National Assembly Abuja at the weekend.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

NNPCL slashes petrol price to N860/litre —Marketers

Some retail outlets belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited have adjusted the petrol pump price to N860 per litre.

It was observed that while there is no official communication from the NNPC, some stations in Lagos adjusted their pumps to N860 per litre, down

from N945 as of Sunday.

This comes a few days after the Dangote Refinery reduced its ex-depot petrol price from N890 to N825 per litre.

NNPC spokesperson, Olufemi Soneye, did not respond to calls or messages regarding the development.

However, the National Vice President of the Independent

Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria, Hammed Fashola, confirmed the development.

"It is true, NNPC is selling petrol at N860 in the filling stations. Though this has not been reflected on the portal, they told me they are working on updating the portal," the IPMAN leader said.

Also, the National President

of the Petroleum Products Retail Outlet Owners Association of Nigeria, Billy Gillis-Harry, said, "They reduced the pump price earlier this morning (yesterday) but I'm yet to get the details."

The Dangote Refinery announced a price cut last week Wednesday, setting another price regime for the petrol market in Nigeria.

Natasha's sexual harassment allegation against Akpabio not before senate —Spokesperson

The spokesperson for the Senate, Senator Yemi Adaramodu, has said that the sexual harassment allegation by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan against the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, is not before the Senate.

Adaramodu made this disclosure while speaking on Arise TV's Morning Show on

Monday.

He also maintained that the only case before the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petition is Akpoti-Uduaghan not complying with the Senate standing orders.

He said, "The only matter before the Senate is between Senator Natasha and the rest

of the senators, that she is not complying with the standing orders of the Senate. No other issues.

"Then, if there is anything that comes tomorrow about any senator in the National Assembly, the ethics, privileges and public petition committee will review once it is referred to them. It is going to be taken as

an internal affair.

"In the hallowed chamber, whatever we do or say is not actionable in the court, so because of that, the committee will treat the issue as it comes.

"The Senate does not run the committee with senators. The Senate President does not even run with its members. It is an independent committee."

Tinubu receives Sierra Leone President, Bio, at the Villa

President Bola Tinubu is meeting with his Sierra Leonean counterpart, Julius Bio, at the Aso Rock Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Bio arrived at the forecourt of the Villa at 12:22 pm Monday in the company of the bagpipers of the Presidential Guards Brigade.

He was received by the President's Chief of Staff, Mr Femi Gbajabiamila, who ushered him into the closed-door meeting.

Nigeria and Sierra Leone

have maintained strong diplomatic relations since their respective independences in October 1960 and April 1961.

Both nations are active members of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union and have collaborated on initiatives aimed at promoting peace, stability, and development in the region.

Between 1991 and 2002, Nigeria played a pivotal role in supporting Sierra Leone during its civil war when it led the ECOWAS Monitoring Group

in peacekeeping efforts to restore stability in the region.

Nigerian forces were also instrumental in combating rebel factions and reinstating the democratically elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah after a military coup in 1997.

This led to the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone in 1999 which assisted in disarmament and peace-building processes.

However, trade between the two countries has fluctuated

over recent years.

A 2023 estimate valued Nigeria's exports to Sierra Leone at approximately \$5.55 million.

The primary exports included fertilizers, miscellaneous edible preparations, electrical and electronic equipment, glass and glassware and coffee, tea, mate, and spices.

Meanwhile, Sierra Leone's main exports to Nigeria include animal and vegetable fats and oils, machinery and boilers, rubber products and fish and crustaceans.

APC adopts final written address at...

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In his submission, Ukala argued that the petitioners' case was built entirely on allegations of non-compliance with electoral procedures but lacked the necessary evidentiary foundation to substantiate these claims.

He cited the Supreme Court ruling in Ucha v. Elechi, which established that claims of over-voting must be proven comprehensively from polling unit to polling unit, ward to ward, and across local government areas.

According to him, the PDP failed to meet this legal requirement, rendering their claims weak and unsubstantiated.

Ukala further referenced the Supreme Court's decision in Baba v. INEC, which held that petitioners must present specific and verifiable evidence from particular polling units to prove electoral malpractice.

He accused the PDP of engaging in "dumping evidence," a legal flaw where documents are submitted to the court without being properly linked to the allegations made in the petition.

He emphasized that such an approach was ineffective and insufficient to support their claims.

Additionally, Ukala scrutinized the testimonies of the PDP's witnesses, designated as PW1 to PW14, asserting that their statements were largely based on hearsay rather than firsthand accounts.

He argued that under Nigerian law, hearsay evidence is inadmissible and unreliable, further weakening the petitioners' case.

He also pointed out that Form EC25D, a critical election document necessary to verify election procedures, was not referenced in any of the sworn witness statements submitted by the PDP.

This omission, he maintained, further undermined the credibility of the petition.

Another significant flaw, Ukala noted, was the PDP's failure to present BVAS (Bimodal Voter Accreditation System) records or the voters' register as evidence to support their allegations of over-voting. He stressed that BVAS serves as a primary tool for voter verification and election credibility, and without its records, the PDP had no substantive proof to validate its claims.

Beyond the legal technicalities, Ukala urged the tribunal to consider the broader implications of setting a precedent where allegations without concrete proof could disrupt electoral outcomes. He insisted that without compelling evidence, the petition should be dismissed outright.

The Edo election petition tribunal has drawn significant attention from political stakeholders, as the outcome could have major implications for the political landscape of the state. With the adoption of final written addresses now completed, the tribunal is set to deliberate on the arguments presented and deliver its judgment in the coming weeks, a decision that will be closely watched by both parties and the electorate.

Meanwhile, the Edo State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) has raised concerns over planned by supporters of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and its governorship candidate, Asue Ighodalo, to stage a protest at the Attorney General's Office in Abuja.

In a statement, the Edo APC Chairman, Emperor Jarret Tenebe, called on security agencies, including the Police, Department of State Services (DSS), and the Nigerian Army, to take proactive measures to prevent any disruption to the judicial process.

According to Tenebe, the planned protest is a deliberate attempt to influence the ongoing Edo State Governorship tribunal proceedings.

He described the move as an unlawful act aimed at exerting pressure on the judiciary and creating unnecessary tension.

The APC chairman reiterated that the party would not tolerate any attempt to compromise the judicial process or disturb the peace.

"We have credible intelligence that PDP supporters, under the directive of Asue Ighodalo and his associates, are mobilizing to storm the Attorney General's Office in an attempt to sway the tribunal's outcome. This is a clear act of desperation and an attempt to obstruct justice," Tenebe said.

The Edo State Governorship tribunal is currently hearing the case brought forward by the PDP and Asue Ighodalo, challenging the results of the recently concluded governorship election.

The APC has maintained that the election was free and fair, insisting that any grievances should be addressed through legal channels, rather than protests and external pressure.

Tenebe urged security agencies to treat the matter with the seriousness it deserves by ensuring that the planned protest does not degenerate into a security threat.

He also called on the international community to be aware of the situation and monitor attempts to undermine the legal process.

Nigeria, UK strengthen ties

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

and investing in capacity building for lawmakers and legislative staff. He reaffirmed that democracy demands dedication and sacrifice, describing it as a challenging but essential path toward good governance.

"The road of democracy is not a paved highway, but a path of toil, struggle, and sacrifice. Yet, it must be traveled, fought for, and preserved. We are not masters of history; we are its servants, and we shall not be found wanting," he declared.

Akpabio concluded by calling for continued collaboration between Nigeria and the UK to ensure democracy thrives, trade flourishes, and citizens enjoy greater opportunities. "Nigeria and the United Kingdom, bound by friendship and fortified by purpose, shall march forward together," he affirmed.

The visit is part of ongoing efforts to deepen parliamentary cooperation between the two nations, focusing on governance, economic growth, and democratic resilience.

NEWS

NDLEA nabs suspected drug baron after 17 years in hiding

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) says it has arrested a suspected drug baron, Ogbonnaya Kevin Jeff, at his hideout in Lagos.

According to a statement by the NDLEA spokesperson, Femi Babafemi, the 59-year-old's arrest came after 17 years of hiding in the dark to ship illicit drugs worth billions of naira across the world.

He said that the Chairman/Chief Executive Officer of NDLEA, Brig Gen Mohamed Buba Marwa (Rtd) disclosed this at a press briefing in Abuja on Monday.

The NDLEA boss detailed how operatives of its Special Operations Unit had been on the trail of Ogbonnaya following

an Interpol red notice against him and information from the National Intelligence Service of South Korea.

According to Marwa: "The major development that warranted this special briefing pertains to the arrest of a drug lord who's wanted across the world as the leader of an international drug trafficking organisation. I am therefore pleased to announce this significant breakthrough in our efforts to dismantle drug trafficking syndicates operating within the country.

"As we have said four years ago when we began the reform of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), our prime targets are drug barons and other important figures that organise drug trafficking rings.

"On Wednesday, 12th February 2025, we achieved that objective in the successful arrest of Ogbonnaya Kevin Jeff, a 59-year-old drug baron. The suspect was arrested at his hideout at No. 3, Ibukunoluwa Taiwo Close, off LASU Road, Lagos. He has been under NDLEA investigation before his arrest.

"As a result, we have comprehensive intelligence on his activities, and incontrovertible facts that he is a notorious drug lord who recruited young Nigerians as couriers to smuggle illicit substances into the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

"Our records reveal that many Nigerians apprehended outside the country for drug-related offences were linked to him. Furthermore, we have established that he laundered drug proceeds through the importation of electronics and other goods.

"Following his arrest, a search of his residence led to the recovery of multiple Nigerian international passports belonging to different individuals, many of which contained Korean visas. Additionally, we recovered some illicit substances in a storehouse at the back of his house."

While unmasking the suspect's ignoble role in the drug underworld, the NDLEA boss said "Ogbonnaya Kevin Jeff is not a typical domestic drug baron; he is an international trafficker operating both from Nigeria and abroad.

His dossier NDLEA stated, indicates that he served a one-year prison sentence in the Republic of Korea in 2007 and was deported to Nigeria in 2008. Despite this, he continued his illicit trade, remaining actively involved in drug trafficking operations to the Far East.

Presently, he is wanted in the Republic of Korea for multiple drug trafficking offences in collaboration with his accomplices. An INTERPOL Red Notice was issued for his arrest and extradition to the country for offences committed between 2023 and 2024.

"From a series of interdictions, it has been established that Ogbonnaya Kevin Jeff is the ringleader of a drug trafficking organisation responsible for smuggling narcotics into the People's Republic of Korea.

"He has been orchestrating operations remotely by giving instructions to drug mules and domestic suppliers who are members of his syndicate spread across Cameroon, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Liberia and other East and Southern African countries."

He further gave insights into what investigations had un-

earthed about Ogbonnaya's illicit trade activities.

"On 5th October 2023, at a location in Burkina Faso, the suspect dispatched 6,051.06 grams of skunk, concealed in dried chillies and jujube, to a Korean, Kim Dong Wook at a designated address in Jinju City, Gyeongsangnam-do, South Korea. The package arrived at Incheon Airport on 19th October 2023 at 07:20 am via Air France.

"Investigation reveals that while residing in Nigeria, he directed his drug couriers, Santa Elizabeth Pieterse and Carl Yohan Stephan Brisman, to smuggle a total of five kilograms of methamphetamine into South Korea via overseas flights, between December 2023 and April 2024. In recent time alone, he has sent illicit drugs worth over N1.4billion in street value to South Korea."

Meranda resigns as Lagos Speaker, re-elected Deputy Speaker

Meranda has resigned as the Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly seven weeks after holding the leadership mantle.

The lawmaker, who represents Apapa Constituency I, announced her resignation on Monday as lawmakers re-elected her as the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly.

The lawmakers commended her leadership style and for bringing peace to the Lagos State House of Assembly.

They also commended her strength and humility for obeying the rules and regulations of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

Meranda's resignation followed a reported meeting with some high-ranking members of the APC in the state to navigate the leadership crisis that has rocked the hallowed chambers.

The leadership crisis in the Assembly became full-blown on January 13, 2025, when a lawmaker, who represents Agege Constituency I, Mudashiru Obasa was removed as Lagos speaker by more than two-thirds

of the 40-member house who voted him out over alleged misconduct and sundry offences.

Obasa's then deputy, Meranda, was immediately elected the new Speaker, becoming the first female to take charge of the legislative body in the South-West State.

However, on January 25, 2025, Obasa vehemently rejected his removal and insisted that he remained the speaker until the right thing had been done. He faulted the militarisation of the assembly complex during the impeachment process. He also claimed his removal as speaker took place in his absence — when he was out of Nigeria.

Thirty-six lawmakers loyal to Meranda has however insisted that Obasa's removal was final and that Meranda remained the speaker of the House.

On February 17, 2025, tempers flared at the Assembly Complex when security agents and some legislative workers clashed over the presence of the former in the hallowed chambers. Thereafter, thirty-six of the lawmakers passed a vote of confidence in an emotional Meranda and adjourned sitting indefinitely.

Dangote Absorbs ₦16bn PMS loss, to refund ₦65/litre to marketers

Dangote Petroleum Refinery & Petrochemicals has said it would absorb N16bn loss by refunding N65/litre to marketers for Nigerians to benefit from cheaper fuel.

In a statement issued over the weekend, the refinery said it will refund customers who purchase Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) at rates higher than the advertised prices from any of its key partners — AP (Ardova Plc), Heyden, or MRS — across Nigeria.

This move follows the refinery's recent reduction of its gantry price from N890 per litre to N825 per litre.

The refinery stated that this is part of its ongoing efforts to ensure that Nigerians are the primary beneficiaries of the price reduction and in line with Pres-

ident Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda, which aims to stimulate the economy.

The refinery confirmed it will refund N65 per litre on the over 200,000 metric tonnes of PMS purchased by marketers at the old gantry price of N890 per litre, before the new rate of N825 per litre.

"The step, effective February 27, 2025, guarantees that none of our valued business partners will experience a loss due to the price change. More importantly, it ensures that the new, lower rate takes immediate effect nationwide for the benefit of the Nigerian people," the statement said.

The refinery emphasised that this initiative extends beyond MRS Holdings, Ardova Plc (AP), and Heyden.



CERTIFICATE OF PARTICIPATION:

Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council and Security and Defense Correspondent of the Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS), Dr Festus Alenke (right), presenting his certificate of participation in the Strategic Leadership Ethics and Policy Making Course (SLEAPM), Course 13, at National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), to his boss, the Managing Director of EBS, Sulaiman Aledeh, at the corporate headquarters of EBS in Benin City..

FAAN closes runway 18R/35L MMA for rehabilitation

The Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria has closed Runway 18R/36L at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja for rehabilitation.

The closure started from 3 am on Monday according to

a statement signed by the Director, Public Affairs and Consumer Protection, FAAN, Mrs Obiageli Orah.

Orah said the closure is due to ongoing rehabilitation work (asphalt phase) at the A2 Taxi-

way link of the runway.

She said this is part of ongoing efforts to ensure that the runway would remain in optimal condition.

"There will be no disruption to flight operations during this

period as all flights would be redirected to the alternative runway, 18L/36R," she said.

She emphasised FAAN's commitment to the safety, security and comfort of airport users.

Retired AIG calls for greater support, funding for Nigeria police

Retired Assistant Inspector General of Police, Mr Abiodun Asabi, has identified inadequate support, particularly in the area of funding, from Nigerians as a serious challenge facing the Nigeria Police Force.

To this end, Asabi, who is a former Commissioner of Police in Ondo State, called on the Federal Government and other stakeholders to fund and assist the force more in reducing criminality to its barest minimum in Nigeria.

The police boss stated this while speaking with journalists at his retirement and pull-out parade, held at Gani Fawehinmi Arcade, Akure, the Ondo State capital, on Monday.

According to him, the Nigeria Police Force needed immense support from Nigerians to tackle the spate of insecurity across the country.

He said, "With my experience in the Nigeria police, my observation is that people need to support the police much more they are doing. This is lacking.

"There are lot of gains if there are collective efforts with the police. So, all stakeholders, people that have the security of this nation at heart, should rally around and support the force so that they can do better in moving the country forward. There is a lot to gain by collective efforts."

Expressing his joy for serv-

ing the Nigeria Police with his vigour for 35 years, Asabi reiterated that service of the force was towards the betterment of the country.

Advocating increased funding for sickle cell research: A call to action

"I will say that it's a thing of joy to have served Nigeria. The service to the country is worthwhile. I love my country, that is why I enrolled to be enlisted in the force and I have never regretted for doing so," he stated.

The AIG advised all police personnel and officers to perform their duties with the utmost integrity, professionalism, fairness, and transparency.

He also asked them to avoid any form of corruption, which

he said could bring depravity to the force

Many colleagues and dignitaries who graced the event hailed AIG Asabi's dedication, integrity, and leadership, highlighting his efforts in crime prevention, community engagement, and police welfare.

Some described him as an exemplary officer whose legacy will continue to inspire future generations of police officers.

Born on April 16, 1965, in Lagos, Asabi hails from Gbongan, the headquarters of the Ayedaade Local Government Area of Osun State, and he was enlisted into the Nigeria Police Force as a cadet Assistant Superintendent of Police on March 3, 1990.

Foreign

News

Belfast factory to supply 5,000 missiles to Ukraine

The Thales missile factory in Belfast is to supply 5,000 air defence missiles to Ukraine, the Prime Minister has announced.

The deal is worth up to £1.6bn and will involve recruiting 200 additional staff.

Thales is a French-owned company which one of Europe's

biggest arms manufacturers.

The order is for lightweight multirole missiles (LMMs) which Ukrainian forces are already using.

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announced the order as he laid out a four point plan to "reach peace and defend Ukraine".

East Belfast MP and DUP leader Gavin Robinson said the order is "hugely significant" given the "turbulence" in international relations and the acknowledgement of the "skill and ingenuity" of the Thales team.

A £162m contract announced in September last

year saw 650 LMMs supplied to Ukraine as an initial order to ramp up production, with the first deliveries in December.

The new order is much bigger: it is worth an initial £1.16bn with the potential for around a further £500m of work to be added in collaboration with a Ukrainian industry

partner.

The partner firm will manufacture launchers and command and control vehicles for the missiles in Ukraine.

Robinson said there was no point talking about international principles and values "if you're not prepared to stand up for them".

"We're giving the tools to make sure a sovereign country has the ability to stand against an international aggressor in Russia, a country that decided to walk over the border, destroy cities, villages and towns and kill civilians," he said.

Robinson added that the defence spend was "encouraging" for the industry and the Northern Ireland economy.

The UK Ministry of Defence

(MoD) said it is the largest contract ever received by Thales in Belfast.

The Defence Secretary John Healey said the deal would "help protect Ukraine against drone and missile attacks and help deter further Russian aggression following any end to the fighting".

The contract has been placed by the MoD's procurement arm Defence Equipment & Support on behalf of the Ukrainian Government.

It will be funded by a loan underwritten by United Kingdom Export Finance (UKEF) after a deal signed last year to allow Ukraine to draw on £3.5bn worth of support from UKEF to spend with UK industry.



M23 REBELS:

Since January, M23 rebels have made major advances in the east of DR Congo

Arab states and UN condemn Gaza aid blockade by Israel

Several Arab states and the UN have condemned Israel for blocking the entry of all humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

Egypt and Qatar said the Israeli move on Sunday violated a ceasefire deal, while UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher described it as "alarming".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country acted because Hamas was stealing the supplies and using them "to finance its terror machine".

He also accused the Palestinian group of rejecting a US proposal to extend the ceasefire in Gaza, after it expired on Saturday. Israel said it had approved the proposal.

A Hamas spokesman said Israel's blockade was "cheap blackmail" and a "coup" against the ceasefire agreement.

The ceasefire deal halted 15 months of fighting between Hamas and the Israeli military, allowing the release of 33 Israeli hostages for about 1,900 Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

In a statement on Sunday, Qatar's foreign ministry said it "strongly condemns" the Israeli decision, describing it as "a clear violation of the ceasefire agreement" and "international humanitarian law".

In Egypt, the foreign ministry accused Israel of using starvation as "a weapon against the Palestinian people", the AFP news agency reported.

Both Qatar and Egypt helped to mediate the ceasefire

agreement in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia expressed its "condemnation and denunciation" of the Israeli aid blockade, the foreign ministry said.

Tom Fletcher, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, wrote in a post on X: "International humanitarian law is clear: We must be allowed access to deliver vital lifesaving aid."

Netanyahu said Israel had decided to act "because Hamas steals the supplies and prevents the people of Gaza from getting them."

"It uses these supplies to finance its terror machine, which is aimed directly at Israel and our civilians, and this we cannot accept."

Hamas has previously denied stealing humanitarian aid in Gaza.

Netanyahu also said Hamas

was refusing to accept a temporary extension of the ceasefire proposed by US President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff.

The first phase of the ceasefire came into force on 19 January and expired at midnight on Saturday.

Negotiations on phase two, meant to lead to a permanent ceasefire, the release of all remaining living hostages and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, were due to have started weeks ago - but have barely begun.

There are believed to be 24 hostages alive, with another 39 presumed to be dead.

Phase three is meant to result in the return of all remaining bodies of dead hostages and the reconstruction of Gaza, which is expected to take years.

Hamas has previously said it

will not agree to any extension of phase one without guarantees from the mediators that phase two will eventually take place.

As the first phase of the deal expired on Saturday, Netanyahu's office said Israel had agreed to Witkoff's proposal for the ceasefire to continue for about six weeks during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and Jewish Passover periods.

If, at the end of this period, negotiations reached a dead end, Israel would reserve the right to go back to war.

Witkoff has not made his proposal public. According to Israel, it would begin with the release of half of all the remaining living and dead hostages.

Witkoff is said by Israel to have proposed the temporary extension after becoming

DR Congo defies pressure over talks with rebel M23

Despite growing international pressure, the Democratic Republic of Congo is standing firm on its decision not to have direct talks with the M23 rebel group that has made major advances in the east of the country in recent months.

Last week, the UK government added to calls for the group to be part of an "inclusive dialogue" to help find a political solution to the conflict.

But in an interview with the BBC, DR Congo Prime Minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka said her government wants to

negotiate with neighbouring Rwanda, which it accuses of backing the M23.

At least 8,500 people have been killed since fighting escalated in January, according to the Congolese authorities.

Hundreds of thousands have also been forced from their homes amid the chaos triggered by the fighting, in which UN experts and others see Rwanda as having a key role.

"The fact remains that the aggressor of the territorial integrity and of the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Congo is Rwanda," Sumin-

wa Tuluka said, citing a UN experts' report from last year that stated that between 3,000 and 4,000 Rwandan troops had crossed into Congolese territory and were fighting alongside the M23.

Peace talks brokered by Angola hit a deadlock last December after Rwanda demanded that the Congolese government talk directly to the M23.

The rebel group then advanced swiftly, taking control of the cities of Goma and Bukavu in January and February.

At a joint East and Southern African mediation effort last

Australian whose blood saved 2.4 million babies dies

One of the world's most prolific blood donors - whose plasma saved the lives of more than 2 million babies - has died.

James Harrison died in his sleep at a nursing home in New South Wales, Australia on 17 February, his family said on Monday. He was 88.

Known in Australia as the man with the golden arm, Harrison's blood contained a rare antibody, Anti-D, which is used to make medication given to pregnant mothers whose blood is at risk of attacking their unborn babies.

The Australian Red Cross Blood Service who paid tribute to Harrison, said he had pledged to become a donor after receiving transfusions while undergoing a major chest surgery when he was 14.

He started donating his blood plasma when he was 18 and continued doing so every two weeks until he was 81.

In 2005, he had the world record for most blood plasma donated - a title he held until 2022 when he was overtaken by a man in the US.

Harrison's daughter, Tracey Mellowship, said her father was "very proud to have saved so many lives, without any cost or pain".

"He always said it does not hurt, and the life you save

could be your own," she said.

Mellowship and two of Harrison's grandchildren are also recipients of anti-D immunisations.

"It made [James] happy to hear about the many families like ours, who existed because of his kindness," she said.

Anti-D jabs protect unborn babies from a deadly blood disorder called haemolytic disease of the foetus and newborn, or HDFN.

The condition occurs at pregnancy when the mother's red blood cells are incompatible with that of their growing baby.

The mother's immune system then sees the baby's blood cells as a threat and produces antibodies to attack them. This can seriously harm the baby, causing severe anaemia, heart failure, or even death.

Before anti-D interventions were developed in the mid-1960s, one in two babies diagnosed with HDFN died.

It is unclear how Harrison's blood came to be so rich in anti-D, but some reports said it had to do with the massive blood transfusion he received at 14.

There are fewer than 200 anti-D donors in Australia, but they help an estimated 45,000 mothers and their babies every year, according to the Australian Red Cross Blood Service, also known as Lifeblood.

Lifeblood has been working with Australia's Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research to grow anti-D antibodies in the lab by replicating blood and immune cells from Harrison and other donors.

Researchers involved hope lab-made anti-D can one day be used to help pregnant women worldwide.

"Creating a new therapy has long been a 'holy grail'." Lifeblood's research director David Irving said.

He noted the scarcity of donors committed to regular donation, who are able to produce antibodies in sufficient quality and quantity.

News

Foreign

ECOWAS mission to Guinea-Bissau to resolve dispute leaves after threats

A mission by a West African regional bloc sent to Guinea-Bissau to resolve a dispute over elections there has left the country, following threats by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, according to a statement.

The dispute over the end date of Embaló's term has escalated tensions and raised fears of unrest in the small West African nation of Guinea-Bissau, which has endured multiple coups since gaining independence from Portugal over 50 years ago.

The opposition argues that Embaló's term, which began in 2020, should have ended last week while the country's supreme court ruled that it ends on Sept. 4. Last month, Embaló announced that the next presidential and parliamentary elections will be held on Nov. 30.

The bloc, known as ECOW-

AS, said its mission left early on Saturday. It was deployed from Feb. 21 to Feb. 28 together with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel to help broker a consensus on when to hold the presidential election.

ECOWAS is West Africa's top political and economic authority, often collaborating with states to solve various domestic challenges. In recent years, however, it has struggled to reverse coups in the region and disputes with citizens complaining of not benefitting from their country's natural resources.

Embaló says he has survived two attempts to overthrow him. After the most recent one in Dec. 2023, which involved a shootout between the national and presidential guard, he dissolved the opposition-controlled parliament, accusing it of passivity.



DIPLOMATIC AVENUES:

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine (1st row right), vowed to use all diplomatic avenues to pursue an end to the war with Russia. He met with European and Canadian leaders in London on Sunday. Credit...

POOL PHOTO BY NEIL HALL

Zelensky bruised but determined after diplomatic whirlwind

Bruised but motivated," was how one of Volodymyr Zelensky's entourage described how they had been feeling, as a small group of journalists crammed into what felt like an even smaller room at Stansted Airport.

The British state had done its best to give the Ukrainian president "all bells and whistles" when he arrived in the UK for a summit with 18 world leaders after his dressing down by Donald Trump and JD Vance on Friday night, a government source told me.

He shared an embrace with Sir Keir Starmer outside

No 10, where he was greeted with spontaneously cheering crowds, and met with King Charles for tea.

But it was telling that in the 90 minutes before his plane's wheels went up as he heads back home, Zelensky wanted to go on the record to make his arguments to the world - this time speaking only in Ukrainian - to make sure he was not misunderstood.

Having been slammed in the White House, then feted in the UK, his mood, in public at least, was not downhearted.

"If we don't keep our spirits up, we're letting everyone

down," he said.

He made positive noises about Sir Keir and French President Emmanuel Macron's plan to grab hold of the plans for peace before presenting them to the US, for Europe to up its game, developing its own more convincing security guarantees.

Zelensky told me he would be prepared to give Donald Trump one of his demands - to sign the minerals deal that would give the US access to some of Ukraine's resources.

Beyond that, despite all the pressure of a three-year war, under all the demands from the

White House which, fairly or not, has the power to protect or abandon his country, on Sunday night Zelensky stood firm.

He told us it was wrong at this stage to discuss giving up territory Russia has captured, and it was too early to be "talking about lines", which the prime minister had mentioned earlier.

He would not apologise to Trump or express regret for anything that happened in the Oval Office, which at the moment, the US president's camp is repeatedly calling for.

Even the boss of Nato called for Zelensky to find a way to reset his relationship with the

US leader.

Yet in the stuffy room at Stansted, there was not much in Zelensky's tone that suggested he was interested in making nice.

He said he had travelled for hours to get to the White House - his visit was a mark of respect. He also said he would never "insult anybody" and the conversation as it erupted had not been a positive for anyone.

Zelensky chose his words very carefully. He tried to an extent to avoid a post-mortem of what went on. He was not rude about Trump - he barely mentioned him by name - and suggested tensions would pass.

If you watched the full horror of what happened in the Oval Office you may well not blame Zelensky for feeling it's simply not for him to say sorry.

If you listen to him talk about what has happened to his country, you can understand why it feels so impossible at this stage for him to acknowledge compromises might have to come to end the war.

Watching him in person talk about the violence and the suffer-

ing that has been unleashed, you sense his total disbelief that anyone might not see the world his way, where Russia's aggression means Putin must not be spared punishment, and his people should be protected at all costs.

But the reality? Neither Zelensky nor any Western leader so far has persuaded Trump to adopt that moral clarity on this war. And even if it's painful, without a willingness to compromise, it's hard to see an end to this war.

Zelensky is though, a master communicator - genuine, doubtless, but also a performer by trade.

"Our freedoms and values are not for sale," a message of no surrender Zelensky wanted to communicate, along with a willingness to sign the minerals deal.

He again expressed his thanks for the backing of the US and other countries. But don't forget right now, for all of the encounters we have with the leaders involved in public, there are so many more between them and their teams behind closed doors.

The 'Time Lords' racing to tackle the threat of GPS jamming

As a Ryanair flight from London approached Vilnius, Lithuania, on 17 January, its descent was suddenly aborted. Just minutes from touching down, the aircraft's essential Global Positioning System (GPS) suffered an unexplained interference, triggering an emergency diversion.

The Boeing 737 MAX 8-200 had already descended to around 850ft (259m) when the disruption occurred. Instead of landing, the plane was forced to climb back into the sky and divert nearly 400km (250 miles) south to Warsaw, Poland. Lithuanian air authorities later confirmed the aircraft had been affected by "GPS signal interference".

This was not an isolated incident. Over the last three months of 2024, more than 800 cases of GPS interference were recorded in Lithuanian airspace. Estonia and Finland have also raised concerns, accusing Russia of deploying technology to jam satellite navigation signals near Nato's eastern flank - though the country has denied that. Last March the then Defence Secretary,

Grant Shapps, was on a plane that had its GPS signal jammed while flying close to Russian territory.

The threat of GPS jamming extends beyond aviation. Without GPS, our lives would grind to a halt: in 2017, a government report stated that systematic GPS jamming could bring the UK's financial, electricity and communications systems to a standstill.

To pinpoint our exact location, we need to know the exact time. GPS works by users receiving signals from multiple satellites. The length of time it takes each signal to reach a device is used to determine exactly where on Earth we are.

Very large atomic clocks communicate directly with the satellites, allowing them to know the time to within 100 billionths of a second, and this precision timing is key to a variety of economic activities around the world, including communication systems, electrical power grids, and financial networks.

The potential cost of losing GPS has been put at £1.4bn each day - no wonder GPS jamming is on the govern-

ment's national risk register as one of the UK's greatest threats.

With this in mind, a group of British scientists - dubbed the "Time Lords" - has been asked to come up with a solution.

The plan is simple: to develop a more secure alternative to GPS by enabling the portable use of new atomic clocks, rath-

er than relying on signals from satellites in space that can be jammed. But its execution is fiendishly difficult: to harness the power of the atom, develop a new type of clock, and even change the way we measure time itself - all within a few years.

In recent months, the UK government has set up re-

Afghans hiding in Pakistan live in fear of forced deportation

"I'm scared," sobs Nabila. The 10-year-old's life is limited to her one-bedroom home in Islamabad and the dirt road outside it. Since December she hasn't been to her local school, when it decided it would no longer accept Afghans without a valid Pakistani birth certificate. But even if she could go to classes, Nabila says she wouldn't.

"I was off sick one day, and I heard police came looking for Afghan children," she cries, as she tells us her friend's family were sent back to Afghanistan.

Nabila's not her real name - all the names of Afghans quoted in this article have been changed for their safety.

Pakistan's capital and the

neighbouring city of Rawalpindi are witnessing a surge in deportations, arrests and detentions of Afghans, the UN says. It estimates that more than half of the three million Afghans in the country are undocumented.

Afghans describe a life of constant fear and near daily police raids on their homes.

Some told the BBC they feared being killed if they went back to Afghanistan. These include families on a US resettlement programme, that has been suspended by the Trump administration.

Pakistan is frustrated at how long relocation programmes are taking, says Philippa Candler, the UN Refugee Agency's

representative in Islamabad. The UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) says 930 people were sent back to Afghanistan in the first half of February, double the figure two weeks earlier. At least 20% of those deported from Islamabad and Rawalpindi had documentation from the UN Refugee Agency, meaning they were recognised as people in need of international protection.

But Pakistan is not a party to the Refugee Convention and has previously said it does not recognise Afghans living in the country as refugees. The government has said its policies are aimed at all illegal foreign nationals and a deadline for them to leave is looming. That

date has fluctuated but is now set to 31 March for those without valid visas, and 30 June for those with resettlement letters.

Many Afghans are terrified amid the confusion. They also say the visa process can be difficult to navigate. Nabila's family believes they have only one option: to hide. Her father Hamid served in the Afghan military, before the Taliban takeover in 2021. He broke down in tears describing his sleepless nights.

"I have served my country and now I'm useless. That job has doomed me," he said.

His family are without visas, and are not on a resettlement list. They tell us their phone calls to the UN's refugee agency go unanswered.

Sports

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

IFAB approves new rule change from next season for goalkeepers

EDWARD OSEGHE

Football rule makers, International Football Association Board (IFAB), have voted unanimously with a new regulation for next season in favour of amending Law 12.2.

The amendment gives goalkeepers a serious reason to reconsider time-wasting tactics; If the goalkeeper holds the ball for more than 8 seconds, the referee will award a corner kick to the opposing team. On-field referees will be aided in their

decision-making by a visual five-second countdown.

This amendment will be in effect for the 2025/26 Premier League season onwards, alongside all international and continental competitions.

The rule change is the first

of its kind since Law 12.2 was first introduced in 1998. Previously, it stated that a goalkeeper has six seconds to release the ball before the opposing team is awarded an indirect free-kick – this, however, was very rarely enforced.

The 2024/25 campaign has reignited concerns over teams excessively retaining possession, with Arsenal emerging as a key player in mastering the dark arts.

However, the IFAB has now sanctioned a rule change set to take effect next season, which could significantly alter how teams approach restarts.

Previously, if a goalkeeper held onto the ball for too long – a timeframe not very regularly enforced – they would receive a yellow card and, in some cases, give away an indirect free-kick. But now, the consequences hold a lot more jeopardy.



Fulham condemn online abuse to Bassey after win over Man United

Fulham have condemned racist and homophobic abuse faced by their defender Calvin Bassey online after he scored in Sunday's FA Cup win over Manchester United.

Nigeria international Bassey gave his side the lead before halftime in the match that ended 1-1 at Old Trafford before Fulham overcame the hosts on penalties to qualify for the quarter-finals of the FA Cup.

"Fulham Football Club is utterly appalled at the racist and homophobic abuse received and subsequently shared by Calvin Bassey on social media after yesterday's FA Cup tie against Manchester United," Fulham said in a statement on Monday.

"We strongly condemn this abhorrent behaviour which has no place in football or society. Such actions are entirely unacceptable,

and we stand in full support of Calvin Bassey, who will continue to receive our full backing.

"We will do everything in our power to work with the relevant authorities in identifying the perpetrators of these vile messages and taking the strongest form of action against them."

Manchester City's Kyle Walker also faced online racist abuse after their loss to Juventus in the Champions League in December.

Last month, City forward Khadija Shaw missed a match for mental health reasons after facing racist abuse following a loss to Arsenal in the Women's Super League.

"Fulham Football Club is committed to maintaining a firm stance against all forms of discrimination and remains dedicated to fostering an environment of respect and inclusion," Fulham added.

Ilaboya congratulates Bassey, Danladi on new appointments

EDWARD OSEGHE

Former Edo State Football Association Chairman, Hon. Frank Ilaboya, has joined millions of Nigerians to congratulate two eminent sports personalities for their recent appointments in their states.

Etubom Paul Bassey and Barr. Isaac Danladi, were last week announced as Sports Commissioners in Akwa Ibom and Nasarawa States respectively.

According to Ilaboya, who is currently an Executive Director in the Edo States Sports Commission, these appoint-

ments are heartwarming and capture the story of rewarding competence of the duo.

"I am excited about these appointments, which to me are richly deserved. I must commend the Governments of Akwa Ibom and Nasarawa States for recognising and giving honours to who honour is due.

"Both Paul Bassey and Isaac Danladi are some of the best brains this country can boast of when it comes to sports administration in Nigeria.

"These appointments are a just reward for the enormous contributions the duo have

made to sports development in their different states and the country as a whole over the years," adds the one time Chairman of Lagos State Sports Writers Association of Nigeria.

Bassey, former Akwa United boss, rose through the ranks from the position of a reporter to becoming a publisher, and also made his mark as a mem-

ber of the Media Committee of the Confederation of African Football (CAF).

Barr. Danladi, who recently retired as a Permanent Secretary in the Nasarawa State Civil Service, was also a Chairman of Nasarawa as well as former Chairman of the Club Owners Association of Nigeria, among other positions.

NPFL25 MD27: Bendel Insurance FC surrender all, points to Bayelsa Utd

There is uneasy calm and self appraisal in the camp of Bendel Insurance Football Club as they surrendered all points to their struggling hosts Bayelsa United in the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) Match Day 27 at the Samson Siasia stadium in Yenagoa on Sunday evening.

The relegation threatened Ladan Bosso led side came from behind to snatch the three points following a 2-1 victory over the resurgent Benin Arsenals.

Bendel Insurance approached the game with all confidence and zeal as they proved their mentle in the first half with Kayode. Oke giving



them the in the 36th minute.

Emo James got the equalizer for the host in the 2nd minute of the extra 3 minutes added time before the half time while. Emo got the chance in a scramble situation.

Substitute Bina Tombiri sealed victory for the host in

the 69th minute with a tapped in strike from a close range.

Recall that Bendel Insurance FC thrashed United 3-0 in their first round meeting in 2024.

Insurance came into the game with 38. Points and were 8th on the table while Bayelsa United 17th.

The Benin Arsenals will be host to table toppers Remo Stars in the next fixture.

In a post match interview, the head coach of Bendel Insurance FC Greg Ikhenoba said he was grateful to God for the significant progress his side has made despite the loss to Bayelsa United. "Like I always say, I give thanks to God in every situation. The game has been played and we didn't get what we planned to get. Honestly, we planned and hoped to win here but our plan didn't work out well. We missed a lot of chances in the first half. We are work in progress and we will continue to work."



World Cup qualifiers: Chelle enlists Ogbu, Onyebuchi as new defenders in Eagles squad

EDWARD OSEGHE

Super Eagles Head Coach Eric Chelle has handed first time invitation to the duo of Igho Ogbu of Czech Republic giants Slavia Prague and Ifeanyi Onyebuchi of Nigeria Premier Football League side Enugu Rangers, as new defenders in his squad for the world

cup qualifiers.

The coach who will be without one key central defender in Semi Ajayi in what will be his first set of games as coach, when they take on Rwanda and Zimbabwe respectively in March has taken a bold step to replacing the 31 year old.

Recall that Onyebuchi caught the eyes of the coach

when he watched their CHAN qualifiers win over Ghana, and also visited the team at their camp in Ikenne, where they were preparing for the CHAN tournament before it was postponed.

Ogbu has been a standout performer this season for his Czech side in the three tournaments they took part in this

season. He played 14 games in the league, four in the UEFA Champions League qualifiers and three in the Europa League.

He has missed only six league games this season with five coming when he sustained a nasty head injury, and the other due to an accumulation of yellow cards.



Atalanta boss praises Lookman after disappointing 0-0 draw



EDWARD OSEGHE

Following Atalanta's unfortunate 0-0 draw against relegation-threatened Venezia, coach Gian Piero Gasperini offered words of encouragement for Nigeria and Super Eagles star Ademola Lookman. Despite Lookman missing a crucial chance that could have secured a vital win for Atalanta, Gasperini highlighted his importance to the team.

Atalanta, who had defeated Empoli 5-0 in their previous match, failed to capitalise on their momentum against Vene-

zia, missing several key opportunities to take the lead.

Lookman, who started the game following his impressive performance against Empoli, was involved in several dangerous situations but ultimately missed a clear-cut chance to put his team ahead.

The miss came after a corner kick was headed towards his path, but he booted the ball over the bar.

Gasperini, who recently had a public disagreement with Lookman, praised the Nigerian forward's contribution to the team.

"Lookman is and always re-

mains our liveliest player," he said per Sporti Italia.

"So it is clear that he also finished several times and had the ball in dangerous positions several times to unlock the result," he added.

Statistically, Lookman had a mixed game. He completed 89% of his passes, created three chances, including two big ones, and made three key passes.

He attempted five shots, with two on target, but struggled with his dribbling, completing only two out of ten attempts.

Notwithstanding missing a significant opportunity, Look-

man's overall performance showed his role as a key attacking threat for Atalanta.

The draw against Venezia was costly for Atalanta, as it prevented them from moving into a joint top position in the Serie A standings alongside Inter Milan.

However, Gasperini remains optimistic about their title chances, emphasising that the season is long and that his team will continue to push forward.

Atalanta's next challenge is at Juventus, Lookman's form and Gasperini's support will be crucial in helping the team regain momentum in the title race.

2026 World Cup: FIFA lifts ban on already eliminated Pakistan

EDWARD OSEGHE

The International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) has lifted the suspension on the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) after the PFF Congress approved constitutional amendments mandated by FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

"The Bureau of the Fifa Council decided on March 2, 2025, to lift the suspension that was imposed on the PFF on February 6, 2025," FIFA stated.

Shahid Khokhar, a member of the PFF Normalisation Committee, confirmed the lifting of the suspension.

He said, "The suspension



has been lifted following the successful outcome of the PFF Extraordinary Congress on February 27.

"We thank Fifa and AFC for their continued support of Pakistan football and extend our

heartfelt congratulations to the Pakistan football community."

The lifting of the suspension allows Pakistan to resume international football activities, including participating in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers.

Pakistan's national team will face Syria, which is scheduled for later this month.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's national team lost all six of its matches against formidable Asian opponents, including Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Jordan, in the first round of the qualifying round.

These teams were unfamiliar foes for Pakistan, who had historically struggled to advance beyond the first round of qualifying.

Former Pakistan national team coach Stephen Constantine, who led the team to historic victories during his tenure, also expressed his gratitude to the PFF Normalisation Committee.



NFF scribe warns of continued polarisation of Supporters club

The General Secretary, Nigeria football Federation (NFF), Dr. Mohammed Sanusi, has warned on the continued polarization and the division at the ranks of the various groups of the Nigeria Supporters clubs.

According to the scribe, of the Federation, Mohammed Sanusi, "on two various occasion, Super Eagles captain, Williams EKong, has approached us complaining about the different vicious tones of songs from the spectators stand whenever the super Eagles is playing a match, describing it as a big distraction to the team."

"EKong, started, that if the supporters clubs can not come together and form one united body, they should better stop supporting them at the stadium stands.

"During the reconciliatory meeting initiated by the President of the Nigeria football Federation, Alhaji Ibrahim Gusau, with the attendance of all the various security Agencies, DSS, Police, and our legal unit, we made it clear to them that we'll not tolerate further polarization of the supporters clubs.

"The Super Eagles is the property of Government and the supporters clubs are privately owned by individuals and owned no right to come and support the Super Eagles.

"Sanusi, further retreated the Federation's strong stance to lock out any supporters group who failed to conform with the new directive NFF to belong to one entity" he concluded.

Tochukwu shines in Remo Stars' hard-fought 1-0 win over Plateau Utd

Remo Stars midfielder, Tochukwu Michael had an impressive performance, as they extended their lead in the top of the log to 12 points, after a hard fought 1-0 win over Plateau United, on Sunday, in a Matchday 27 encounter.

The encounter which took place at the Remo Stars Stadium, Ikenne, saw the Daniel Ogunmodede' led side bounced back from their mid-week defeat to Nasarawa United last Wednesday, to secure a

vital victory.

Tochukwu, who started once again in the heart of Remo Stars' midfield, had a brilliant game with his impact throughout the game as they overcome a tough Plateau United side, who are currently battling relegation.

The former Nasarawa United, Plateau United and Sporting Lagos midfielder is currently having his best season with the Sky Blue Stars, as they are close in on winning their first league title for the first time in the club history.



Three cities to host MTN athletics schools Championships

Three cities have been selected to host the 2025 edition of Nigeria's biggest Schools' athletics Championships - MTN CHAMPS

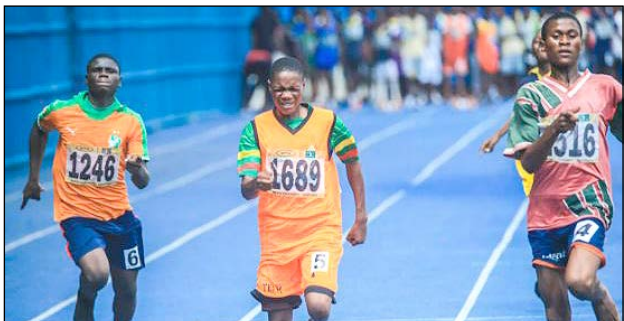
Season 3 will take place in these iconic cities, Benin, Lagos and Uyo.

The first leg is scheduled to hold between the 13th to 15th at the Samuel Ogbemudia sta-

dium Benin City, Edo State, South South Nigeria while the second comes up in Lagos from the 9th to 12th of April.

The grand final is scheduled to hold in Uyo the Akwa Ibom State, South South, Nigeria between the 30th of April to the 3rd of May.

Understand that telecommunication giant MTN is still the title sponsors.



Whittaker joins forces with Fury's assistant coach Andy Lee ahead of rematch with Liam Cameron

EDWARD OSEGHE

Ben Whittaker and Liam Cameron will meet again on April 20 at the BP Pulse LIVE Arena in Birmingham following their contentious inaugural encounter last October.

Notably, Whittaker and Cameron's first fight ended in bizarre circumstances.

The pair both flipped over the top rope in the dying embers of the fifth round, resulting in Whittaker sustaining injuries that left him unable to continue.

As more than four rounds had been completed, the fight went to a technical decision with the judges unable to split the fierce rivals.

One judge favoured Whittaker at 58-57, a second scored the bout 58-57 for Cameron,

while a third had it 58-58 even, meaning the contest was declared a split draw.

Cameron claims Whittaker was exhausted by the fifth round and was merely 'looking for a way out of the fight' while the Olympic silver medallist has never shared any medical proof of his injuries.

His promoter Ben Shalom claims Whittaker suffered a sprained ankle and aggravated a neck injury on the way down.

Shalom went on to admit that Whittaker was in 'a bad way' after the draw and would be making 'huge changes' to his camp.

Whittaker turned over as a professional under the watchful eye of SugarHill Steward, before switching back to his former amateur coach and godfather Joby Clayton last year.

However, he has since packed his bags and travelled to Dublin to start his camp with new trainer Lee at the Ballybrack Boxing Club.

Lee became the first member of the travelling community to win a major world title when he stopped Matt Korobov for the

WBO middleweight belt in 2014.

He has since gone on to become a well-respected trainer whose gym is home to former WBO heavyweight champion Joseph Parker and fast-rising Irish welterweight Paddy Donovan as well as Fury from time to time.



FEATURE

Separating facts from fiction: Gov Okpebholo's security achievements vs. PDP's propaganda

Our attention has been drawn to yet another reckless, misleading, and baseless statement from Chris Osa Nehikhare, the Publicity Secretary of the Edo PDP Caretaker Committee. His latest piece is nothing short of a desperate, fear-mongering diatribe designed to mislead Edo people, scare off potential investors, and distract from the undeniable security progress being made under Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

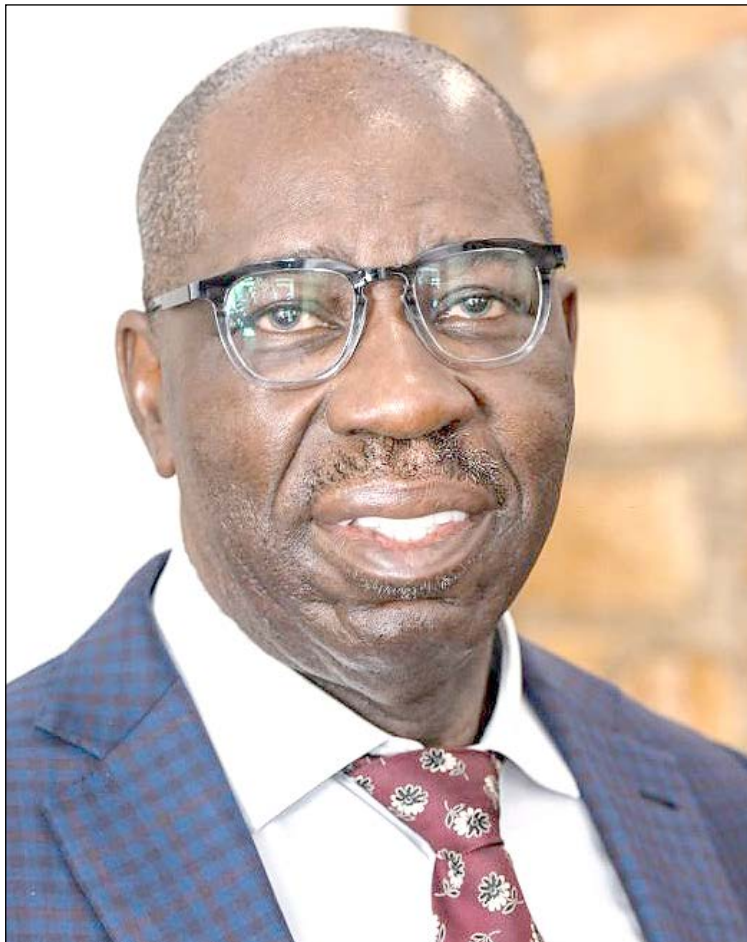
For clarity, Edo State is not, and will never be, the so-called "capital of kidnapping and violent crimes" as Nehikhare maliciously claims. This is a dishonest fabrication from a party whose time in power was marked by gross incompetence, abject failure, and outright surrender to criminals.

If anyone should be silent on security matters, it is the PDP. Under the watch of the PDP, cultists took over Edo State, leaving over 100 people dead in a wave of attacks, with the then governor admitting he was helpless and overwhelmed. The security architecture was further crippled by neglect, with the government procuring second-hand, unfit sienna vehicles that failed to serve their purpose. Vigilante groups and local security outfits were abandoned with the PDP government making no provision for the remuneration. The total collapse of security under the Obaseki-led PDP government reached its zenith when the very Chairman of the party in Edo State, Anthony Aziegbemi, was brazenly kidnapped in the heart of the city—GRA, Benin. This shocking incident exposed the PDP's utter helplessness and inability to protect even its own leaders, let alone the people of Edo State.

It is laughable that Nehikhare, a man who defended the catastrophic failure of the PDP government, is now shedding crocodile tears over insecurity. The same PDP-led government abandoned security, allowed cultists to take over the state, and openly admitted helplessness as killings skyrocketed. Edo people have not forgotten that it was under PDP's watch that security in the state completely collapsed, forcing citizens to live in fear.

Governor Okpebholo's security vote is being prudently utilized for the protection of lives and property, not squandered like in the past. Edo people are seeing the difference already—security agencies have been strengthened, kidnappers are being flushed out, and criminals no longer have a free hand to operate.

The Obaseki government, despite all its noise, could not apprehend the kidnappers, proving that they had completely lost control of the state's security architecture. Yet today, the same PDP dares to question a gov-



OBASEKI

Chris Nehikhare and the Edo PDP should bury their heads in shame for trying to mislead the public and scare investors away. Edo people know the truth, and the truth is that Governor Okpebholo is delivering real results in security, not PDP's empty noise

ernment that has taken bold steps to reverse the mess they created?

Unlike the PDP's years of excuses and failures, Governor Monday Okpebholo has hit the ground running, implementing concrete and strategic measures to secure the state:

1. Total Crackdown on Cultism: Under Governor Okpebholo, cultists who once terrorized Edo with impunity have been put on the run. His administration declared an all-out war on cult groups, leading to a drastic reduction in cult-related killings.

2. Deployment of Special Tactical Teams: The government swiftly deployed a Special Tactical Team to Agenebode, leading to the timely res-

cue of kidnapped victims and the dismantling of criminal hideouts.

3. Security Success in Uromi and Environs: In another swift operation, kidnapped victims were rescued, and criminal gangs were flushed out in Uromi and surrounding areas.

4. Tougher Laws Against Crime: Unlike the PDP's lip service to security, Governor Okpebholo has already sponsored and passed a new Cultism Prohibition Law, imposing severe penalties on cultists and their sponsors.

5. Massive Security Equipment Procurement: Unlike the PDP government, which procured second-hand, unserviceable security vehicles, Gov-



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ernor Okpebholo has delivered brand new Toyota Hilux vehicles to security agencies, ensuring enhanced patrol and rapid response.

6. 1,000 High-Performance Motorcycles for Security Operations: The state government has also acquired 1,000 motorcycles for bush combing, tactical pursuit of kidnappers, and improved security coverage in hard-to-reach areas.

7. Public Safety Response Team: To complement the efforts of security agencies, the governor has established the Public Safety Response Team, which has significantly improved surveillance and enforcement of public order.

8. Reconstituting Edo State Security Corps & Illegal Arms Mop-Up: The Edo State Security Corps has been revalidated, and over 5,000 illegal firearms have been recovered, making it one of the most successful mop-up exercises in recent times.

It is no secret that Edo is a growing economic hub with increasing investor interest under Governor Okpebholo's leadership. Nehikhare's attempt to paint the state as a war zone is not just a shameless lie, but a deliberate and desperate move to scare off investors and sabotage the state's economic growth.

This reckless propaganda will not

succeed. Investors and business owners know the truth—Edo is open for business, security is improving, and the government is fully committed to creating a safe and prosperous environment for all. Unlike the PDP's years of cluelessness and stagnation, Governor Okpebholo is providing credible leadership and strategic solutions that will make Edo one of the safest and most investment-friendly states in Nigeria.

Edo people have rejected PDP's lies and propaganda. The state is on the path to security and progress, thanks to Governor Monday Okpebholo's bold and proactive leadership. No amount of politically motivated falsehoods from a failed PDP propaganda machine can erase the progress being made.

Chris Nehikhare and the Edo PDP should bury their heads in shame for trying to mislead the public and scare investors away. Edo people know the truth, and the truth is that Governor Okpebholo is delivering real results in security, not PDP's empty noise.

Signed:
Fred Itua,
Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor.
Monday, 03 March, 2025.