

ECOWAS activates standby force to tackle terrorism

The Economic Community of West African States has activated its standby force to combat terrorism in the sub-region.

The regional body had, in October last year, hinted at the establishment of a 5,000-man kinetic force to tackle terrorism in the region.

Speaking at the 43rd ordinary meeting of the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of De-

fence Staff in Abuja on Tuesday, the Minister of Defence, Abubakar Badaru, said the activation of this force underscores the collective determination of member countries to confront the threat of terrorism.

He said, "Central to our discussions in the coming days are pressing issues concerning the ECOWAS Standby Force, ECOWAS peace support operations, as well as maritime secu-

rity in the Gulf of Guinea. I am confident that our deliberations will be marked by a spirit of collaboration, innovation, and determination as we work toward drafting a comprehensive strategy to address the security challenges in the subregion.

"By leveraging our collective expertise, resources, and commitment, we can make a tangible impact on fostering peace, stability, and prosperity in the

sub-region.

"In this regard, I am pleased to announce the activation of the ECOWAS Standby Force to combat terrorism in the sub-region. This activation underscores our collective determination to confront the threat of terrorism and ensure the security of the subregion.

"With regard to security and ensuring the safety of our citizens, let me express my profound

gratitude to each of you for your ongoing dedication, professionalism, and commitment to the security and well-being of our people. Let us approach our deliberations with a sense of purpose, unity, and resolve, knowing that we have the power to shape a more secure and prosperous future for our subregion."

The ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, Abdel-Fatau Musah,

said that despite the recent withdrawal of three African countries from the regional body, ECOWAS would maintain the free movement of persons and goods for their citizens.

He also said that plans were in place to mitigate the unforeseen consequences of the withdrawal of Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali.

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...that the people may know

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Sale of 2025 Direct Entry forms begins March 12 —JAMB

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PDP leaders sponsoring kidnappings in Edo —Govt

● **Calls for investigation** ● **Reps, Idahosa hail Okpebholo's tough stance on insecurity**

The Edo State Government has accused leaders of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of sponsoring kidnappings and violent crimes across the state, alleging that the opposition is deliberately fueling insecurity to undermine Governor Monday

Okpebholo's administration. The government claimed that intelligence reports indicated that PDP leaders are funding criminal activities, using violence as a political tool to create fear, destabilize governance, and discredit the current administration. The allegations were made

public on Tuesday in a statement by the Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Fred Itua, who condemned the PDP's recent criticism of insecurity in the state, describing it as hypocritical.

"The sudden concern expressed by PDP leaders is nothing but a smokescreen to

divert attention from their own complicity," he said. "These are the same individuals who, during the 2024 governorship election, armed non-state actors. Today, those weapons are being used by criminals to terrorize Edo citizens."

The wave of kidnappings,

targeted attacks, and misinformation campaigns, according to government sources, is part of a larger strategy by the PDP to destabilize the state and erode public confidence in Governor Okpebholo's leadership.

"Their goal is clear—spread fear, weaken public trust in the government, and create a false perception of failure," Itua added.

Security officials, speaking anonymously due to the sensitive nature of the case, confirmed that ongoing investigations have

uncovered links between some PDP figures and violent groups operating in the state.

A senior security officer, Itua said disclosed that intelligence reports suggest organized efforts behind the attacks, rather than random criminal activities.

"This is not just about ordinary criminals," the official stated. "Certain individuals in the opposition are using insecurity as a weapon against the government."

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ABIODUN VISITS AIR FORCE HQ:

Governor Dapo Abiodun of Ogun State (right), receiving a gift item from the Nigeria's Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Hassan Abubakar, when the governor visited the Nigeria Air Force headquarters in Abuja recently.

NiMet warns 19 states of impending heat stress, urges safety precautions

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency has warned residents in 19 states, the South-East, and coastal areas of impending heat stress.

The states that would be mostly affected, according to the agency, are; north-central and eastern states; Kebbi, Niger, Kwara, Oyo, Kogi, Nasarawa, Benue, Enugu, Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Cross River, and FCT.

Other vulnerable regions are the South-West, coastal areas, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Kaduna, Zamfara, and Sokoto.

The heat stress warning is-

sued by the agency on Tuesday morning shows that the rising temperatures and high humidity levels over the next three to four days may cause thermal discomfort across several regions.

The agency warned that potential health risks include fatigue, irritability, reduced focus, impaired motor skills, and decreased productivity.

It urged residents in affected regions to take safety precautions.

"Stay cool by using fans, air conditioning, or shaded spaces, and dress light by wearing breathable clothing.

ESTA strengthens transport sector with EDSTMA, ECTS partnerships —Pg 2

Edo govt debunks PDP's revenue claims —Pg 3

Greenland goes to polls in vote dominated by Trump, independence —Pg 5

Athletics: Benin City bubbles as over 2000 athletes across 100 schools gear up for MTN CHAMPS Benin! —Pg 7

ESTA strengthens transport sector with EDSTMA, ECTS partnerships

EDENIYERE OSOSE

The Edo State Transport Authority (ESTA) has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening transportation services in the state through enhanced collaboration with the Edo State Traffic Management Agency (EDSTMA) and the Edo City Transport Service (ECTS).

This move aligns with Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo's vision of an efficient, safe, and structured transport system that supports economic revitalization.

Hon. Henshaw Oligbi, the Managing Director of ESTA, made this commitment during an official visit to EDSTMA and ECTS, where he assessed their progress, addressed key challenges, and reinforced the need for sustainable partnerships.

At EDSTMA, Oligbi emphasized the importance of continued cooperation to improve

traffic management and ensure road safety, stating, "We are here to understand the progress made so far, where you currently stand, and the direction you intend to go under this administration."

"We also seek to renew the longstanding relationship between the Transport Authority and EDSTMA."

He highlighted Governor Okpebholo's dedication to road infrastructure development, noting that a well-structured transport system is crucial to economic growth.

He urged EDSTMA officers to enforce regulations with a balance of firmness and empathy while advocating for a review of traffic laws to ensure effective enforcement.

Acknowledging EDSTMA's impact, he expressed confidence in the leadership of Barr. Stainless Mike Ijiogbe Ijigede, urging the agency to maintain its high standards.

Barr. Ijigede welcomed ESTA's renewed support, assuring that EDSTMA remains committed to efficient traffic management, strict enforcement of road regulations, and improved road safety.

He pledged to work closely with ESTA to build a well-regulated transport system.

During his visit to ECTS, Oligbi reaffirmed ESTA's dedication to improving public transportation services, ensuring they remain efficient, reliable, and affordable for residents.

To facilitate smooth operations and effective decision-making, he instructed the ECTS management team to submit weekly reports to ESTA.

He explained that these reports would help monitor progress, identify challenges, and enable timely recommendations for government interventions.

Barr. Festus Ehiemua, Operations Manager of ECTS, commended Oligbi's proactive leadership, outlining the agency's achievements and progress.

He also appealed for ESTA's support in communicating the

transport service's challenges to the state government for swift resolution.

The visit underscored a shared commitment among ESTA, EDSTMA, and ECTS to drive Edo State's transportation sector forward through strategic collaboration, innovative traffic solutions, and efficient road management.

Edo govt boosts healthcare access with facility inspections in Edo North

In a continued effort to enhance healthcare delivery across the state, the Edo State Government has intensified its healthcare reforms with a comprehensive inspection of medical facilities in Edo North.

The Director-General of the

Edo State Health Insurance Commission (EDHIC), Mrs. Augusta Ikpea-Enaholo, led an inspection team on an assessment tour to evaluate the condition of healthcare centers, staff

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He stated, "As you are aware, on January 29, 2025, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger formally withdrew their membership from ECOWAS."

"Following the directives of the Authority of Heads of State and Government at the last summit in December 2024, the ECOWAS Commission has now initiated a contingency plan to mitigate the unforeseen consequences of their withdrawal."

"Therefore, I call on you to critically examine the implications of their withdrawal on regional security in the course of your deliberations."

"I also wish to stress that ECOWAS still has its doors open to welcome back our brothers and sisters from the three countries that recently withdrew from our community."

"In this regard, the ECOWAS Committee of Heads of State has directed that, despite the withdrawal, ECOWAS must maintain the free movement of people and goods, as well as the right of settlement and establishment, for all citizens of our community, including those from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger."

"This aligns with ECOWAS' vision of building a united community, ensuring that ordinary citizens of our member states do not suffer."

In his remarks, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Chris-

topher Musa, said that military leaders were aware that without a secure and conducive environment, economic growth and development would continue to elude the region.

Musa called on military chiefs to support political leadership by ensuring a secure environment for economic development to thrive.

He said, "The complexity of the security landscape demands that we leverage our collective expertise, and intelligence assets, and coordinate our efforts across borders if we must solve these challenges."

"The world has become a global village, and the gap between us is shrinking even more. Thus, collaboration is paramount and imperative to address both the root causes and symptoms of insecurity in our region."

"Some of the critical areas under discussion include the proposed review of pledges for the ECOWAS Standby Force, consideration of pledges for the ECOWAS Standby Force Counter Terrorist Brigade, and the rotation of staff officers of Peace Support Operations Divisions and the ECOWAS Standby Force, as well as maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea."

"Others include the presentation of the outcome of the Governmental Experts Meeting on the ECOWAS Logistics Concept and the Standing Operating Procedures for the ECOWAS Logistics Depot in Lungi."

COURTESY VISIT:

Edo States Deputy Governor, Hon Dennis Idahosa (left), and the Chairman, Nigeria Association of Visual Impaired Persons, Edo State branch, Evang. Lucky Imafidon, during a courtesy visit to Government House, Benin City by the association.

PHOTO: MOSES OBOH.

PDP leaders sponsoring kidnappings...

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Government officials argue that the root of the current crisis can be traced back to the former PDP-led administration under ex-Governor Godwin Obaseki.

During the 2024 governorship election, the PDP was accused of arming non-state actors to secure political advantage, a move that allegedly flooded the state with dangerous weapons. Many of these arms, they say, were never retrieved and are now being used by criminal elements to perpetrate kidnappings and assassinations.

In response to these allegations, the Edo State Government has called on security agencies, including the Nigeria Police and the Department of State Services (DSS), to launch a full-scale investigation into the involvement of PDP leaders in the rising wave of kidnappings and armed violence.

"No political group or individual should be allowed to hold the state hostage for political gain," the statement read. "Those responsible must face the full wrath of the law."

Governor Okpebholo's administration has reaffirmed its commitment to tackling insecurity and restoring peace, assuring residents that decisive measures are being taken.

However, security analysts warn that unless swift action is taken, the situation could deteriorate further.

A senior government source emphasized that addressing the crisis must go beyond law enforcement and include exposing and prosecuting those allegedly pulling the strings behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Government has urged citizens to remain vigilant and not be deceived by what it describes as the PDP's "false narratives." The administration insists that the growing insecurity is not due to a failure of governance but a calculated effort by political actors to create chaos for their own gain.

With tensions rising and security concerns mounting, the focus is now on law enforcement agencies. Will those accused of sponsoring violence be investigated and held accountable? The coming weeks will be crucial in determining the next course of action as Edo State grapples with its worsening security situation.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives has commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for the establishment of a Joint Security Taskforce (Operation Rescue) to address the escalating insecurity across the State.

Code-named Operation Rescue, the taskforce has been empowered by the Okpebholo-led government through the provision of security vehicles and other gadgets as well as the restructuring of the Edo State Security Corps to strengthen community-based security

measures across the state.

The resolution of the House followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public importance sponsored by the member representing Esan North East/Esan South East Federal Constituency, Edo State, Mr Henry Okojie.

Rallying support for the motion, Okojie, a member of the ruling All Progressives Congress, lamented the insecurity challenges in the constituency, stressing that the establishment of a military base in Uromi will help address the challenge.

He said, "The House commends the effort of His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo, the Executive Governor of Edo State, for his innovative actions, including the establishment of a Joint Security Taskforce (Operation Rescue) to address the escalating insecurity across the State."

"This initiative includes the purchase and empowerment of security vehicles and other gadgets across the State, as well as the restructuring of the Edo State Security Corps to strengthen community-based security measures, which have started yielding positive results."

"The House urged the Federal Government through the Defence Headquarters to establish a military base in Uromi, Esan North East Local Government Area to enhance security presence and response capabilities in the region."

Citing Section 14(2) (b) of the 1999 Constitution which pro-

vides for the primary purpose of government; Okojie lamented that crimes such as kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape and cult-related killings "Are now reported almost daily, necessitating serious and tactical operations to stem the situation."

He stated that, "The level of insecurity in Esan North East and Esan South East Federal Constituency of Edo State has reached a critical juncture, with persistent and increasing incidents of killings, kidnappings and other forms of violence."

According to him, "The House is saddened by the increasing rate of insecurity, and the situation has become unbearable. This has caused constituents to live in fear, experience psychological trauma, and suffer a significant decline in their overall sense of security. Numerous people have been killed, and their mutilated bodies have been recovered, showing signs of organ harvesting."

He further noted that the criminals operate predominantly along "The rail route from Uzea to Ugboha, Amedokhian, Udo, Eko-Ibadin, and Ubijaja to Ewohimi in the Esan North East/Esan South East Federal Constituency of Edo State, and have escalated their activities to include kidnapping people in their homes."

Following the overwhelming support for the bill, the House observed a minute silence in honour of the dead.



Edo govt debunks PDP's revenue claims

● Calls party serial liar

The Edo State Government has refuted claims made by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) regarding the state's Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), branding the opposition par-

ty as habitual liar desperate to mislead the public.

Commissioner for Information and Communication, Hon. Paul Ohonbamu, dismissed the PDP's assertion that Edo State's IGR has dwindled

to N3.4 billion under Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration.

He clarified that in January alone, the state generated N10.4 billion, far exceeding the figures falsely peddled by the PDP.

Ohonbamu accused the PDP Chairman, Tony Aziegbemi, of

deliberately spreading misinformation in the party's so-called "State of the State Address," claiming that non-state actors employed by Okpebholo were responsible for a supposed revenue decline.

He countered that the governor has, in fact, significantly

boosted the state's revenue, surpassing the N6 billion monthly average under former Governor Godwin Obaseki's administration, with the highest revenue under PDP rule reaching only N7.8 billion in February 2024.

According to Ohonbamu, PDP's allegations are not just baseless, but are part of a larger propaganda campaign orchestrated by Obaseki and his loyalists, who, having failed the people for eight years, are now attempting to undermine a government committed to transparency, accountability, and economic growth.

He further accused the PDP of hypocrisy, recalling how, after losing the governorship election, party loyalists vandalized government property, including security cameras and the command and control center, only to later demand what they had destroyed.

He also pointed out that the Okpebholo administration has implemented crucial measures to enhance security, providing

new vehicles and motorcycles to law enforcement, unlike the PDP, which armed untrained individuals under the guise of a security network and later abandoned them without salaries, leading to increased crime.

The commissioner assured Edo people that Governor Okpebholo remains committed to correcting the wrongs of the past administration, diversifying the economy, and attracting new investments.

He highlighted the government's swift action in implementing a N500 million monthly subvention for Ambrose Alli University (AAU), a commitment Obaseki never honoured.

Ohonbamu added that PDP's so-called "State of the State Address" was nothing more than an attempt to give false hope to a dying party.

He asserted that the people of Edo have moved on from a government that thrived on deception, and no amount of media blackmail or misinformation can reverse that reality.



SIGNING OF AN MoU:

L-R: Perm Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Amb. Nura Rimi; Minister of Trade and Investment (FMITI), Dr Jumoke Oduwole; Minister of State Industry, FMITI, Sen. John Owan Enoh; Executive Vice Chair of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, Mrs Ofowwe Aig-Imoukhuede, and Director of Programmes of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, Chioma Njoku, during the signing of an MoU.

Senate urges INEC to hold by-elections for Edo Central, Anambra South

The Senate has called on the Independent National Electoral Commission to organise by-elections to fill the vacant seats in Edo Central and Anambra South Senatorial Districts.

Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, made this announcement during Tuesday's plenary

while officially declaring both seats vacant.

The Edo Central seat became vacant after Monday Okpebholo was sworn in as the Governor of Edo State in November.

Similarly, the Anambra South seat has remained empty since the passing of Senator Ifeanyi Ubah in July 2024.

INEC had previously stated in January 2025 that it was waiting for an official request from the Senate before proceeding with the Anambra South by-election.

During a stakeholders' meeting organised by the International Press Centre in Awka, Anambra State's Resident Elec-

toral Commissioner, Elizabeth Agu, confirmed that INEC was yet to receive this request.

With both senatorial districts currently unrepresented, Akpabio urged INEC to conduct the elections as soon as possible to ensure the affected constituencies have proper representation in the Senate.

Oborevori celebrates Efeizomor II, Obi of Owa at 87

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor of Delta, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevori, has felicitated with the Obi of Owa Kingdom, HRM Obi (Dr) Emmanuel Efeizomor II, OON, on his 87th birth anniversary.

In a statement by his Chief

Press Secretary, Sir Festus Ahon in Asaba, Governor Oborevori described the revered monarch as "One of Delta's longstanding traditional rulers with exceptional leadership achievements."

He said that through the years, Obi Efeizomor had made important contributions

to the growth and development of Delta State and Owa kingdom in particular.

The Governor said: "For the Owa people, Obi Efeizomor has remained a revered leader, a role model, and the defender of their traditions and culture."

"The Owa kingdom has ex-

perienced remarkable transformation in infrastructure and human capital development under your direction.

"As the immediate past Chairman of the Delta State Council of Traditional Rulers, you made a great deal of contributions. You were a role model."

Reps probe oil, gas pipeline vandalism

The House of Representatives, on Tuesday, resolved to investigate the current state of oil and gas pipelines across the country in a bid to avert economic losses to the nation.

The lawmakers will also probe the causes and impacts of frequent vandalism of pipelines in the country.

The resolution followed the adoption of a motion of urgent public importance sponsored by the member representing Fagge Federal Constituency, Kano State, Mr Muhammed Shehu, and 15 others on the "urgent

need to rehabilitate the oil and gas pipeline networks to avert economic loss for Nigeria."

While noting that Nigeria's oil and gas sector remains the backbone of the national economy, contributing approximately 9 per cent to the Gross Domestic Product and generating over 90 per cent of export revenues, the Kano lawmaker lamented that between 2018 and 2023, "Nigeria recorded over 7,000 incidents of pipeline vandalism, resulting in the loss of \$12.74m worth of crude oil."

He said, "The House is aware that in October 2024, crude oil

supply to Shell's Forcados Terminal was reduced by 50 per cent due to sabotage, leading to loading delays and the risk of force majeure declarations.

"In January 2025, a major pipeline spill from a facility owned by Shell's Nigerian subsidiary caused environmental devastation in the Niger Delta, worsening pollution and economic hardship for host communities.

"The House is concerned that in February 2025, Shell reported an oil spill near Port Harcourt caused by an overflow during pipeline flushing operations,

highlighting ongoing risks in pipeline management."

He added that the recurrent pipeline breaches have led to extensive environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, and substantial national revenue losses, thus, straining the country's economic and security landscape.

He said, "The House recognises that the Niger Delta region has suffered from decades of oil spills, causing severe health hazards, destruction of farmlands, and contamination of water sources, thereby exacerbating poverty among local communities."

IG reaffirms ban on public parade of suspects by police

The Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, has confirmed the ban on the public parade of criminal suspects by operatives of the Nigeria Police Force.

This follows an earlier directive by the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi (SAN), prohibiting the practice.

It had been reported that the AGF had ordered the police to desist from parading suspects.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Force Public Relations Officer, Muiyiwa Adejobi, reaffirmed the police chief's commitment to upholding fundamental human rights and aligning with global best practices in policing.

"IGP Kayode Egbetokun has reiterated the ban on the public parade of suspects by the operatives of the Nigeria Police Force."

"This commitment by the IGP aims to uphold the fundamental human rights of every citizen and adhere to global best practices in policing by reiterating the standing directive prohibiting the public parade of criminal

suspects before formal charges are filed in a court of law," Adejobi stated.

He noted that the directive had previously been communicated to all police commands and zones as part of the force's modernization efforts and dedication to respecting the rights of all individuals, including criminal suspects.

According to Adejobi, the policy aligns with international human rights standards, which prioritize the protection of human dignity throughout the judicial process.

Adejobi also called on the media and the public to support the directive by ensuring responsible reporting and ethical journalism.

He said, "This directive, previously communicated to all commands and zones within the Police Force, is a cornerstone of the Nigeria Police Force's modernization efforts and reflects its dedication to respecting the fundamental rights of all individuals, including those suspected of criminal activity."

Edo govt boosts healthcare access...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 2

capacity, and enrolment procedures under the Edo Health Insurance Scheme (EdoHIS).

Speaking during the visit, Mrs. Ikpea-Enaholo emphasized the importance of firsthand assessments in identifying gaps and ensuring that medical facilities are equipped to meet the needs of the people.

She noted that similar inspections had been conducted in Edo Central, and this latest exercise aligns with the state's commitment to expanding access to quality healthcare, particularly for vulnerable citizens and pensioners.

"It is essential to assess conditions on the ground, identify gaps, and ensure that enrolment procedures run smoothly," she stated.

"We are committed to strengthening primary healthcare centers, ensuring adequate staffing, and expanding access to quality medical services for all Edo people."

As part of the state's drive to increase healthcare inclusion, the Director-General referenced the recently concluded 100 Days Enrolment Event, which she described as a major step in Governor Monday Okpebholo's vision for universal health coverage.

NEWS

Idahosa pledges support for visually impaired community

BERNADETTE IDALU

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa has reaffirmed the state government's commitment to supporting visually impaired

persons in the state, while acknowledging their challenges

Speaking when members of the Nigeria Association of the Blind, Edo State Chapter visited him at Government House, Benin City, Hon Idahosa said that

they are a vital part of society.

He emphasized the state government's commitment to providing quality education and employment opportunities for visually impaired persons, stating that their welfare is a priority to government.

During the visit, the association's Chairman, Evangelist Lucky Imafidon, highlighted several challenges faced by visually impaired individuals, particularly the lack of boarding facilities at the only school catering to the blind in Benin City.

He explained that students from Edo Central and Edo North were forced to seek education in other states like Ekiti and Ondo, where such facilities exist.

Imafidon also used the opportunity to congratulate

Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo and Idahosa on their electoral victory and subsequent swearing-in.

He urged the government to fulfill its duty of ensuring both security and the well-being of all citizens.

Airtel buys back 66,089 units of own shares

Airtel Africa announced on Tuesday, that it has purchased about 66,089 of its ordinary shares of \$ 0.50 each from Barclays Capital Securities Limited.

The telecoms firm said the move is pursuant to the authority granted by its shareholders as part of its share buy-back programme, as earlier announced on 23 December 2024.

The purchase made on Monday, March 10, contained an aggregate of 66, 089 ordinary

shares at a price of N143.70 per share.

The highest price paid was N144 per share, with a volume-weighted average price of N143.96 paid per share.

Since the commencement of the share buy-back programme announced on 23 December 2024, the company added that it has purchased 16,750,765 ordinary shares in aggregate, at a volume-weighted average price of 120.8955 GBp per ordinary share.

Panel begins probe into alleged corruption in correctional service

An independent panel set up to investigate allegations of corruption and other misconduct against top officials of the Nigerian Correctional Service has officially started its work.

The panel's secretary, Uju Agomoh, who led the session on Tuesday in Abuja, stated that many of the cases under review involve senior officers overseeing custodial centres across the country, where the alleged misconduct took place.

Agomoh explained that the panel has been tasked with carrying out a detailed investigation into specific incidents and recommending urgent steps to prevent such issues in the future.

Agomoh said, "Recent reports have highlighted cases of corruption, torture, cruelty, and inhumane treatment by correctional officers in Nigeria's facilities.

"These accusations include breaking official rules, abusing authority, and mistreating inmates, which violate their rights and dignity."

She further mentioned that the panel's work includes short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations for improving the correctional system.

Recall that the Minister of Interior, Dr. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, established the investigative panel following the widespread controversy regarding a cross-dresser, Idris Okunneya, popularly known as Bobrisky on whether he served his sentence at the proper correctional facility or not.

The panel is also looking into allegations of corruption and extortion against Iloafonfi Ikechukwu, the officer in charge of Kuje custodial centre, who has been accused of threatening, intimidating and defrauding an inmate.



ECOWAS DEFENCE CHIEFS:

A group photograph of ECOWAS Defence Chiefs at the 43rd ordinary meeting of the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff in Abuja.

Security, rehabilitation: EDHA Speaker pledges collaboration with NAPTIP, Correctional Service

The Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, has reaffirmed the 8th Assembly's commitment to working closely with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and the Nigeria Correctional Service to enhance security, combat human trafficking, and improve rehabilitation efforts in the state.

During a meeting with the leadership of both agencies, Agbebaku expressed gratitude

for their relentless service in protecting vulnerable individuals, particularly women and girls, from human trafficking.

He praised their dedication to reducing crime and commended the Correctional Service for its efforts in reforming inmates despite the challenges they face.

Acknowledging the risks associated with their work, the Speaker encouraged NAPTIP to submit recommendations to the House for possible areas of legislative support and collab-

oration that could strengthen the agency's operations.

He emphasized the importance of collective efforts in curbing criminal activities and ensuring the safety and well-being of Edo residents.

The Zonal Commander of NAPTIP, Mr. Aganran Alao noted that the agency has maintained a strong working relationship with both the government and the people of Edo State.

He reported significant progress in the fight against human trafficking, stating

that the once-alarming levels of trafficking in the state have drastically declined.

In his remarks, the Controller of Corrections, Nigeria Correctional Service, Mr Sunday Oyakhire, highlighted the need for greater synergy between the Assembly and his agency.

He called for support in providing empowerment programs for inmates, addressing prison congestion, and securing logistical assistance to enhance the effectiveness of correctional services.

Sale of 2025 Direct Entry forms begins March 12 —JAMB

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has announced commencement of the 2025 Direct Entry (DE) form sales from Wednesday, March 12.

The announcement was made in a statement signed by JAMB's spokesman, Fabian Benjamin on Monday.

He said the registration process is crucial for individuals who possess degrees, diplomas, or A-level certificates and wish to advance their education at their preferred universities.

"The initiation of the DE sales follows the successful conclusion of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) application sales, which ended on Saturday, March 8, 2025.

"During this period, JAMB recorded a total of 2,030,627

registrations for the 2025 UTME, along with 200,115 for the Mock-UTME and 630 applications for the trial mock," the statement read.

The board further emphasised the importance of adhering to all entry requirements, warning applicants that serious penalties would be imposed on applications containing false declarations.

"A special committee will verify all submitted advanced-level qualifications, and any fraudulent results will lead to prosecution.

Additionally, institutions are encouraged to directly verify certificates before considering admissions.

"Registration can only be done at JAMB Professional Registration Centre (PRC)," JAMB stated.

Nnamdi Kanu: New trial judge didn't step down, Federal High Court clarifies

The Federal High Court has dismissed reports that the newly assigned judge in the case of the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, has stepped down.

The FHC, in a statement signed by the Chief Registrar, Sulaiman Hassan, on Tuesday described the report as "false and misleading."

A publication circulating on social media had claimed that Justice John Tsoho, the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, was the new judge in

Kanu's case and had withdrawn, citing the illegality of his arrest.

However, in the statement, the chief registrar said the claim was "entirely unfounded, fictitious, grossly mischievous, damaging in intent and should be disregarded in its entirety."

"The attention of Management of the Federal High Court has been drawn, with great concern, to an online reportage as above captioned.

"The court unequivocally refutes the false and misleading report, alleging that the Honourable Chief Judge, Hon.

Justice John T. Tsoho, OFR, has stepped down from Nnamdi Kanu's case and made statements regarding the legality of his arrest," the statement read.

According to Hassan, the true position is that the Justice Tsoho, in his capacity as Chief Judge, has reassigned Nnamdi Kanu's case from Justice Binta Nyako to another ('new') Judge.

"The defence team should hence prepare to receive instructions regarding the case, as may be issued by the new judge.

"The Federal High Court strongly cautions against delib-

erate misinformation to mislead the public and erode confidence in the judicial system.

"We urge the general public to be wary and rely only on verified information from official court sources.

"The court remains steadfast in upholding justice through due process of the law."

It was reliably gathered, however, that the case between the Federal Government and Kanu had been reassigned to Justice James Omotosho, following Justice Nyako's recusal (withdrawal).

Reps orders NCC to shut down pornographic websites nationwide

The Nigerian House of Representatives has directed the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to immediately shut down all pornographic websites across the country.

This decision aims to pro-

tect societal values and address concerns over the impact of explicit content on youth.

The directive came during a plenary session after Dalhatu Tafoki, representing the Faskari/Kankara/Sabuwa Federal Constituency in Katsina State,

sponsored a motion highlighting the negative consequences of unrestricted access to explicit content.

Tafoki emphasized that cyber pornography is becoming a global problem, and no concrete steps have been taken to address

its proliferation in Nigeria.

The House also mandated internet service providers to block access under the new directive.

Lawmakers warned that sanctions would be imposed on providers that fail to comply.

Foreign

NEWS

Largest drone attack of war hits Moscow region, say Russian officials

At least three people have been killed in the Moscow region, in what appears to be the largest drone attack on the Russian capital Ukraine has launched so far during the war.

A further 18 people, including three children, were injured, Russian media reports citing health officials.

Regional Governor Andrei Vorobyev says the casualties were in the towns of Vidnoye and Domodedovo, just outside the capital, and included a 50-year-old man who died in hospital.

State news agency Tass re-

ports that 91 of the 337 drones were shot down over the region.

Vorobyev said two people were in a serious condition in hospital in Domodedovo: a 43-year-old woman who had suffered injuries to her torso including intestinal damage, and a 44-year-old man who had been wounded in the torso, shoulder and shin.

He said two of the people killed had both died as they began their shift at a food company.

Domodedovo official Evgeniya Khrustaleva later confirmed a third person had died.

The company told Tass the

two had died after debris hit its distribution centre. More than 40 cars were also damaged in the incident, it said.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said seven apartments in a residential building were damaged. The roof of one building was damaged by drone wreckage, though Sobyenin described the damage as "insignificant".

He also said 12 people - including three children - had to be evacuated from their damaged flats after the overnight strike.

One district train network is now suspended, and flight restrictions were put in place at Mos-

cow's airports after the attack.

In a post on social media, Governor Vorobyev published pictures purportedly showing one of the damaged apartments, and burnt vehicles in what looked like a car park in the Moscow region.

The attack comes just hours ahead of a crunch meeting between representatives from the US and Ukraine in Saudi Arabia, focused on ending the war between Russia and Ukraine.

The talks in Jeddah between Ukrainian delegates and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will be the first official meet-

ing since last month's fiery exchange at the White House

between Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Rubio suggested on Monday that, as part of an agreement to stop the war, Ukraine may have to relinquish territory to Russia, adding that both sides needed to understand that "there's no military solution to this situation".

Following the strikes, flight restrictions were imposed in Moscow's four major airports - Sheremetyevo, Domodedovo, Vnukovo and Zhukovsky - as well as airports in the Yaroslavl and Nizhny Novgorod regions. These are major transport hubs used by millions of passengers every year.

Flights have since resumed at Sheremetyevo Airport, Rus-

sian media reports, citing the aviation regulator.

Russia's defence ministry later said that, overall, 337 Ukrainian drones were either intercepted or destroyed overnight in the Moscow and nine other Russian regions, including Kursk.

Ukraine has not publicly commented on the attack.

Overnight, Ukrainian officials reported Russian drone attacks on the capital Kyiv and several other regions.

Ukraine's air force said it had shot down 79 of 126 drones launched by Russia, as well as an Iskander-M ballistic missile.

It added that another 35 drones likely failed to reach their targets due to electronic warfare countermeasures, though it is unclear whether the other 12 hit their targets.



COURTESY VISIT:

Zelensky met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman on Monday but is not expected to play any formal role in Tuesday's talks with the US.

Rubio says Ukraine partial ceasefire plan 'has promise' ahead of talks

The US's top diplomat said that he sees promise in Ukraine's proposal for a partial ceasefire to end the war with Russia, ahead of talks in Saudi Arabia between US and Ukrainian officials later on Tuesday.

"I'm not saying that alone is enough but it's the kind of concession you would need to see in order to end the conflict," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Monday.

Kyiv is expected to propose an aerial and naval truce with Russia during the negotiations in Jeddah.

Russia has previously rejected the idea of a temporary ceasefire, saying it was an attempt to buy time and prevent Ukraine's military collapse.

In a separate development, at least three people have been killed in a "massive" overnight drone attack on Moscow and the capital region, Governor Andrei Vorobyev said. Seven apartments in a residential building were damaged.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said 74 drones heading toward the city were shot down. The roof of one building was damaged by drone wreckage, he added.

The attack forced the suspension of one district train network, and flight restrictions

at Moscow's airports.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky landed in Saudi Arabia on Monday to meet Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, although he is not expected to play any formal role in the talks with the US.

In his video address late on Monday, Zelensky said he was hoping for a "practical result" at the talks, adding that the Ukrainian position would be "absolutely constructive".

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

Rubio will represent the US delegation alongside National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff.

Before arriving in Jeddah on Monday, Rubio said that it was important to "establish clearly Ukraine's intentions" for a peace deal and that the country would "have to be prepared to do difficult things like the Russians are going to have to do difficult things to end this".

"I'm not going to set any conditions on what they have to or need to do," he added. "We want to listen to see how far they're willing to go, and compare that to what the Russians want, and then see how far apart we truly are."

He said that both sides needed to realise that "there's no military solution" to the conflict and it can only be resolved through "diplomatic means".

Meanwhile, Witkoff is planning to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow later this week, Bloomberg and Axios news websites report, citing unnamed sources.

The Kremlin has not publicly commented on the reported visit.

The talks in Jeddah come as US President Donald Trump steps up pressure on Zelensky to agree to a ceasefire with Moscow, without any promises of US security guarantees.

Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian govt forces

A Kurdish-led militia alliance which controls north-eastern Syria has signed a deal to integrate all military and civilian institutions into the Syrian state, the country's presidency says.

The agreement, which includes a complete cessation of hostilities, says the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) will hand over control of the region's border posts, airport, and vital oil and gas fields.

It also recognises the Kurdish minority as "an integral part of the Syrian state" and guarantees "the rights of all Syrians to representation and participation in the political process".

SDF commander Mazloum Abdi called the deal a "real opportunity to build a new Syria".

"We are committed to building a better future that guarantees the rights of all Syrians and fulfils their aspirations for peace and dignity," he wrote on X on Monday night.

Abdi signed the deal in Damascus alongside interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

It represents a major step towards Sharaa's goal to unite the fractured country after his Sunni Islamist group led the rebel offensive that overthrew president Bashar al-Assad in December.

The size of that challenge has been made clear by the recent

violence in western Syria, where attacks on security forces by Assad loyalists triggered reprisals in which more than 1,000 civilians were reportedly killed, most of them members of Assad's minority Alawite sect.

The deal could also de-escalate the SDF's conflict with neighbouring Turkey and Turkish-backed Syrian former rebel factions allied to the government, which are trying to push the alliance out of areas near the border.

The SDF, which has tens of thousands of well-armed and well-trained fighters, was not aligned with either Assad's re-

gime or the opposition during the country's 13-year civil war.

It currently controls more than 46,000 sq km (18,000 sq miles) of territory in the north-east, where it defeated the Islamic State (IS) group in 2019 with the help of a US-led coalition.

The SDF plays a major role in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), which governs the region also known to Kurds as Rojava.

About 10,000 IS fighters are being detained in SDF-run prisons spread across the region and about 46,000 other people linked to IS, mostly women and chil-

dren, are held in several camps.

Since the fall of Assad, the SDF has warned that attacks from Turkish-backed factions are forcing it to divert fighters away from guarding the prisons and paving the way for an IS resurgence.

The Turkish government views the biggest militia in the SDF, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), as a terrorist organisation. It says it the YPG is an extension of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) group that waged an insurgency in Turkey for decades but whose imprisoned leader recently declared a ceasefire.

Philippines ex-leader Duterte arrested on ICC warrant over drug killings

Philippine police have arrested former President Rodrigo Duterte after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued a warrant accusing him of crimes against humanity over his deadly "war on drugs".

The 79-year-old was taken into police custody shortly after his arrival at Manila airport from Hong Kong.

He has offered no apologies for his brutal anti-drugs crackdown, which saw thousands of people killed when he was president of the South East Asian nation from 2016 to 2022, and mayor of Davao city before that.

Upon his arrest, he questioned the basis for the warrant, asking: "What crime [have] I committed?"

Duterte's former presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo criticised the arrest, calling it "unlawful" as the Philippines withdrew from the ICC in 2019.

The ICC earlier said that it has jurisdiction in the Philippines over alleged crimes committed before the country withdrew as a member.

But activists called the arrest a "historic moment" for those who perished in his drug war and their families, the International Coalition for Hu-

man Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP) said.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but today, it has bent towards justice. Duterte's arrest is the beginning of accountability for the mass killings that defined his brutal rule," said ICHRP chairman Peter Murphy.

Duterte had been in Hong Kong to campaign for the upcoming 12 May mid-term elections, where he had planned to run again for mayor of Davao.

Footage aired on local television showed him walking out of the airport using a cane. Authorities say he is in "good health" and is being cared for

by government doctors.

"What is my sin? I did everything in my time for peace and a peaceful life for the Filipino people," he told a cheering crowd of Filipino expatriates before leaving Hong Kong.

A video posted by his daughter, Veronica Duterte, showed Duterte in custody in a lounge at Manila's Villamor Air Base. In it, he can be heard questioning the reason for his arrest.

"What is the law and what is the crime that I committed? I was brought here not of my own volition, it is somebody else's. You have to answer now for the deprivation of liberty."

NEWS**Foreign****Greenland goes to polls in vote dominated by Trump and independence**

Residents of Greenland are going to the polls in a vote that in previous years has drawn little outside attention - but which may prove pivotal for the Arctic territory's future.

US President Donald Trump's repeated interest in acquiring Greenland has put it firmly in the spotlight and fuelled the long-standing debate on the island's future ties with Copenhagen.

"There's never been a spotlight like this on Greenland before," says Nauja Bianco, a Danish-Greenlandic policy expert on the Arctic.

Greenland has been controlled by Denmark - nearly 3,000km (1,860 miles) away - for about 300 years. It governs its own domestic affairs, but decisions on foreign and defence policy are made in Copenhagen.

Now, five out of six parties on the ballot favour Greenland's independence from Denmark, differing only on how quickly that should come about.

Voting takes place over 11 hours at 72 polling stations, and ends at 20:00 local time on Tuesday (22:00G).

The debate over independence has been "put on steroids by Trump", says Masaana Egede, editor of Greenlandic newspaper Sermitsiaq.

The island's strategic location and untapped mineral resources have caught the US president's eye. He first floated the idea of buying Greenland during his first term in 2019.

Since taking office again in January, he has reiterated his intention to acquire the territory. Greenland and Denmark's leaders have repeatedly rebuffed his demands.

Addressing the US Congress last week, however, Trump again doubled down. "We need Greenland for national securi-

ty. One way or the other we're gonna get it," he said, prompting applause and laughter from a number of politicians, including Vice-President JD Vance.

In Nuuk, his words struck a nerve with politicians who were quick to condemn them. "We deserve to be treated with respect and I don't think the American president has done that lately since he took office," Prime Minister Mute Egede said.

Still, the US interest has stoked calls for Greenland to break away from Denmark, with much of the debate focused on when - not if - the process of independence should begin.

Greenland's independence goal is not new, Nauja Bianco points out, and has been decades in the making.

A string of revelations about past mistreatment of Inuit people by the Danes have hurt Greenlandic public opinion about Denmark. Earlier this year, PM Egede said the territory should free itself from "the shackles of colonialism".

But it is the first time the subject has taken centre stage in an election.

Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), the party of Prime Minister Mute Egede, favours gradual steps towards autonomy. "Citizens must feel secure," he told local media.

Arctic expert Martin Bream says Egede's handling of the challenge from Trump and strong words against Denmark over past colonial wrongdoings "will give him a lot of votes".

Smaller rivals could also gain ground and potentially shake up alliances.

Opposition party Naleraq wants to immediately kick-off divorce proceedings from Copenhagen and have closer defence dealings with Washington.

**12 TOILETS CLOGGED:**

The plane, carrying up to 342 passengers, had already crossed the Atlantic when crew members found eight of its 12 toilets clogged, causing discomfort for those on board.

Air India plane returns after plastic bags and rags clog toilets

Air India has confirmed that one of its flights from the US was forced to turn around last week after passengers trying to flush away plastic bags, rags and clothes clogged up most of its toilets.

The plane, which was heading from Chicago to India's capital Delhi, spent several hours in the air before it returned to the US city.

Video clips from inside the aircraft showed scenes of confusion as passengers huddled around crew members who seemed to be explaining the situation.

The incident has stirred a lively debate on social media, with many Indians weighing in on aeroplane bathroom etiquette.

The incident took place on 5

March on Air India Flight 126, according to a statement by the airline released on Monday.

About two hours into the flight, crew members reported that some of the toilets were "unserviceable".

Subsequently, they found eight of the 12 toilets in business and economy class could not be used, "causing discomfort to all on board". The plane can carry up to 342 passengers.

At that point the plane was already flying over the Atlantic Ocean, according to Air India's statement. Due to restrictions on night operations at most European airports at the time, the pilots decided to return to Chicago for "passenger comfort and safety".

A BBC check on flight

tracking website Flightradar24 found the plane was near Greenland when it turned around, and had spent a total of 10 hours in the air.

Air India said an investigation later found "polythene bags, rags and clothes that had been flushed down and stuck in the plumbing" of the plane's toilets. It released several pictures showing bags containing waste cleared from the toilets. One photo showed a crew member holding a drainage pipe completely stuffed with what appeared to be rags.

The statement said that all passengers and crew disembarked normally in Chicago and were provided with accommodation and alternative flight options.

Plane toilets store human waste in special tanks and use a vacuum system for flushing. These are normally disposed of once the plane has landed.

While clogged toilets are not uncommon, it is "next to im-

possible" for all toilets to break down "due to only passengers' fault, and in a way that it causes an emergency diversion", Mark Martin, an aviation expert, told the Hindustan Times newspaper.

But Air India said it had previously found objects such as blankets, underwear and diapers flushed down its planes' toilets.

"We take this opportunity to urge passengers to use lavatories only for the purposes that they are meant for," it said.

On X, many criticised the airline for poor upkeep and the lack of sanitation facilities on its aeroplanes.

"Only Air India has such frequent mishaps. Honestly what has happened is indefensible," one user said.

But others pointed out that the airline could not be held responsible for the situation.

"Can we honestly dump all the blame on Air India and the crew, when people can't follow basic travel etiquette?" another user said.

Uganda deploys troops to South Sudan to secure capital —Military chief

Uganda has deployed special forces to South Sudan's capital, Juba, to help President Salva Kiir to "secure it", Uganda's military chief Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba has said.

The move comes as tensions escalate between Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar, raising fears that their fragile peace deal could collapse and a conflict could resume.

Gen Kainerugaba did not give reasons for the deployment to the neighbouring state but said that any move against Kiir "is a declaration of war against Uganda".

"We shall protect the entire territory of South Sudan like it was our own," he added on the social media platform X.

South Sudan's government has not yet commented on the deployment.

Concern about the security situation in South Sudan has been mounting, with the US

on Saturday ordering the evacuation of all its non-emergency staff from the country.

Last week, the deputy chief of the army and two ministers - all allies of Machar - were arrested by the security forces, which an opposition spokesman called a "grave violation" of the peace deal.

One of the ministers has since been released.

The arrests followed clashes in the Upper Nile state between government forces and a militia known as the White Army.

It had fought alongside Machar during the civil war that broke out in 2013 following a power struggle between him and Kiir.

It led to heavy fighting in Juba, with Kiir accusing Machar of plotting a coup.

Machar denied the allegation, but South Sudan then plunged into a civil war that killed more than 400,000 people.

A 2018 power-sharing agreement between the two stopped the fighting, but key elements of the deal have not

been implemented - including a new constitution, an election and the reunification of armed groups into a single army.

Pakistan militants attack train carrying hundreds of passengers

A train carrying hundreds of passengers has been attacked and halted by armed militants in Pakistan's Balochistan region.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) confirmed it had attacked the Jaffar Express Train which was travelling from Quetta to Peshawar.

A statement from the separatist group said it had bombed the track before storming the train in remote Sibi district. It claimed the train was under its control.

Pakistani police told local reporters that they had received information that three people, including the train driver, had been injured in the attack.

Police added that securi-

ty forces had been sent to the scene of the attack.

A Balochistan government spokesman told local newspaper Dawn that there were reports of "intense firing" at the train.

The BLA claims that it is holding a number of passengers including security officers hostage, and has warned of "severe consequences" if an attempt is made to rescue those it is holding.

However, officials have not yet confirmed that anyone is being held hostage.

Quetta's railway controller Muhammad Kashif told the BBC that 400-450 passengers had been booked on the train but said they had no independ-

ent verification that anyone had been taken hostage.

A senior police official from the area bordering Sibi said "the train remains stuck just before a tunnel surrounded by mountains", AFP news agency reports.

Meanwhile the country's interior minister Mohsin Nawaz has condemned the attack and said he prayed for the speedy recovery of those injured.

Officials are yet to communicate with anyone on the train. The area the express is stopped in has no internet and mobile network coverage, officials told the BBC.

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province and the richest

in terms of natural resources, but it is the least developed. The Baloch Liberation Army has waged a decades-long insurgency to gain independence and has launched numerous deadly attacks, often targeting police stations, railway lines and highways.

Additional reporting by Usman Zahid and BBC Urdu

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Sports

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

Athletics: Benin City bubbles as over 2000 athletes across 100 schools gear up for MTN CHAMPS Benin!

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

A total of 4371 Entries were received from 2056 Athletes as registration for MTN CHAMPS Benin Athletics Classics closed a few days to the commencement of the competition, which runs from March 13th to 15th across two locations simultaneously in Benin.

The two designated venues

are the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium and the UNIBEN Sports Complex respectively.

The Youth (U17) category accounted for nearly half of the registrations, with a total number of 976 registrants, with 496 registrations from the Junior (U20) category, 388 from the Cadet (U14) class and 196 from the Seniors (no age limit).

According to the organizers,

only the Youth (U17) category will compete at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium on the first two days of competition (March 13th and 14th) due to the volume of registration, and will join the Cadet (U14), Junior (U20) and Senior categories at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium on the third and final day (March 15th) for their remaining events. The Cadet (U14), Junior (U20) and Senior cate-

gories will compete at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium on all three days of the event.

All registered Schools/Athletes must pick up their competition bibs from Tuesday, March 11th, to confirm their participation, at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium to remain on their event startlists. It is compulsory for at least one parent or legal guardian of each participating athlete

in the Cadet, Youth & Junior categories to sign the Parental Consent Form which can be downloaded at <http://mtnchamps.com> and brought along for bib collection.

Also, all Cadet (U-14), Youth (U-17) and Junior (U-20) Athletes are to come along with a photocopy of a means of identification showing their Date of Birth, such as their Birth Certificates, Internation-

al Passport or School Records.

Online registration continues for the MTN CHAMPS Lagos Continental Relays (April 9th to 12th) and the MTN CHAMPS Grand Final in Uyo (April 30th to May 3rd) at <http://mtnchamps.com>. The deadline for registration for the Lagos Continental Relays is April 2nd while that of the Grand Final in Uyo is April 23rd.



L-R: Friday Okuwe, senior manager, Brand, Media and Sponsorships, MTN Nigeria; Olaniyi Alabi, senior manager, Sales and Trade Development; Idowu Adesokan, general manager, Consumer Marketing, MTN Nigeria; Monday Okpebholo, governor, Edo State, and Osaze Ebueku, senior manager, Go-to-Market, MTN Nigeria, during the meeting.

Dikko commends GTI's strategic efforts at repositioning Nigerian football

The chairman of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Shehu Dikko has poured encomiums on strategic partners to the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), GTI Asset Management and Trust Limited for their effort at repositioning Nigerian football.

He made the remark during the presentation of Newstap/SWAN 5-star award to the GMD of GTI Group, Abubakar Lawal, alongside four other recipients in Lagos.

The well-attended event, which attracted a lot of stakeholders of the Nigerian football family, was jointly organised by Newstap Communications Limited and Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN).

In his opening speech, Dikko revealed how he and

other football administrators ensured GTI's remarkable entry into the Nigerian sports ecosystem, and since then, our country's football has witnessed a positive trajectory.

"I appreciate the organisers of Newstap/SWAN award for a successful execution of the maiden edition of this award and thank GTI Group for their effort so far in repositioning our beautiful game," Dikko began.

"I made serious effort to ensure that I'm present at this event today and I thank God that I succeeded. When I eventually came here and saw the team from GTI, I was overwhelmed with joy, such that I didn't know how to start thanking them for their accomplishments with the NPFL and President Federation Cup.

14th CAF EGA: Nigeria's Pinnick favoured to retain FIFA Council seat

Nigeria's Amaju Melvin Pinnick is highly favoured to retain his seat as a member of the 37-person FIFA Council – the supreme governing-organ for world football – when elections are conducted at the 14th Extraordinary General Assembly of the Confederation of African Football in Cairo, Egypt on Wednesday.

The debonair football administrator is at the forefront of the race alongside Moroccan Fouzi Lekjaa and Egyptian Hany Abou Rida, with 10 persons to battle for the available five seats when the poll is called inside the Marriott Mena House on Wednesday morning.

Africa has seven seats on the FIFA Council, with the sitting CAF President's position guaranteed. One of the seven seats is reserved for a woman, and here, CAF's sitting 5th vice president Kanizat Ibrahim from the Comoros Islands will slug it out with sitting member Isha Johansen from Sierra Leone.

The contest for the FIFA Council seats will certainly be

the fiercest ever, with Ivorian Yacine Idriss Diallo, Senegal's Augustin Senghor, Niger Republic's Djibrilla 'Pele' Hima Hamidou, Zambia's Andrew Kamanga, Mauritanian Ahmed Yahya, Benin Republic's Mathurin De Chacus and Djibouti's Souleman Hassan Waberi also in the poll.

CAF President Patrice Motsepe, who is also unchallenged for a second term at African football's helm, keeps his seat without any sweat, but will watch keenly

as only half of the contestants, all strong and deft politicians in their own rights, make it to the esteemed FIFA Council.

Each of the 54 Member Associations will have the opportunity to vote five persons in the densely-populated male category, and one of the two women. President of NFF, Alhaji Ibrahim Musa Gusau, who will vote on behalf of Nigeria, landed in Cairo on Sunday in company with the General Secretary, Dr Mohammed Sanusi.

The Government of Nigeria, which publicly endorsed Pinnick's candidacy through the Presidency in July 2024, is robustly represented, with Chairman of the National Sports Commission, Alhaji Shehu Dikko, and Director-General, Hon. Bukola Olopade on ground.

There were indications on Tuesday morning that Mauritania's Yahya may also sail through in the contest at the extraordinary general assembly that begins at 9am Nigeria time.



NNL 25: ABS Ilorin FC re-appoints Anthony Encho as new head coach



Abubakar Bukola Saraki Ilorin Football Club have re-appointed Cameroonian-born Encho Anthony Encho as the new head coach for the remainder of the 2024/25 season, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

Encho comes in as a replacement to Coach Sani Sarduana, who was asked to step aside after a not-too-impressive run in the first round of the league.

Speaking to the media shortly after his presentation, Encho promised to guide the team to secure the playoff spot for NPFL promotion at the end of the season.

"I was in ABS before I did 50 percent and I am back to do the remaining 50% to complete 100 percent, my first mission is to take the team to the Super Eight and promote the team to the NPFL.

"Every coach has its own philosophy; I want to believe in myself and in my players and what I impact on the player. Let me remind you that there is a team in Lagos that was down in the NPFL before, but now they're up there.

"So, I don't want my players to be distracted or discouraged by their position. I want them to have a positive mindset that they are go-

ing to the Super 8 and by the special grace of God we will achieve it"

The Cameroonian Coach was once the Technical Adviser of NNL side Crown FC Ogbomosho. He has also worked with NNL sides Solution FC and Ijebu United FC while also handling some foreign-based clubs such as Samui United Academy of Thailand and Tiger Soccer Academy Sharjah of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Encho will work with Saliu Aremu, Salaudeen Adeyinka (Keshi) and Boyin Ayodele (Goalkeeper coach).

SPORTS

2026 World Cup Race: Musa dropped as Chelle names Ekong, Lookman, Osimhen, 20 others for Rwanda, Zimbabwe

Super Eagles' Head Coach Eric Sékou Chelle has named goalkeepers Stanley Nwabali and Kayode Bankole, defenders William Ekong, Calvin Bassey and Olaoluwa Aina, midfielders Alex Iwobi and Wilfred Ndidi, and forwards Ademola Lookman, Victor Osimhen and Simon Moses in his final list of 23 players for the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying matches against Rwanda and Zimbabwe.

Also in the final list are defenders Bruno Onyemaechi and Bright Osayi-Samuel, midfielders Raphael Onyedika and Alhassan Yusuf Abdullahi, and forwards Samuel Chukwueze and Sadiq Umar.

Czech Republic-based defender Igoh Ogbu makes the final cut, alongside home-based midfielder Papa Daniel Mustapha, and Belgium-based forward Tolu Arokodare.

Nigeria will confront group C leaders Rwanda in Kigali on Friday, 21st March before taking on Zimbabwe's Warriors at the Godswill Akpabio Stadium, Uyo four days later.

LIST OF 23 SUPER EAGLES FOR RWANDA, ZIMBABWE GAMES

Goalkeepers: Stanley Nwabali (Chippa United, South Africa); Amas Obasogie (Singida Blackstars, Tanzania); Kayode Bankole (Remo Stars)

Defenders: William Ekong (Al-Kholood FC, Saudi Ara-

bia); Bright Osayi-Samuel (Fenerbahce SK, Turkey); Bruno Onyemaechi (Olympiacos FC, Greece); Calvin Bassey (Fulham FC, England); Olaoluwa Aina (Nottingham Forest, England); Igoh Ogbu (SK Slavia Prague, Czech Republic)

Midfielders: Wilfred Ndidi (Leicester City, England); Raphael Onyedika (Club Brugge, Belgium); Alhassan Yusuf Abdullahi (New England Revolution, USA); Alex Iwobi (Fulham FC, England); Joseph Ayodele-Arifo (Southampton FC, England); Papa Daniel Mustapha (Niger Tornados)

Forwards: Samuel Chukwueze (AC Milan, Italy); Victor Osimhen (Galatasaray FC,

Turkey); Ademola Lookman (Atalanta FC, Italy); Victor Boniface (Bayer Leverkusen,

Germany); Simon Moses (FC Nantes, France); Sadiq Umar (Valencia FC, Spain); Nathan

Tella (Bayer Leverkusen, Germany); Tolu Arokodare (KRC Genk, Belgium)



Egypt, Mozambique get wildcards for 2025 AfroBasket Women's Championship

● Two more slots up for grab for the grand finale, D'Tigress are the defending champions



Egypt and Mozambique have been awarded wildcards to compete for honours in the 2025 FIBA Women's AfroBasket which will take place in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire from July 25 to August 3.

This development was made public on Monday by the slaming and dunking game governing body on the continent - FIBA Africa.

Egypt finished second in the

Zone 5 qualifiers held in Cairo last month after losing 74-63 to eventual regional champions Uganda. Mozambique, on the other hand, lost 109-108 (aggregate) to Angola in a two-game series played in the Angolan capital, Luanda from February 2-3.

Egypt and Mozambique have now joined the eight other teams which have so far secured their spots at this year's Women's AfroBasket.

Some countries advanced to the finals after winning their qualifying series and while others booked automatic qualifications after reaching the semi-finals of the 2023 AfroBasket edition.

Ten teams have so far secured their slots in the tournament while two more wildcards will be confirmed in April by FIBA Africa to complete the 12-team field.

Nigerian premier basketball league kings, Rivers Hoopers re-sign Olisemeka, Anatomy

● Coach Ogoh Odaudu, fortifies squad ahead of 2025 Basketball Africa League Season 5

Nigeria Premier basketball League champions, Rivers Hoopers Basketball Club, have re-signed experienced shooting guard, Kelvin Amayo and fierce center, Peter Olisemeka, for their outing at the 2025 Basketball Africa League Season 5.

Head Coach of Rivers Hoopers, Ogoh Odaudu, is solidifying his team with the best of hands, as they will be making their third appearance at the premium continental basketball showpiece.

With Kelvin Amayo spearheading the KingsMen's offenses,

and 33 year old Peter Olisemeka coordinating the defense, the Rivers Hoopers made history last year, finishing third, Nigeria's highest ever in the Basketball Africa League.

The Nigerian b-ball giants are seeking to rewrite history, this time moving a step further, as they are strengthening their squad with some of the best hands on deck, Kelvin Amayo and Peter Olisemeka.

Basketball buff, Amayo went on to lead Rivers Hoopers to victory at the 2024 abridged Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF), Men's Premier League

Final, squeezing past, Hoops N' Read of Lagos, claiming the MVP Award.

The Canadian-born Nigerian averaged 16 Points Per Game, 6.7 Assist Per Game, 5.3 Rebound Per Game and 2.2 Steal Per Game to finish in the All-BAL Second Team (2024) and BAL All-Defensive Second Team (2024).

Amayo and Peter Olisemeka becomes Rivers Hoopers' first set of signings ahead of this season's BAL.

The 6'9 center averaged 10 Points Per Game, 11.7 Rebounds Per Game, 2 Assists Per

Game, 1.4 Blocks Per Game in 9 games played for the KingsMen at the 2024 BAL.

Olisemeka also recorded three double-doubles against US Monastir, AS Douanes and APR in the Sahara Conference.

Rivers Hoopers, have been drawn in the Kalahari Conference of the 2025 Basketball Africa League (BAL) season.

The Port Harcourt based team will play against FUS Rabat of Morocco, Egypt's Al Itihad, and Stade Malien of Mali from 5-13 April at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Sports Complex in Rabat, Morocco.



Nigeria begin IHF emerging nations championship campaigns with 31-31 draw against USA

Nigeria's Under 23 Handball Men Team came from the brink to play a dramatic 31-31 draw with the United States of America on the opening day of the 5th IHF Emerging Nations Championship in Varna, Bulgaria.

The Coach Solomon Yola tutored sides who only left the country a day before their match, went into the match against the USA who brought a much-changed team from the team that finished 26th in the 2025 IHF Men's World Champi-

onship in Denmark to the 2025 IHF Men's Emerging Nations Championship but still had the experience of top players such as Pal Merkovszky and Andrew Donlin in their ranks and were expected to win the match.

The Americans started the

match and led 9-2 in the first 13 minutes as Merkovszky had a 50% save efficiency and provided great defensive cover, forcing Nigeria either to turn the ball over or try difficult shots, which had a low chance of being converted into goals.

It is correct to say the first half was for USA as they won the first half 18-12 with Andrew Donlin scoring 7 goals despite a late surge from Nigeria.

The second half was for Nigeria as goalkeeper, Obinna Okwor, started raking up saves,

including some one-on-one situations fueling a comeback for the Coach Solomon Yola's side and they took it with both hands with Faruk Yusuf who plays in the top flight French league was a key part in that comeback attempt.