

UNICEF raises alarm over diversion of life-saving food for malnourished children in N/East

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has sounded a grave warning over the rampant diversion and illegal sale of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) meant for severely malnourished children in Nigeria's conflict-hit northeastern states, particularly

Borno and Adamawa.

Speaking in Maiduguri on Tuesday during a stakeholders' meeting, UNICEF Chief of the Maiduguri Field Office, Joseph Senesie, expressed deep concern that the unauthorised resale of RUTF by health workers, transporters, and traders was becoming

"out of hand," potentially threatening the lives of over half a million children across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States.

"This is a major crisis. For a child to die because the therapeutic food meant for them is stolen is alarming," Senesie said. "It is now being sold in markets

and online. Those behind this act are depriving children of their right to life. If donors withdraw support due to this abuse, many more children will die."

UNICEF has conducted internal investigations confirming the widespread diversion of the nutritional aid, and has called on

law enforcement agencies, government transporters, and health workers to take immediate action to halt the malpractice.

The agency also appealed to the media to intensify awareness campaigns to protect children's rights.

Senesie urged that any con-

fiscated supplies be returned promptly to the Ministry of Health to prevent expiration and ensure they reach those in need.

"These commodities are not meant to sit in police storage facilities. They are for the children. Let's get them to where they are needed," he stressed.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Senate seeks inclusion of LG in FAAC deliberations

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PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968

VOL. 46, NO. 1,000

WEDNESDAY, 14TH MAY 2025.

House of Reps rejects rotational Presidency

The House of Representatives on Tuesday decisively voted down a constitutional amendment bill proposing the rotation of the offices of the President and Vice President among Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, following intense debate that exposed deep divisions among lawmakers on issues of equity, national unity, and constitutional fairness.

The bill, which sought to embed a zoning arrangement in the 1999 Constitution to ensure each zone—North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West—has a turn at producing the country's highest office holders, failed to scale second reading after a voice vote. Lawmakers also rejected six other constitutional alteration bills slated for consider-

ation, though the House resolved to revisit the proposals individually on Wednesday.

The Deputy Minority Leader, Aliyu Madaki, led strong opposition to the rotational presidency bill, arguing that existing mechanisms such as the Federal Character Commission already promote equitable distribution of public offices.

He cautioned that formalising

rotational leadership in the Constitution would be counterproductive and unnecessary, given that political parties are already guided by internal zoning arrangements.

"This proposal is dangerous," Madaki warned. "Let political parties continue to use their discretion. Putting zoning into the Constitution undermines the principle of merit and demo-

cratic competition."

Sada Soli (APC, Katsina) echoed this sentiment, warning that while the bill was well-intentioned, it risked entrenching ethnic and regional rivalry.

"The rotation principle may sacrifice quality leadership on the altar of geography," he said.

Other lawmakers, such as

Shina Oyedeji (PDP, Oyo), argued that such an amendment would provoke further agitation at state and tribal levels, potentially opening a Pandora's box of demands for micro-zoning within the zones themselves.

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SOUTH-SOUTH MONARCH'S FORUM:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo (6th left); Secretary to the State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor (5th left), in a group photograph with members of the South-South Monarch's Forum, during their visit to Governor Okpepholo in Benin City.

2027: Okpepholo mobilises S/South monarchs for Tinubu

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpepholo, has called on traditional rulers in the South South region to rally behind President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ahead of the 2027 presidential election, describing his re-election as non-negotiable for national stability and progress.

Governor Okpepholo made the appeal while hosting members of the South South Monarchs Forum at the Government House in Benin City.

Addressing the royal fathers, he emphasised the vital role traditional institutions play in national development, especially in fostering unity and combating insecurity.

"South South should speak with one voice because we have our son as President. He deserves our total support to complete the good work he has started," the Governor declared.

He praised President Tinubu's economic reforms, tax policies, and increased federal allocations to states, noting that these initia-

tives are creating room for tangible grassroots development.

While commending Tinubu's efforts in tackling insecurity, Okpepholo appealed to the monarchs to support intelligence gathering within their communities, pointing to their strategic presence and influence at the grassroots level.

The Governor also reaffirmed his administration's commitment to strengthening traditional institutions, promising to engage other Southern governors to uphold the dignity and relevance of royal fathers in governance.

Responding on behalf of the Forum, Vice Chairman and Orodje of Okpe Kingdom, HRM Maj. Gen. Felix Mujakperuo (rtd), lauded Governor Okpepholo for his bold leadership, especially in defending the dignity of the Oba of Benin and promoting peace across Edo State.

He congratulated the Governor on his electoral victory and pledged the Forum's full support for his administration and President Tinubu's re-election.

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NNL Chairman vows to uphold integrity, ensure only best teams advance to NPFL

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Senate seeks inclusion of LG in FAAC deliberations

The Senate has urged the Federal Government to ensure that every local government council across the states, along with each area council in the Federal Capital Territory, is granted direct representation in the deliberations of the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC).

It further directed that this resolution be formally conveyed to the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, who chairs the FAAC, for immediate implementation.

This move, aimed at reinforcing constitutional adherence and promoting financial transparency at the grassroots level, followed a motion sponsored by Senator Barau Jibrin

(Kano North).

He stressed that local government councils, as constitutionally recognised third-tier entities under Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), are entitled to a direct share from the Federation Account.

The Senate referenced a recent Supreme Court ruling which clarified that state governments merely serve as intermediaries for transmitting allocations to local governments and possess neither ownership nor discretionary authority over those funds.

Lawmakers also noted that while FAAC currently comprises only federal and state representatives, Section 5 of the Allocation of Revenue

(Federation Account, etc) Act 1981 explicitly excludes local governments, a provision now considered incompatible with

the Constitution in light of the Supreme Court's landmark judgment delivered in July 2024.

The Senate noted that the evolving legal interpretation now calls for direct local government participation in

FAAC, both to protect their interests and to enhance accountability in the allocation of national revenue.

Edo SUBEB trains over 1,500 teachers in professional devt

EBUANEKPE JOY

In a significant stride towards educational transformation, the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), in collaboration with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has concluded a week-long Professional Teachers' Development Programme

The intensive training, conducted across more than thirty school-based centres throughout Edo North, Edo Central, and Edo South senatorial districts, empowered over 1,500 educators, including primary and junior secondary school teachers as well as school leaders.

Designed to bolster the quality of basic education in the state, the initiative immersed participants in modern, learner-centred pedagogical methods.

Over the course of five days, educators were introduced to a range of innovative instructional techniques such as collaborative inquiry, differentiated instruction, gamification, storytelling, and project-based learning.

Additionally, they received hands-on training in evidence-based assessment strategies and digital tracking tools, enabling them to better monitor student progress.

Participants also learned how to incorporate digital resources

and free educational software into their lesson delivery—skills seen as vital in reaching the tech-savvy "Gen Alpha" learners.

The skills, facilitators emphasised, will not only improve learning outcomes but also help teachers act as role models and gatekeepers in an increasingly digital world.

The Executive Chairman of Edo SUBEB, Barrister Mrs Onomen Briggs, and the Board's Training Desk Officer, Mrs Amarchi Itenebe, took part in key sessions of the programme, presenting certificates to deserving participants.

UBEC monitoring officers, Iduma Christian and Lawani Gloria, were on ground to observe the training across various centres and provide quality assurance through feedback collection.

Speaking to educators during the closing session, Barr. Briggs stressed the importance of immediate application: "Our learners are growing up in a digital world.

"As teachers, we must meet them where they are, on TikTok, on Instagram, not just to engage them, but to protect and guide them. This is the future of teaching."

Participants expressed satisfaction with the quality and depth of the training, describing it as a transformative experience that will enhance classroom practice.

Reps reject rotational...

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"When it's zoned to the South West, for instance, who decides whether Ogun or Oyo gets it? It's a slippery slope," he said.

Bello El-Rufai raised the constitutional and legal implications, citing the possible complications should a president die in office, as was the case with former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.

"Are we saying a vice president from a different zone cannot take over? This will infringe on the constitutional rights of Nigerians to aspire to any office," he said.

However, not all lawmakers were in opposition. The Minority Whip, Ali Ismail, urged the House to consider the bill in the interest of fairness.

"We must allow all geopolitical zones a chance at the presidency. In 2027, for example, the North East should be given a shot," he said.

Clement Jimbo (APC, Akwa Ibom) defended the bill, saying it sought to remedy historic injustice faced by minority regions.

He proposed that after all zones have had their turn, the rotation clause could be repealed to restore open competition.

Despite these arguments, the bill failed to gain enough traction, and the House rejected it alongside six other constitutional amendments, including proposals to transfer party registration from INEC to a Registrar General of Political Parties, to establish independent State Auditors-General for Local Governments.



SAUDI CROWN PRINCE & TRUMP:

US President Donald Trump (left), and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (middle), broke protocol by personally greeting on the tarmac, rather than sending a lower-ranking royal as is customary, in Riyadh Saudi Arabia.

Nigeria to receive \$3bn telecoms infrastructure in June —Minister

Nigeria will receive a significant boost to its digital infrastructure in June 2025 with the arrival of telecommunications equipment and fibre optic cables worth \$3 billion, the Minister of Communications, Innovation and

Digital Economy, Bosun Tijani, announced on Tuesday.

Speaking at the World Bank's Nigeria Development Update (NDU) event, Tijani said the incoming infrastructure, including \$1 billion in telecoms equipment and \$2 billion in fibre optic

cables, would help close the connectivity gap and improve digital access nationwide.

"This investment will connect over 20 million Nigerians who currently have no access to telecommunications," the Minister stated. The pilot phase

of the connectivity initiative is set to begin soon.

The NDU, a bi-annual report by the World Bank, reviews Nigeria's socio-economic progress and offers policy advice on addressing development challenges.

New Okuokpellagbe emerges in Okpella Kingdom

LAMAI CASSIUS

Engr. Michael Sado of Ukhumoyio, Afokpella in Etsako East Local Government Area has emerged as the new traditional ruler—Okuokpellagbe of Okpella kingdom.

Sado was elected by the 24-member council of kingmakers following the revocation of the appointment of Engr. Lukman Akemokue by the Edo State government.

According to the government, the previous appointment was nullified due to non-compliance with the declaration of customary law regulating succession to the throne, as outlined in Bendel State Legal Notice No. 132 of 1979.

Chairman of the Electoral Committee, Dr Hanson Aimofumeh, revealed that eleven candidates contested for the throne, with the kingmakers voting in line with the customs and traditions of the kingdom.

Dr Aimofumeh announced that Engr. Michael Sado secured 16 votes to emerge as the new traditional ruler.

"By the power conferred on me as Chairman of the Electoral Committee, I hereby declare Engr. Michael Sado as the new traditional ruler of Okpella, having scored the highest number of votes," he stated.

"I therefore direct the appropriate branch of Ukhumoyio, by virtue of Section 6 of the Traditional Rulers and Chiefs

Act, to proceed with the installation of Engr. Michael Sado as the Okuokpellagbe of Okpella," Aimofumeh added.

He further directed the kingmakers to commence the traditional rites leading to Sado's formal installation.

"With this announcement, the process of electing a new king in Okpella has been concluded," he affirmed.

Chairman of Etsako East Local Government, Solomon Oghumah, described the process as free, fair, and transparent. He extended his congratulations to the newly elected monarch.

"On behalf of the local government, we congratulate Engr. Michael Sado on his emergence as the traditional ruler of Ok-

pella and wish him a successful reign," Oghumah said.

In his response, Engr. Michael Sado thanked the Edo State Government for ensuring due process in the selection of a new king.

Describing his emergence as an act of God, Sado expressed appreciation to the kingmakers for finding him worthy of the throne.

"This is a new dawn for Okpella. I thank Governor Okpelloh for upholding due process. I also thank the kingmakers for their trust and support," he said.

He promised that his reign would usher in a new era of development for Okpella.

"I want to assure my people that from today, Okpella will experience a new chapter," the new Okuokpellagbe said.

FEC approves life insurance scheme for top govt officials, civil vil servants

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) has approved the implementation of a Group Life Insurance Scheme for federal civil servants, key government officials, and personnel of certain paramilitary agencies.

The approval was granted during a council meeting presided over by President Bola Tinubu at the State House Council Chamber in Abuja.

Briefing journalists after the

meeting, the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Didi Walson-Jack, said the scheme will extend coverage to a wide range of senior officials.

These include the President, the Vice President, the Chief of Staff, the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, ministers, permanent secretaries, and employees of federal ministries and treasury-funded agencies.

In addition, personnel from

various paramilitary organisations will also benefit from the insurance cover.

These include the Nigerian Immigration Service, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the Nigeria Correctional Service, the Federal Fire Service, the Federal Road Safety Corps, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and staff under the Office of the National Security Adviser.

Walson-Jack described the

scheme as a clear demonstration of the Tinubu administration's commitment to the welfare of public servants.

"The Group Life Insurance Scheme is essentially a policy taken out by the Federal Government on behalf of every public servant. In the unfortunate event of death, the next of kin of the deceased will receive a financial benefit to help cushion the burden of loss," she explained.

After 13yrs, public power restored to Ekuku-Agbor, surrounding communities

AJUWA VICTOR

After enduring over 13 years of total blackout, the agrarian community of Ekuku-Agbor in Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State, is once again enjoying public electricity supply, prompting scenes of jubilation across the town.

Ecstatic residents expressed heartfelt appreciation to Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwori, and Ika South Local Government Chairman, Engr. Jerry Ehiwarior, who played a

key role in the restoration project. The return of electricity has sparked widespread celebration, with men, women, children, and the elderly seen singing and dancing in gratitude.

The development marks a significant turning point for the community, which had grappled with the harsh consequences of prolonged darkness.

The restoration process began under Engr. Ehiwarior's tenure as Commissioner for Power and Energy, during which he facilitated the approval for critical infrastructure, including a step-

down transformer project serving Ekuku-Agbor and neighbouring communities such as Agbor-Alidinma, Obi-Agbor, Obi-Iduhor in Ika South, and Egbudu-Akan in Aniocha South Local Government Area.

Residents hailed Ehiwarior's dedication to the project, especially his commitment even after leaving office. "Despite attempts to discourage him, he remained focused until the project was completed," said Mr. Simon Okocha, President-General of the Ekuku-Agbor community.

Mrs Veronica Onwumeri

described the moment as transformational: "Living without electricity for over a decade brought immense hardship. This change is truly a blessing."

Similarly, Mr. Orunwan Chizoke, a meat seller, noted the restoration as a lifeline for his business, which had suffered due to his inability to preserve meat products without refrigeration.

The event reaffirms the community's belief that citizens will always acknowledge genuine efforts by the government to improve their lives.

SMEDAN launches 'GROW Nigerian' strategy to boost MSME sector

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) has unveiled its new "GROW Nigerian" strategy aimed at creating jobs and boosting productivity in the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector.

Speaking in Abuja on Tuesday during an engagement with the Commerce and Industry Correspondents Association of Nigeria, SMEDAN Director-General Charles Odii said the strategy—standing for Guidance, Resources, Opportunities, and Workforce Support—has already yielded impressive results.

According to SMEDAN's first-quarter report, the agency created over 90,000 jobs and supported more than 116,000 entrepreneurs with training, access to markets, funding, and work tools between January and March 2025.

Odii said the GROW framework equips businesses with expert mentorship, operational resources, access to markets,

and workforce development tools. "It's a comprehensive plan designed to help SMEs overcome common obstacles and thrive," he explained.

Under the strategy, SMEDAN will focus on eight key sectors: agriculture value chain, fashion and textiles, tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, education, digital economy, innovation, and new technology adoption.

Odii acknowledged persistent challenges confronting MSMEs, including difficulty accessing finance, high operating costs, regulatory hurdles, infrastructure gaps, and limited exposure to technology and innovation.

He emphasised that with proper support from stakeholders, Nigerian SMEs could become powerful engines of job creation and economic transformation.

"Through collaboration with partners, we will build a sustainable ecosystem where small businesses grow, create jobs, and improve livelihoods," he concluded.



ABDUCTED WAEC STUDENTS:

Rivers' women protesting from Bille Kingdom in Degema LGA storm Government House, Port Harcourt, demanding release of eight abducted WAEC students by pirates. yesterday.

Rivers women protest abduction of 8 WAEC candidates

Women from the Bille community in Degema Local Government Area, Rivers State, have marched on the streets of Port Harcourt to demand the release of eight students abducted by suspected pirates while travelling by boat to sit for the ongoing West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC).

The students were among 13 passengers kidnapped on May 6, 2025 when three boats carrying goods and commuters were hijacked along the Port Harcourt-Bille waterways. In response, the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria, through its Port Harcourt Commercial District Chairman, Israel Pep-

ple, announced a suspension of transport activities to pressure the government into improving security on the waterways.

The protesting women, operating under the umbrella of Concerned People of Bille Kingdom, wore black attire and carried placards with messages such as, "Government save us from sea pirates,"

"Our children going to write WAEC are with the pirates in the bush," and "Bille people are suffering in the hands of pirates."

The march began at the State Police Headquarters on Moscow Road and concluded at the Government House on Azikiwe Road.

Protesters claimed the pi-

rates were heavily armed, with reports of rape and theft of passengers' belongings.

A visibly distressed elderly woman collapsed in front of Government House, crying for help in rescuing her abducted son.

Blessing Alale, one of the protesters, recounted how her mother and seven others had earlier been kidnapped along the same route and only released after paying N30 million and providing other items.

She lamented that the students had already missed several WAEC papers, asking why children on their way to school would be targeted.

Janet Adebayo, a protest leader, submitted a formal ap-

peal to government representatives, detailing the incident and its impact on the community.

She called for urgent intervention from the Nigerian Police, Army, and Navy to ensure the victims' safe release and curb further attacks.

Camp Commandant O.I. Gabriel of the Rivers State Government House commended the women for their peaceful protest and assured them that the matter would be addressed urgently.

Meanwhile, police spokesperson Grace Iringe-Koko confirmed that investigations were ongoing and efforts had been intensified to rescue the abductees and bring the perpetrators to justice.

UBEC to introduce new template for education funds disbursement

The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) has announced plans to introduce a new disbursement template for counterpart funding in basic education delivery across Nigeria.

Speaking during an interactive workshop with State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) in Abuja on Tuesday, UBEC Executive Secretary Aisha Garba said the move

was part of efforts to align the Commission's operations with the four strategic pillars of the Federal Government's new basic education plan.

These pillars include expanding access to education for underserved and rural communities; enhancing the quality of teaching and learning; strengthening accountability in fund utilisation; and optimising institutional mon-

itoring for efficient service delivery.

Garba explained that the New Hope Education Project is a performance-based initiative designed to reward states that effectively apply education resources towards these goals.

As such, new templates are being developed to help SUBEBs prepare work plans aligned with these objectives and qualify for UBE interven-

tion funding.

In his welcome address, UBEC Deputy Executive Secretary (General Services), Tunde Ajibulu, stressed the importance of the workshop, noting that the realignment of education delivery systems necessitated new planning tools.

He urged participants to contribute meaningfully to the development of practical and effective templates.

Boko Haram: Senate task military to deploy troops to Borno, Yobe

The Senate on Tuesday asked the military to urgently redeploy personnel and advanced equipment to Borno and Yobe states, following a resurgence of attacks by Boko Haram terrorists in the area.

The resolution followed renewed insurgent attacks in the North-East region, including the killing of over a dozen soldiers in Marte town of the Monguno Local Government Area on Monday, May 12, and a subsequent assault early Tuesday on Gajiram, the headquarters of the Nganzai Local Government Area.

In a motion raised by the Senate Chief Whip, Tahir Munguno, lawmakers noted that while two-thirds of the local government areas in Borno were once under Boko Haram control, collaborative efforts between the Nigerian military and civilian joint task force had successfully reclaimed their territories.

The restored peace, however, had led to a relocation of the tactical command to the North-West, where the military is combating kidnapping and banditry.

Expressing concern over the militants' evolving tactics, Munguno highlighted the use of modern technologies by the group, including drones, and an increase in the deployment of improvised explosive devices, which have led to high civilian and military casualties, disrupt-

ing transportation networks.

The Senate subsequently resolved to urge the military high command to swiftly redeploy sufficient troops to the North-East and ensure they are adequately equipped with modern technology to effectively combat the renewed threat, as well as mandate the committees on the army and air force to monitor and ensure compliance with this directive.

The Borno State Governor, Professor Babagana Zulum, had condemned the recent spate of attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists in various parts of the state.

Recently, the insurgents launched attacks on the Maiduguri-Damboia Road, Marte, Chibok, Gwoza, Kala Balge, among other communities.

Governor Zulum also expressed his heartfelt sympathy to the families of all victims, including those affected by the tragic explosion of an improvised explosive device (IED) along the Maiduguri-Damboia Road.

The explosion, which occurred on May 12, claimed the lives of two staff members of the Damboia Local Education Authority who were on their way to Maiduguri to sit for the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) examination.

In a statement by his spokesperson, Dauda Iliya, the Bor-

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NEWS

Gov Okpebholo urges arrest, prosecution of NBM President over alleged forgery

The Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has called for the immediate arrest and prosecution of Olorogun Ese Kakor, the President of the Neo Black Movement (NBM) of Africa, in connection with the alleged forgery of official state government documents.

Governor Okpebholo has petitioned both the Inspec-

tor-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, and the Director General of the Department of State Services (DSS), Oluwatosin Ajayi, urging them to take swift action.

In the petition, the Governor accused Kakor of forging documents that falsely claimed to authorise him to provide support to schools within the Edo South Senatorial District.

Okpebholo condemned the act as not only fraudulent but also a direct attack on the integrity of the state's administrative processes.

The Governor labelled the alleged forgery as criminal and deceitful, stating that it was executed in collaboration with certain low-level civil servants

within the state bureaucracy.

These civil servants have already been identified and arrested, and a police investigation is currently underway to assess their involvement and determine the extent of their culpability.

Governor Okpebholo reaffirmed his commitment to en-

sure that all those implicated in the scandal will face prosecution in accordance with the law.

He also addressed concerns regarding the Neo Black Movement's activities in the state, stating that the land title on which the NBM headquarters was established in Edo

has been revoked due to the group's alleged involvement in violent crimes and unlawful actions within the region.

The Governor called on both the Nigeria Police Force and the DSS to intensify efforts against criminal organisations and ensure that all responsible parties are brought to justice.

Our job not done yet,' Obasanjo tells Nigerian leaders

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has declared that the mission of Nigeria's leaders remains incomplete, urging continued national service and sacrifice from statesmen and political figures to steer the country towards its full potential.

Speaking in Abuja during the launch of "Being True to Myself," the autobiography of former Jigawa State Governor Sule Lamido, Obasanjo said, "Nigeria that we are working

for, we haven't gotten there. And I believe it is the responsibility of each of us to ensure that we get there. Our job is not finished until we are finished."

Obasanjo, who served as Nigeria's Head of State and later civilian president, called on Lamido and other elder statesmen not to retreat from public life, insisting that their experience and commitment are still needed in navigating Nigeria's path to stability and development.

Oando records 4 oil spills, repairs pipeline in Bayelsa

Oando Plc, the indigenous firm that acquired Nigeria Agip Oil Company, says it has recorded four operational oil spills from October 2024 to date.

The company also confirmed the conclusion of repair works on oil spill incidents along the NNPC Exploration and Production Ltd/Oando pipeline in Bayelsa State.

The oil firm disclosed this in a statement made available to the News Agency of Nigeria by Oando's Spokesperson, Mrs Alero Balogun, General Manager, Human Resources & Business Support, Oando Group, on Tuesday.

The statement is sequel to a May 3 oil spill incident reported around Oando's Ogboinbiri flow station in Southern Ijaw LGA swamps, which feeds crude to the oil firm's export terminal at Brass in Bayelsa.

Balogun said the company had concluded repair works on the ruptured pipelines, as well as ongoing replacement sections of the pipeline that were dilapidated

"Oando Plc announces the successful completion of repairs to its pipeline following oil spill incidents along the NEPL/Oando pipeline, which affected the Ogboinbiri Community in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State.

"Between October 2024 to date, four operational spills occurred. Upon identification of each incident, we swiftly activated emergency response protocols in line with company policy, including the immedi-

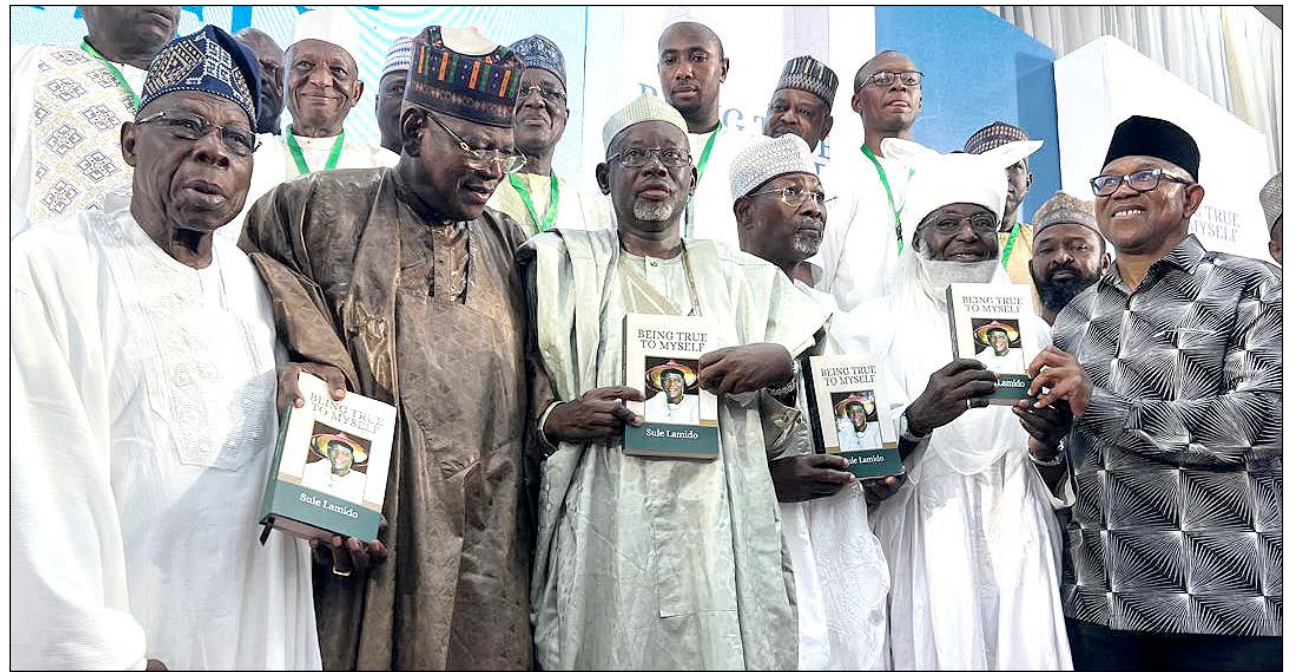
ate shut-in of the affected wells and cessation of crude oil delivery through the pipeline.

"Simultaneously, we deployed containment materials to prevent further spread of the oil and promptly initiated recovery efforts.

"In accordance with regulatory requirements Joint Investigation Visits were conducted with all relevant stakeholders, including representatives from Government regulatory agencies and the Ogboinbiri community.

"We are pleased to report that the repairs of the affected sections of the pipeline have been completed. To further mitigate the risk of future incidents, we are implementing a sectional replacement of the pipeline.

"Oando remains fully committed to its host communities and is working diligently to ensure that its operations support the long-term environmental sustainability of the region," Balogun said.



PUBLIC PRESENTATION:

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo (left); former Jigawa State Governor, Sule Lamido (2nd left); former Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof Atahiru Jega (3rd right); Presidential candidate of Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 General Elections, Mr Peter Obi, and other distinguished Nigerians, during the public presentation of the autobiography of Sule Lamido, titled 'Being True to Myself', at the NAF Conference Centre, in Abuja.

Wellspring University eases fee burden, introduces work-study programme

● As VC cautions new students on social media misuse

EDWARD OSEGHE

Wellspring University, Benin City, has rolled out flexible school fee payment options to cushion the impact of Nigeria's harsh economic climate on students and their families.

The Vice Chancellor, Professor Isaac Rotimi Ajayi, announced that students facing financial hardship can now pay their fees in up to four instalments, provided they submit formal requests subject to institutional approval.

The university, which was recently ranked third among second-generation private universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC), is also set to launch a work-study programme.

The initiative will provide part-time job opportunities within the university, allowing students—especially those from low-income backgrounds—to earn stipends to support their education.

This comes as reports indicate that many students are dropping out of universities due to financial constraints.

Speaking at the matriculation ceremony for the institution's 16th cohort of undergraduates, Professor Ajayi said that the payment relief and work-study plan aim to prevent students from dropping out due to financial hardships.

He stressed that students who are serious about learning should not be denied access to education because of poverty.

Addressing the newly admitted students, the VC described them as privileged, noting that only about 600,000 of the 1.9 million candidates who sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) last year secured admission into Nigerian universities.

He urged them to take full advantage of the opportunity, pursue their studies diligently, maintain discipline, and avoid any form of misconduct such as examination malpractice, plagiarism, drug abuse, fighting, or indecent dressing.

Professor Ajayi also gave a strong warning on the dangers of irresponsible social media use.

While encouraging students to embrace technology for learning, networking, and research, he urged caution, noting that social media platforms like Facebook,

X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok could serve as both tools of growth and sources of distraction and misinformation.

He reminded students of the permanence of online content, warning that careless posts or photos could affect their future prospects.

"Employers, scholarship boards, and organisations now examine your digital footprints before making decisions. What you posted today could hurt your chances tomorrow," he said.

Ajayi also urged students to be mindful of how they represent themselves online, as their digital actions could impact their reputation and future opportunities.

The Vice Chancellor further called on government at all levels to intensify investment in education. He advocated for improved infrastructure, better funding, enhanced staff welfare, and closer collaboration between universities and industries to equip students with practical skills for national development.

"Education is not just a sector," he said. "It is the foundation of every other form of progress. We must protect and strengthen it for future generations."

Boko Haram: Senate task military to deploy...

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no governor reaffirmed the state government's unwavering commitment to working closely with the Federal Government, military, and other security agencies to contain the security challenges.

He extended his thoughts and prayers to the families of the fallen troops, innocent civilians, and all citizens of Borno State during this difficult period.

Governor Zulum stated, "These acts of terror are deeply condemnable. The recent tragic loss of our education workers, gallant troops, and innocent civilians is a painful reminder of the challenges we continue to face.

"I am more determined than ever to support the military, security agencies, and our volunteer forces in the fight to end terrorism and insurgency in our state."

The governor recalled his

recent visit to Gwoza, where he engaged with military personnel and the Izge community, as part of ongoing efforts to reinforce resilience and ensure the protection of lives and property.

"The recent surge in attacks will not deter our resolve to tackle the scourge of the 16-year-long insurgency. I urge the people of Borno to remain resilient and prayerful. This is a partial eclipse — and we shall overcome it, Insha Allah," he added.

Foreign

NEWS

US-Israeli hostage reunites with family after being freed by Hamas

Israeli-American hostage Edan Alexander has been reunited with his family in Israel after being held captive by Hamas in Gaza for 19 months.

The 21-year-old had been serving in the Israeli army on the border of Gaza when he was captured by Hamas militants on 7 October 2023.

On Monday, Israel paused its military operations in Gaza for a few hours to facilitate the transfer. A senior Hamas official told the BBC the release was intended as a goodwill gesture and as part of efforts to reach a new ceasefire deal ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit to the Middle East on Tuesday.

Mr Alexander is thought to be the last US citizen held by Hamas who was still alive.

President Trump offered "congratulations" to his family on his release.

Television pictures show Edan Alexander smiling as he embraces his parents and siblings at an Israeli military base.

In a statement, his family thanked the US president but also urged the Israeli government and negotiators to continue working to free the 58 remaining hostages.

Mr Alexander is the first hostage to be freed by Hamas since Israel restarted its military offensive on 18 March, after a two-month ceasefire came to an end.

On Monday, he was seen with masked Hamas fighters as they handed him over to Red Cross workers in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

He was then transferred to Israeli authorities in Gaza before being reunited with his family in southern Israel. The Israeli military said it provided a "safe corridor" for Mr Alexander's release.

A video shared on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's X account showed Yael Alexander speaking to her son over the phone.

"You are strong. You are protected. You are home," she said in the video.

Netanyahu called Mr Alexander's return a "very moving moment" - and thanked Trump for his support.

The release had been made possible because of military pressure on Hamas and "the political pressure exerted by President Trump", Netanyahu said.

He added that Israel intended to continue with plans to intensify its military actions in Gaza and that there would be no ceasefire.

Hamas had earlier said Mr Alexander's release was intended to facilitate a deal for the entry of humanitarian aid into the enclave.

Israel has blocked the entry of all food, medication and other humanitarian supplies into Gaza for 70 days, which aid agencies say amounts to a policy of starvation and could be a war crime, and renewed its aerial bombardment and other military operations there in mid-March.

Hamas has previously said it will only agree to a deal that includes the end of the war. This has been repeatedly rejected by Netanyahu.



GAZA:
Gaza, the ruins of war born out of extremism

Israel denying food to Gaza is 'weapon of war', UN Palestinian refugee agency head says

How do you measure misery? For journalists the usual way is to see it, to feel it, to smell it.

Beleaguered Palestinian colleagues in Gaza are doing that, still doing invaluable reporting at great risk to themselves. More than 200 have been killed doing their jobs.

Israel does not allow international journalists into Gaza.

Denied the chance of eyewitness reporting - one of the best tools of the job - we can study, from a distance, the assessments of aid organisations operating in Gaza.

Pascal Hundt, deputy director of operations at the International Committee of the Red Cross said last week that civilians in Gaza faced "an overwhelming daily struggle to survive the dangers of hostilities, cope with relentless displacement, and endure the consequences of being deprived of urgent humanitarian assistance."

He added: "This situation must not—and cannot—be allowed to escalate further."

But it might, if Israel con-

tinues the plunge deeper into war that resumed on 18 March when it broke a two-month ceasefire with a massive series of air strikes.

Israel had already sealed the gates of Gaza. Since the beginning of March, it has blocked all shipments of humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies.

The return to war ended any chance of moving on to the ceasefire's proposed second phase, which Israel and Hamas had agreed would end with the release of all the remaining hostages in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

That was unacceptable to the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the ultra-nationalist religious extremists who keep him in power.

They want Gaza's Palestinians to be replaced by Jewish settlers. They threatened to topple Netanyahu's government if he did not go back to war, and the end of Netanyahu's political career would bring the day of reckoning for his part in Israel's failure to prevent the deadly Hamas attacks on 7 October

2023. It might also force a conclusion in his long trial on corruption charges.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is now promising a new "intense" offensive into Gaza in the days after President Donald Trump finishes his swing through the wealthy Arab oil monarchies in the Gulf later this week.

The offensive includes a plan to displace massive numbers of Palestinian civilians on top of waves of artillery, air strikes and death. "To displace" is a cold verb. It means families having only handfuls of minutes to flee for their lives, from an area that might be hit immediately to one that might be hit later. Hundreds of thousands have done so repeatedly since the war began.

Gaza was one of the most overcrowded places on earth before the war. Israel's plan is to force as many Gazans as possible into a tiny area in the south, near the ruins of the town of Rafah, which has been almost entirely destroyed.

Before that happens, the UN humanitarian office estimates that 70% of Gaza is already

effectively off limits to Palestinians. Israel's plan is to leave them in an even smaller area. The UN and leading aid groups reject Israeli claims that Hamas steals and controls food that comes into Gaza. They have refused to cooperate with a scheme proposed by Israel and the US that would use private security firms, protected by Israeli troops, to distribute basic rations.

Far from Gaza, in London, I talked to Philippe Lazzarini, the commissioner-general of Unrwa, the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees. He told me that he was running out of words "to describe the misery and the tragedy affecting the people in Gaza. They have been now more than two months without any aid".

"Starvation is spreading, people are exhausted, people are hungry... we can expect that in the coming weeks if no aid is coming in, that people will not die because of the bombardment, but they will die because of the lack of food. This is the weaponisation of humanitarian aid."

Menendez brothers' long-awaited resentencing hearing to begin

A long-awaited resentencing hearing on Tuesday is set to determine whether two brothers who killed their wealthy parents in their Beverly Hills mansion could be freed from prison after three decades.

After months of delays, a judge will begin hearing two days of arguments both for and against Erik and Lyle Menendez's bid to receive a lesser sentence - which could ultimately lead to their paroled release.

Prosecutors have argued the brothers meticulously planned the 1989 killings to access their parents' fortune, still have not taken accountability and should not be released. The brothers have said they acted out of self-defence after years of abuse.

The notorious case, which has prompted books, documentaries and dramas, still divides America.

During the two-day hearing, will not be televised or streamed, the judge is expected to look at evidence, hear testimony from witnesses and ultimately determine whether the brothers, who were sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole, should receive a lesser sentence.

It is expected to include testimony from a variety of people, including members of the Menendez family and potentially those involved with the original case.

Erik and Lyle could even take the stand, although such a move would open them up to ques-

tioning from prosecutors who oppose their release. The BBC has asked whether they will testify or who else might be called to testify.

On an episode of his podcast, their lawyer Mark Geragos said he had not decided whether to call them to the stand.

"I know right now that I'm going to put family members on the stand," Mr Geragos said. "I know right now, I'll put correctional officers on the stand. I know right now I may put behavioural scientists on the stand."

The district attorney's office has not said who it plans to call to testify.

The hearing will not be a re-trial and the brothers' guilt will not be questioned.

Instead, much of the focus is likely to be on what they have done during their 30 years in prison and whether they have been rehabilitated.

During their trials, prosecutors painted them as entitled and eager to access their parents' \$14m (£10.7m) fortune.

They argued that the duo methodically planned the killings, buying shotguns and opening fire on their parents 13 times as the couple watched TV - before going gambling, to parties and on shopping sprees.

The brothers ultimately admitted to the killings, but argued they acted out of self-defence after years of emotional, physical and sexual abuse by their father Jose, a high-powered film and record label executive.

Zambia warns diplomats after US reveals 'systematic' aid theft

Zambia's foreign minister has warned diplomats against interfering in the country's affairs, days after the US ambassador raised concerns about the "systematic theft" of drugs donated to the southern African state.

Mulambo Haimbe said there was an "increasing tendency" by envoys to ignore diplomatic channels, and this could undermine the "spirit of mutual respect".

He did not name anyone, but his comments were seen as being directed at the US ambassador to Lusaka, Michael Gonzales.

Last week, Gonzales called a press conference to announce that the US was cutting \$50m (£37m) of health aid to Zambia because of the theft of life-saving medications that the US had provided for patients.

He added that he had decided to go public after holding more than 30 fruitless meetings with senior Zambian officials.

In his response, Haimbe said that addressing the government through the media amounted to interference and was in breach of diplomatic conventions.

"We remain open to addressing any matters of concern through appropriate diplomatic

channels," the minister added.

Last week, the US embassy said it had presented its findings of the alleged corruption to Zambian officials in April last year, and had offered help to stop further theft and to bring the culprits to justice.

However, no action was taken by the Zambian authorities, it added.

On Monday, Zambia's Home Affairs Minister Jacob Mwiimbu said that a forensic audit on the alleged theft had been completed and handed over to security agencies for further action.

About 75 people have been arrested in a countrywide crackdown that saw more than 400 health facilities raided over the alleged scam, he said.

"There will be no sacred cows in this pursuit," Mwiimbu added.

Gonzales said that an inspection carried out by US officials at more than 2,000 pharmacies last year had found that most were selling drugs and medical supplies donated by the US.

Zambia's Health Minister Elijah Muchima earlier said the problem of theft predated the current government, which took office in 2021.

NEWS

Foreign

Gérard Depardieu found guilty in sexual assault trial

French film star Gérard Depardieu has been found guilty of sexually assaulting two women on a film set at a trial in Paris and given a suspended jail term of 18 months.

The 76-year-old actor was accused by the two women of groping them during work on a film in 2021. Depardieu had denied the allegations against him and his lawyer said he would appeal.

The court in Paris found that one of the women, a set dresser named Amélie, had given consistent evidence while the actor's

accounts had changed over time.

She told reporters afterwards she was "very moved" and satisfied with the verdict, which for her was "a victory, a major step forward".

Depardieu was also convicted of assaulting an assistant director called Sarah, which was not her real name.

The actor was not in court to hear the verdict but was instead working on a film set in the Azores.

Carine Durrieu-Diebolt, the lawyer acting for the two wom-

en, said she hoped the verdict marked the end of impunity for an artist in the film industry.

"It's a victory for two women on a film set but it's a victory for all the women behind this case and I'm thinking of all of Depardieu's other victims," she told reporters.

The lawyer also noted the case had come to an end hours before the Cannes film festival was due to start.

The judge said there was no reason to doubt the word of the two women victims, who had told the court how Depardieu had touched them on intimate parts of the body, using lewd language.

He placed Depardieu on a list of sex offenders and ordered him to pay compensation of €1,000

(£840) each to Amélie and Sarah for "secondary victimisation", a recent innovation covering the additional suffering for the women from the trial itself.

Depardieu's lawyer Jérémie Assous had accused the women of lying during their evidence.

The assaults took place in September 2021 when Depardieu was making a film called *Les Volets Verts* (The Green Shutters) about an ageing actor coming to terms with his declining powers.

This was Depardieu's first trial on sexual assault charges. Several other women have made similar allegations in the media, and an alleged rape case could come to trial in the future.

After the trial, the actor was invited to join his close friend and fellow actor Fanny Ardant

for a film-shoot in the Azores.

At the end of the trial in Paris in late March, prosecutor Laurent Guy said: "It's perfectly possible to be an excellent actor and a great father - and still commit a crime."

"You are not here to pass judgment on French cinema. You are here to judge Gérard Depardieu, just as you would any other citizen."

Claude Vincent, representing one of the two women plaintiffs, described Depardieu as a "misogynist" and a "case-study in sexism".

Depardieu's lawyer had demanded an acquittal and called the plaintiffs' team "more militants than lawyers".

"They cannot bear that there should even be a defence. They think any defence is a supplementary assault," he told the court.

The first plaintiff - 54-year-old set decorator Amélie - told the court that after a minor argument with Depardieu, he caught her between his legs and held her by the hips.

The second woman - a 34-year-old assistant film director - said the actor had touched her buttocks and breasts through her clothes on three separate occasions. She chose to maintain her anonymity and was not in court to hear the verdict.

Depardieu denied the allegations, saying only that he might have touched the women accidentally or to keep his balance.

At the end of the hearings, Depardieu said: "My name has been dragged through the mud by lies and insults."

These five measures remain, despite the India-Pakistan ceasefire

Days after India and Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire, questions remain over what lies ahead for the two South Asian neighbours.

Early on 7 May, India launched air strikes into Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir in response to a deadly militant attack on tourists in India-administered Kashmir (Islamabad has denied involvement in the attack).

What followed were four days of intense shelling and aerial incursions between the two nuclear-armed countries, until the surprise ceasefire announcement on Saturday.

But - even accounting for the usually tense relationship between India and Pakistan - things are nowhere close to normal yet.

The fragile ceasefire, now in its fourth day, is still holding as life slowly begins to return to normal in towns along the de facto border between India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, days before launching the military operation, India had announced a flurry of diplomatic meas-

ures against Pakistan, including suspending a key water-sharing treaty, halting most visas and stopping all trade.

In response, Islamabad announced its own set of tit-for-tat actions, including the suspension of visas for Indians, a trade ban and the closure of its airspace to Indian flights.

None of these punitive measures have been reversed by both countries so far. Here's where things currently stand between the two neighbours in terms of the measures announced since the Pahalgam attack:

Suspension of Indus Waters Treaty

On Monday, in his first public comments on the strike, India Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "India's stand is absolutely clear - terror and talks cannot go hand in hand."

"Water and blood cannot flow together," he added.

His comments align with media reports citing sources that say that the key water-sharing treaty between India and Pakistan, known as the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), remains suspended.

Toxic algae kills more than 200 marine species in Australia

More than 200 marine species off the coast of South Australia (SA) have been killed by a weeks-long toxic algae explosion, in what conservationists have described as "a horror movie for fish".

The algal bloom - a rapid increase in the population of algae in water systems - has been spreading since March, growing to about 4,500 sq km (3,400 sq miles), or roughly the size of nearby Kangaroo Island.

"It's an unprecedented event, because the bloom has continued to build and build," said Vanessa Pirotta, a wildlife scientist.

Other scientists say the algae produces poisons which "act like a toxic blanket that suffocates" a wide range of marine life, including fish, rays and sharks.

Brad Martin, SA project manager for OzFish, a non-profit organisation that protects fishing habitats, said that while algal blooms are not uncommon, the "massive" scale of the current

event has had a dramatic impact on marine life.

Toxins produced by the algae can cause "gill and tissue damage" by attacking the red blood cells, Mr Martin told the BBC.

The large density of the bloom also means that oxygen is being taken out of the water, "so we know that the fish are suffocating".

"It is like a horror movie for fish," he said.

The event has been widely documented by people sending in pictures of dead wildlife washed up on beaches.

The effect on sharks and rays has been particularly graphic, with large numbers washing up on beaches "bright red", showing indications of haemorrhaging.

A three-metre great white shark was among those found dead in recent weeks.

Among the more than 200 species that have been killed, which range from the smallest of baby fish to great whites, some are more vulnerable than others.



The brothers' trial in 1993 was one of the first high-profile murder cases to be shown live on television

Germany arrests self-declared 'king' and bans his extremist group

A self-declared "king" of Germany and three of his senior "subjects" have been arrested and their group banned for attempting to overthrow the state.

Peter Fitzek, 59, was among those arrested in morning raids across seven states on Tuesday, which involved about 800 security personnel.

The government banned their group, the Reichsbürger, or "citizens of the Reich", which seeks to establish the Königreich Deutschland, or "Kingdom of Germany".

Alexander Dobrindt, Germany's interior minister, accused the group of attempting to "undermine the rule of law" by creating an alternative state and spreading "antisemitic conspiracy narratives to back up their supposed claim to authority".

His ministry announced the dissolution of the group, and accused it of financing itself through "economic criminal structures".

Fitzek, a former chef and karate instructor, calls himself "king" and identified himself to judges as "Peter the First" in a previous court case.

He had himself crowned in 2012 while dressed in ermine robes and brandishing a medieval sword. Since then he has been buying land and property across Germany.

Reichsbürgers have their own currency, flag and ID cards, and want to set up separate banking and health systems.

Fitzek claims to have thousands of followers - or "subjects". In an interview with the BBC in 2022 he denied having any violent intentions, but also described the German state as "destructive and sick".

"I have no interest in being part of this fascist and satanic system," he told the BBC's Jenny Hill, when she visited his "kingdom" in eastern Germany.

Fitzek has repeatedly clashed with the authorities and refused to abide by German laws, often

in what appears to be in a publicity-seeking manner.

He has previously been jailed for repeatedly driving without a licence, following a decision to hand his back in a symbolic rejection of the law. At the end of one trial session, Fitzek was seen getting into his car in front of the court and driving off.

Fitzek is one of around 25,000 Reichsbürger in Germany. Numbers have been growing over the last few years.

Many are right-wing extremists who peddle racist and antisemitic conspiracy theories. They refuse to recognise the authority of security forces and many possess illegal arms, which has led to shoot-outs with police. Officials say that around 2,500 are potentially violent and that 1,350 are classed as right-wing extremists.

In 2022 dozens of people were arrested, many of them Reichsbürger, for plotting to overthrow the German government in Berlin. They were accused of planning a violent coup, which

included kidnapping the health minister, to create "civil war conditions" to bring down German democracy.

In the past, Reichsbürger were often dismissed as eccentric cranks because of their outlandish ideas.

But as the far right has grown in strength politically in Germany over the last decade, officials now see them as a serious threat.

The federal prosecutor's office in Karlsruhe said Fitzek was arrested along with three other suspected ringleaders of the group, which it classified as a criminal organisation.

As the "so-called supreme sovereign", Fitzek had "control and decision-making power in all key areas", the office said.

"The 'Kingdom of Germany' considers itself a sovereign state within the meaning of international law and strives to extend its claimed 'national territory' to the borders of the German Empire of 1871," it added in a statement.

Feature

Hope returns to 2nd West Circular road as EdoFEWMA confronts 16 years of flooding

WINIFRED INARUMEN

After more than a decade of relentless flooding, residents of 2nd West Circular Road in Benin City, Edo State, are beginning to see signs of relief, following a major desilting operation launched by the Edo State Government.

The area, which comprises largely low-lying terrain, has suffered repeated flooding for the past sixteen years, with homes inundated during each rainy season, roads rendered impassable, and many residents forced to abandon their properties. But for the first time in years, that tide appears to be turning.

The ongoing operation is being carried out by the Edo State Flood, Erosion and Watershed Management Agency (EdoFEWMA), as part of a broader state-wide intervention to tackle long-standing environmental issues. The work forms a key component of Governor Monday Okpebholo's SHINE five-point development agenda, which includes efforts to rehabilitate public infrastructure and address flood risks.

The drainage project covers the stretch of 2nd West Circular Road between Oliha Junction and Textile Mile Road Junction. It is the most comprehensive intervention the area has seen in nearly two decades. EdoFEWMA teams are currently clearing blocked drains, removing accumulated silt, and restoring the natural flow of water in a bid to reduce the severity of flooding ahead of the current rainy season.



OKPEBHOLO

Hon. Ahmed Momoh, CEO of EdoFEWMA, said the initiative is aimed not just at short-term relief, but at restoring the community's long-term resilience.

"Our objective goes beyond opening up drainages," he said. "This is about

restoring lives, dignity, and hope. We're working to significantly lower the risk of flooding this season while laying a sustainable foundation for future flood control across Edo State."

The impact of the operation has already been noticed by residents,

"Flood prevention is not the government's responsibility alone," Momoh said. "It requires a collective effort. Everyone has a role to play." As the rainy season begins, expectations are high that the intervention will bring not just drier streets, but a measure of renewed confidence among residents who have spent years under water

many of whom had grown accustomed to years of neglect. Mr Okoro Benson, a long-time resident and Secretary of the Community Association, expressed optimism that the intervention could mark a turning point.

"We are hopeful that those who abandoned their properties will

return," he said. "We are very, very happy, and we thank God the Governor has finally come to our rescue."

Another resident, Mr Isaac Osaigbovo, recalled the toll past flooding had taken. "In previous years, the water would fall over my fence nearly every time it rained—it was that bad," he said. "We've cried for help for so long, and now it has finally come. This is a wise and commendable step by the government."

While work continues on 2nd West Circular Road, similar efforts are underway in other flood-prone areas across the state, underscoring a broader commitment by the Okpebholo administration to environmental renewal and disaster prevention.

The desilting project has been widely welcomed as a sign that the state government is taking seriously the challenge of flooding and infrastructure decay. Officials, however, are urging residents not to return to the risky practice of building on low-lying areas, warning that such developments remain highly vulnerable to future flooding.

EdoFEWMA has also called on the public to assist in maintaining clean and functional drainage systems by keeping their environments free of waste.

"Flood prevention is not the government's responsibility alone," Momoh said. "It requires a collective effort. Everyone has a role to play."

As the rainy season begins, expectations are high that the intervention will bring not just drier streets, but a measure of renewed confidence among residents who have spent years under water.

Okpebholo's N75,000 minimum wage implementation: A redefining moment for Edo NLC

ERHARUYI A. JOE

Labour unions across the world are a force to be reckoned with. Their influence lies in the power they wield through collective solidarity, primarily in defence of their members' interests and welfare.

In Africa—and particularly in Nigeria—labour activism has been shaped by a long history of controversy, including allegations of behind-the-scenes deals on fuel price hikes, minimum wage increments, and other issues concerning the general welfare of citizens. In recent times, threats of protests by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) have increasingly become objects of ridicule, especially on social media. Even more troubling is the accuracy with which critics have predicted the eventual withdrawal of these so-called threats of industrial action.

Consider a few examples: the NLC threatened nationwide strikes over electricity tariff hikes, increased telecommunications charges, pay-TV subscriptions, and multiple bank deductions disguised as taxes and commissions. Yet,

these threats were repeatedly shelved without any substantial concessions from the government or concerned institutions. Prices of essential goods have continued to rise uncontrollably, with no corresponding increase in workers' income or broader public relief.

In Edo State, the relationship between the state government and the NLC has largely been cordial. Most industrial actions in the state have simply followed directives from the national NLC headquarters. While such a cordial relationship is beneficial and contributes to overall stability and development, it must not come at the cost of the core interests of public servants—who lack the capacity to negotiate independently.

Persistent issues such as wage disparities and un-harmonised career progression remain major concerns. Workers across the state face similar economic pressures: they shop in the same markets, pay comparable rents, cover transportation and utility costs, and shoulder family responsibilities. However, different salary structures across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) re-

sult in glaring inequalities. While some receive wardrobe or hazard allowances, others equally deserving do not. For some, career progression depends entirely on the governor's discretion and the constitution of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), which is also at the governor's mercy.

When Senator Monday Okpebholo assumed office as Governor of Edo State, there was scepticism among workers regarding the previous administration's decision to raise the minimum wage from N40,000 to N70,000. Many considered it a political gesture rather than a genuine wage adjustment, as its implementation allegedly lacked consistency across all ranks—despite being publicly celebrated, even by the Edo NLC leadership.

However, on 1st May 2025, during the annual Workers' Day celebration, Governor Okpebholo announced a further increase in the state minimum wage to N75,000. In this digital age, where every public statement is archived and easily retrieved, the NLC leadership must not only acknowledge the governor's gesture but also demand

its proper implementation across all levels—from Salary Grade Level (SGL) 01, step 01 to SGL 17, step 09.

The NLC should propose a revised salary structure for MDAs, including equitable access to allowances such as wardrobe and hazard pay. Furthermore, the union must push for a standardised career progression model to prevent delays that often discourage productivity. Governments that fail to prioritise public servants' welfare rarely enjoy sustained support, as these workers are the face of government in everyday interactions with the people.

Ensuring the welfare of public servants benefits both the government and the state. It fosters mutual trust, encourages genuine participation in governance, and boosts morale. The recent constitution of the Civil Service Commission by Governor Okpebholo signals a promising shift toward positive, welfare-driven policy.

Edo State has come a long way and should no longer be defined by systemic inequalities. The administration of Chief Lucky Nosakhare Igbinedion (1999–2007) remains notable for har-

monising the annual incremental step and Leave Transport Grant (LTG) for public workers. Under that system, every worker automatically advanced one step annually, and LTG was paid in the month of their employment anniversary. If such a milestone was achieved nearly 35 years ago, it raises the question: why aren't there more institutionalised policies protecting public servants today?

It is unfair to place the blame solely on government, which faces pressure from all quarters. The NLC leadership must commit to research and comparative analysis with other sub-national entities to determine evolving trends and propose viable solutions to safeguard the continued advancement of their members.

I hold my comrades in the NLC executive in the highest regard, as they are entrusted with our collective representation. If this piece contributes, even modestly, to shaping a defining moment for labour in Edo State, then it has served its purpose.

He Soweto! He Africa! Solidarity forever

Sports

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

NWFL Super Six: Edo Queens beat Naija Ratels 2-0 to secure first win • *Hon. Enabulele hails team*

KEHINDE OSAGIIDE

Defending champions Edo Queens Football Club, Tuesday defeated Naija Ratels 2-0 to record their first victory in the ongoing NWFL Super Six tournament in Ikenne, Ogun state.

Goal poacher Emem Essien's master class brace gave Edo Queens a deserved maximum

points and put them back in the Super six tournament

Emem Essien, who has grown into a reliable source of goals for the Benin Queens in the attack scored the first goal in the 26th minute of action and netted the second in the 37th minute to announce their presence in Ikenne.

The 2-0 triumph over Naija Ratels is Edo Queens' first

victory and their third game of the Super six championship campaign.

Edo Queens who lost their first match 1-0 to the hosts, Remo Stars Ladies on Saturday, drew 1-1 with Rivers Angels in their second game on Monday afternoon, and went on to beat Naija Ratels 2-0 in the third match of the Campaign.

The Benin-based ladies will

be going back to prepare better ahead of the games against Bayelsa Queens and Nasarawa Amazons who are their next opponents respectively.

Edo Queens' win over Naija Ratels, no doubt will serve as a morale booster for the players ahead of the titanic clashes against Bayelsa Queens and Nasarawa Amazons on Thursday May, 15th and Friday 16th

respectively.

In other matches played today, Nasarawa Amazons beat Rivers Angels 2-1 just as Bayelsa Queens spunk Remo Stars Ladies 2-0.

Meanwhile, the Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele has commended the players for their

victory over Naija Ratels. He charged them to keep the winning mentality on, adding that beating Bayelsa Queens and Nasarawa Amazons in the last two matches will put them in pole position on winning the trophy back-to-back."

He also pledges more supports and incentives for the team.



Egypt 2025: Zubairu promises a more composed Flying Eagles against South Africa

Aliyu Zubairu has assured that the Nigeria U20 squad will be even better when they take on South Africa's Amajita in the first semi-final of the ongoing CAF U20 Cup of Nations in the city of Ismailia on Thursday evening.

Pundits have praised the seven-time champions for dominating the tough quarter-final encounter against Senegal at the same venue on Monday, before sending the Cup holders out of the tournament after a 3-1 penalty shootout win.

"I believe we are going to have a great semi-final against the South Africans. I can guarantee that our approach will be much better, as the anxiety of whether or not we will earn a FIFA World Cup ticket is no longer there. It was a tense 120 minutes for ourselves and the defending champions on Monday.

"We have the World Cup ticket now and are quite happy. Against South Africa, we will play with great determination and composure, as we aim for the trophy, but without the tense atmosphere around the last match. Of course, we know the little matter of the rivalry between Nigeria and South Africa and what the game means, and we will go in there to do a real

battle," Head Coach Zubairu said on Tuesday.

The man who led El-Kanemi Warriors of Maiduguri to win last year's President Federation Cup competition believes his team has improved considerably since the first match against Tunisia on the first day of May.

"We can all see that the team has improved, and actually getting better with each match. We will go all out against the South Africans."

Apart from their seven titles, Nigeria have also finished as runners-up on two occasions (1999 and 2007), and as bronze medallists on two other occasions as well (2009 and 2013).

To set up a clash with the most-decorated team in the competition's history, the Amajita had to also endure a 120-minute affray against the Democratic Republic of Congo, also at the same Suez Canal Authority Stadium where the Flying Eagles upended Senegal's expectations. They won their own game 1-0 after extra time.

Nigeria had collected four of her seven titles (1983, 1985, 1987, 1989) before South Africa (isolated for decades) was assimilated back into global sport following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990.

Nottingham Forest confirms Awoniyi's successful surgery

Nottingham Forest has officially confirmed that Nigerian forward Taiwo Awoniyi has successfully undergone surgery, following an abdominal injury he sustained during a recent match against Leicester City, BSNSports.com.ng reports.

The Nigerian international was forced to undergo the procedure to address the injury. In a statement released on Tues-

day afternoon, the club reassured fans about the success of the surgery.

"The club can confirm that Taiwo Awoniyi has had urgent surgery following the abdominal injury sustained during Sunday's match against Leicester City. Everyone at Nottingham Forest sends their best wishes to Taiwo. We will provide further updates when appropriate," the statement read.



NOC unveils revolutionary safeguarding handbook, SAFE SPACE Initiative at 22nd National Sports Festival, "Gateway Games," Ogun

In a landmark move to enhance athlete's welfare and safety, the Nigeria Olympic Committee (NOC) proudly announces the launch of its comprehensive Safeguarding Handbook and the innovative SAFE SPACE initiative.

The handbook would be launched at the 22nd National Sports Festival (NSF), tagged the Gateway Games.

The Gateway Games' as the National Sports Festival is known will run from May 16 to May 31, 2025 in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

This initiative aligns with the

International Olympic Committee's (IOC's) longstanding commitment to promoting safe sporting environments since 2004.

The NOC Safeguard Commission will collaborate with (My Space My Time) MSMT to implement a cutting-edge, evidence-based mental health platform.

This partnership will facilitate mental health and safeguarding risk assessments for athletes and officials throughout the duration of the Games.

The insights gained will drive the development of robust safe-

guarding policies to fortify protectiveness across all levels of sport in Nigeria.

A statement released by Tony Neziyanya, the spokesman of the NOC notes that the Safeguarding Handbook, designed as a vital resource, offers a comprehensive framework for sports organizations, coaches, and athletes.

It focuses on preventing harm, recognising signs of abuse, and providing effective responses to safeguarding concerns.

This essential guide will be distributed to athletes and officials visiting the SAFE SPACE,

establishing a new benchmark for athlete's protection and well-being in sporting environments.

The SAFE SPACE initiative elevates these efforts by providing a dedicated platform for education, support, and resources.

It will serve as a hub for safeguarding expertise: SAFE SPACE will offer training, guidance, and advocacy, empowering athletes, coaches, and organisations to prioritise athletes' welfare confidently.

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AFN Zonal Elections put on hold

Elections into the board of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria, AFN, expected to start this Wednesday with the election of the six zonal representatives have been put on hold by the National Sports Commission, NSC.

In a message by the Secretary General, Israel Inwang early Tuesday morning to all athletics stakeholders, especially the member state associations, the NSC advised that those travelling for Wednesday's zonal elections should not do so.

I am directed to inform all Delegates, Contestants, Observers etc for the 2025 Zonal Elections not to travel to their Zones yet. Please wait for further direc-

tives from the NSC before we proceed with the Zonal Elections," read the message.

Sportsnow.com.ng could not confirm the reason for this directive but feelers from the NSC revealed the untidiness of the arrangements made by the AFN, especially the violations of several provisions of its constitution related to the elections.

One of these violations is the appointment of a seven-man electoral committee when the AFN Constitution (2017 and 2023 as amended clearly stated that a 3-man electoral committee should oversee the elections while the AFN Congress in Bayelsa appointed a 7-man electoral committee).

Basketball: D'Tigers, good enough to qualify for Men's Afrobasket knockout stage

International Basketball Federation, (FIBA), Ambassador and member of the Nigeria Basketball Federation, (NBBF), Olumide Oyedeji, is very confident that Nigeria's men national basketball team, D'Tigers, have what it takes to roar and conquer

at the FIBA Afrobasket Men's Championship, Angola 2025. Olumide Oyedeji, made his thoughts known on Tuesday in an interview with journalists yesterday. The NBA ambassador, explained that despite the tough and fierce Group B Nigeria is

placed in, with back-to-back defending champions Tunisia, Cameroon and Madagascar, the 2015 champions will surely pull it's way through into the last eight. "Nigeria is in a tough group, no doubt about it, but I believe we're going come out of the

group, 100%, we have both the talent and the ability to qualify, we are not going to be pushed over, we will make our presence felt on the continent," he said.

He added that despite Nigeria's strong presence on the continental scene, no team should be taken for granted.

"Every team is good, every team is gonna be tough, all the teams that participated in the Olympic Qualifiers are all good enough to wreck havoc," he stressed.

The captain of the 2015 Afrobasket winning team, went on to add that no group or team in the championship will have it easy as there are no small teams in the competition.

"I don't see any team that will be a easily knocked out, we have heavyweights South Sudan, Central African giants

Cameroon, defending champions Tunisia, North African powerhouse Egypt, warlords Cote d'Ivoire and we also have Angola who will be playing at home, it's not going to be an easy ride," he explained.

Olumide Oyedeji, the CEO of Olumide Oyedeji Youth Foundation, also had some nice words for the Head Coach of the D'Tigers, Abdulrahman, a man he strongly believes has the power and the desire to get the job done.

"I believe that coach Abdulrahman knows what to do and how he wants his team to be, he is experienced, he's man enough, he knows where to strengthen his team, he wants to win, and he will do everything within his might to achieve that," he emphasized.

Oyedeji, the president of three major basketball clubs further added that with the

proper support from the Nigeria Basketball Federation and the Nigeria Sports Commission, (NSC), D'Tigers will be unstoppable.

The 16 participating teams have been divided into 4 groups, of 4 teams each, with the top two teams in each group advancing into the knock out stages of the competition, scheduled to take place in Angola between 12 and 24 of August.

GROUPS	
GROUP A	GROUP B
Cape Verde	Cameroon
Côte d'Ivoire	Madagascar
DR Congo	Nigeria
Rwanda	Tunisia
GROUP C	GROUP D
Angola	Egypt
Guinea	Mali
Libya	Senegal
South Sudan	Uganda



NNL Chairman vows to uphold integrity, ensure only best teams advance to NPFL

OGISO PROMISE

The Chairman of the Nigerian National League (NNL), George Aluo, has reaffirmed his board's commitment to maintaining the integrity of the league, emphasizing that only the most deserving teams will progress to the Super Eight and ultimately gain promotion to the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

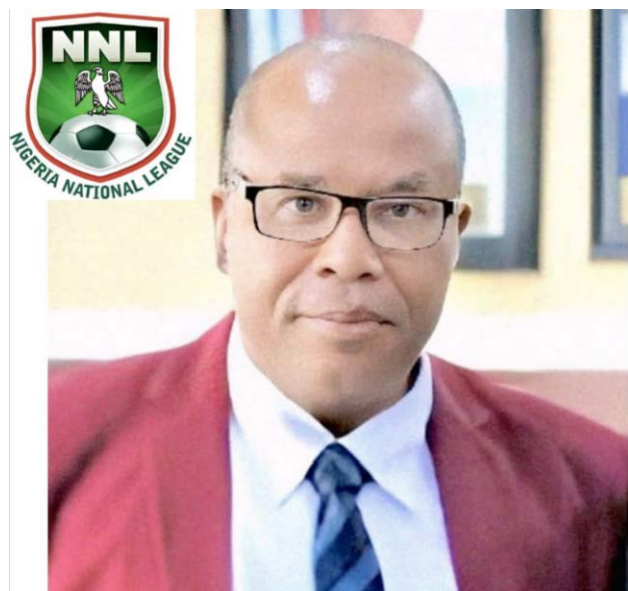
Speaking with confidence, Aluo stated that the current NNL leadership is focused on aligning its operations with international best practices and will not be swayed by external pressures or influences.

"We have maintained a high level of integrity since we came on board, and we are very determined to reposition the league, which is very evident in the performance of the teams we promoted last season to the NPFL," Aluo declared. "We would continue to do our best to ensure that same is replicated this season."

The NNL Chairman also extended his gratitude to the President of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF), Ibrahim Gusau, for his continuous support. He assured stakeholders and fans that the NNL is on course to becoming the

best-managed football league in the country.

Aluo's remarks come as the league enters a crucial phase, with teams battling for a place in the prestigious Super Eight tournament — the gateway to top-tier football in Nigeria



NOC unveils revolutionary safeguarding handbook...

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Engr. Habu Gumel, President of the NOC, emphasised the significance of this initiative: "We believe that sport has the power to transform lives, and it must be a safe and supportive space for athletes to flourish.

"Our Safeguarding Handbook and SAFE SPACE initiative represent crucial steps to-

ward fostering a culture of care and respect in sports, where athletes can thrive and reach their full potential."

The launch of the Safeguarding Handbook and SAFE SPACE initiative marks a pivotal moment in NOC's steadfast commitment to athlete welfare.

We invite State Sports Councils, commissions, athletes, and stakeholders to engage with this

initiative by visiting the Safe Space Zone, ensuring prioritisation of safeguarding and the protection of athletes.

The members of the Safeguard Commission are Dr Olajide Joseph Adebola, FAPH (Chairman), Mr Femi Abioye, Dr Oluwaseun Nariwoh, Dr Bakare Ummukulthoum, Ms Justina Erezi and Mrs Kemi Obidahunsi as the Administrative Secretary.

Katsina Sports Commissioner Shargalle hands over Funtua Township Stadium for upgrade

Katsina State Sports Commissioner Aliyu Lawal Zakari Shargalle has handed over the Samaila Isah Funtua Township Stadium to Space & Dimensions Limited, a state-based construction firm, for complete renovations.

Aliyu Lawal Zakari handed over the stadium project documents to the company's CEO, Eng Abu Kasim, at an event held at the Fitch Stadium.

According to the Sports Commissioner, the present state administration of Dik-

ko Umar Radda approved the stadium's upgrade due to its importance in encouraging sporting activities in the state.

The sports commissioner reveals that the project's components include the re-arming of the stadium perimeter fence, the construction of drainages, the installation of natural grass, and the athletic running track.

The project has a four-month completion period beginning today.

In response, Eng Abu Kasim, Chief Executive Officer of Space

& Dimensions Limited, thanked Governor Dikko Radda for putting his trust in him to carry out the project. Eng Abu Kasim guaranteed that the stadium will be built to world-class standards and would last for a long time.

Eng Kasim, Chief Executive Officer of Space & Dimensions Limited, reiterates the company's commitment to completing the stadium upgrade within the time limit specified.

The contract was awarded for the sum of more than nine million Naira.



FEATURE

Gov Okpebholo: six months of purposeful leadership, restored hope in Edo State

FRED ITUA

It is often said that "when the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind." Six months after stepping into the stormy shoes of governance, Senator Monday Okpebholo has proven that leadership is not about noise but about substance. He did not come in as a messiah with lofty promises wrapped in sweet speeches. Instead, he came with a broom, a hoe, and a plan—to clear the debris of the past and rebuild Edo State with his hands in the soil and his ears to the ground.

To understand the significance of Okpebholo's leadership, one must revisit where Edo has come from. For eight years, the people of Edo were like tenants in their own house. Governance became a monologue—a conversation among the elite, with little regard for the voices of ordinary citizens. Development was spoken of in press conferences but absent on the streets. Roads were death traps. Civil servants were demoralized. Food became gold in the market. Schools were in ruins. Hospitals were gasping for breath. Security became a private affair. The people were left holding the empty shell of promises.

But Governor Monday Okpebholo came in like a farmer who understands that no matter how lush a forest looks, it cannot feed a hungry man. He is going back to the basics—fixing what matters. In just six months, a fresh wind of responsible governance is blowing through the state. The drums of disconnected leadership have gone silent, and the rhythm of accountability has taken over.

Governor Okpebholo has chosen the narrow path—a path often ignored by those who prefer skyscrapers in the sky to pothole-free roads. He understands that no man eats blueprints. The real test of governance is not in ribbon-cutting ceremonies but in whether a farmer in Irukep can get his produce to the market without getting stuck in the mud, or whether a civil servant in Ikpeshe can afford a meal after salary.

From day one, Governor Okpebholo made it clear that he would not be governed by ego or revenge. Unlike his predecessor, who often seemed more interested in vendettas than value, the current governor has shown maturity. He is fixing roads, not picking fights. He is restoring dignity, not renaming institutions to settle political scores.

One of the greatest indicators of a functioning government is the strength of its civil service. For years, Edo's civil service was reduced to a ghost town. The previous administration preferred consultants who



drained the system without transferring knowledge. The state became a feeding ground for outsiders while the real engine room of governance—the civil servants—were sidelined and starved of opportunities.

Governor Okpebholo saw the rot and went to work. He began recruiting qualified personnel, reversing the decay. The handover chaos with the state's IT systems is a metaphor for how broken things were. Obaseki's IT consultant refused to release login details and digital assets of the state, exposing a system built on control rather than continuity. But Okpebholo's team rolled up their sleeves and began the slow but steady process of digital recovery. "When a pot breaks, you don't cry over the clay—you mold another one."

When Okpebholo said during his campaign that "Edo will become a construction site," many dismissed it as political talk. But he has matched words with action. Roads that had become symbols of abandonment are being rehabilitated. He is not waiting for the federal government to fix federal roads. He understands that a bad road doesn't ask if it's federal or state before it kills.

In Esanland, in Edo South, and

in Edo North—construction is ongoing. Rural communities are being reconnected. Markets are springing to life. Mobility is no longer a punishment. The difference is as clear as day. "A man who repairs the path to his neighbor's farm is planting goodwill for the next harvest."

Perhaps the most shameful chapter of the past government was its treatment of education. Tertiary institutions were reduced to battlegrounds. Ambrose Alli University (AAU), once a proud academic citadel, became a theater of strikes. Lecturers became street protesters. Monthly subventions were slashed from respect to ridicule—down to 41 million naira. A governing council was denied the school; instead, a so-called Special Intervention Team (SIT) took over, adding insult to injury.

Governor Okpebholo walked into that mess and began cleaning house. He restored funding and upped it. He listened to stakeholders. He gave AAU a chance to breathe again. Today, lecturers are in their classrooms, not on the streets. The ghost of vendetta is giving way to the light of vision. "When a leader fights knowledge, ignorance wins." Okpebholo

knows better.

In a time when the cost of living is squeezing the average Nigerian, food security cannot be treated as a campaign slogan. Okpebholo has backed his words with action. Over N70 billion was earmarked in the state budget for agriculture. Thousands of hectares of arable land have been acquired across Edo North, Central, and South. Farmers are being empowered. Food production is being scaled.

This is not trial and error. It is intentional policy. He understands that "he who controls the seeds controls the stomachs." The government is partnering with stakeholders to ensure that Edo does not just survive but thrives as a food-producing state.

A governor's most sacred duty is the safety of his people. Insecurity had eaten deep into Edo's peace—cultism, kidnapping, herdsmen encroachment. But Governor Okpebholo did not sit behind a desk issuing statements. He signed laws. He enforced them. Houses linked to cultism and kidnapping were demolished. Arrests were made. Awareness campaigns were launched. Citizens began to feel the presence of government again.

With the Anti-Cultism and An-

ti-Kidnapping Laws in place and their enforcement in motion, a new message has been sent to criminal elements: "Edo is no longer a safe haven for evil."

Six months may seem short in the life of a government, but it is enough to take a bearing. Governor Okpebholo is not performing magic. He is simply returning to common sense governance—listening, acting, and staying connected to the people. He is proving that "you don't need a megaphone to build a legacy—just results."

Edo State is not perfect. There are still battles to fight, holes to fill, and dreams to fund. But one thing is clear: the train has left the station, and it is headed in the right direction. For the first time in years, Edo people are beginning to believe again—not in empty slogans, but in the power of sincere, focused leadership.

And that, in itself, is a victory worth celebrating.

Oba ghatto kper, Ise!

Fred Itua is the Chief Press Secretary to the Edo State Governor