

Palace protocol breach: Benin Traditional Council sanctions chief, staff, Queen

● Tightens Palace access protocols

BENIN CITY

The Benin Traditional Council (BTC) has acted decisively following a brazen breach of Palace protocol, which saw social media influencer Habeeb Hamzat Adelaja, popularly known as "Peller," gain unauthorized access to the sacred precincts of the Palace of the Oba of Benin on Friday, 6 March 2026.

In a press statement signed by the BTC Secretary, Frank Irabor, the Council described the incident as a serious desecration of the Palace's sanctity and a direct affront to centuries-old customs and traditions.

"The Palace is not a public thoroughfare or a location for frivolous content creation; it is the ancient and spiritual seat of the Oba of Benin, governed by centuries of tradition, cus-

tom, and sacred protocols," the statement read.

According to the BTC, Mr. Adelaja and his entourage entered the Palace without requisite permission, causing significant embarrassment and disturbing the peace within the royal grounds.

Following a preliminary investigation, the Council took swift disciplinary action against those who facilitated the influencer's unauthorized entry.

A Palace Chief implicated in the incident has been suspended

indefinitely, while a staff member of the Council, Mr. Omuemu, has been detained by the Nigeria Police Force and charged to court for causing a breach of the peace and abetting the intrusion.

"Furthermore, it is with deep regret that the Council confirms that a Queen of the Palace who was unfortunately featured in the incident is now facing serious disciplinary proceedings. In accordance with Benin traditions and customs, these proceedings may inadvertently result in her removal from the Palace."

The BTC confirmed that Mr. Adelaja was formally invited to appear before a committee of Chiefs to provide his account of the incident.

However, he has reportedly failed to honour the invitation.

The Council is now using this public medium to demand that he present himself immediately and tender an unreserved written apology for the embarrassment caused.

The statement warned that failure to comply would compel the Council to pursue legal

action, noting that the appropriate law enforcement agencies have already been notified and are prepared to act.

The Council's Secretary, Mr. Frank Irabor, emphasised the institution's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the traditions of the Benin Kingdom.

"While unscrupulous elements may occasionally attempt to undermine our sacred Institutions, banking on the fatherly and forgiving disposition of

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The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Plateau University expels 76 students over exam malpractice

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Ramat Park flyover to restore INEC, Appeal Court operations as flooding nears end —Okpebholo

BENIN CITY

Relief is in sight for the Appeal Court and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices in Benin City, as Governor Monday Okpebholo has

assured that ongoing works at the Ramat Park flyover will soon restore full operations at the flood-hit institutions.

The governor gave the assurance while inspecting the project site, noting that years of persistent flooding in the Ramat Park

axis had forced both institutions to scale down activities, disrupting judicial processes and electoral administration.

Okpebholo said the near-completion of the flyover, alongside extensive drainage infrastructure, would permanent-

ly resolve the environmental challenges that have hindered the effective functioning of the Appeal Court and INEC office.

According to him, the project is specifically designed not only to ease traffic congestion but to eliminate the perennial flooding that has crippled critical government institutions and surrounding businesses.

"Flooding in this area has threatened key institutions, including the Appeal Court and INEC, forcing them to reduce operations," the governor said.

"With the level of work done, we are confident that normal activities will fully resume once the project is completed."

He disclosed that construction of the flyover bridge has reached about 90 percent completion, while drainage works are approximately 70 percent

completed, expressing optimism that the entire project would be delivered before the peak of the rainy season.

The governor stressed that the restoration of full operations at the Appeal Court and INEC remains a priority, given their central role in governance, justice delivery, and democratic processes.

He added that beyond institutional recovery, the intervention would also revitalise economic activities in the area, as businesses previously affected by flooding would regain stability.

Okpebholo reiterated his administration's broader commitment to infrastructure renewal, noting that addressing flood-prone areas is essential to sustaining public services and urban functionality in Benin City.

Also speaking, the site en-

gineer, Femi Fatola, confirmed that work is progressing according to schedule, with the bridge construction already above 90 percent completion.

He said significant progress had also been made on flood control measures, particularly the drainage system, which is now about 70 percent completed and nearing its final stage.

"The progress recorded shows clearly that we are on track," Fatola said.

"Once the drainage system is fully completed, the flooding challenges that affected institutions like the Appeal Court and INEC will be effectively resolved."

He assured that the engineering design of the project would ensure proper chan-

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EL-DOUEIHY VISITS NASS COMPLEX:

Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Kalu (R), receiving a souvenir from the leader of the International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Nigeria delegation, Ms Doris El-Doueihy, during the latter's visit to the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Tuesday.

Eid-ul-Fitr: FG declares Thur, Fri public holidays

ABUJA

The Federal Government has declared Thursday and Friday as public holidays to enable Muslims celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr.

The Minister of Interior, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, made the announcement in a statement signed by the ministry's Permanent Secretary, Dr Magdalene Ajani, on Tuesday in Abuja.

The minister, who made the

declaration on behalf of the federal government, extended warm greetings and heartfelt congratulations to the Muslim faithful on the successful completion of the holy month of Ramadan.

Tunji-Ojo urged Muslims to sustain the virtues of love, generosity, peace, tolerance, and sacrifice, which were emphasized during the holy month.

He called on all Nigerians to use the festive period to pray

for the continued peace, unity, and prosperity of the nation.

Tunji-Ojo also encouraged citizens to celebrate responsibly and extend acts of kindness to the less privileged in the society.

"The federal government remains committed to fostering national unity and peaceful co-existence among all Nigerians," he said. I-G drags 2 to court over alleged N500,000 'Monie-point scandal cyberstalking

FG rolls out electric buses for civil servants to boost local auto industry, cut emissions —Pg 2

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Belgian court clears way for trial over 1961 killing of Congo PM Lumumba —Pg 9

FIFA confirms DR Congo's place in 2026 World Cup play-off despite Nigeria's protest —Pg 11

UBTH's half-price dental drive draws hundreds, boosts access to oral care

BENIN CITY

The University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) has seen a surge of patients taking advantage of a 50% discount on selected dental treatments, part

of a nationwide push to improve oral health and mark the 2026 World Oral Health Day.

Hundreds of patients visited the hospital on Tuesday to benefit from the initiative, organised by the Nigerian Dental Association, in partnership with

UBTH, under the theme: "A happy mouth is a happy life."

Dr. Nneka Chumwumah, Coordinator of the UBTH Dental Centre, described the turnout as "encouraging" and noted that over 100 patients had already received treatment since the programme began.

She emphasised that the discount is intended to make essential dental care more affordable and accessible, particularly for

those who might otherwise delay treatment due to cost.

"By reducing the financial burden, we are helping more people maintain good oral health, which is critical for overall wellbeing," Dr. Chumwumah said.

Several patients, who preferred to remain anonymous, praised UBTH management for the initiative, saying that it has made procedures like scaling,

polishing, extractions, and radiographs far more attainable.

The programme, officially launched on Monday by UBTH Chief Medical Director Prof. Idia Ize-Iyamu, runs from March 16 to 19 at the hospital's Dental Centre, offering half-price rates on essential treatments including GIC restorations and other basic procedures.

Prof. Ize-Iyamu highlighted that UBTH remains commit-

ted to improving healthcare delivery and promoting community access to vital medical services, adding that initiatives like this reinforce the hospital's role in public health advocacy.

The dental drive underscores the growing emphasis on preventive oral care in Nigeria, aiming to reduce long-term dental issues, while encouraging healthier lifestyles across communities.

FG rolls out electric buses for civil servants to boost local auto industry, cut emissions

ABUJA

The Federal Government has approved the acquisition of electric buses for civil servants in a move aimed at stimulating local vehicle assembly and fast-tracking Nigeria's transition to cleaner transportation.

The Director-General of the National Automotive Design and Development Council (NADDCC), Joseph Osanipin, disclosed this on Tuesday while briefing journalists in Abuja, explaining that the buses would be sourced from local assemblers to strengthen domestic manufacturing and drive growth in the nation's automotive sector.

Osanipin added that the government had already procured charging infrastructure to be deployed across parts of the country to support the rollout and adoption of electric vehicles.

He said the initiative is designed not only to encourage cleaner mobility but also to open up opportunities for local manufacturers and component producers.

The NADDCC boss further revealed that the council is developing an automotive industrial hub in Nnewi, Anambra State, known as the Nnewi Automotive Development Park, to deepen Nigeria's automotive ecosystem.

According to him, the park will provide shared infrastructure for manufacturers,

enabling investors to operate without bearing the heavy cost of setting up independent facilities.

"We are developing the Nnewi Automotive Development Park where users can share critical infrastructure, reducing entry barriers for investors and manufacturers," he said.

Osanipin noted that the council is actively seeking additional investment to accelerate the project and attract more industry players.

He urged Nigerians to prioritise locally assembled vehicles, stressing that such patronage would create jobs, reduce import dependence and stimulate economic growth.

He also disclosed that NADDCC is providing training to manufacturers and stakeholders to support local production of key components such as batteries and tyres, a move expected to boost value addition and contribute significantly to the Gross Domestic Product.

The council, he said, is collaborating with the Bank of Industry to facilitate the disbursement of the National Automotive Development Fund to qualified stakeholders.

Osanipin further revealed plans to forward a bill to the National Assembly to strengthen the council's operations in line with global best practices, reaffirming NADDCC's commitment to repositioning Nigeria's automotive industry



OFFICIAL PRESENTATION OF LEARNING MATERIALS:

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, (2nd right) congratulating the Chairman of the Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Ebanehita Omonzane. With them is the Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Education, Mrs Edith Ebomoyi (right), during the official presentation of learning materials to schools in Edo State at New Era College, Benin City. Photo: Moses Obboh.

Akpokona emerges NUJ Warri Chapel chairman

WARRI (DELTA)

The correspondent of Vanguard Newspaper, Okakuro Akpokona Omafuaire, Esq., has emerged as Chairman of the Warri Correspondents' Chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), following a closely fought election

held in Warri, Delta State.

Omafuaire secured 17 votes to defeat his closest rival, Okpare Theophilus Onojeghen, who garnered 13 votes in the keenly contested poll.

The result was announced by the Chairman of the NUJ Delta State Council, Churchill Oyowe, who presided over the

exercise alongside the Acting Secretary of the Council, Josephine Omodior.

Shortly after the declaration, Omodior administered the oath of office on the newly elected chairman as well as other members of the executive who emerged unopposed.

Those returned unopposed

include Francis Sadhere as Vice Chairman, Odeya Ogbetuo as Auditor, and Samuel Ogude as Assistant Secretary.

Dignitaries present at the election included the State Auditor, Celestine Afokoba, alongside Emmanuel Enebeli, Shedrack Onitsha, Abel John Gold, and Dominic Adewole.

I-G drags 2 to court over alleged N500,000 'Moniepoint scandal cyberstalking

ABUJA

The Inspector-General of Police has filed criminal charges against two individuals, Adebayo Aliu and Fatunle Tunde, over the alleged defamation of Moniepoint Microfinance Bank through a coordinated cyberstalking scheme.

The charge, filed before Justice Rita Ofili-Ajumogobia

of the Federal High Court in Abuja, contains seven counts bordering on cyberstalking and related offences.

However, proceedings scheduled for Tuesday could not go ahead as both defendants and their legal representative were absent from court.

Justice Ofili-Ajumogobia subsequently adjourned the matter until April 27 for arraignment.

The charge, marked FHC/

ABJ/CR/122/2026, was filed by a police officer, Anthony Egwu.

According to the prosecution, the defendants allegedly conspired in January 2026 to cyberstalk Moniepoint by creating a fraudulent online platform designed to generate misleading and damaging content against the financial institution.

They were accused of offering N500,000 to unsuspecting members of the public who

would post the phrase "Moniepoint Scandal" and fabricate negative experiences about the bank, with the intention of inciting public unrest and damaging the company's reputation.

The police said the alleged offences contravene Section 27(2) (b) of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act, 2015 (as amended in 2024), and are punishable under Section 24(1) (b) of the same Act.

Ramat Park flyover to restore INEC,...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

ling of stormwater, preventing future disruptions to institutional and commercial activities in the area.

During the inspection tour, the governor also assessed other ongoing projects, including the Sapele Road flyover and

road construction works at Charismatic Road and Upper Ekenwan Road.

He reaffirmed his administration's resolve to strengthen infrastructure across the state, stressing that restoring the functionality of key institutions remains central to governance and service delivery.

Palace protocol breach: Benin Traditional...

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His Royal Majesty, Omo N'Oba N'Edo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewuare II, CFR, they do so at their peril," the statement read.

The BTC further assured the public that it possesses the institutional tools to correct such infractions and prevent future occurrences.

The Benin Traditional Council pledged to continue uphold-

ing the sanctity and dignity of the throne, warning that any further violations would be met with strict consequences.

Meanwhile, BTC has officially reviewed and tightened access protocols to the Palace of the Oba of Benin, His Royal Majesty, Oba Ewuare II, following growing concerns over unauthorised entries that threaten the dignity and sanctity of the historic institution.

In a statement signed by BTC Secretary Frank Irabor, the council expressed "grave concern" over the increasing number of individuals and groups gaining access without due process, calling such actions a "breach of our time-honoured traditions that undermines the sanctity of the Palace."

The statement explained that the revised protocol is intended to preserve the security, dignity, and sacredness of the Palace.

Going forward, any person wishing to visit the Oba must submit a formal written application to the BTC office.

Visits will only be allowed upon receipt of explicit approval and a scheduled appointment.

Under the new rules, loitering, unauthorised wandering, or aimless movement within the Palace grounds is strictly prohibited.

All visitors are required to be escorted by a designated

Palace or BTC official to their intended destination.

The council emphasised that any attempt to enter or remain on Palace premises without proper approval, permit, or valid reason will be considered a serious violation of tradition and law.

Offenders will be apprehended and made to face appropriate consequences.

The BTC said the measures are not only intended to safe-

guard the Palace as a cultural and spiritual landmark but also to reinforce respect for centuries-old customs that have preserved the Oba's authority and the identity of the Benin Kingdom.

The council urged members of the public, including social media influencers, tourists, and dignitaries, to comply fully with the new protocols to prevent incidents that could compromise the Palace's security or cultural integrity.

Security crisis: Military victories alone insufficient for lasting peace —Defence Minister

ABUJA

The Minister of Defence, retired Gen. Christopher Musa, has declared that military gains, though significant, cannot on their own guarantee enduring peace in Nigeria, urging a shift towards

addressing the root causes of insecurity.

Speaking through his Special Adviser on Policy and Strategy, retired Maj.-Gen. Olufemi Akinjobi, at the unveiling of "Beyond the Symptoms: Tackling the Root of Nigeria's Insecurity" authored by

retired Air Vice Marshal Sayo Olatunde, the minister stressed the need for a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy.

He noted that while the Armed Forces of Nigeria had recorded notable successes against insurgency, banditry, separatist agitations and oil-re-

lated crimes, sustainable peace would only come through deeper structural interventions.

"Military successes alone cannot deliver enduring peace. We must confront the socio-economic, ideological and systemic issues that fuel insecurity," he said.

Musa likened the nation's security challenges to medical practice, where lasting healing

depends on treating underlying causes rather than symptoms, describing the book as a timely and practical contribution to national security discourse.

Also speaking, the Minister of Interior, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, represented by Prof. Mukhtar Abugadri, said Nigeria's security situation requires a whole-of-society response.

He stressed that lasting peace must be built on justice, good governance and social inclusion, describing the event as not just a book launch but a call to national action.

The event drew security experts, traditional rulers, scholars and government officials, all of whom emphasised co-ordinated efforts to tackle the drivers of insecurity



CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:

L-R: Past President, Nigeria Society of Engineers (NSE), Kashimc Ali; NSE Vice President, Engr. Valerie Agberagba; former Minister of Transport, Mr Rotimi Amechi; President of the Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria (APWEN), Engr. Chinyere Igwegbe and former Minister of Aviation, Babatinde Omotoba, during the celebration of the International Women's Day by the APWEN in Abuja on Tuesday.

Fix root causes, not symptoms, ex-Air Force chief urges at book launch

ABUJA

Retired Air Vice Marshal Sayo Olatunde has called for a systemic overhaul of Nigeria's security architecture, warning that failure to address underlying causes will continue to fuel recurring crises.

Speaking at the unveiling of his book, "Beyond the Symptoms: Tackling the Root of Nigeria's Insecurity," Olatunde

said Nigeria has long focused on treating manifestations of insecurity rather than eliminating its sources.

"Plucking the leaves only gives temporary relief. To stop the problem permanently, you must uproot the tree," he said.

He identified 17 drivers of insecurity, highlighting five as most critical: corruption, socio-political polarisation, porous borders, defective defence

architecture and an ineffective police system.

According to him, these factors have worsened challenges such as the influx of arms, foreign fighters and illicit activities including illegal mining.

Olatunde stressed that while identifying root causes is essential, strong political will and integrity at all levels are required to implement lasting solutions.

The event also featured com-

mendations from stakeholders, including Chief Benito Ozigbo, who supported the initiative with N3 million, and retired Maj.-Gen. Garba Wahab, who described the book as insightful and methodologically rigorous.

The ceremony was attended by past and serving defence chiefs, with the Minister of Interior chairing the occasion and the Defence Minister serving as Special Guest of Honour.

Nigeria expands private sector role in TB fight, engages 20,000 providers

ABUJA

Nigeria has intensified efforts to combat tuberculosis, mobilising over 20,000 private healthcare providers nationwide to expand detection, treatment and prevention services.

The Institute of Human Virology Nigeria (IHVN) disclosed this in Abuja during activities marking the 2026 World TB Day, highlighting a major scale-up of interventions across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

Dr Temitope Adetiba, Senior Programme Manager at IHVN, said the initiative provides free TB testing and referral services through an extensive network that includes pharmacies, laboratories, medicine vendors, traditional healers and birth attendants.

He explained that the expansion builds on a multi-year project and lessons from past collaborations, aimed at strengthening Nigeria's TB response system.

Adetiba noted that over two

million pregnant women were screened for TB and HIV between 2024 and 2025, while digital tools and artificial intelligence are being deployed to enhance detection and surveillance.

He acknowledged past drug shortages due to global supply disruptions but said efforts were underway to boost domestic production and reduce reliance on imports.

Also speaking, Dr Queen Ogbuji-Ladipo of the Stop TB Partnership Nigeria commended increased private sector involvement and the support of the First Lady, Sen. Oluremi Tinubu, who has contributed about N2 billion to TB control efforts.

She, however, warned that over 90 percent of TB funding still comes from external sources, stressing the need for stronger domestic financing.

Stakeholders agreed that sustained partnerships, community engagement and co-ordinated national action remain vital to eliminating tuberculosis in Nigeria.

LP crisis deepens as NEC sacks Nenadi c'ttee, backs Abure leadership

ABUJA

The internal crisis rocking the Labour Party escalated on Tuesday as the National Executive Council (NEC) dissolved the Nenadi Usman-led Caretaker Committee, accusing it of inflicting "incalculable damage" on the party.

In a statement issued by NEC Secretary Alhaji Abdulrahim Chindo, the council reaffirmed its confidence in the National Working Committee led by Mr Julius Abure.

The decision was reached during a virtual NEC meeting attended by elected state chairmen and secretaries, following earlier calls for both physical and virtual sessions.

NEC maintained that the caretaker committee was illegally constituted and nullified all notices it had issued to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The council also mandated Abure and Umar Ibrahim to pursue an appeal at the Court of Appeal to overturn a Federal High Court judgment delivered on January 21, 2026.

Furthermore, NEC directed the party leadership to notify INEC and proceed with preparations for the 2027 general election primaries in line with the electoral timetable once legal hurdles are cleared.

The development signals a fresh phase in the party's leadership tussle as it positions for future electoral contests.

Aggregation centres key to women farmers' empowerment —Expert

ABUJA

Governments at all levels have been urged to establish community aggregation centres as a strategic tool to empower women farmers and reduce post-harvest losses across Nigeria.

Ms Chika Orji, a Fellow of the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development Gender in Agrifood Sys-

tems Policy Programme, made the call in Abuja, describing the centres as critical women-focused infrastructure.

She said such facilities would curb exploitation by middlemen, prevent farmgate price dumping and significantly reduce post-harvest losses.

According to her, nearly 60 million tonnes of the 150 million tonnes of food produced annually by smallholder farm-

ers are lost due to poor storage, weak infrastructure and policy inconsistencies.

She added that women farmers, who account for about 70 percent of Nigeria's estimated 38 million smallholder farmers, remain largely excluded despite their contributions to food security.

Orji stressed that beyond sympathy, women need functional systems, effective policies

and improved access to finance, markets and technology.

Referencing the 2026 International Women's Day, she called for investments in storage, preservation systems and homegrown technologies to create jobs for women and youth.

"This is about food security, inclusion, dignity and the future of Nigeria and Africa," she said.

Tinubu directs political appointees seeking elective office to resign March 31

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has directed all political appointees under his administration, seeking elective offices in the 2027 general elections to resign on or before

March 31, 2026.

This was contained in a circular issued by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and signed by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Sen. George Akume.

The circular stated that the directive is in line with Section 88(1) of the Electoral Act, 2026, as well as the timetable released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for party primaries ahead of the polls.

"The directive is pursuant to

the provisions of Section 88(1) of the Electoral Act, 2026, as well as the timetable issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for party primaries ahead of the 2027 general elections."

According to the circular

issued by the Permanent Secretary General Services Office, Dr Ibrahim Kana, the directive applies to all categories of presidential political appointees intending to participate in party primaries or seek nomination for elective offices.

"Those affected include ministers, ministers of state, special advisers, senior special assistants, special assistants, personal assistants, as well as directors-general and chief executive officers of federal government parastatals, agencies, commissions and government-owned companies"

NEWS

Northern governors condemn Maiduguri blasts as heinous, barbaric

GOMBE

The Northern State Governors' Forum has strongly condemned the deadly explosions that shook Maiduguri on Monday evening, describing them as heinous, barbaric, and a direct assault on innocent lives.

Inuwa Yahaya, Chairman of the forum and Governor of Gombe State, spoke on behalf of his colleagues on Tuesday, expressing profound sorrow over the tragic incidents and extending heartfelt condolences to the government and people of Borno State, particularly families who lost loved ones.

"This senseless act of violence is not only reprehensible but a cruel attempt to instill

fear and disrupt the fragile peace being restored in the North-East. It is an attack on our collective humanity and must be condemned in the strongest terms," Yahaya said.

He sympathized with victims receiving treatment in various hospitals and commended first responders and security agencies for their swift intervention.

He reiterated the commitment of northern governors to work closely with the Federal Government and security agencies to defeat terrorism and criminality threatening regional peace.

Yahaya urged residents to remain calm, vigilant, and law-abiding, while cooperating with security agencies by providing credible information to aid investigations.

"Now, more than ever, we must stand united against forces

of terror. Our resolve to secure our region remains unshaken, and together, we shall overcome

these cowardly acts," he said.

Explosions occurred almost simultaneously at the gate of

the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, the Monday Market Roundabout, and

the Post Office area, leaving many feared dead and several others injured



STOP CYBER BULLING:

Members of Coalition of Justice Advocate in conjunction with affected platforms and individuals saying no to stop cyber bullying and defamation of people's character in Lagos on Tuesday.

LCCI cautions against complacency despite slight inflation dip

LAGOS

The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has warned against complacency following a marginal decline in Nigeria's inflation rate, highlighting risks that could reverse the trend.

Dr Chinyere Almona, Director General of LCCI, reacted on Tuesday to February's inflation figure of 15.06 per cent, slightly down from 15.10 percent in January.

She noted that the rise in month-on-month inflation to 2.01 percent signals that price pressures remain entrenched.

"Food inflation continues to dominate, driven by structural supply chain inefficiencies, insecurity in farming regions, and high logistics costs," she said.

Almona added that global and domestic headwinds, including geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and potential energy market volatility, could worsen Nigeria's inflation out-

look.

She warned that any surge in global oil prices could increase fuel and transport costs domestically.

Exchange-rate instability, she said, remained a major concern, as disruptions in global supply chains could drive up the cost of imports, including raw materials, machinery, and essential goods.

Almona urged the Federal Government to prioritise exchange-rate stability, improve foreign exchange liquidity, boost non-oil export earnings, and invest in agriculture to increase productivity and reduce supply bottlenecks. She also called for accelerated reforms in the power sector and improvements in transport and trade infrastructure to reduce production and distribution costs.

"The recent slowdown in inflation is positive, but only sustained structural reforms and supply-side interventions will ensure long-term price stability," she stressed.

Customs hands over N131.6m cannabis seizure to NDLEA in Ogun

IDIROKO (OGUN)

The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Ogun 1 Area Command, has handed over 2,437 parcels of Cannabis Sativa worth N131,598,000 to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).

Customs Area Comptroller, Mr Olukayode Afeni disclosed this on Tuesday while handing over the seized drugs to Mr Olaniyi Ekundayo, Commander of the NDLEA Idiroko Special Area Command.

The seizures, made across various locations in the state from January to date, were

allegedly intended for youths aged 20 to 21.

Afeni urged parents to advise their children against drug use, stressing that substance abuse has no benefit.

Ekundayo, represented by NDLEA Deputy Commander of Narcotics, Ganiyu Adeyoye, reaffirmed the agency's commitment to partner with Customs to curb drug trafficking through Nigeria's land borders.

He said laboratory tests would confirm the substance as cannabis sativa and warned youths to abstain from drug use to protect their future.

ACPN endorses Soludo's healthcare reforms, local drug manufacturing drive

ABUJA

The Association of Community Pharmacists of Nigeria (ACPN) has pledged support for healthcare transformation in Anambra State, backing Governor Charles Soludo's reforms targeting drug distribution, regulatory improvements, and expansion of local pharmaceutical manufacturing.

The pledge followed Soludo's second-term inauguration, which ACPN described as a testament to visionary leadership and people-centred gov-

ernance promoting sustainable development and inclusive healthcare advancement.

In a joint statement on Tuesday in Abuja, ACPN leaders, Omokhaye Ashore and Felix Enendu commended the governor for recognising pharmacists as central to healthcare delivery. They highlighted how the state's business-friendly policies were attracting pharmaceutical investors planning manufacturing facilities and distribution centres in Onitsha, which would improve medicine access, create jobs, and

strengthen the health economy.

The association said such investments would boost availability of quality medicines, enhance employment opportunities, and reinforce Anambra's position as a rising healthcare and pharmaceutical hub.

They also praised the state's initiatives to sanitise the pharmaceutical supply chain through Coordinated Wholesale Centres, such as the Oba hub, which support National Drug Distribution Guidelines and reduce circulation of counterfeit drugs.

ACPN lauded industrial-

ization efforts, including the Anambra Mixed Use Industrial City and pharmaceutical hub in Ogbogi, which they said would promote local drug production, research, and regional competitiveness.

They also cited Soludo's engagement with companies like May & Baker Nigeria Plc to encourage indigenous research, innovation, and expansion of pharmaceutical production capacity.

The association reaffirmed readiness to collaborate with government to advance healthcare reforms, emphasising their commitment to policies that improve access, safety, and sustainability in Nigeria's healthcare system.

Tertiary unions threaten strike over delayed salary structure in Abia

UMUAHIA

The Joint Unions of Tertiary Institutions in Abia State have announced a three-day warning strike over delays in implementing the 2024 Consolidated Salary Structure.

The unions, in a statement released on Tuesday, said the action would commence on

Wednesday, March 18, stressing that all dialogue channels with the government had been exhausted.

Institutions affected include Abia State University, Uturu; Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochuku; and Abia State College of Health Sciences and Management Technology, Aba.

The unions include the Sen-

ior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities, Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, Senior Staff Union in Colleges of Education, Nigeria, and the Nigerian Association of Academic Technologists.

The statement described the delay as "unacceptable" and "economic injustice" to workers and warned that failure to

address the matter could lead to an indefinite strike.

"We remain open to sincere dialogue and immediate implementation of the salary structure to restore industrial peace and stability within the tertiary education sector in Abia. We urge the government to treat this matter with the seriousness and urgency it deserves," the statement added.

NiMet forecasts 3-day dust haze from Wednesday

ABUJA

The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) has predicted dust haze across the country from Wednesday to Friday.

NiMet's weather outlook, released on Tuesday in Abuja, envisaged moderate dust haze with horizontal visibility between two and five kilometres over the northern region on Wednesday.

The agency envisaged localised visibility of less than or equal to 1,000 metres over parts of Katsina, Kano and Jigawa States

throughout the forecast period.

NiMet anticipated moderate dust haze over the North-Central region throughout the period.

It predicted sunny skies with a few patches of cloud over the southern region, with slim prospects of afternoon or evening thunderstorms accompanied by light rainfall over parts of Lagos, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.

According to NiMet, moderate dust haze is expected over the northern and North-Cen-

tral regions throughout the forecast period on Thursday.

It forecast sunny skies with few patches of cloud over the southern region, with slim chances of isolated thunderstorms and light rainfall over Ondo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta and Edo states later in the day.

The agency predicted slight dust haze over the northern region during the forecast period on Friday.

iMet envisaged moderate dust haze over the North-Central region throughout the period.

The agency anticipated sunny skies with few patches of cloud over the southern region, with slim chances of isolated thunderstorms and light rainfall over Lagos, Edo, Delta and Bayelsa States later in the day.

The agency warned that dust particles would remain in suspension while advising the public to take necessary precautions.

NiMet advised the people with asthma and other respiratory conditions to be cautious under the prevailing weather conditions.

NUT steps up teacher training, vows legal action against school violence in Oyo

IBADAN

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), Oyo State Wing, has announced a renewed drive to intensify teacher training and

take firm legal action against violence and misconduct in schools.

Mr Raji Oladimeji, Chairman of the union in the state, told newsmen on Tuesday in Ibadan that the union had budgeted

for regular capacity-building programmes aimed at updating teachers' knowledge and improving classroom delivery.

Oladimeji explained that the programmes are categorised into statutory and non-statutory training.

ry training.

The statutory sessions, known as Study Circle, are constitutional and mandatory, targeting state officers and branch executives, including local government chairmen, secretaries, and treasurers.

Facilitators from relevant ministries and agencies are invited to conduct the sessions.

Beyond statutory training, Oladimeji said, the union organises in-service workshops within the state to enhance teachers' skills locally. Partnerships with agencies such as the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM) further expand professional development opportunities.

"The programmes, increasingly supported by development partners, focus on ICT compliance to equip teachers to move from analogue methods to effectively teach today's digital learners," Oladimeji said.

He added that union members are also exposed to international learning opportunities, including upcoming workshops in Accra, Ghana, before the end of March 2026.

On school safety, Oladimeji emphasised that cases of cult-

ism, bullying, attacks on teachers, and other threats would not be tolerated.

The union promptly reports such incidents to security agencies and pursues legal action where necessary.

Currently, about three court cases involve attacks on teachers and school violence.

Recalling a case in Afijio Local Government Area, he said hoodlums had attacked and stabbed a teacher.

The suspects were arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

Oladimeji stressed that creating a safe school environment requires collective effort.

"It is the duty of parents, the community, students, and teachers. All of us must sanitise and sensitise people against these barbaric attitudes in schools," he said.



NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Country Programme Director, AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) Nigeria, Echej Ijezie; Executive Secretary, NINERELA+, Amber Itoha and General Secretary, Nigerian Union of Allied Health Professionals and Joint Health Sector Unions, Martin Egbanubi, during a news conference urging the European Union to stop blocking health equity regarding the World Health Organisation pandemic agreement by AHF, in Abuja on Tuesday.

PDP urges Ebonyi SWC to mobilise members for e-registration

ABAKALIKI

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has directed the newly inaugurated State Working Committee (SWC) in Ebonyi State to ensure active participation of members in the ongoing e-registration exercise.

Mr Chidiebere Egwu, South-

East National Vice Chairman of the party, gave the charge on Tuesday in Abakaliki, stressing the need for teamwork ahead of the 2027 general elections. He urged the new executives to work with stakeholders to ensure active participation of members in the ongoing e-registration exercise.

"We must hit the ground

running by ensuring that members actively participate in e-registration in line with the Electoral Act 2025 recently signed into law," Egwu said.

The SWC, inaugurated on Saturday, is led by Mr Chukwuma Igwe as Chairman. Other members include Mr Henry Ngonu (Secretary), Elechi Ngwuta (Deputy Chairman), Kingsley Igwe

(Treasurer), Chukwudi Goodluck (Legal Adviser), Nnanna Emea Oji (Organising Secretary), Mrs Chinyere Nwele (Women Leader), Darlington Onwe (Publicity Secretary), Emmanuel Abraham (Financial Secretary), Alhaji Idris Oken (Auditor), Ugochukwu Obasi (Vice Chairman, South), and Mrs Nwojiji Chinazum (Vice Chairman, North).

NDC launches digital membership portal to expand nationwide participation

ABUJA

The Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) has unveiled its digital membership registration portal, a major step to strengthen the party's structure and expand political participation.

The ceremony on Monday in Abuja was led by the party's National Leader, Sen. Henry

Seriake Dickson, alongside National Chairman, Sen. Cleopas Moses, and other stakeholders. Dickson described the platform as a modern tool to allow Nigerians across the country, including the diaspora, to register as members while ensuring proper documentation and management of records.

"Although only weeks old, the NDC has attracted significant

attention and support across the country. Nigerians are angry with the status quo and hungry for change. The NDC is a fresh, crisis-free movement focused on ideological politics and national development," he said.

The digital platform will be complemented by manual forms to include citizens in rural communities who lack digital access. Dickson expressed

confidence that the party would meet registration requirements despite limited time.

Sen. Cleopas Moses added that the portal would enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness, strengthen grassroots mobilisation, and build a broad membership base ahead of future political engagements.

NDC among the two newly registered parties by INEC.

Eid-el-Fitr: NSCDC deploys 2,000 personnel to secure Edo

BENIN CITY

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Edo Command, said that it has deployed more than 2,000 personnel across the state to ensure security before, during and after the Eid-el-Fitr celebration.

The state Commandant of the

corps, Mr Saidi Akintayo, disclosed this on Tuesday while addressing journalists in Benin City. Akintayo described the move as part of proactive measures to guarantee a peaceful and hitch-free celebration.

"We have deployed more than 2,000 personnel drawn from our specialised units across the three senatorial districts to ensure a

hitch-free Eid-el-Fitr celebration. "These units include the Armed Squad, Female Special Squad, Counter Terrorism, Disaster Management, and the Commandant's Monitoring Team," he said.

He added that the personnel had been strategically positioned across the state.

"Critical public places such

as markets, recreational centres, prayer grounds, highways and other vulnerable points will be adequately secured to prevent any form of criminal activity," he also said.

Akintayo revealed that the command would work closely with other security agencies to ensure comprehensive coverage and rapid response to emergencies.

Plateau University expels 76 students over exam malpractice

JOS

Plateau University, Boko, has sanctioned 76 students caught engaging in examination malpractice during the 2024/2025 academic session.

In a statement on Tuesday, Mr Ngwen Jacob, speaking on behalf of Acting PRO, Mr Masara Kim, said the university's senate approved the punishments during its 102nd regular meeting chaired by Prof. Moses Galadima, Deputy Vice

Chancellor Academic.

"The offences include possession of mobile phones in exam halls, written notes, and inscriptions on body parts. Sanctions include rustication for one session, compulsory carryover of courses, and outright expulsions in severe cases," the statement said.

Kim reaffirmed the university's zero tolerance for examination malpractice, highlighting Vice Chancellor Prof. Shadrach Best's commitment to integrity, discipline, and sound moral values.

NSCDC deploys 2,500 officers for Eid security in Kaduna

KADUNA

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Kaduna State Command, has deployed 2,500 personnel across the state to safeguard lives and property during the Eid-el-Fitr celebrations.

State Commandant Mr Panam Musa, in a statement on Tuesday issued by PRO SC Habeeb Badamasi, said officers would protect critical national

assets and infrastructure before, during, and after the festive period.

He warned criminals to desist, stressing that any personnel found compromising duties would face disciplinary action. Musa also urged residents to report suspicious activities to security agencies for prompt intervention.

Musa congratulated Muslim faithful on Eid and encouraged peaceful celebrations, harmony, and adherence to public order.

4 arraigned in Ekiti over alleged breach of peace

ADO-EKITI

Four men were on Tuesday arraigned before a Chief Magistrates' Court in Ado-Ekiti over alleged breach of peace.

The defendants—Anifowose Ayomide (28), Peter Ayomide (24), Rasaz Opeyemi (30), and Ojo Timileyin (22)—pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutor ASP Akinwale Oriyomi told the court that the defendants were arrested on March 14 at about 7:30 a.m. in

an area described as a criminal hideout.

He alleged that they breached the peace by resisting arrest, contrary to Section 181(1)(d) of the Criminal Law of Ekiti State, 2021.

Defence counsel urged the court to grant bail, assuring that the defendants would not abscond.

Chief Magistrate Abayomi Adeosun granted bail in the sum of N50,000 each with one surety each and adjourned the case to April 14 for mention.

NEWS

Maiduguri bomb blasts kill 23, injure 108

● Hospitals targeted, security on high alert

MAIDUGURI

At least 23 people were killed and 108 others injured in multiple coordinated bomb explosions across Maiduguri on Monday evening, marking one of the deadliest attacks in the city in recent months.

The Borno State Police Command said suspected suicide bombers carried out the attacks at 7:24 p.m., targeting crowded civilian areas including Maiduguri Central Market (Monday Market), the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital (UMTH) gate, and the Post Office Flyover.

The attacks occurred during the evening Iftar period, when markets and streets were crowded with residents breaking their fast during Ramadan.

ASP Nahum Daso, the command's spokesperson, said preliminary investigations indicated that improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were used.

"A combined team of Police Tactical Units, military personnel, and other joint security operatives was swiftly deployed," he said.

"The scenes were secured and cordoned off, while the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Unit conducted thorough sweeps to ensure no further threats remained. We are examining CCTV footage and interviewing witnesses to identify the perpetrators."

Borno State Commissioner of Police, Mr Naziru Abdulmajid, visited the sites to assess

the damage and commiserate with victims and their families.

He noted that some victims had suffered severe injuries, including amputations and blast trauma.

"Normalcy has been restored, and security has been heightened across the metropolis," Daso added.

The Joint Task Force (North East), Operation HADIN KAI (OPHK), confirmed the attacks and blamed suspected Boko Haram terrorists.

Lt.-Col. Sani Uba, JTF Media Officer, said the explosions were intended to inflict mass casualties and instill fear.

"Preliminary findings suggest multiple suicide bombers infiltrated the city with the intent to carry out coordinated attacks. Security forces are pursuing leads to apprehend those responsible," he added.

Emergency responders, including the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Borno State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA), promptly evacuated victims to the General Hospital, Specialist Hospital, and UMTH.

Many victims required urgent surgery, blood transfusions, and intensive care support. Local residents assisted in transporting victims before emergency services arrived.

The Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) condemned the attacks, especially the blast at UMTH, describing it as "tragic, barbaric, and unacceptable."

NARD President, Dr Mo-

hammad Suleiman said hospitals should remain sanctuaries for healing.

"None of our members at UMTH was harmed, but this attack underscores the urgent need for heightened security

around healthcare facilities," he said.

Dr Suleiman praised doctors, medical students, and other healthcare workers for their bravery and professionalism during the crisis.

"Despite the chaos, our staff ensured victims were treated promptly. This demonstrates

the resilience of health workers in conflict-affected areas," he said.

Lt.-Col. Uba warned residents to remain vigilant, especially during the 27th and 29th days of Ramadan, when public spaces are densely populated.

"Avoid crowded areas, report unattended objects, and

cooperate with security personnel. Community and religious leaders, market associations, and transport unions must help sensitise the public," he added.

Security agencies have intensified patrols, surveillance, and counter-IED measures across the city.



NIESV VISIT TO NAN:

L-R: Deputy Editor-in-Chief and Head of Editorial Operations, *News Agency of Nigeria* (NAN), Lagos, Mr Kelvin Okunzuwa; Head of Lagos Operations, NAN, Mrs. Ifeyinwa Omowole; Chairman Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers (NIESV), Mr Tosin Kadiri and Vice Chairman NIESV, Lagos Branch, Mr Ayodeji Odeleye, during the visit of NIESV to NAN Lagos on Tuesday.

NNPP denies Tinubu, APC role in party disputes, calls on members to return

LAGOS

The New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) has rejected allegations by the Sen. Rabiul Kwankwaso-led faction that President Bola Tinubu and the APC are backing court litigations within the party, describing the claims as "mischievous and unfounded."

In a statement by NNPP National Secretary Mr Omini

Olaposi, the party blamed internal disputes and defections on Kwankwaso's high-handed attempts to hijack the party, warning members against listening to "lazy blackmail."

"Was it Tinubu who made Kwankwaso, the 2023 presidential candidate of NNPP, attempt to hijack a party that gave him a free ticket to run?" the statement asked. Olaposi urged members who defect-

ed to other parties to return, stressing that loyalty to the party will be rewarded.

The statement recalled that the last national convention held in Lagos in 2025 resolved that all elected members would automatically be granted tickets based on loyalty.

"NNPP remains the beautiful bride of the 2027 general elections. Members who left due to court cases or over-

bearing leadership are advised to return and participate in the party's rebuilding," it read.

Olaposi emphasised that NNPP is focused on service to Nigerians, not political rivalry.

"We are a responsible partner to all registered parties. Our fight is not for politics or power, which belongs to God. We are committed to building a structure to ensure success in 2027," he said.

Suicide bomb threats trigger security alert across N'East

ABUJA/MAIDUGURI

The Headquarters, Joint Task Force (North East) Operation HADIN KAI (OPHK), has issued a heightened security advisory following Monday's deadly bombings in Maiduguri, warning that Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists often increase attacks during religious periods,

particularly in the final days of Ramadan.

Lt.-Col. Sani Uba, JTF Media Officer, said the recent blasts targeted Monday Market, the Post Office, and the UMTH entrance, illustrating the terrorists' intent to strike crowded civilian locations.

He urged residents to remain vigilant, report unattended bags, parcels, or suspicious

objects, and avoid overcrowded areas. Worshippers attending night prayers such as Taraweeh and Tahajjud were advised to cooperate fully with security personnel during screening and access control operations.

"Community leaders, religious authorities, market associations, and transport unions have been asked to support security efforts by sensitising

members and promptly reporting suspicious activities," Uba said.

Operational readiness has been intensified across the region, with increased patrols, surveillance, and protective measures around critical locations.

"Security is everyone's responsibility," he added. "If you see something, say something."

NARD urges protection of hospitals in conflict zones

MAIDUGURI

Following the bomb blasts in Maiduguri, the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) has called for urgent measures to protect healthcare facilities and personnel in conflict-prone areas.

In a statement by President Dr

Mohammad Suleiman, NARD described the attacks as "tragic, barbaric, and unacceptable."

The body expressed concern that one of the explosions occurred at UMTH, the largest tertiary health facility in North-East Nigeria.

"Hospitals are sacred spaces meant for healing, hope, and

preservation of life. To witness such places targeted by acts of violence is both painful and unacceptable," the statement said.

NARD praised healthcare workers for attending to victims promptly and commended UMTH management for their leadership.

The association urged the

Federal Government and security agencies to strengthen surveillance, increase security presence, and strategically deploy EOD units around UMTH and other critical locations.

NARD also called for proactive measures to prevent future attacks, safeguard healthcare workers, and protect patients.

FGM persists in Nigeria despite laws, advocates warn

IBADAN

The Wellspring Outreach and Support Foundation has raised concern over the continued practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in parts of Nigeria despite legal prohibitions.

Speaking on Tuesday, Director Mrs Adelayo Ojo-Nkom said FGM remains widespread in many communities, including Oyo State.

"FGM is extremely harmful and has caused excessive bleeding, infections, lifelong trauma, sexual dysfunction, and psychological disorders including PTSD," she said.

Ojo-Nkom explained that cultural beliefs, misinformation, and the role of older women as custodians perpetuate the practice.

"Many girls are told that if they are not cut, they will not marry or give birth, or their children will be abnormal."

These are false beliefs with no medical or moral basis," she said.

The foundation urged parents, community leaders, and women's groups to reject FGM. "Everyone should be an advocate against FGM. It should stop. We should not encourage it," she said.

Ojo-Nkom reminded the public that FGM is a criminal offence under the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, 2015, punishable by fines or imprisonment.

As part of its advocacy, the foundation unveiled an anti-FGM pledge encouraging individuals to commit to ending the practice in their homes and communities.

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **DIBIE CHUKWUJI SAMUEL**, **DIBIE SAMUEL CHUKS**, **DIBIE CHUKWUJI** and **DIBIE SAMUEL CHUKWUJI**, are one and the same person. Henceforth I wish to be known and address as **DIBIE CHUKWUJI SAMUEL**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities, banks, Nigeria stocks and general public please take note.

CORRECTION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **AKOGUN LADI** and **LADI JOSEPH AKOGU** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and address as **AKOGUN LADI**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Court slams EFCC with N500,000 fine over delays in Emefiele trial

ABUJA

Justice Hamza Muazu of the Abuja High Court on Tuesday fined the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) N500,000 for seeking multiple adjournments in the ongoing trial of former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Godwin Emefiele.

Emefiele is facing charges bordering on criminal breach of trust, forgery, abuse of office, conspiracy to obtain by false pretence, and obtaining money by false pretence while in office.

The anti-corruption agency alleged that he fraudulently

obtained \$6.23 million purportedly meant for international election observers for the 2023 general election.

He is also accused of conferring corrupt advantages on two firms—April 1616 Nigeria Ltd and Architekton Nigeria Ltd.

The former apex bank chief has, however, pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

The court imposed the fine following the prosecution's failure to produce its 13th witness (PW13), DCP Edwin Okpoziakoe, who was scheduled to testify.

The absence of the witness, a member of the investigative team in the alleged fraud case,

led to another adjournment.

Earlier, EFCC counsel, A.O. Mohammed, told the court that although the witness had been duly informed, he was unavailable due to administrative procedures.

He explained that the Force Headquarters had directed him to write formally to the Inspector-General of Police to secure the officer's attendance, which he said he promptly did.

Mohammed further disclosed that the witness later informed him of a personal matter at a court in Gwagwalada, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), where his account was reportedly un-

der a garnishee order.

He consequently appealed for an adjournment to enable the prosecution present the witness.

However, defence counsel, Matthew Burkaa, strongly opposed the request, citing Sections 396(3) and (4) of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, which limit parties to five adjournments from arraignment to judgment.

He argued that the EFCC had already exceeded this limit, having been granted eight adjournments.

Burkaa further contended that the prosecution had earlier sought accelerated hearing

but failed to demonstrate diligence, adding that the witness chose personal matters over official duty.

He urged the court to refuse any further adjournment.

In his ruling, Justice Muazu agreed with the defence that the prosecution had exceeded the statutory number of adjournments. Nevertheless, he held that the court retains discretion

to grant adjournments in the interest of justice, noting that an investigating officer's testimony is crucial in a case of this nature.

The judge, however, sanctioned the EFCC with a N500,000 fine for delaying the trial despite earlier assurances of accelerated hearing. The case was subsequently adjourned to April 27 for continuation of trial.

Ansaru Commanders trained in Libya, confessed to IED expertise —DSS witness

ABUJA

A Department of State Services (DSS) operative on Monday told the Federal High Court in Abuja that two suspected commanders of the Ansaru terror group received weapons and explosives training in Libya.

The witness, identified as ABC for security reasons, testified before Justice Emeka Nwite as the first prosecution witness (PW-1), led in evidence by prosecution counsel, David Kaswe.

The defendants, Mahmud Usman and Abubakar Abba, are being prosecuted on terrorism-related charges. Usman is listed as the first defendant, while Abba is the second.

According to the witness, the suspects confessed that foreign instructors from Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria trained them in Libya on the manufacture and use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

He further stated that Usman was arrested after intelligence identified him as

a leader of Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru), while Abba was apprehended in Kaduna North Local Government Area.

The DSS operative described Ansaru as a breakaway faction of Boko Haram involved in terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, and illegal mining across several regions, including the North-West, North-Central, South-West, and parts of Edo and Delta states.

The witness added that the defendants confessed to founding the group in Jigawa State in 2012 and to participating in a 2020 attack on a Nigerian Army formation in Wawa that led to multiple fatalities.

He also told the court that the suspects admitted to kidnapping the in-law of late former President Muhammadu Buhari, as well as immigration and customs officers.

Abba was further said to have pledged allegiance to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which allegedly supplied arms and ammunition.



10TH ANNUAL RAMADAN PROGRAMME:

Officials and members of Daharatu Mismas Foundation, with widows, during the 10th Annual Ramadan programme and support for widows and needy in Kaduna on Monday.

Agunloye unilaterally cut FG equity by \$900m in Mambilla deal —EFCC witness

ABUJA

An Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) witness, Umar Babangida, on Tuesday told an Abuja High Court that former Minister of Power and Steel, Dr Olu Agunloye, unilaterally reduced the Federal Government's equity participation in the Mambilla Hydroelectric Power Project by \$900 million.

Babangida, an Assistant Commissioner of Police and EFCC investigator, made the disclosure while being cross-examined by defence counsel, Adeola Adedipe (SAN), before Justice Jude Onwuegbuzie in Apo.

Agunloye is standing trial on charges of disobeying presidential directive, conspiracy, forgery, and receiving gratification.

He is alleged to have received N5.212 million through Jide Sotirin, via his Guaranty Trust Bank account, for conveying Federal Government approval for the construction of the 3,960MW Mambilla Hydroelectric Power Station.

The EFCC further alleged that Agunloye, while in office, conspired with Leno Adesanya of Sunrise Power and Transmission Company Limited (SPT-CL) to forge a document titled "Construction of 3,960MW Mambilla Hydroelectric Power

Station on a build, operate and transfer basis."

He has pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The witness told the court that the initial Federal Government equity was 25 percent, valued at \$1.5 billion, but was reduced to between zero and 10 percent under the contract awarded in 2003.

While responding to questions, Babangida clarified that 10 percent of \$6 billion amounts to \$600 million, contradicting any claim that the arrangement saved the government \$900 million.

He added that Agunloye had advised investigators to consult participants at the

May 21, 2003 Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting for clarity, noting that a questionnaire sent to former President Olusegun Obasanjo had already been admitted in evidence as Exhibit EFCC3 O.

Babangida also testified that investigations revealed that Agunloye received N5.2 million as gratification 16 years after leaving office. According to him, the money was transferred by Sotirin on the instruction of his principal, Leno Adesanya.

He said although Sotirin claimed the funds were for medical purposes, a review of the defendant's bank statements contradicted that assertion.

Court orders cable thief to sweep Mosque for one month

ABUJA

A Magistrates' Court in Abuja has ordered a businessman, Musa Ibrahim, to sweep the premises of Amur Mosque in Wuse II for one month after pleading guilty to theft and mischief.

Magistrate Lami Sani handed down the sentence after the convict admitted to stealing electrical cable valued at N2

million from the mosque on March 5.

The prosecution, led by A.A. Adeje, told the court that Ibrahim had entered the mosque under the guise of collecting Ramadan food before sneaking through a back entrance to commit the theft.

The stolen cable was recovered, and the convict expressed remorse, pleading for leniency and promising not to reoffend.

4 arraigned over alleged theft of N27.6m gold in Ibadan

IBADAN

Four persons were on Tuesday arraigned before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court in Ibadan over the alleged theft of gold worth N27.6 million.

The defendants—Israel Mapko (60), Kabirat Nurudeen (48), Salisu Adamu (58), and Abiola Modesola (49)—are

facing a four-count charge bordering on conspiracy, stealing, and receiving stolen goods.

They all pleaded not guilty. Prosecutor, Sgt. Akeem Akinyole, told the court that the offences were committed between October 2025 and February 2026 in the Ologuneru area of Ibadan.

He alleged that Mapko fraudulently converted a 21-carat gold weighing 119.2

grammes, belonging to one Alhaji Kamoru Lawal, which he was meant to deliver to a buyer identified as Queen Sila.

Instead, he allegedly absconded with the gold valued at N27.6 million.

The prosecutor further stated that the second and third defendants received 15 grammes of gold earrings valued at N6.9 million, knowing them to be stolen, while

the fourth defendant allegedly harboured Mapko to evade arrest.

Chief Magistrate Olabisi Ogunkanmi granted the defendants bail in the sum of N10 million each with two sureties in like sum.

The court stipulated that one surety must be a landed property owner, while the other must be a blood relative.

The case was adjourned to June 5 for hearing.

Cleaner, 24, arraigned for alleged theft of employer's kitchen tools

ABUJA

A 24-year-old cleaner, Prince Philip, was on Tuesday arraigned before a Magistrates' Court in Asokoro, Abuja, for allegedly stealing kitchen utensils belonging to his employer.

Philip, an employee of Farm City Gardens in Maitama, is facing a one-count charge of stealing. He pleaded not guilty. Prosecutor A.A. Adeyeju

told the court that the matter was reported on March 10 by Mr Maaji Jeremiah, alleging that the defendant stole two frying pans and several spoons from the facility's store.

Police investigations reportedly led to the recovery of the items from the defendant, who allegedly confessed.

The court granted him bail in the sum of N50,000 with one surety and adjourned the case to April 1.

NEWS

Foreign

Trump seeks to delay meeting with Xi in China

US President Donald Trump said that he is planning to delay a high stakes visit to China later in March by about a month because of the Iran war.

"We've requested that we delay it a month or so," he told reporters at the White House, adding that it was important that he remained available to oversee the war.

The meeting between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping is currently set to take place between 31 March to 2 April, following their last face to face talks in October last year.

Chinese foreign affairs spokesman Lin Jian said on Tuesday that Beijing and Washington are in talks over "the timing and related matters of President Trump's visit to China".

China also rejected any connection between the delayed

meeting and issues around the Strait of Hormuz - a critical waterway for global energy shipments from the Gulf.

"We have noted that the US side has publicly clarified these false reports by the media, stating that the relevant reports are completely wrong, and emphasised that the visit has nothing to do with the issue of the open navigation of the Strait of Hormuz," Jian said.

On Sunday, Trump told the Financial Times he might postpone the meeting if China did not help unblock the Strait of Hormuz. But on Monday, he said he had proposed the delay solely to make sure he was around to manage the war.

"I'm looking forward to being with him," he said, referring to Xi. "We have a very good relationship."

"There's no tricks to it either," Trump added. "It's very simple. We've got a war going

on. I think it's important that I be here."

The Iran war has eclipsed most of Trump's other foreign policy priorities, faced with an intensifying conflict and disruptions to the global oil supply, which has threatened to raise prices in the US.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Monday that the meeting's delay would not be due to Washington's request that Beijing help in the Gulf, or any trade disagreements.

Bessent said: "The President wants to remain in DC to co-ordinate the war effort... Travelling abroad at a time like this may not be optimal."

Trump's remarks come as frictions between the world's two largest economies have grown, fuelled by the Iran war.

Beijing is a major buyer of Iranian energy exports and has criticised the US and Israeli strikes against the country.

Washington also announced it would investigate trade practices among a list of countries, including China, after Trump's signature tariff policy was struck down by the Supreme Court in February.

Representatives from the US and China have met in Paris in recent days for negotiations, such as over investments, tariffs and economic sanctions.

The sides reached consensus on some issues and will carry on with negotiations, Chinese trade representative Li Chenggang was quoted as saying in state media outlet Xinhua on Monday.

US representatives briefed their Chinese counterparts on changes to Washington's tariff measures, said Li.

Chinese negotiators expressed "serious concern" about Washington's plans to probe the country's trade practices and urged the US to maintain economic stability, he said.

UN chief wants countries to eradicate anti-Muslim hatred

UN Secretary General António Guterres has urged countries to "work together" and eradicate a rising tide of anti-Muslim hate, calling for a rejection of "the narratives of fear and exclusion".

As conflict and instability rage, "millions of Muslims around the world carry that pain with them," Guterres said in an event marking the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in New York.

"Let us recommit to equality, human rights and dignity of every person, everywhere," he said.

The secretary-general warned that for far too many Muslims living as minorities, their daily lives faced being shaped by exclusion, institutional discrimination, socioeconomic marginalisation, unwarranted surveillance and profiling.

As the world's two billion Muslims approach the end of the holy month of Ramadan, Guterres called on governments to take responsibility and introduce measures that "safeguard equality, not entrench prejudice."

Guterres, however, warned against the "subtle biases" that rarely make headlines but nonetheless "shape lives, erode trust, and send a clear message about who is seen as belonging and who is not."

These could be "opportunities quietly denied, assumptions left unchallenged, or questions weighted down by

suspicion" and "are driven – and dangerously amplified – by anti-Muslim rhetoric, misinformation, and outright hate."

Guterres said that when discrimination is "echoed by those in positions of authority, prejudice becomes normalised."

"When stereotypes are left unchallenged, they harden into policy. And when fear is allowed to guide decision-making, injustice follows."

"Governments have a clear responsibility," he added, urging them to take action and bring forward legislation and security measures that protect people and respect human rights, "not stigmatise entire communities."

He also emphasised the responsibility of technology companies and said that "online spaces should bring people together, not drive them apart," adding that "they must do far more to identify, prevent, and address hate speech and harassment."

"Silence in the face of hatred only allows it to spread," the Secretary-General underscored, adding that "we all have a responsibility to speak out against bigotry, xenophobia, and discrimination."

"As Ramadan draws to a close, Muslims around the world reaffirm values that also form the foundation of the UN Charter... These universal principles must guide our global response to hatred and division."



PAKISTAN AIR STRIKE:

The rehabilitation centre was razed to the ground in the strike

Sri Lanka declares Wednesdays off as Asian countries try to conserve fuel

Sri Lanka has declared every Wednesday a holiday for public institutions to conserve fuel as the island nation grapples with possible shortages in the wake of the US and Israel's war with Iran.

"We must prepare for the worst, but hope for the best," President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said at an emergency meeting with senior officials on Monday.

This is the latest in a series of belt-tightening measures undertaken by Asian countries since the war choked off the Strait of Hormuz, which used to carry millions of barrels of oil from the Gulf into the region.

Nearly 90% of all the oil and gas flowing through the strait last year was bound for Asia, which is the world's largest oil-importing region.

What are other Asian countries doing?

Elsewhere in Asia, authorities have resorted to a variety of austerity measures.

In Thailand, for example, the government is urging people to swap suits for short-sleeved tees to reduce reliance on air conditioning, while in Myanmar, private vehicles are allowed only to operate on alternate days depending on their licence plate numbers.

Bangladesh has brought forward Ramadan holidays in universities and introduced planned blackouts across the nation to conserve energy.

In the Philippines, some government offices have mandated that staff work from home at least one day a week, while President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has banned non-essential travel in the public sector.

Marcos also announced cash assistance to tricycle drivers, farmers and fishermen to help them cope with rising oil prices, ranging from 3,000-5,000 pesos (\$50-\$84; £38-63).

And Vietnam is strongly encouraging citizens to stay at home more to conserve fuel. The government also called on people to "ride bicycles, carpool, use public transport, and "restrict personal vehicle use when unnecessary."

What else is Sri Lanka doing?

Sri Lanka's new four-day week will also apply to schools and universities, but it will not affect state institutions providing essential services, such as the health and immigration authorities, officials say.

Authorities picked Wednesday instead of Friday as the additional off day so that gov-

ernment offices would not be closed for three days in a row, they added.

Motorists are also now required to register for a National Fuel Pass which rations the amount of fuel that people can buy.

This has sparked some unhappiness among some Sri Lankans who feel that the fuel quotas - 15 litres for private cars and five litres for motorcycles - are too low.

The rationing mechanism was first implemented in 2022 during the country's worst economic crisis which saw it run out of foreign reserves and unable to import essential items and buy enough fuel.

Oil prices have soared since the US and Israel started bombarding Iran late last month, and is currently hovering at around \$100 a barrel.

Pakistan air strike kills at least 100 at Kabul drug rehab centre

More than 100 people have been killed in a Pakistani air strike on a drug treatment centre in Afghanistan's capital, forensic laboratory sources told the BBC.

Some of the bodies were injured beyond recognition, sources at the Kabul Forensic Medicine department said. Taliban officials have put casualty figures much higher. The UN called for a swift investigation.

Pakistan denied striking the facility deliberately, saying it had "precisely targeted military installations and terrorist support infrastructure".

The cross-border conflict re-erupted last month, with Pakistan saying Afghanistan was harbouring militants who attacked its territory, something Kabul denied.

The scene of a destroyed drug addiction treatment centre in Kabul

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (Unama) condemned the strike, which it said had been carried out by Pakistani forces on the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital.

"Unama reiterates its call for de-escalation and an immediate ceasefire, and for parties to comply with their obligations under international law to ensure the protection of civilians," a statement said.

Some 2,000 people were be-

ing treated at the rehab centre, according to officials at the facility, who believe there could be hundreds of casualties.

The Afghan health ministry's spokesman, Sharafat Zaman Amarkhail, told the BBC there were no military facilities near the rehabilitation centre.

Residents reported hearing loud explosions across Kabul at around 20:50 (16:20 GMT) on Monday, followed by the sound of aircraft and air defence systems.

Family members of those being treated at the centre were gathered outside, desperately trying to find out information about their loved ones.

A Taliban government spokesman said the death toll had reached at least 400, but the BBC has not independently verified the numbers. A BBC reporter at the scene saw more than 30 bodies carried out on stretchers on Monday evening.

Pakistan's information ministry said the strikes in Kabul and the eastern province of Nangarhar had been "precise and carefully undertaken to ensure no collateral damage is inflicted".

It dismissed Afghanistan's claim as a "misreporting of facts... [that] seeks to stir sentiments, covering illegitimate support to cross-border terrorism".

Foreign

NEWS

US west coast prepares for 'dangerous' heatwave in early spring

A significant and unusually early heatwave is building across the south-western US this week, bringing temperatures more typical of early summer than mid-March.

Temperatures could exceed 100F (38C) as soon as Wednesday.

In Phoenix, Arizona, the National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts temperatures could exceed 100F (38C) as soon as Wednesday, the earliest arrival of triple-digit heat to the city in nearly four decades.

A strong, slow-moving high-pressure system - often called a heat dome - is trapping hot air over the region, pushing temperatures 20-30F above normal in parts of California, Nevada, and Arizona.

The heat is expected to persist for several days, with limited overnight cooling adding to the strain. Millions are likely to be affected.

Highs are expected to reach well above 90F in many areas, including typically cooler coastal regions, while inland and desert locations could exceed 100F, with some spots approaching or surpassing 110F, challenging long-standing March records.

NWS has issued heat advisories for parts of California, including the Bay Area and central coast, where temperatures could reach around 90F.

Residents in the affected areas are being warned to check on the

elderly and other at-risk groups as temperatures climb, and to schedule events around peak heat.

"Extreme early-season heat coupled with high tourism rates will make this heat very dangerous, particularly for those not acclimated to the heat and/or traveling from cooler climates," the Las Vegas, Nevada NWS office said.

Forecasters warn this could be a prolonged event, with only gradual relief possible by the weekend or early next week, raising concerns about health risks and broader environmental impacts.

The heatwave also poses a serious threat to California's already below-average snowpack, accelerating melt at a time when it would normally build or decline slowly.

With temperatures running far above normal, snow in the Sierra Nevada is likely to melt weeks earlier than usual, reducing the amount of water that can be gradually released into reservoirs later in the year.

This rapid runoff increases the risk of summer water shortages - since snowpack provides roughly a third of the state's water - and leaves landscapes drying out sooner, heightening the potential for a longer and more intense wildfire season.

Wildfire risk remains relatively low across much of the Southwest despite the heatwave, as lighter winds in these regions are expected to limit the rapid spread of fires.

Aspiring female Zambian politicians asked for sexual favours, official says

A senior Zambian government official has said that some political parties were asking prospective female candidates for sexual favours in exchange for selection ahead of August's general election.

Women are under-represented in leadership positions in Zambia.

"I am going to appeal to all female aspiring candidates to ensure that they record all these cases," Mainga Kabika, the civil service head of the gender division in the president's office, said on Monday.

She did not name the political parties involved.

Zambia has a big gender imbalance in national politics with around 15% of MPs being women. Their under-representation at leadership level reflects "deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers", a statement from the presidency said last year.

Kabika was addressing a conference of state prosecutors when she revealed that women had been in touch with her about what they were being asked to do.

"I can confirm to you right now that I am actually receiving a lot of messages; some of them are already on record... they are reporting that they are already being asked for sexual favours in exchange for adoption [as candidates], and this

is unacceptable," she said.

"This situation is very troubling as it discourages many women from participating in politics, particularly as candidates," Beauty Katebe, who chairs the board of the Non-Governmental Gender Organisations Coordinating Council, told the BBC.

She added that many women had experienced what she described as "sextortion" during the nomination process and encouraged those affected to report such cases. Katebe, however, acknowledged the challenges faced as a result of "cultural biases and the embarrassment that the victims normally face".

She called for the establishment of a fast-track court to handle allegations swiftly and said that laws must be stiffened to discourage sexual harassment of women.

"If they were being exposed, they would definitely stop," she said of alleged perpetrators.

Katebe argued that patriarchal tendencies in political parties have impacted women's participation.

In its statement on gender disparities last year, the president's office acknowledged that while there had been some high-profile female appointments in politics, including Vice-President Mutale Nalumango, there was still a long way to go.



CONGO PM KILLED 1961:

Patrice Lumumba's only surviving remains, a tooth, were laid to rest in Kinshasa in 2022

Belgian court clears way for trial over 1961 killing of Congo PM Lumumba

A Belgian court has ruled that a former diplomat can stand trial in connection with the killing in 1961 of Patrice Lumumba, Congo's first prime minister.

Etienne Davignon, now 93, is accused of involvement in the unlawful detention and transfer of Lumumba and of his degrading treatment. Davignon was a trainee diplomat at the time and went on to become a vice-president of the European Commission.

He is the only surviving member of the 10 Belgians accused in a criminal case brought

by Lumumba's family in 2011.

The independence hero was executed by a firing squad and his body was dissolved in acid.

Belgium, the former colonial power, has recognised its responsibility and apologised both to Lumumba's relatives and the Democratic Republic of Congo - as the country is now known.

The leader's grandson Mehdi Lumumba welcomed the decision by a Brussels court that Davignon could stand trial. "We are all relieved," he told the AFP news agency. "Belgium is finally confronting its history." The ruling is subject to appeal.

Lumumba was appointed prime minister after Congo gained independence in June 1960. He was one of the most prominent voices in Africa's anti-colonial movement.

Although Belgium had relinquished power, it viewed Lumumba as a threat to its continued economic and political influence in the country.

In a famous speech on independence day, in front of Belgian dignitaries including King Baudouin, Lumumba, aged 34, castigated Belgium saying that the Congolese had been held in "humiliating slavery".

He was ousted in a coup in September 1960 and captured two months later. In January 1961, with the tacit backing of Belgium, he was shot along with two associates.

Although Lumumba denied being a communist, other Western powers were also suspicious of him, fearing that he was sympathetic to the USSR during the Cold War.

A 1975 US Senate inquiry found that the CIA had plotted to assassinate him, though the plan was not carried out and Lumumba was killed by Belgian-backed Congolese forces.

Strait of Hormuz: What have other countries said about Trump's request for help?

Donald Trump's request for countries to send ships to the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial oil route under near-blockade by Iran during the war in the Middle East.

Trump has said the US will keep bombing the shoreline and Iranian vessels to "soon get the Hormuz Strait OPEN, SAFE, and FREE!" but has also called on other countries to send warships.

"Hopefully China, France, Japan, South Korea, the UK, and others, that are affected by this artificial constraint, will send ships to the area so that the Hormuz Strait will no longer be a threat by a Nation that has been totally decapitated," Trump said in a Truth Social post on 14 March.

The US president later warned that failing to secure the strait would be "very bad for the future of Nato".

The strait has been effectively blocked by Iran, except for a handful of vessels carrying Iranian oil to countries like India and China, since Israel and the US attacked Iran on 28 February.

Multiple commercial cargo

ships in the strait have been hit by "unknown projectiles" during more than two weeks of war, with one person reported killed.

About 20% of the world's oil travels through the passage. Global oil prices rose, and some countries in Asia are taking measures to conserve fuel.

Trump has said the US Navy could escort ships through the strait - his energy secretary's official social media erroneously posted that the US had escorted one, but it has not happened yet.

This is what other countries have said in response to Trump's request.

US talking to other countries about 'policing' Strait of Hormuz, Trump says

Strait of Hormuz: What happens if Iran shuts global oil corridor?

UK

At a news conference on Monday, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said conversations aimed at working out a "viable plan" were ongoing with the US, European and Gulf partners, but

that we are "not at the point of decisions yet".

Pressed by the BBC on Sunday whether the UK was considering sending drones or ships to the region, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband responded: "You can rest assured that any options that can help to get the strait reopened are being looked at in concert with our allies."

Refusing to be drawn into operational details, Miliband reiterated that "ending the conflict is the best and surest way to get the strait reopened".

GERMANY

A government spokesman said the war with Iran had "nothing to do with Nato", while Defence Minister Boris Pistorius asked: "What does Trump expect from a handful of European frigates that the powerful US navy cannot do?"

"This is not our war. We have not started it."

FRANCE

President Emmanuel Macron last week said he was trying to put together a coalition to escort

vessels and guarantee freedom of navigation.

But he said this could only happen once the "hottest phase" of the conflict was over. A few days later, his Defence Minister, Catherine Vautrin, said there were no immediate plans to send vessels into the Strait of Hormuz.

On 14 March, France's foreign ministry said the country's aircraft carrier strike group remained deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean, and its mission remained "defensive".

CHINA

Asked by reporters on Monday whether the country had received a request to send ships and how it would respond, foreign ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said: "China once again calls on parties to immediately stop military operations, avoid further escalation of the tense situation and prevent regional turmoil from further impacting the global economy."

Jian also said China was "in communication with relevant parties to work for the deescalation of the situation".

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Sports

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NWFL26: Captain Deborah confident Edo Queens are unstoppable as team face Heartland Queens

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Edo Queens captain Deborah Odiagbe, has expressed confidence in the ability of her team to make it to the super six as they face Heartland Queens in the match day 11 of the Nigeria women premier Football League on Wednesday,

but admitted that no match is easy in the Nigeria league.

The energetic super right back player said that Edo Queens are determined and will go all the way to the super six despite the toughness of the current season.

Odiagbe who is emerging as one of the top defenders play-

ing in NWFL domestic league, expressed optimism that nothing will stop Edo Queens from flying the club's flag at the forthcoming Super six. She has played significant roles in Edo Queens successes since joining the club three seasons ago. She has also been enjoying a prolific run in the current league season.

According to her: "I think we are on the right track, we have played 10 matches and lost only two. We are set and fully prepared to face any team. This is a critical stage of the league, we are very focused and committed, this is not the time to joke, every team in the race want to be at the Super six. For Edo Queens, I will say that our spirit is already at the Super six because I know that nothing will stop us."

"I'm so happy with our per-

formances. There is a great improvement in each game. This is our season to shine. Is going to be super fantastic outings for us. We started very well, we are also going to end the season on a good note. Edo Queens have a target, we are working very hard to win the league and fly Nigeria colour at continental scene. I know by the special grace of God Edo Queens will get there."

"For Heartland Queens, we are good to go. Though it is going to be a tough match but we are equal to the task. We are going there to get our three points. I think it is about mindset, I think it's about mentality in the game, it is about belief, it is about going into that game saying we are meant to be here, play win and smile back to Benin swinging victory songs."



EDO QUEENS

How Jannik Sinner matched Federer, Djokovic record with Indian Wells triumph

Jannik Sinner has matched a remarkable milestone previously achieved only by tennis greats Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic after winning the Indian Wells Masters title with a straight-sets victory over Daniil Medvedev.

The Italian world number two defeated Medvedev 7-6 (8-6), 7-6 (7-4) in the final played under intense heat in California on Sunday. The victory completed Sinner's collection of major hard-court titles, making him the youngest player to achieve the feat.

With the triumph, the 24-year-old has now won both hard-court Grand Slams and all six ATP Masters 1000 events played on hard courts, alongside the season-ending ATP Finals.

His Grand Slam successes include back-to-back titles at the Australian Open in 2024 and 2025, as well as victory at the US Open in 2024.

The latest win at Indian Wells adds to his Masters triumphs in Miami, Toronto, Cincinnati, Shanghai, and Paris, placing him in elite company with Federer and Djokovic as the only men to complete the full set of major hard-court trophies.

"It means a lot to me," Sinner said after lifting the trophy. "I knew this was a tournament I hadn't won yet, so I prepared as professionally as possible. Achieving this milestone is very special."

Sinner produced a dominant serving display in the final, not facing a single break point against Medvedev. He won 43 of 47 points on his first serve, fired 10 aces, and controlled the match

despite two tight tie-breaks.

The Italian also did not drop a set throughout the tournament, securing his first title of 2026 and the 25th of his career.

Medvedev pushed hard, even leading 4-0 in the second-set tie-break, but Sinner responded by winning seven consecutive points to seal the victory.

Despite the defeat, Medvedev is expected to re-enter the ATP top 10 when the rankings are updated. The Russian had earlier produced an impressive semi-final win over world number one Carlos Alcaraz.



JANNIK SINNER

11 Days to Go: Sneak Peak into 17 Para Athletics Events Lined Up for 3rd National Para Games, Abuja 2026

With just 11 days to the start of the 3rd National Para Games Abuja 2026, excitement is building as Para Athletics takes center stage with a total of 17 medal events confirmed for competition at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium.

The Para Athletics events

have been carefully structured across multiple classifications to ensure fair and inclusive competition for athletes with varying impairments.

The field events will feature F57 Discus and F57 Javelin, alongside combined classification events such as F53/54/55/56 Shot Put and

Discus. Athletes in the F42-44/61-64 classes will compete in both Javelin and Discus, while additional Shot Put events will take place in the F46/47, F11/12/13, F37/38, and F40/41 categories.

On the track, athletes will compete in a range of sprint and middle-distance events, including the T11/12/13 200m, T53/54 100m, and T53/54 1500m races. The program also includes T37/38 200m, as well as T46/47 100m and 200m events, all of which are expected to deliver thrilling and closely contested races.

Completing the lineup is the T46/47 Long Jump, which adds a dynamic element to the competition by showcasing agility, speed, and technical precision.

Together, these 17 events span throwing, sprinting, middle-distance racing, and jumping disciplines, reflecting



PARA POWERLIFTING ATHLETE



AKOR ADAMS

Akor Adams reflects on gains of AFCON on his career

Adams was one of the revelations of the tournament and scored important goals for the team in the tournament. He scored three goals as Nigeria finished in third place.

Although the tournament ended in January, Akor Adams still has beautiful memories from the widely viewed AFCON.

"I think my confidence was already good. But playing in the Africa Cup of Nations with Nigeria was a great privilege, something I'm very grateful

for," Adams said.

"I was able to play every match and experience the whole thing. It's a shame we couldn't win the tournament, but it was a very important step in my career," he added.

Adams returned from the tournament in fine form and has scored 7 goals this season for Sevilla. Adams acknowledged that his club has been supporting his career and he feels safe at the club. He started for the side in their 5-2 loss to Barcelona on Sunday in the LaLiga.

Arokodare's late header earns Wolves dramatic draw at Brentford

Tolu Arokodare came off the bench to rescue a crucial point for Wolverhampton Wanderers for as they fought back from two goals down to secure a 2-2 draw against Brentford FC in Monday night's Premier League clash.

The Nigerian striker powered home a 77th-minute header to complete Wolves' comeback after the visitors had trailed 2-0 earlier in the contest.

Brentford started brightly and broke the deadlock in the 22nd minute when Michael Kayode finished calmly to put the hosts in front. The Bees doubled their advantage in the 37th minute as Brazilian forward Igor Thiago found the back of the net, mark-

ing his recent national team call-up with a well-taken goal.

Wolves pulled one back just before halftime when Adam Armstrong struck from the edge of the penalty area in the 44th minute to give the visitors renewed belief.

The momentum shifted after the break, and Wolves eventually drew level when Arokodare rose highest to meet a cross from João Gomes, powering a header into the net in the 77th minute.

The Nigerian forward nearly completed a remarkable turnaround late on, but his second header rattled the crossbar.

The result extends Wolves' unbeaten run to three matches following recent victories over Aston Villa and Liverpool FC.



TOLU AROKODARE

Edo FA Cup tourney to kick off March 31 as draws holds in Benin

Insurance FC to begin campaign at quarter finals stage

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

The Edo State Football Association (EFA) has scheduled the 2026 Edo FA Cup tournament to kickoff on March 31 with twenty-five (25) football clubs vying for honours in the process.

Preceding the kickoff was the draws ceremony which held yesterday at the Media Center of the Samuel Ogbemudia stadium in Benin. A total of 21 teams will be competing in the men's category and 4 teams in the women's category including the female defending champions Edo Queens.

At the draws ceremony witnessed by the Permanent Secretary, Edo State Sports Commission Mrs Patricia Efe-Amenze who also represented the Ex-

ecutive Chairman Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele, Mrs Sabina Chikere, Executive Director Sports Development and Operations in the State Sports Commission, Coach Baldwin Bazuaye MON and Hon Commissioner for Youth Development Charity Amayaevbo among other football and sports stakeholders saw the defending champions Bendel Insurance FC put on bye to begin their campaign at the quarter finals stage while the Runners Up of last edition, Assemblies of God FC are also on bye to the Second Round of the tournament.

In the Preliminary Round Fixtures, Delight FC are paired against Moren Grace FC as curtain raisers in what promises to be an interesting three weeks of football activities

where the state's representatives will emerge for the 2026 President Federation Cup.

Other fixtures include Shops FC vs Okuta FC, St Andrews FC vs Victoria FC, Worshippers FC vs Namo FC, Royal Force FC vs Alhaji FC and

Ine Stars FC vs Ancient FC. Clubs on bye to the Second Round of the tournament are Dynamo Academica Football Club, BJ Foundation Football Club, Bendel Insurance Feeders, Benin Warriors Football Club, Rolly Football Club, West Gate Football Club and Living Voice Football Club.

In the Women's category, defending champions, Edo Queens also gets a bye to the final and waiting to play against the winners between Fortress Ladies and Spunky Blazers Football Club.



EDO FA CUP DRAWS CEREMONY HOLDS

FIFA confirms DR Congo's place in 2026 World Cup play-off despite Nigeria's protest

The world football governing body, FIFA, has reaffirmed that the Democratic Republic of the Congo will participate in the intercontinental play-off for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, despite a formal protest lodged by the Nigeria Football Federation.

The confirmation came through an exclusive interview published on FIFA's official website with DR Congo head coach Sébastien Desabre ahead of the decisive play-off tournament scheduled to take place in Guadalajara, Mexico, on 31 March.

Nigeria had earlier filed a petition with FIFA alleging that DR Congo fielded ineligible players during their encounter with the Nigeria national football team, popularly known as the Super Eagles. The complaint raised hopes among Nigerian fans that the result could be overturned, potentially allowing Nigeria another chance to compete for a World Cup spot.

However, FIFA has yet to publicly address the protest, while continuing preparations for the intercontinental play-off involving the Congolese side.

The interview with Desabre effectively signals that DR Congo remain on course for the play-off match, which will determine whether they secure a place at the 2026 World Cup

finals in North America.

DR Congo, nicknamed the Leopards, are attempting to qualify for the global tournament for the first time in more than five decades. Their only previous appearance came in 1974 when the nation, then known as Zaire, competed in the tournament but exited in the group stage without scoring a goal.

Speaking ahead of the decisive encounter, Desabre said his team was highly motivated and focused on achieving its long-standing objective.

"We're really fired up. We're still on course to meet our main

objective," he told FIFA. "This final will be our 13th match since our qualifying campaign

began. It's been a long road and we've worked our way through every stage."



DR CONGO CELEBRATE

NBBF President Kida commends President Tinubu for fulfilling Afrobasket promises to D'Tigress

It was a moment to once again witness and savour the fulfillment of one of the several life-changing initiatives hinged on the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, as the record winners of the Afrobasket championship, D'Tigress, received their certificates of ownership of the promised houses and national honours, by the federal government.

During the presentation of the certificates to the players, officials and management of the team, an obviously delighted President of the Nigeria

Basketball Federation (NBBF), Engr. Ahmadu Musa Kida, was quick to commend President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for fulfilling his pledge to members of Nigeria's senior women's basketball team.

Kida, in his speech noted that the honours given to the team, would certainly go a long way to reassure the team and of course, the up and coming generations of athletes, that the government of President Bola Tinubu, is intentional about the empowerment and development of the Nigerian youth, using sports as a veritable tool.

President Tinubu had pledged that each member of the victorious team would receive \$100,000 and a house in Abuja as a reward for winning the continental basketball tournament and for bringing pride and honour to the country.

Kida went on to appreciate the selfless efforts and contributions of the leadership of the Chairman of the National Sports Commission, Mallam Shehu Dikko and the Director-General, Bukola Olopade, to the development of sports in Nigeria.

Michael B Jordan becomes first EPL club owner to win Oscar award

Hollywood star Michael B Jordan has made history by becoming the first owner of an English Premier League (EPL) club to win an Oscar, after claiming the Best Actor award at the 98th Academy Awards held on March 15, 2026.

Jordan earned the prestigious honour for his performance in the supernatural thriller Sinners, where he portrayed identical twin brothers, Elijah "Smoke" Moore and Elias "Stack" Moore.

The role marked a major acting milestone, as he became the first actor to win an Academy Award for playing identical

twins in the same film.

Beyond Hollywood, Jordan also has ties to English football. The 39-year-old actor has been a minority owner of AFC Bournemouth since December 2022, after joining the Black Knight Football Club consortium led by American businessman, Bill Foley.

Jordan's Oscar victory represents a rare crossover between sports ownership and film excellence.

His achievement places him among a select group of Black actors who have won the Best Actor Oscar, joining legendary figures such as Sydney Poitier and Denzel Washington.



MICHAEL B JORDAN



NIGERIAN WRESTLERS CHAMPIONS

Purity lauds CG Adeniyi investment as four Nigerian wrestlers win gold in Collegiate Wrestling Championships in USA

Four Nigerian wrestlers that participated in the 2026 NAIA Women's Wrestling National Championships, USA, secured four gold, a feat that adds to Nigeria's continued growing influence in the sport.

The collegiate tournament had over 210 wrestlers within 10 weight classes, jostled for honour and it was Christinah

Ogunsanya 117 lbs who started the medal sweep, delivering a strong performance throughout the tournament, showcasing her technical ability and experience to secure the title.

Ogunsanya, with the win, cemented her place as NAIA National Champion and All-American in the 117-pound division.

Jumoke Adekoye 131 lbs

followed the trajectory with a display of excellent tactical control and resilience, earning the championship title in her weight class.

Also, Esther Kolawole 138 lbs produced an eye-catching display that highlighted her strength.

Kolawole international experience helped her to dominate the tournament, leading

the event in technical falls during the competition.

In a final wrap, Mercy Adekuroye 160 lbs showed a tactical approach to a critical match situation with skilful displays.

Mercy younger sister to wrestling icon Odunayo Adekuroye exhibited tactical control and resilience, which secured the championship title for her.

FEATURE

The Nigerian Observer
...that the people may know

The biggest Iran polling takeaway: Americans don't see the point of this war

The war with Iran is now about two weeks old. And we're getting a lot of polling data on how Americans feel about the most significant new US military conflict in two decades.

It's still a confusing picture, though — and one that could break either for or against the Trump administration.

But at least for now, pessimism and uncertainty about the benefits of this war still seem to be the prevailing takeaway.

Perhaps most strikingly, Americans seem to think this war makes us less safe.

Let's recap.

Where support stands

A new Washington Post poll released Thursday should provide the Trump administration at least a little reason for optimism.

While the Post's poll last week showed Americans opposed Trump's strikes against Iran 52%-39%, this one suddenly showed about an even split on the "U.S. military campaign against Iran" — 42% in support, 40% opposed.

It's now that second poll to suggest this war isn't so unpopular, along with a Fox News survey showing an even 50%-50% split among registered voters.

But it's too soon to say that the Post's poll means the war is getting more popular.

First, it asked different questions between last week and this week. The first was about Trump's initial strikes at the end of February, while the second was about the broader "U.S. military campaign" and didn't mention Trump. (In polling, things can poll worse when you connect them to an unpopular person, as the president is.)

Second, 5 of 7 high-quality pollsters show Americans oppose the war by double digits, including a CNN poll last week.

And that includes two polls conducted in the same period as the Post's new poll — a Quinnipiac University survey (53% of registered voters opposed, 40% support) and a Reuters-Ipsos poll (43% of Americans disapprove, 29% approve).

Third, that Reuters poll asked the same question both right after the first strikes and over the last weekend. It showed virtually no movement.

Americans think war makes us less safe

And to the extent Americans remain skeptical about the war, that's not too surprising.

That's because, when you dig beneath the overall numbers, Americans don't seem to see the point. They actually seem to think it will be a net-neg-



ative for national security.

The Fox poll is a case in point. It shows voters split 50-50 overall on the war.

But the survey also asked whether Trump's "handling of relations with Iran" has made the United States safer or less safe. By a 51%-29% margin, registered voters said it made the US less safe. (Another 19% said it made no difference.)

This is a thread that runs through multiple polls.

The Reuters poll showed Americans thought the war would harm US national security over the long run, 42%-29%. The Quinnipiac poll showed registered voters said it would make the US "less safe," 47%-34%. And the CNN poll showed Americans said it would make Iran more of a threat to the US, 54%-28%.

Even the new Washington Post poll, which was somewhat better for the Trump administration, showed Americans said 53%-46% that the war "will not contribute to the long-term security of the United States."

It's one thing for a war to be more costly than people would like it to be — both in US lives and treasure; it's

quite another for people to think it will be counterproductive. But that's where we're at.

The Quinnipiac poll showed Americans said 55%-39% that Iran did not pose an "imminent military threat to the United States."

And even Republicans don't seem universally convinced the war will wind up improving US national security. Across the five polls asking a version of this question, an average of 19% of Republicans said the war would make the US less safe, compared to 66% more safe.

That's still a largely positive split inside Trump's base, but it's not an overwhelming one. And notably, it seems even some Republicans who approve of the war — which is the vast majority of Republicans — also think it will make us less safe.

This would seem to point to the softness of the support for the war.

Americans didn't see an imminent threat

The threat of Iran — especially a nuclear one — has long lingered large in Americans' minds.

But it doesn't appear they saw that as a threat that required going to war right now.

The Fox poll showed registered voters agreed 61%-38% that Iran posed a "real national security threat" to the US. This is in line with past polling.

But when you add the i-word to such questions — "imminent" — the finding is very different. The Quinnipiac

poll showed Americans said 55%-39% that Iran did not pose an "imminent military threat to the United States."

Things could change because people aren't really tuned in

If some of these findings seem confusing or difficult to reconcile, there may be a good reason.

That's because many people haven't really tuned in and the issue isn't a priority for them — at least not yet.

The newer Reuters poll asked Americans how much they'd heard about the strikes against Iran. While 51% said "a lot," almost half said only "a little" or less.

And even fewer said they cared a lot about what's going on in Iran.

In fact, a majority of Americans said they personally cared "some" or less. Another 28% cared "quite a bit," while just 17% cared "a great deal."

That's a recipe for some volatility in public opinion. And much depends on what happens in the days and weeks to come — including how long the war lasts and what it costs the United States.

Americans could seemingly be convinced of the wisdom of this war. But they're not starting yet.