

# Edo Forestry Commission declares crackdown on illegal logging

● **To collaborate with IDH NISCOPS on sustainable oil-palm production**

The Edo State Forestry Commission has launched a renewed offensive against illegal logging activities, vowing to enforce strict compliance with forestry regulations across the state.

This declaration was made

by the Chairman of the Commission, Hon. (Dr) Valentine Owamagbe Asuen, during a recent inspection of a truck loaded with illegally harvested timber that was intercepted by forest officers in Oluku, Ovia North-East Local Government Area.

Hon. Asuen described the seizure as further evidence of the state government's commitment to ending the plundering of its forest resources.

Condemning the act, he issued a stern warning to those engaged in illegal logging, affirming that

offenders would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

He also appealed to the public to report cases of illegal logging or environmental abuse, stressing that safeguarding Edo's forests required collective effort.

In a related development,

Hon. Asuen addressed forest guards from across the state in his first official meeting with them, issuing clear instructions to intensify their vigilance across all forty-nine forest reserves.

Expressing concern over the increasing incidence of

unauthorised activities in the forests, he charged the guards to align fully with the administration's zero-tolerance stance on corruption and malpractice.

He praised officers from

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# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**JAMB to release results of 379,000 UTME resit candidates today**

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# Anti-corruption move: FG to sell 753 housing units recovered from Emefiele

The Federal Government has formally taken possession of a massive 753-unit housing estate in Abuja, previously owned by embattled former Central Bank Governor, Godwin Emefiele, and plans to put the property up for public sale.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development confirmed on Tuesday that the estate, located in the capital's Mabushi district, was handed over by the Economic and Financial

Crimes Commission (EFCC) during a brief ceremony at the Ministry's headquarters.

In a statement issued by the Ministry's Director of Press and Public Relations, Salisu Haiba, the property was described as part of assets recovered by the EFCC in its ongoing crackdown on corruption.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Arc Ahmed Dangiwa, hailed the transfer as a significant milestone in the gov-

ernment's efforts to repurpose recovered assets for the public good.

"The housing estate recovered from the former Governor of the Central Bank is a case in point," he said.

Dangiwa announced that a joint inspection and structural integrity assessment would be conducted to evaluate the estate's habitability.

Upon completion of the assessment, the housing units will be made available for purchase

by members of the public and for special government needs.

He assured that the sale process would be competitive and transparent, with applications managed through the Renewed Hope Portal.

"There will be nationwide advertisements and a clear channel for Nigerians to express their interest," he said.

EFCC Chairman, Olanipekun Olukoyede, emphasised the symbolic importance of the handover.

"It is important to demonstrate to Nigerians that proceeds of crime recovered in our work will be applied transparently, and will not be looted again," he said.

The move is widely seen as a

bold step in linking anti-corruption efforts with housing policy, converting seized assets into opportunities for citizens while reinforcing the government's commitment to accountability.

## el-Rufai accuses judges, lawyers of corruption

● **As CJN urges Magistrates, Judges to defend judicial independence**

Former Kaduna State Governor, Nasir el-Rufai, has accused many judges and lawyers in Nigeria of engaging in corruption, stating that their actions have seriously eroded public trust in the judiciary.

Speaking at the Law Week of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Bwari Branch, in Abuja, el-Rufai declared that delayed justice and biased judgments have weakened the integrity of the courts.

He urged judges to stop issuing biased rulings and warned that justice in Nigeria increasingly favours the wealthy and powerful.

El-Rufai also criticised lawyers who manipulate the judiciary for political gains, particularly through the use of ex parte orders in political disputes.

He called on legal professionals to reflect deeply on their responsibilities and uphold justice without interference from the executive arm of government.

"Our judiciary, meant to stand as the foundation of fair-

ness and order, now faces intense scrutiny," he said.

"The rise of forum shopping, the misuse of ex parte orders in political cases, and the growing belief that justice is for sale accessible only to the rich and influential show that our courts administer law, not justice."

While delivering the keynote address titled 'Lawyers as Agents of Change: Navigating Economic Reforms, Judicial Policy and Contemporary Issues', el-Rufai challenged lawyers to act as "custodians of conscience" and to resist systemic failures, especially within the judiciary.

At the same time, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Kudirat Kekere-Ekun, urged newly appointed magistrates and judges to maintain high ethical standards and uphold judicial independence.

She gave the charge while declaring open an induction course organised by the National Judicial Institute (NJI) for new judicial officers in

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### DOCUMENTS HAND OVER:

Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Arc. Ahmed Dangiwa (left), handing over documents for the 753 housing units in Abuja recovered from former Governor of CBN, Mr Godwin Emefiele, to Chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Ola Olukoyede.

**We're not elected to fight executive**  
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# JAMB to release results of 379,000 UTME resit candidates today

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has announced that it will release the results of 379,000 candidates who took the rescheduled Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) between Friday and Monday. The results will be made public on Wednesday.

The exam was rescheduled after widespread public outcry over mass failure during the initial UTME.

JAMB acknowledged that both technical and human errors, particularly in Lagos and the South-East, significantly impacted candidates' performance.

Of the 1.9 million who took the exam, over 1.5 million scored below 200 out of 400, triggering concern from various stakeholders.

Following mounting pressure, JAMB investigated the failures and found system errors.

JAMB Registrar, Prof. Ishaq Oloyede, last week took responsibility for the shortcomings and announced a resit for affected candidates. During the announcement, he became emotional and tearful.

On Monday, JAMB spokesperson Dr Fabian Benjamin confirmed that the results of the rescheduled exam will be re-

leased on Wednesday.

Prof. Oloyede had previously disclosed that 379,997 candidates—206,610 in Lagos and 173,387 across the South-East—were impacted by the glitches. He described the disruption as an act of “sabotage” and said the affected candidates were notified by SMS from last Thursday.

From the 1,955,069 initial results processed, only 4,756 candidates (0.24%) scored 320 or above. An additional 7,658 (0.39%) scored between 300 and 319, bringing the number of top scorers (300+) to 12,414 (0.63%).

Meanwhile, 73,441 candidates (3.76%) scored between 250 and 299, while 334,560 (17.11%) scored between 200 and 249. The bulk—983,187 (50.29%)—scored between 160 and 199, the threshold for admission in many institutions.

Another 488,197 (24.97%) scored between 140 and 159, while 57,419 (2.94%) scored between 120 and 139. Only 3,820 (0.20%) scored between 100 and 119, and 2,031 (0.10%) fell below 100.

The result profile has led to widespread debate about the credibility and fairness of this year's UTME.

In reaction, the South-East Caucus in the House of Repre-

sentatives on Monday demanded the immediate resignation of Prof. Oloyede, describing the 2025 UTME as a “catastrophic institutional failure.”

In a statement signed by Iduoma Igariwey (PDP, Ebonyi), the caucus criticised JAMB for poor communication, inadequate notice for the rescheduled UTME, and clashes with ongoing WAEC examinations, which they said

caused “unnecessary trauma” for students.

They noted that the May 14 admission by Oloyede that nearly 380,000 candidates were affected by technical issues confirmed their worst fears.

All five South-East states were hit by the disruptions, the lawmakers said.

Calling for the cancellation of the entire 2025 UTME, the cau-

cus demanded a fresh exam—preferably after WAEC and NECO—to avoid further disadvantaging students.

They also called for the suspension of JAMB officials responsible for digital operations.

“While we appreciate the registrar's honesty, JAMB's hasty and chaotic approach has fallen short of public expectations,” the statement read. “Many students,

already sitting for WAEC, were given less than 48 hours' notice, leading to low turnout and timetable clashes. The result was needless confusion and hardship.”

Quoting Section 18(1) of the 1999 Constitution, the caucus insisted the flawed UTME denied many South-East students their right to equal and adequate educational opportunities.



**NIGERIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY:**

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (middle), with the Executives and members of the Nigerian Red Cross Society (Edo State branch), in his office at the Government House in Benin City

## NNPCL's oil output may slump by 50% —Wood McKenzie

Global provider of data and analytics solutions for the energy and natural resources sectors, Wood McKenzie, has predicted that oil and gas production from the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), could be halved by the late 2030s given lot of sub-commercial assets portfolio operated by the firm.

The submission was made as Woodmac's team of experts, including its Research Director, Upstream, Ian Thom; Director, Corporate Research, Neivan Boroujerdi and Head of West Africa Upstream Content, Sub-Saharan Africa Oil & Gas, Mansur Mohammed, reviewed the status of the company after the exit of its erstwhile Group Chief Executive Officer, Mele

Kyari.

In a podcast theme, “A New Era for NNPC and Nigeria's Upstream Oil & Gas Sector”, Woodmac said its analysis was based on the deployment of its new upstream benchmarking tool, which provides ‘customisable views’ of key operational and financial metrics.

It stated that the review was against the backdrop of the recent ambitious targets set for the NNPC board by President Bola Tinubu to achieve by 2030, including attracting \$60 billion investment to the sector, raising oil output to 3 million barrels daily, gas to 10 BCF per day and 500,000 barrels per day of NNPC refining capacity.

“What's unique to NNPC

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## el-Rufai accuses judges, lawyers...

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Abuja.

Justice Kekere-Ekun said the judiciary selected the new officers based on confidence in their capacity to dispense justice with integrity and efficiency.

She described the theme of the course, ‘Enhancing Judicial Efficiency and Quality of Decision-Making’, as timely and relevant, stressing the importance of delivering justice promptly and professionally.

“Justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done promptly and professionally,” she stated.

She acknowledged that judicial delays still undermine public confidence in the courts and identified tools such as Alterna-

tive Dispute Resolution (ADR), sentencing guidelines, and the Nigeria Case Management System (NCMS) as essential for addressing inefficiencies and promoting transparency.

Drawing from her own experience as a magistrate, the CJN encouraged the new judicial officers to combine sound legal reasoning with an awareness of the social and economic conditions in which they serve.

“This approach will help you issue decisions that are both legally sound and socially just,” she added.

The Administrator of the NJI, Hon. Justice Salisu Abdullahi, also called on the new magistrates and judges to uphold efficiency, fairness, and impartiality in their service

## Idahosa pledges state partnership with Red Cross

BERNADETTE IDALU

The Deputy Governor of Edo State, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, has pledged the full support and collaboration of the state government with the Nigerian Red Cross Society, Edo State Branch in the organisation's longstanding commitment to humanitarian service and its role in supporting vulnerable populations during crises and disasters.

Speaking during a courtesy visit by the leadership and members of the Red Cross Society at Government House, Benin City, Idahosa praised the society for its voluntary efforts in delivering aid to those in distress.

He described the group as a stabilising force for communities across the state during emergencies.

He affirmed that the state remains committed to alleviating the suffering of residents, in line with the promises made during

the last electoral campaign, and will actively support the humanitarian activities of the Red Cross to enhance its reach and sustainability.

The deputy governor encouraged the members of the Red Cross Society to remain faithful to the vision of the society's founder, Jean Henry Dunant, whose early dedication to disaster relief at the Battle of Solferino in 1859 inspired the creation of what has become a global humanitarian movement.

He also acknowledged the enduring legacy of the Red Society in providing critical medical and psycho-social support during emergencies around the world.

In addition to affirming the state's willingness to collaborate with the society, Idahosa appealed to affluent individuals and corporate organisations in Edo to support the work of the Red Cross, which he noted continues to deliver essential relief services to underserved com-

munities.

He assured the visiting delegation that their proposals and appeals would be conveyed to the State Governor, Senator Okpebholo for a thorough review and response.

Earlier, the Chairman of the Nigerian Red Cross Society, Edo State Branch, Mr. Monday Edogawerie, congratulated the governor and his deputy on their electoral success and judicial affirmation by the Governorship Election Tribunal.

He noted that the high regard in which both leaders are held stems from their evident contributions to societal development and good governance.

Edogawerie used the opportunity to brief the deputy governor on planned activities for the 2025 World Red Cross Week, an annual event observed on 8 May to commemorate the 162-year history of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

He recounted the society's

origins, crediting Jean Henry Dunant's mobilisation of local volunteers to treat wounded soldiers at Solferino as the seed that blossomed into the international humanitarian network known today.

The chairman revealed that the theme for this year's observance is “On the Side of Humanity,” underscoring the society's unwavering commitment to human dignity.

He disclosed that, in line with this theme, the Edo State branch had, within the last six months, provided livelihood support to over 1,500 residents affected by the 2024 flood disaster in Ogbesse (Ovia North-East), Ikpe (Ikpeba-Okha), and the communities of Iguoriakhi, Ofulama, and Siluko (Ovia South-West), among others.

He reiterated the society's appeal for financial and logistical support from the government to expand its humanitarian impact across the state.

## Edo Forestry Commission declares crackdown on...

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Ovia South-West, Ovia North-East, Orhionmwon, and Etsako West Local Government Areas for successfully impounding vehicles transporting illegally felled timber.

However, he also warned that any Commission staff found complicit in aiding such criminal acts would face disciplinary action in line with Civil Service Rules.

To boost morale and efficiency, the Chairman pledged to reward dedicated personnel and ensure the provision of essential tools and logistics.

He further urged the guards

to play a proactive role in increasing the Commission's revenue by sealing loopholes and protecting forest assets.

Hon. Asuen linked Forestry Commission's renewed energy to the broader developmental agenda of Governor Monday Okpebholo's administration, calling for full cooperation in ensuring the sustainable management of Edo's rich forest heritage.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Forestry Commission has disclosed plans to collaborate with the IDH Sustainable Trade Initiative's National Initiatives for Sustainable and Climate-Smart Oil-Palm Smallholders (NISCOPS) to promote sustainable oil-palm pro-

duction across the state.

Chairman of the Commission, Hon. Valentine Owamagbe Asuen, made this known during a courtesy visit from Mr Augustine Ninyio, the Programme Officer of IDH NISCOPS, and Mr Abraham Ogwu, Senior Programme Manager of the initiative.

The discussions at the meeting focused on the environmental and socio-economic benefits of sustainable oil-palm farming and explored ways to support small holder farmers in Edo State.

Hon. Asuen welcomed the potential partnership, saying it fits perfectly with the Commission's goal of improving farmers' livelihoods through

responsible forestry practices.

He also thanked Governor Monday Okpebholo for supporting the initiative and reaffirmed the state government's willingness to work with both public and private partners to advance sustainability in the oil-palm sector.

NISCOPS, a long-term initiative connecting palm-oil producer and consumer countries, aims to drive sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices.

The proposed collaboration is expected to generate meaningful improvements in Nigeria's oil-palm industry, benefiting both the environment and smallholder farmers.

# Edo Dep Gov pledges govt partnership with Red Cross

Violence erupted in the Isihor area along the Benin-Lagos road in Edo State on Tuesday, following a protest by youths suspected to be involved in internet fraud, commonly referred to as "Yahoo Yahoo."

The demonstration, which turned chaotic, left a police officer and a tricycle spare parts dealer, Mr Lucky Akoda, with gunshot injuries.

According to eyewitnesses, the protest was a reaction to a raid allegedly carried out by operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commis-

sion (EFCC) and other security agents on Monday night.

The operation reportedly targeted the area for its reputation as a hotspot for cybercrime activity.

In response, youths believed to be affected or affiliated with those arrested took to the streets the following morning in protest, accusing the security forces of harassment and intimidation.

The protest degenerated into violence when some of the demonstrators attacked a police officer and vandalised a security van suspected to belong to a local vigilante group.

Amid the ensuing disorder, shots were fired, and Mr Akoda, a 40-year-old spare parts dealer whose shop is located near the protest site, was struck by a stray bullet as he attempted to close his shop and flee the violence.

The injured police officer and Mr Akoda were both rushed to the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) for treatment.

However, controversy ensued when Mrs Benedicta Akoda, the victim's wife, arrived at the hospital and found her husband handcuffed to his hospital bed by the police.

She expressed outrage and

sorrow that her husband, an innocent businessman caught in the crossfire, was being treated as a suspect.

Speaking through a family source, she appealed to the police and the wider public to intervene and ensure justice, insisting that Mr Akoda had no connection to the protest or the criminal activities attributed to the demonstrators.

"The man was hit by a stray bullet while trying to escape the violence and is now being held as though he were a criminal," the source said.

"His wife, Benedicta, has been

pleading with the authorities to release him and allow him to recover. He is a legitimate trader, not a fraudster."

The incident has drawn public concern over the conduct of security agencies during operations and the potential for innocent civilians to become collat-

eral victims in efforts to clamp down on cybercrime.

Police authorities are yet to issue a statement on the handcuffing of Mr Akoda, but calls are mounting for his immediate release and an investigation into the circumstances surrounding his injury and detention.

**Laughter reloaded: Godpikin Season 3 set to shake Ambrose Alli University with top-notch comedy and entertainment**

The much-anticipated Godpikin Season 3, tagged Godpikin Unleashed, is set to storm the Ambrose Alli University Student Conference Centre on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at 4 p.m., promising an unforgettable evening of jokes, vibes, and pure entertainment.

Popularly known as Unstoppable, Godpikin has built a reputation as a creative powerhouse in comedy, content creation, acting, and influencing. Now, he returns with a bigger, bolder season designed to light up the stage and thrill fans like never before.

The event will feature a power-packed lineup of performers, including crowd favourites like

MC Bongo, MC Dasaint (also known as Oga Johnbosco), MC Pinmouth, De Prophetic, Hype King Ohis, MC Carrot, and Hypertext Mikkie. Also gracing the stage will be Mishael Swiss, Boy Power, Boy Reehan, Jossy Comedian, MC Boyo, and Funny Sam CFR, each bringing their unique flavour of humour and showmanship.

With the promise of jokes and thoughts, Godpikin Unleashed aims to blend laughter with insight, creating a memorable experience for both students and guests. If you're looking for an evening of high-energy comedy, top-tier talent, and a room full of laughter, this is one show you don't want to miss.



**CATHOLIC LEADERS:**

Nigeria's Catholic leaders with President Bola Tinubu in Rome, yesterday.

## Gunfire disrupts Anambra festival as Police arrest suspect, seize weapons

A tense shootout broke out during the opening night of the Imo-Awka cultural festival in Awka, Anambra State, as operatives of the Anambra State Police Command confronted suspected criminals attempting to exploit the event for their operations.

The incident occurred late on Monday, 19 May 2025, when the Rapid Response Squad (RRS) of the Command

moved in on identified hotspots within the vicinity of the festival grounds.

According to a statement from Police Public Relations Officer, SP Tochukwu Ikeniga, the RRS acted on credible intelligence suggesting that a criminal gang had infiltrated the area under the cover of the festival crowd.

As officers closed in on the suspects, one of them, identified as 25-year-old Nasiru

Samaila, reportedly tried to evade arrest by opening fire on the approaching team.

The officers returned fire, wounding Samaila in the leg before successfully apprehending him.

A search of the suspect yielded a locally fabricated Beretta pistol, several rounds of live ammunition, a knife, and substances believed to be hard drugs.

One police officer sustained injuries during the exchange of

gunfire but is said to be recovering.

The Anambra State Police Command reiterated its determination to ensure the safety and security of all festival goers.

SP Ikenga assured that surveillance operations and further investigations would continue throughout the duration of the cultural event to forestall any repeat incidents and maintain public confidence.



GODPIKIN

## Proceeds of Crime Amendment Bill scales 2nd reading

The Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Bill 2025 has scaled second reading in the Senate.

This bill amends the existing Proceeds of Crime Act 2022 to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the management of national assets recovered from unlawful activities.

The bill sponsored by Senator Idiat Adebule, representing Lagos West, proposes the establishment of a central agency to take over the management and dis-

posal of recovered assets, a function currently shared among 18 government agencies.

Leading the debate, Senator Adebule argued that the current arrangement had created overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies, opening the door to mismanagement and corruption; hence, the bill seeks to create an independent body to streamline the process and block leakages.

"The lack of coordination and standardised procedures among the agencies has made asset recovery opaque and un-

accountable," Adebule said.

The lawmakers instantly held polarised views on the bill.

While Senator Sani Musa expressed partial support, stressing the need for stronger oversight but cautioning against the creation of a new agency, Senator Emmanuel Udende opposed the bill.

Udende argued that existing agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are already empowered to manage recovered assets and warned against the proliferation of government

bodies.

Conversely, lawmakers like Senator Isah Jibrin have massive support for the bill, arguing that "there are leakages by agencies that recover these assets, and we need to block them through an independent agency".

In spite of the opposition, the bill scaled second reading and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Human Rights and Legal Matters for further legislative work and is expected to report back in four weeks.

## NNPCL's oil output may slump...

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is (that) unlike a lot of the other National Oil Companies (NOCs) within our corporate universe and around the world, most of its production and its assets are non-operated.

"So it's got big ambitions to grow its business, to grow the Nigerian upstream sector, but a lot of that will be reliant on a lot of other IOCs around the world, indigenous producers, where assets will have to compete for capital within a wider portfolio.

"And if we look at production in a little bit more detail,

we can see that it is growing production in the short term. That's set to peak in 2026. But clearly, there are challenges in the longer term. As we move further out towards the late 2030s, production could be half of what it is today.

"So there is a lack of longevity in the portfolio. It needs more projects in the pipeline. And if we look at the reserve base, what you see is that NNPC has a huge amount of resources within its portfolio, but most of those resources are still sub-commercial," the global research and consultancy firm stated.

## NEWS

# We 're not elected to fight executive —Akpabio

Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, has said that lawmakers were not elected to engage in confrontation with the Executive but to work in partnership for the progress of Nigeria.

Akpabio made the remarks in a feature documentary set to mark two years of the Bola Tinubu administration.

According to a statement by the Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, Akpabio insisted that legislators were elected to make laws that advance the nation's interest, not to act as political antagonists.

"When elected into the National Assembly, whether in the Senate or the House of Representatives, your constituents will not give you boxing gloves. It's not a boxing tournament. You are there to work in a bipartisan manner for the interest of Nigeria," Akpabio said.

The Senate President explained that the cordial relationship between the National Assembly and the Executive arm over the past two years has been made possible by a shared vision for Nigeria's development.

"If you spend all your energy

fighting the Executive, who will work for Nigeria?" he asked.

He noted that the current administration is unprecedented in Nigerian history, with a President, Vice President, and First Lady who are all former senators, a factor he said has strengthened mutual understanding between both arms of government.

Highlighting legislative priorities, Akpabio revealed that the National Assembly is working on a law to compel ministries, departments and agencies to prioritise the purchase of locally assembled vehicles over foreign ones.

"We have started the bill for enacting legislation to enable us first purchase automobiles from Nigerian companies before thinking of importing them," he said.

According to him, Nigeria loses billions of dollars annually to vehicle imports and other goods that could easily be produced within the country.

He blamed the collapse of key sectors like the textile, cotton, groundnut, and palm oil industries on the country's over-reliance on imports, noting that other countries like Malaysia

have succeeded economically by leveraging resources such as palm oil.

"Over 50 textile companies have left Nigeria. The cotton industry collapsed. The groundnut industry collapsed. The palm oil industry collapsed. Look at countries like Malaysia that have leveraged palm oil to boost their economies," he said.

Akpabio praised the Tinubu administration's "Nigeria First" policy and described it as a "fantastic" initiative that deserves

full legislative support.

He disclosed that consultations are ongoing with the Raw Materials Research and Development Council to draft laws aimed at boosting local production.

"We are going to make laws and produce bills that ensure almost every item we consume that can be produced in Nigeria is produced in Nigeria.

"Taking Nigeria First means bringing industries back to the country to serve our population

of over 200 million," he said.

The Senate President also called for more support for local entrepreneurs, adding that Nigeria's large consumer base makes small-scale businesses potentially profitable.

"Even if you produce vinegar and bag it well, it will fly. If you produce bread, you will be a millionaire considering the kind of population that we have," Akpabio stated.

Akpabio pushed back against criticisms that the legislature

under his leadership has acted merely as a rubber stamp for the Executive.

He said the Senate has, on occasion, rejected some of Tinubu's nominees and amended proposals that did not align with public interest.

"People forget that we have made enemies by rejecting some of the nominees that the President sent to us. It's not everything the President brings that he takes back the same way," he said.



**DISSEMINATION MEETING:**

L-R: Dr. Andrew Iyamu, the Special Adviser to Edo State Governor on Health (2nd), Dr. Cyril Oshiomhole, Commissioner for Health, Edo State and Dr. Stanley Ehiarimwian, Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Health, during the dissemination meeting of the 2025 Edo State Health Sector held in Benin City.

## NBA, Falana kick against Compulsory Voting Bill

### ● Say it's illegal, draconian

The Nigerian Bar Association has condemned the proposed compulsory voting bill under consideration by the House of Representatives, describing it as unconstitutional and draconian.

In a statement signed by its President, Afam Osigwe, SAN, on Tuesday, the NBA emphasised that citizens cannot be punished for choosing to abstain from voting.

The House of Representatives recently passed for the second reading, a bill seeking to amend the Electoral Act 2022 to make voting compulsory for all eligible Nigerians of voting age.

The bill, first introduced in February and sponsored by the Speaker of the House, Tajudeen Abbas, was presented last week by co-sponsor, Daniel Asama, for a second reading.

The proposed legislation includes a provision for a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment or a fine of up to ₦100,000 for Nigerians of voting age who fail to vote during elections.

According to the bill's sponsors, the penalties aim to address

persistently low voter turnout, which they claim undermines democratic institutions.

Asama argued that mandatory voting could reduce the influence of vote buying, electoral apathy, and voter inducement.

He also pointed to global precedents, noting that countries such as Australia, Belgium, and Brazil have adopted mandatory voting with positive outcomes in political participation and public accountability.

However, the NBA rejected the bill, describing it as a violation of civil liberties and democratic principles.

In its statement, the NBA asserted that the bill is inconsistent with the 1999 Constitution.

"Section 39(1) of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to remain silent, dissent, and abstain.

"In a democracy, voting is a civil liberty, not a legal obligation. Compelling citizens to vote through coercive measures infringes on their fundamental rights," the statement read.



## TUC members protest poor welfare, block Finance Ministry entrance in Abuja

Members of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) on Tuesday staged a protest at the Federal Ministry of Finance in Abuja over unpaid allowances, poor welfare, and other grievances.

The demonstration involved workers from the Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NNRA), under the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior

Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), who accused the Minister of Finance, Wale Edun, of withholding their entitlements despite repeated appeals.

Wearing red shirts and carrying placards, the workers locked the gates of the ministry, preventing vehicles from entering or leaving and forcing employees to return home.

Patrick Solomon, Industrial Relations Officer at the NNRA, told reporters that the ministry had been unresponsive to workers' demands.

"We've exhausted every available channel to resolve these issues without success. Our Internally Generated Revenue has been withheld for 15 months, making office operations extremely difficult. Most

importantly, staff allowances remain unpaid. Despite numerous attempts, the minister has failed to engage with us," Solomon said.

The protesting workers demanded the immediate payment of all arrears and improved conditions for staff, warning that the action may escalate if their demands continue to be ignored.

## Why Dangote Refinery consistently reduces petrol prices —Spokesperson

Dangote Petroleum Refinery & Petrochemicals has reaffirmed that, despite the fluctuations in global crude oil prices, it has consistently reduced the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), commonly known as petrol, to reduce financial burden on the masses.

The company, in a release, signed its Group Chief Branding and Communications Officer, Anthony Chiejina said the decision to maintain price stability reflects its unwavering commitment to supporting the Nigerian economy, and alleviating the burden on consumers from the increase in fuel prices by maintaining price stability.

The decision, Dangote said, underscores its dedication to

providing affordable, reliable, and high-quality petroleum products without compromising operational efficiency and sustainability.

"Our approach aligns with the objectives of the Federal Government's Nigeria First policy, which promotes the prioritisation of locally-produced goods and services.

"By refining petroleum products domestically at the world's largest single-train refinery, we are proud to make a substantial contribution to Nigeria's energy security, foreign exchange savings, and overall economic resilience—aligning with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda, which is focused on addressing the nation's eco-

economic challenges and improving the well-being of Nigerians," the statement sent to Channels Television late Monday said in part.

Checks by Channels Television on Tuesday showed that Brent as of 8:43 AM WAT, fell to \$65.15 per barrel or 39 cents (0.60%) from \$65.54 at the close of business on Monday.

Chiejina also referenced the Naira-for-Crude Initiative, which, he said, also contributed to low petrol prices at its Ibeju-Lekki facility.

"We are immensely grateful to His Excellency, President Bola Tinubu, for making this possible through the commendable Naira-for-Crude Initiative, which has enabled us to consistently reduce the price of petroleum products

for the benefit of all Nigerians."

Although Chiejina had denied the development during a telephone call with Channels Television, as of last week, reports did the rounds that the refinery, for the second time in May, had slashed price to ₦825 per litre from ₦865.

The clarification by the refinery's media team comes amid a purported row between Aliko Dangote and oil marketers, who have resumed product importation.

As of Tuesday, data from the Tanker Position Report says oil marketers resumed large-scale importation of petrol, with over 496.17 million litres of petrol brought into the country within nine days.

# PDP Senate caucus reaffirms unity, urges loyalty amidst internal strains

CAROLINE AMEH

The Senate caucus of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has reaffirmed its commitment to party unity and resilience in the face of internal disputes and broader political instability across Nigeria's political landscape.

Led by Senate Minority Leader, Senator Abba Moro, the caucus emphasised the need for loyalty, solidarity, and steadfast adherence to the founding ideals of the party.

Addressing the internal frictions recently reported within

the PDP, the caucus contextualised these tensions as part of a wider trend affecting all major political formations in the country, including the All Progressives Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), and Nigerian People's Party (NPP).

"We are a great party," the caucus declared. "Despite economic hardship and the erosion of workers' earnings, the PDP remains a formidable political force, poised to emerge even stronger."

Encouraging members to remain committed, the caucus expressed confidence in the reform agenda being spearhead-

ed by the party leadership.

"It stated that these efforts are expected to pave the way for new leadership and revitalise the PDP's political competitiveness ahead of future electoral contests.

Underscoring its dedication to democratic principles, the caucus warned against celebrating the decline of rival parties, stressing that a vibrant opposition is essential for a functional democracy.

"The beauty of democracy lies in the existence of a robust opposition," the statement noted, urging members to demonstrate political maturity.

The caucus also addressed the possibility of political alliances, stating that while coalitions are not off the table, they must be initiated by the party and not driven by personal ambitions.

"The PDP is broad and capable enough to lead any coalition effort, should the need arise," it said.

In closing, the PDP Senate caucus called on all party faithful to recommit to its founding vision and work collectively towards building a revitalised, unified platform capable of offering a credible alternative to the ruling party.



**BENIN CITY FLYOVER:**

The Benin City Flyover under construction at Ramat Park.

## Governance without corruption: Stakeholders chart reform path at anti-corruption workshop

CAROLINE AMEH

A cross-section of Nigerian legislators, public officials, and anti-corruption advocates have renewed their push for transparent and effective governance during a three-day high-level workshop on institutional reform and fiscal integrity.

Organised by the House of Representatives Committee on Financial Crimes in partnership with Barclays Global Consult and other stakeholders, the event was held under the theme: "Enhancing Effectiveness in Local Governance Without Corruption."

It brought together key actors from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), civil society, and the Edo State government.

Leading the delegation on behalf of Edo State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo, Mr Peter Abulu, Director General

of the Edo State Liaison Office in Abuja, praised the initiative as timely and strategic.

He called on public officials to uphold ethical standards, describing them as custodians of public trust.

"Our actions carry significant consequences," Abulu said. "Workshops like this are vital for equipping us with the frameworks needed to act with integrity and professionalism."

Highlighting Edo State's adherence to national fiscal standards, Abulu also advocated for greater use of non-custodial sentencing, citing prison overcrowding and delays in prosecution.

"Some individuals and YER EFCC trial have died before verdicts were reached," he observed.

"The National Correctional Service Act 2019 must be fully implemented to reflect today's realities."

Professor Abubakar Suleiman, Director General of NILDS, described the workshop as a pivotal moment in the national fight against entrenched

corruption.

He emphasised the importance of extending anti-corruption reforms to sub-national governments.

"While commendable efforts are underway at the federal level, state institutions must not lag behind," Suleiman said.

"Legislative oversight must be strengthened across all tiers of government to ensure fiscal accountability."

Representing the EFCC Academy, ACE II Moses Longe commended the collaborative effort and urged participants to apply the lessons gained.

"This initiative is essential at a time when institutional synergy is crucial to combating systemic corruption," he said.

A spokesperson for Barclays Global Consult stressed the importance of empowering local government officials with tools to resist corruption and improve service delivery.

"Building capacity at the grassroots is essential to eradicating corruption sustainably," he stated.

Hon. Ginger Onwusibe, Chairman of the House Committee on Financial Crimes, was represented by Mr Austin Adesoro, Clerk of the Committee.

Adesoro reiterated the committee's emphasis on prevention over punishment in the anti-corruption drive.

"Corruption remains a pervasive threat to national progress," he said, citing the EFCC's recovery of N365.4 billion and 4,111 convictions in 2024 under the leadership of Ola Olukayode.

He called for urgent legislative reforms to support the judiciary and address obstacles that hinder the agency's work.

Adesoro also applauded Governor Okpebholo's commitment to transparency, describing his administration's participation in the workshop as a positive sign of political will.

He concluded with a call to action: "Let us all take this message of integrity back to our institutions and commit to a new era of ethical governance driven by patriotic citizens."

## Reps urge Bol to provide soft loans for local textile industry

The House of Representatives has urged the Federal Government to protect the local textile industry through the provision of soft loans to operators by the Bank of Industry.

The decision of the House was sequel to the adoption of a motion on notice sponsored at Tuesday's plenary by Jigawa lawmaker, Mr Garba Muhammad.

Rallying his colleagues for support, Muhammad noted that the Nigerian textile industry, with over 180 mills in operation, has significantly impacted the manufacturing sector, employing nearly 450, annually growth, making it one of the highest employers of labour.

He added that revitalising the textile industry will create employment, diversify the economy, and enhance the socio-economic development of the country.

He however expressed concern, stating, "Over the significant decline in the textile industry, particularly the layoff of thousands of workers from

companies like Kaduna Textile, Ka Nigeria Textile, and First Spinners, among others.

"The House is concerned that the discovery of oil in Nigeria resulted in decreased material for the textile industry, thereby significantly impacting the textile industry.

"We are worried about government policies such as higher taxation and expensive liberalisation leading to extensive importation of textile materials."

The House, following the adoption of the motion, urged the Federal Government to regulate the importation of foreign textiles and encourage the production of local textile materials.

It called on the Federal Ministries of Finance, Industry, and trade agencies to encourage local textiles by providing soft loans through the Bank of Industry.

It also advised the Federal Ministry of Power to collaborate to provide necessary facilities, especially power supply to companies to enhance quality outputs.

## Police arrest notorious interstate kidnap syndicate, recover arms in Delta

Operatives of the CP-Special Assignment Team of the Delta State Police Command have successfully dismantled a notorious interstate kidnap syndicate that has been operating in Delta, Rivers, Enugu, and Imo states.

This was contained in a statement signed by the police public relations officer for Delta State Command, SP Bright Edefe, copies of which were made available to journalists in Warri on Tuesday.

The statement said, "On May 16, 2025 at about 1745hrs, the operatives followed a trail to Port-Harcourt, where they arrested a syndicate member named Idirisu Yakubu, a 21-year-old male suspect from Kwara State, but a resident of Elenwo area, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

"Upon interrogation, on May 17, 2025 at about 1320hrs, he led operatives to the arrest of their gang leader and coordinator viz: Bello Amodu (40), of Tangaza LGA, Sokoto State but a resident of Elenwo area Port Harcourt,

Rivers state who is coordinating the various syndicates within the South-South and South-East region.

"Further investigation led to the arrest of Umar Mohammed Beto (38), of Tsamiya village, Bagudu LGA, Kebbi State, a resident of the Oil Mill Area, Port Harcourt area of Rivers State, who is said to be the one heading the Enugu axis.

"Upon further interrogation, at about 0635hrs of the same date, they led operatives to a bush along Ughelli - Ozo-ro Road where one AK-47 Rifle loaded with 23 rounds of live ammunition and a pump action with seven rounds of live cartridges were recovered."

The PPRO stated that the investigation is ongoing in the matter.

In another development, operatives of the Eagle Net Surveillance Team based at Ughelli, Ughelli North LGA, while acting on intelligence, trailed a kidnapping/armed robbery suspect to a residence located in Warri South LGA, from where they arrested one 53-year-old Benjamin Benemor.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### FAITH MINISTRIES THEOLOGICAL BIBLE SCHOOL

The general public is hereby notified that the above named has applied to the Corporate Affairs Commission for registration under part of the incorporated trustee allied matters act 2020.

#### TRUSTEES:

Blessing Aiyina Peters  
Francis Okhipo Peters  
Simeon Uwa Eboigbe  
Precious Oshone Eboigbe

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

Gospel, Training, and Help to Less Privilege

SIGNED: SECRETARY

## NEWS

# Jattu Ibie road residents raise alarm as gully erosion destroys homes, unearths graves

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

Residents of Jattu Ibie Road in Jattu Uzairue, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, are once again living in fear and uncertainty as the rainy season worsens the devastating gully erosion that has plagued the community for the past three years.

What began as a gradual environmental concern has now evolved into a full-blown crisis.

The erosion, which intensifies with each rainy season, has displaced families, destroyed properties worth billions of naira, and now desecrates the dead, washing corpses out of

graves and into people's homes.

The affected road, originally constructed by a previous Edo State administration to link Jattu and South Ibie, was once seen as a key development initiative.

Today, however, it has become a source of heartbreak and anxiety.

Each rainy season brings fresh damage, forcing residents to abandon their homes temporarily or, in many cases, permanently.

With no lasting solution in sight, the number of displaced families continues to grow.

Among the most disturbing consequences of the erosion is its impact on a Christian cem-

etry in the area.

Locals recount chilling incidents of exhumed human remains being swept into residential compounds.

For many, the horror of encountering bones and skulls where children play or families gather has become a traumatic and recurring reality.

As the 2025 rainy season begins, the atmosphere in the community is thick with dread.

Households are preparing to evacuate yet again, not out of

choice, but necessity. Many have already begun relocating, unable to trust that the ground beneath their homes will remain intact.

Abdulrahman Shaibu, a landlord in the area, appealed to relevant authorities, saying "This is Jattu Uzairue Ibiene Road, and we want to use this medium to draw the government's attention to this road before it gets out of hand."

His plea reflects the desperation of a community that feels neglected and left to face the

elements on its own.

Mr. Odion Aliu, chairman of the Jattu Community Development Association, told journalists that local efforts to seek intervention have been ongoing.

"We have been following up on it, seeking to get the relevant agencies to address the gully challenge. Edo FEWMA has visited to see the site. A few days ago, the local government chairman also brought some people to assess the damage. We are calling on relevant agencies,

both federal and state governments, to come and help us."

The road, once a symbol of progress, now embodies environmental neglect.

Without urgent and coordinated action, more homes will collapse, more families will be displaced, and more graves will be violated.

The cries from Jattu Ibie Road are not only calls for help, they are a warning of the cost of inaction in the face of worsening ecological crises.

## WHO member states adopt first-ever global pandemic agreement

Member states of the World Health Organisation (WHO) have formally adopted the world's first Pandemic Agreement, aimed at improving future preparedness and response to global health emergencies.

The historic resolution, passed during the 78th World Health Assembly on Tuesday, followed more than three years of negotiations triggered by the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was adopted by consensus after an earlier committee vote saw 124 countries in favour, none opposed, and 11 abstentions.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the agreement as a landmark achievement in multilateral public health policy.

"The world is safer today thanks to the collaboration and commitment of our member states," he said. "This agreement ensures that we are better prepared for the next pandemic."

Dr Teodoro Herbosa, President of the current World Health Assembly, emphasised that governments acted with "urgency and purpose" to bring the accord to life.

He added that implementa-

tion must now move forward with equal determination, particularly on ensuring fair access to vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics during global health crises.

The agreement lays out frameworks for international cooperation to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response systems.

It calls for equitable access to critical health tools and coordination mechanisms during health emergencies.

Importantly, the document reaffirms national sovereignty in health decision-making. It states explicitly that the WHO and its leadership have no authority to dictate or enforce national laws, policies, or public health measures, such as vaccine mandates, travel restrictions, or lockdowns.

The World Health Assembly also launched a process to establish a Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) system.

A dedicated intergovernmental working group will draft this annex, which will be reviewed at the 2026 Assembly.

Once the annex is adopted, the full agreement will be open for signature and ratification. It will enter into force after ratification by 60 countries.



**GULLY EROSION:**  
Jattu Ibie road gully erosion site.



**ADDRESSING NEWSMEN:**  
The Edo State Amiru Hajj, HRH, Mallam Ali D. Sulayman, the Oghieaga of Ibie in Etsako East Local Government Area, addressing newsmen in Madinah prior to departure of Edo State Pilgrims to Makkah.

## HAJJ 2025: Edo Amiru Hajj lauds NAHCON for quality standards service delivery

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

As Edo State pilgrims depart Madinah for Makkah, the Amirul Hajj of the State, HRH Mallam Ali D. Sulayman, the Oghieaga of Ibie in Etsako East Local Government Area, has lauded the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) for its quality and excellent service delivery in the 2025 Hajj exer-

cise.

According to Abdulateef Muhammad, a media officer with NAHCON in Saudi Arabia, the Oghieaga gave this commendation recently in a chat with newsmen in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, expressing satisfaction over the quality services NAHCON is rendering to Nigerian pilgrims. "I must confess that this year's experience is exceptional," he

said. "I hardly ate the meals provided for pilgrims in previous years, but this time, I ate what was given here in Madinah because it was nutritious."

In another development, the Edo State Amirul Hajj, HRH Mallam Ali D. Sulayman, urged Nigerian pilgrims to be disciplined at all times, noting that obedience is a recommended and rewarding act in Islam. "We should respect and honor the

teachings of Islam by being obedient to one another and to the delegated authorities while in the Holy Land," he emphasized.

The Edo State Amirul Hajj further urged Nigerian pilgrims to strictly observe the rules and regulations of the pilgrimage during their stay in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the importance of discipline and representing Nigeria with dignity.

## Edo Assembly Service Commission reinstates politically victimised staff, orders refund in ₦18m fraud case

In what has been described as a historic and reform-driven sitting, the Edo State House of Assembly Service Commission has held its inaugural plenary session in Benin City.

The session, which drew members, staff, journalists, and members of the public, was presided over by the newly appointed Chairman of the Commission, Hon. Ezechi MD Igbas.

In his opening address, Hon. Igbas welcomed members and stakeholders to the new dispensation and announced a shift in administrative practice, stating that plenary sessions would now

be held monthly to deliberate on staff matters, petitions, policy recommendations, and committee reports.

He emphasised the Commission's constitutional powers to set up investigative and advisory committees and declared that an open-door policy would define the new era of governance.

He urged members to make thoughtful and objective contributions that reflect the Commission's vision under the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo.

A major highlight of the plenary was the report presented by the Research and Investiga-

tion Committee chaired by Hon. Rev. Andrew Uwadia, which addressed a series of politically motivated dismissals.

The case of Mr. J. Ohiokhuobo and Mr. S. Haruna, both accused of absconding from duty, was revisited. The men claimed they were victimised due to their roles as clerks during the controversial swearing-in of the G14 lawmakers.

The committee concluded that their dismissal was unjust and politically engineered by the previous administration.

As a result, the Commission ordered their immediate rein-

statement, promotion, and payment of three months' salary arrears. Similarly, the cases of Mrs. Ego Agunede and Mrs. Marian Edoror were reviewed.

Both women had been either retired or dismissed under questionable circumstances.

The Commission approved their full reinstatement, payment of arrears, and, in the case of Mrs. Edoror, a promotion in recognition of the injustice she suffered.

The Commission also resolved a promotion dispute involving Mr. Bello Saheed, who had received a double promotion but faced uncertainty regarding his

subsequent progression.

His next promotion was approved to take effect from 1 June 2026, based on his last promotion dated 9 May 2023. Another case involved Mr. Ebegue Igbo-Osagie, who presented two appointment letters issued in the same year. The Commission nullified the second appointment letter dated 18 April 2012, upheld the original one issued on 14 February 2012, and approved his promotion.

The Commission warned against administrative irregularities in appointment documentation and pledged stricter oversight.

Infrastructure development also featured prominently at the plenary as Mrs. Isoken Olotu, Chairperson of the Tenders Board Committee, presented a comprehensive report on procurement and maintenance plans.

The Commission approved several projects aimed at improving staff welfare and office efficiency.

These included the replacement of damaged roofs in residential quarters, installation of solar-powered infrastructure, and procurement of HP printers, TVs with accessories, inverters, and a photocopier.

## Foreign

## NEWS

# Jeremy Bowen: Goodwill running out as UK, France and Canada demand Israel end Gaza offensive

Israel went to war after the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 armed with an arsenal of weapons mostly paid for, supplied and then resupplied

by the United States.

Its other allies gave Israel something just as potent in its own way: a deep credit of goodwill and solidarity, based

on revulsion at the killings of 1,200 people, mostly Israeli civilians, and the sight of 251 people being dragged into captivity in Gaza as hostages.

Now it seems that Israel's credit has gone, at least as far as France, the United Kingdom and Canada are concerned. They have issued their strong-

est condemnation yet of the way Israel is fighting the war in Gaza.

Israel, they say, must halt its new offensive, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says will destroy Hamas, rescue the remaining hostages and put all of Gaza under direct Israeli military control.

Their statement dismisses Netanyahu's arguments and calls for a ceasefire. Together, the three governments say that they "strongly oppose the expansion of Israel's military operations in Gaza" adding: "The level of human suffering in Gaza is intolerable."

They call for the release of the remaining hostages and recall that after the "heinous attack" on 7 October they believed that the Israeli state "had a right to defend Israelis against terrorism. But this escalation is wholly disproportionate".

Netanyahu's decision to allow what he called "minimal" food into Gaza was they said "wholly inadequate".

Netanyahu has hit back, saying the "leaders in London, Otta-

wa and Paris are offering a huge prize for the genocidal attack on Israel on October 7 while inviting more such atrocities".

He insisted the war could end if Hamas returned hostages, laid down its arms, agreed for its leaders to go into exile and Gaza was demilitarised. "No nation can be expected to accept anything less and Israel certainly won't," he said.

Netanyahu - who is sought under an International Criminal Court warrant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, which he has dismissed as "antisemitic" - had been under heavy international pressure to end the blockade of Gaza after a respected international survey warned of imminent famine.

At the London summit between the EU and the UK the President of the European Council, António Costa, called the humanitarian crisis in Gaza "a tragedy where international law is being systematically violated, and an entire population is being subjected to disproportionate military force".



**GAZA CEASEFIRE:**

IDF attacks in Gaza have killed thousands since Israel ended a ceasefire in March.

## Zelensky accuses Russia of 'buying time' to stall truce talks

Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of "trying to buy time" to continue its war in Ukraine, a day after Donald Trump said progress towards a ceasefire had been made in a call with Vladimir Putin.

"If Russia continues to put forward unrealistic conditions and undermine progress, there must be tough consequences," Ukraine's president wrote on social media, adding that Kyiv was ready to negotiate.

Following separate calls with Zelensky and Putin on Monday, Trump said truce talks between Russia and Ukraine would start "immediately".

Putin said he was ready to work on a "memorandum on a possible future peace agreement", but did not address calls for a 30-day pause in fighting.

On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said it was up to Kyiv to "make decisions" and respond to a proposed peace memorandum.

However, the Kremlin downplayed suggestions that negotiations were close, with Russian state news agencies citing spokesperson Dmitry Peskov as saying "there are no deadlines and there cannot be any".

Meanwhile, Zelensky launched a fresh round of diplomacy, speaking to Western allies in a bid to shore up support.

Following a phone call with the Finnish president, Zelensky wrote on social media that Ukraine was working with partners to ensure pressure on Moscow "forces the Russians to change their behaviour".

It came as the European Un-

ion and UK announced that they had adopted new rounds of sanctions against Russia.

The EU said it was blacklisting nearly 200 more oil tankers in Russia's "shadow fleet", and warned of a "tougher response" if Moscow did not agree to a truce in Ukraine.

The UK placed sanctions on 18 more tankers, as part of its package targeting Russian military suppliers, energy exports and financial institutions.

It followed a record drone assault in Ukraine over the weekend, which Kyiv officials described as the largest since the start of the full-scale invasion.

On Monday, Trump indicated he would not join in any new sanctions on Russia, telling reporters that they could hinder recent progress.

It came as heavy fighting

continued along the front line, with Ukraine reporting 177 clashes and claiming over 1,000 Russian casualties in 24 hours.

Speaking ahead of a meeting of EU ministers on Tuesday, German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said Russia's continued attacks "speak louder than the lip service we have heard for so long".

"Putin is clearly playing for time. Unfortunately, we have to say he is not really interested in peace," he said.

Putin has so far rebuffed a joint US-Ukrainian proposal for a 30-day ceasefire and last week rejected Zelensky's invitation to meet for talks in Istanbul. Trump had offered to attend the talks if Putin would be there, but the Russian leader declined.

## Iran's Khamenei doubts US nuclear talks will lead to agreement

Iran's Supreme Leader has expressed doubt that nuclear talks with the US will lead to a new agreement, saying it had made "excessive and outrageous" demands on uranium enrichment.

"We don't think it will lead to any outcome. We don't know what will happen," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said.

US President Donald Trump said last week that Iran had "sort of" agreed to the terms of a deal following four rounds of talks mediated by Oman since 12 April.

But ahead of another round scheduled for this weekend, Iran's chief negotiator rejected his US counterpart's assertion that it would have to commit to stop producing enriched uranium, which can be used to make reactor fuel but also nuclear weapons.

Trump, who pulled the US out of a 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers during his first term in office, has warned Iran that it could face US and Israeli military action if the talks are not successful.

Iran insists its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful and it will never seek to develop or acquire nuclear weapons.

However, it has breached restrictions imposed by the existing nuclear deal in retaliation for crippling US sanctions reinstated seven years ago, and has stockpiled enough highly-enriched uranium to make several bombs.

Khamenei addressed the latest developments in Iran's negotiations with the US at a ceremony honouring late President

Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash one year ago.

He praised Raisi, a fellow hardline cleric, for refusing direct talks with the US while in office.

"He clearly said 'no' without ambiguity," Khamenei noted, adding that Raisi did not let enemies "drag Iran to the negotiating table through threats or tricks".

Khamenei said nuclear talks under Raisi's predecessor, the moderate cleric Hassan Rouhani, had failed to achieve results, and that he did not think there would be any breakthrough under his successor, Masoud Pezeshkian, who is a reformist.

The supreme leader also criticised the Trump administration's approach, saying: "The American side in these indirect talks should avoid nonsensical remarks."

"Saying they will not allow Iran to enrich is a big mistake. No-one waits for their permission."

US special envoy Steve Witkoff told ABC News in an interview on Sunday: "We cannot allow even 1% of an enrichment capability. We've delivered a proposal to the Iranians that we think addresses some of this without disrespecting them."

He added: "We want to get to a solution here. And we think that will be able to."

"But everything begins from our standpoint with a deal that does not include enrichment. We cannot have that. Because enrichment enables weaponisation, and we will not allow a bomb to get here."

## At least 38 killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza in half-hour period, medics say

At least 38 Palestinians were killed in a series of Israeli air strikes across the Gaza Strip during a half-hour period overnight, according to Palestinian medics.

Israeli warplanes struck several locations, including a school in eastern Gaza City, and an abandoned fuel station sheltering displaced families in central Gaza's Nuseirat refugee camp, according to the Hamas-run civil defence agency.

It added that rescue teams were facing major difficulties reaching the wounded due to a lack of equipment and the intensity of the bombardment.

The attack comes after Israel

issued a sweeping evacuation order for civilians in Gaza in preparation for what it said was an "unprecedented attack".

Live coverage

Ten people were killed when an Israeli air strike hit classrooms at the Musa bin Nusayr School, where hundreds of displaced people were sheltering, according to local activists in Gaza City.

In central Gaza, 15 people were reported killed in a strike targeting tents at an abandoned fuel station in Nuseirat.

Meanwhile, local journalists said 13 Palestinians were killed in an air strike on the Abu Samra family's three-story home in central Deir al-Balah.

Separately, Israeli jets launched 10 air strikes on the Shujaiya neighbourhood in eastern Gaza City.

Local reports described the blasts as causing tremors similar to an earthquake. The strikes are believed to have targeted Hamas's network of underground tunnels.

The attack comes as the leaders of the UK, France and Canada issued a joint statement threatening action if Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu persisted with his goal to "take control" of all of Gaza.

Netanyahu described the statement as a "huge prize" for Hamas. Earlier, Israel said it would

allow a "basic amount" of food into Gaza, ending an 11-week blockade of the territory.

But United Nations aid chief Tom Fletcher said the amount of aid was a "drop in the ocean of what is urgently needed".

The war was triggered by the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, which saw about 1,200 people killed and 251 taken hostage.

Some 58 hostages remain in Gaza, up to 23 of whom are believed to be alive.

At least 53,486 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's military campaign in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

## NEWS

## Foreign

## India's 'Silicon Valley' flooded after heavy rains

Parts of the southern Indian city of Bengaluru, often called India's Silicon Valley are under water after heavy rainfall.

The city is on high alert for more pre-monsoon showers on Tuesday due to cyclonic formations over the Andaman Sea, according to authorities.

Three people, including a 12-year-old boy were killed in rain-related incidents on Monday.

Bengaluru is home to major global technology companies, many of whom have asked their employees to work from home due to flooded roads.

Many parts of the city received 100 mm (4in) of rain on Monday, a record since 2011.

This is "rare" for Bengaluru, CS Patil, a director at the regional weather department told news agencies.

Apart from severe water-logging and traffic disrupting daily life, heavy rainfall has also caused property damage.

In one of the city's major IT corridors, the compound wall of a software firm - i-Zed - collapsed on Monday morning, killing a 35-year-old female employee.

Videos also showed commuters wading through knee-deep water, with several cars parked on waterlogged streets. Water has also entered houses in some parts of the city.

Authorities say the city corporation has identified 210 flood-prone areas where they were working round the clock to "rectify" the situation.

"There is no need for the people of Bengaluru to be worried," DK Shivakumar, deputy chief minister of Karnataka state told reporters on Monday.

But officials are facing criticism on social media with many complaining about the city's crumbling infrastructure and deluged roads.

"No other city invokes a sense of fear and helplessness for commuting during rains as Bangalore does," a user wrote on X.

Annu Itty, who has lived in the city for eight years told the

BBC that the city's infrastructure becomes especially fragile in the monsoons.

"Ironically, it's the newly developed areas - those built to house the booming tech sector - that face the worst flooding," she said.

Itty, who works in public policy, says a "lack of coherent urban planning that respects environmental limits", as well as a lack of government accountability, has left Bengaluru residents to deal with the consequences.

Karnataka, of which Bengaluru is the capital is currently run by the Congress party. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which sits in the opposition in the state has accused the local government of failing to tackle rain-related issues in the city and the state, despite spending million of rupees on its infrastructure.

The BJP has demanded the immediate release of 10bn rupees (\$117m, £87.5m) for relief operations.

The state government has, however, defended itself saying these were long-standing issues.

"The issues we face today are not new. They have been ignored for years, across governments and administrations," Shivakumar said.

Floods have been a recurring phenomenon in Bengaluru in recent years. Experts partly blame rapid construction over the city's lakes and wetlands and poor urban planning for the crisis.

Ananda Rao, president of the Association for Information Technology (AIT) - which represents over 450 software companies - told the BBC that such frequent flooding has caused "discomfort and inconvenience" for businesses.

"Bengaluru contributes significantly in taxes - both at an individual level and property tax. There is no return on this investment," he said, calling on the state government to work on long-term solutions to improve the city's infrastructure.



**100MM OF RAIN:**

Several parts of the city have received over 100mm of rain which authorities say is rare

## Tanzania president warns 'meddling' Kenyan activists

Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan has warned activists from neighbouring Kenya that she will not allow them to "meddle" in her country's affairs and cause "chaos".

Her comments came after prominent Kenyan lawyers and rights campaigners were deported, preventing them from attending the court case of an opposition leader charged with treason.

"If they have been contained in their country, let them not come here to meddle. Let's not give them a chance. They have already created chaos in their own country," Samia said.

Human rights groups are concerned that the Tanzanian government is increasingly cracking

down on the opposition ahead of elections in October.

On Monday, the leader of the main opposition Chadema party, Tundu Lissu, appeared in a magistrate's court after being arrested last month.

He raised his fist in a gesture of defiance and told his supporters: "You will be fine. You should not fear."

There was a heavy deployment of security officers at the court in Dar es Salaam, the largest city.

This did not deter Lissu's supporters, hundreds of whom had gathered outside.

The case was adjourned to 2 June after the prosecution asked for more time for investigations.

The court had previously

attempted to conduct proceedings virtually, but Lissu's legal team opposed this, citing the need for transparency.

The Chadema party leader was arrested on 9 April following his rallying call for "no reforms, no election".

He is demanding sweeping changes, saying Tanzania's current laws do not allow for free and fair elections. The government denies the allegation.

He has since been charged with treason and publishing false information online, which allegedly incited rebellion and accused police of electoral misconduct.

He denies the charges. If convicted, he could face the

death penalty.

Could this be the end of the road for Lissu, Tanzania's great survivor?

Lissu's legal team raised concerns over the heavy police presence around the court, which the magistrate acknowledged, saying there would be consultations on whether this was justified.

President Samia was widely praised for giving Tanzanians greater political freedom when she took office in 2021 following the death of the incumbent, John Magufuli.

But her critics say Tanzania is once again seeing the repression that characterised Magufuli's rule. The government denies the allegation.

## Biden's cancer diagnosis raises fresh questions about his health in White House

Joe Biden's announcement that he has been diagnosed with prostate cancer has revived questions about what health issues the former US

president was dealing with while he was in the White House.

In a statement on Sunday, Biden's office said the 82 year old had received the diagnosis

on Friday after seeing a doctor for urinary symptoms.

Some doctors have expressed surprise that the aggressive form of cancer, which has spread to his bones, had not been detected earlier.

Others pointed out that cancers can grow fast without the patient displaying symptoms - and that men over 70 are not routinely screened.

President Donald Trump told reporters on Monday his predecessor should have been more transparent with the public, seeming to suggest - without offering evidence - that the cancer diagnosis had been covered up.

"I think it is very sad actually. I am surprised that the public wasn't notified a long time ago," Trump said at an event at the White House.

"It could take years to get to this level of danger. So, look, it's a very, very sad situation. I feel very badly about it, and I think people should try and find out what happened."

Biden has yet to respond to

Trump's comments, which came amid reports that the Democrat's aides sought to conceal other deteriorating health conditions from the public ahead of the 2024 election.

Cancer touches us all, says Biden after outpouring

What we know about Biden's cancer Republicans claim that Biden, who ran for re-election as the oldest president in history at 81, was mentally and physically unfit for office. He dropped out of the race last summer after a disastrous debate performance against Trump.

According to Original Sin, a new book by journalists Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson, Biden was unable to recognise Hollywood actor and Democratic donor George Clooney or to recall the names of key aides in his final year in office.

The authors write: "Biden's physical deterioration - most apparent in his halting walk - had become so severe that there were internal discussions about putting the president in a wheelchair, but they couldn't do so until after the election."

## Seven Mexican youths shot dead at church festivity

Seven Mexican youths have been shot dead at a festivity organised by the Catholic Church in the central state of Guanajuato.

Gunmen opened fire on a group of people who had stayed behind in the central square of the village of San Bartolo de Berrios after an event organised by the local parish.

Eyewitnesses said the assailants had driven straight to the village square in the early hours of Monday and fired dozens of shots seemingly at random.

The authorities have not yet said what the motive behind the shooting may have been but messages scrawled on signs left at several nearby locations appear to indicate it was carried out by the Santa Rosa de

Lima cartel.

While attacks on nightclubs, bars and cockfighting venues are not unusual in Mexican states hit by cartel violence, an attack on an event organised by the Catholic Church is rare.

The Episcopal Conference of Mexico, which represents the country's bishops, condemned the fatal shooting saying it "cannot remain indifferent in the face of the spiral of violence that is wounding so many communities".

The local archbishop, Jaime Calderón, also released a statement blaming the attack on a fight for territory between rival cartels.

Guanajuato, where San Bartolo de Berrios is located, had the highest number of murders

of any state in Mexico in 2024 with a total of 2,597 homicides.

Both the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) and the Santa Rosa de Lima cartel are active in the state and have been locked in a deadly battle for control over territory.

While the two groups engage in extortion and drug trafficking, they have also increasingly tapped pipelines which run through the state carrying petrol from refineries to major distribution points.

The practice of stealing and selling fuel on the black market - known as huachicoleo - is a major source of revenue for the criminal gangs in the region.

In their fight for territorial control, the gangs often try to spread fear amid the local pop-



ulation in order to ensure their silence and compliance.

Bloody shootings such as the one in San Bartolo de Berrios and the subsequent display of threatening messages are a particularly brutal way gangs use to show they have expanded into a particular town.

Residents of San Bartolo de Berrios said they had heard around 100 shots ring out in the early hours of Monday within the space of a few minutes.

They said the scene in the central square resembled "a bloodbath" with the bodies of the seven youths, two of them aged under 18, strewn across the pavement.

No arrests have so far been made in connection with the attack.

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# Sports

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

## 2024 NSF: Enabulele confident Edo cricket, kickboxing, gymnastics teams will deliver

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, has expressed confidence in the ability team Edo Cricket, Kickboxing, Gymnastics and Kunful to deliver at the ongoing National Sports Festival in Abeokuta, Ogun State.

The Edo state sports Commission boss was speaking at the Cricket Pavilions in the

### ● as Edo harvest gold in weightlifting, Kunful

MKO Abiola Sports Complex after the Edo Cricket team's first game at the 22nd National Sports Festival.

Hon Enabulele commended the Edo Cricket players for their dedication and commitment which they exhibited during their match against Delta State at the Cricket Pavilion, MKO Abiola Stadium.

"Our cricket teams, male and female are unquestionably our

major stronghold and are always contenders for gold medals," he enthused.

He said that he was impressed by the performance of the male cricket team and urged them to keep the flames up and maintain the momentum as the competition continues

"Cricket is one of our strongholds and that is why we're here to support them fully to ensure that we clinch the gold medals

available there". He emphasized.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss who went round all the event centers to support his athletes also visited the NYSC Orientation Camp in Ikenne, venue for the weightlifting competitions to encourage Edo athletes competing in various events.

Meanwhile, team Edo weightlifting and Kunful athletes have powered up the state to winning four Gold, 14 silver and 14 Bronze medals to have a total of 32 medals as at 6pm on Tuesday.

Team Edo got off to a winning start on Tuesday as

John Aladetun registered his name in Gold with 2 Gold and 1 Silver medals in 67 kg Men Weightlifting event early in the morning.

Kelly Alonge followed the footsteps of his compatriots in weightlifting, harvesting 2 Gold medals in Kung Fu Daoshu.



## Gateway Games 2024: Six athletes disqualified for anti-doping issues

The National Sports Commission (NSC) has barred six athletes from participating in the National Sports Festival over anti-doping issues.

It said the affected athletes would not compete for medals at the games.

The commission disclosed this in a statement signed by the Director of Press, Kehinde Ajayimade, and available to journalists in Abeokuta, the Ogun state capital.

It said the decision was in line with global best practices and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) code.

It cautioned that registered athletes with anti-doping issues would not compete for medals at the ongoing festival, tagged 'Gateway Games 2024'.

The verdict was handed down after a strategic joint

meeting of the Main Organising Committee and the Local Organising Committee of the games on Monday in Abeokuta, the Ogun state capital.

NSC's Director-General, Bukola Olopade, charged all the participating states to ensure that every athlete competes clean.

"The issue of antidoping is one important mandate of the Commission to ensure that Nigeria is devoid of drug problems at both domestic and international competitions.

"We are happy now that the national antidoping law has finally been passed by our sports-loving President, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the ripple effect of such a landmark feat must swiftly be felt in our sports, starting with the current sports festival," he stated.

## NSF: We'll continue to motivate our athletes, Edo State Sports Commission Chairman vows

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Edo State Sports Commission Chairman, Hon Amadin Enabulele on Tuesday said his commission will continue to do everything humanly possible to motivate their athletes for optimum performance.

Hon. Enabulele stated this while chatting with Sports Journalists at the Cricket Pavilions at the ongoing National Sports Festival holding in Abeokuta, in Ogun State.

Moved by the men cricket team outing, Hon Enabulele commended Team Edo's performance so far, highlighting their dedication and the promising start to the Ogun Games.

He emphasized the importance of teamwork, discipline, and dedication in achieving success at any big stage event as the national sports festival.

The chairman also restated that Edo State remains com-

mitted to excellence and will continue to motivate its athletes to get the best out of them.

Speaking further on the games, Hon Amadin Enabulele said, "if Edo is not here, the competition is not complete. We all know that Edo state is the heartbeat of sports. Team Edo has come to this Ogun Games to make a statement as usual. We are here with quite a young team and we are sure of what they can do."

On the expectations of Edo State contingent, he said that Edo state, is known to be strong in kick boxing, cricket, Gymnastics, Football and weightlifting.

"Cricket is one of the areas of our strength, including weightlifting Gymnastics Football and Kunful. We just finished our first match in Cricket which we won. They are the sports we dominate.

"For Edo state we have come purely to do sports and not politics because this is a sporting event. We came with our own

monitoring team to make sure that everything is going well.

Hon Enabulele commended the organizers of the Ogun Games. "I want to commend His Excellency the governor of Ogun state. I was here three weeks ago and after that coming to this place to see what they have achieved so far I think I must commend them for what they have done in terms of facilities.

"Also for the officiating, so far it's been fair though we have had one or two reasons to protest against some decisions in

Kung Fu yesterday, I got a report that our girl did very well in the sport but we were so surprised that the result was given to another state, but we followed through the proper channel to make such complaints.

"We had our own target which we set for ourselves, and we want to keep it private but we are working seriously towards it.

On the rewards for podium finish athletes, Enabulele said that the state Government has promised to reward them handsomely.

## Ogun2025: Mother and daughter duo, Ronke, Florence Olarinoye, lead Lagos weightlifting medal charge at National Sports Festival

Lagos State's weightlifting team was powered by a remarkable mother and daughter combination at the 22nd National Sports Festival in Abeokuta.

Ronke and Florence Olarinoye made headlines by winning multiple medals in their respective weight categories,

inspiring sports fans across Nigeria.

Ronke Olarinoye, the experienced matriarch, grabbed gold in the women's 45kg snatch event and a silver in the clean and jerk. Her daughter Florence, just 13 years old, matched the excitement by clinching silver medals in the

49kg and 59kg categories.

Together, they formed a unique and powerful duo that highlighted Lagos' strength in the festival.

African Games champion Omolola Onome Didih also contributed to Lagos' medal tally by winning gold medals in the women's 55kg category,

while Joy Chima secured two bronze medals in the same class, solidifying Lagos as a dominant force.

No cause for alarm, Ogun State Government assures, as diesel tanker explosion causes scare

The Ogun State government, on Tuesday, assured

athletes participating in the National Sports Festival holding in Abeokuta, as well as the residents of the state, of their safety, following a diesel tanker explosion near Alake's Sports Complex, one of the facilities used for the ongoing Sports Festival.

Special Adviser to Ogun

State Governor on Media and Strategy, Kayode Akinmade, in a statement, said that while there was an incident involving a diesel tanker that resulted in a fire outbreak, the fire was immediately put out to prevent any damage.

Akinmade commended the promptness and proactiveness



## Ikoyi Club set for Zenith Bank Inter School Swimming Competition

The 2025 edition, the 8th in the series of the Zenith Inter-School Swimming Competition will take place at Ikoyi Club 1938 on Saturday May 24th.

About 20 schools are expected to converge at the swimming pool section of the club for the annual event in which the primary and secondary schools will compete for honours on the loaded day of interesting activities in the swimming pools of Ikoyi Club.

According to the Vice Chairman of the Swimming Section, Trish Okereke, all preparations have been made to ensure a hitch-free event.

The technical officials and coaches have been working round the clock to ensure the draws for all the events capture the scope for both the primary and secondary school cadre.

Events to be competed for include Freestyle, Breaststroke,

Backstroke, Individual medley, Relays and Team events.

The Group Managing Director of Zenith Bank, Adaora Umeoji, also said the outfit was committed to sports development at schools and grassroots levels.

"We are intentional with our sports events especially for the



youth which, are aimed at catching them young and this swimming event is one of such events. We expect the kids to enjoy themselves and we promise to make it better every year," Umeoji said.

Chairman of the club's tennis section, Akinbulejo Onabolu, said arrangements have been

on for the youth swimming competition in the past weeks.

"All the necessary things have been done to make the young swimmers enjoy themselves. We are committed to this event and we are very happy that our partners, Zenith Bank remain a strong supporter of our developmental initiatives.

"We are also happy that this event is yielding results for us as our swimmers recently excelled in a recent national event in Abuja because we are always keeping them busy with this event and other competitions to better their skills," Onabolu said.

He added that the inter-school meet has produced many budding talents in the past editions

In the 2024 edition of the Zenith Bank-Ikoyi Club Inter School Swimming, Grange School emerged champions in the Primary and Secondary school events of the competition.



## Madugu names 23-player Super Falcons squad for Cameroon friendlies

Super Falcons head coach Justine Madugu has released a 23-woman squad for Nigeria's upcoming double-header international friendlies against Cameroon's Indomitable Lionesses.

The list includes several familiar faces, with team captain Rasheedat Ajibade, goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie, defender Michelle Alozie, midfielder Toni Payne, and forward Rinsola Babajide all getting call-ups.

Also included are defensive stalwarts Osinachi Ohale, Oluwatosin Demehin, and

Shukurat Oladipo. Midfielders Deborah Abiodun and Jennifer Echegini, along with attackers Ifeoma Onumonu and Francisca Ordega, complete a solid lineup.

All selected players are expected to report to the team's camp at Am2pm Hotel in Ijebu-Ode on Monday, May 26.

The first match is scheduled for Saturday, May 31, at the Remo Stars Stadium in Ikenne, while the return fixture will be played on Tuesday, June 3, at the MKO Abiola Sports Complex in Abeokuta.

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL: Madugu rolls out Army for WAFCON in strength-testing tie with Cameroon

Super Falcons' Head Coach Justine Madugu has invited 23 players, among them captain Rasheedat Ajibade, goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie, defender Michelle Alozie, midfielder Toni Payne and forward Rinsola Babajide, for the upcoming two friendly matches against the Indomitable Lionesses of Cameroon.

The matches are in preparation for the Women's Africa Cup of Nations holding in Morocco in July.

The Falcons and the Lionesses will face off at the Remo Stars Stadium, Ikenne-Remo on Saturday, 31st May, before a second confrontation at the MKO Abiola Sports Complex in Abeokuta on Tuesday, 3rd June.

While the Falcons will use the matches as part of their preparations for the 13th Women's Africa Cup of Nations taking place in Morocco, 5th - 26th July, the Lionesses will use the games to stay in shape for future challenges, having failed to qualify for this year's Women's AFCON finals.

All invited 23 players have been directed to arrive at the Am2pm Hotel in Ijebu-Ode on Monday, 26th May.

Nine-time champions Nigeria (they also won the two non-tournament-format competitions in 1991 and 1995) will be up against Tunisia, Al-

geria and Botswana in group B of the 13th Women AFCON in Morocco.

### SUPER FALCONS FOR THE LIONESSES' CHALLENGE:

Goalkeepers: Chiamaka Nnadozie (Paris FC, France); Linda Jiwuaku (Bayelsa Queens); Morufa Ademola (Edo Queens)

Defenders: Osinachi Ohale (Pachucha Club de Futbol, Mexico); Shukurat Oladipo (AS Roma, Italy); Michelle Alozie

(Houston Dash, USA); Rofiat Imuran (London City Lionesses, England); Sikiratu Isah (Nasarawa Amazons); Oluwatosin Demehin (Galatasaray Sportive, Turkey); Miracle Usani (Edo Queens); Blessing Ilivieda (Bayelsa Queens)

Midfielders: Rasheedat Ajibade (Atletico Madrid, Spain); Deborah Abiodun (Dallas Trinity, USA); Jennifer Echegini (Paris Saint Germain, France); Josephine Mathias

(Nasarawa Amazons); Christy Ucheibe (SL Benfica, Portugal); Amarachi Odoma (Edo Queens)

Forwards: Toni Payne (Everton Ladies, England); Francisca Ordega (Ittihad Ladies Club, Saudi Arabia); Olamide Bolaji (Remo Stars Ladies); Ifeoma Onumonu (Montpellier FC, France); Omorinsola Babajide (Coasta Adeje Tenerife Egatesa (Spain); Emem Essien (Edo Queens).

## Nigeria's National Youth teams add glamour to the National Sports Festival

Five-time world champions Golden Eaglets and FIFA World Cup-bound Flamingos have been adding colour and panache to the ongoing 22nd National Sports Festival in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital.

The two teams are part of the exciting new concept of IJA (Invited Junior Athletes) which has drawn praise from observers and stakeholders since the commencement of the Games.

The Golden Eaglets are in a three-team pool, and have already shot their way to the quarter-finals of the football event after a 2-1 win over Edo State on Monday, and a scoreless draw with Delta State on Tuesday. Abdulmuiz Adeleke and Mohammed Imrana were

the scorers for the Eaglets.

The Flamingos, who flew over and above South Africa and Algeria to reach their eighth FIFA World Cup finals, drew 0-0 with Abia State on Monday and defeated Delta

State 1-0 on Tuesday. Defender Jumai Adebayo was the scorer.

On Thursday, the Flamingos will take on Lagos State, and conclude their attrition in group B with a game against Enugu State on Saturday.



## Ronaldo headlines Portugal squad for Nations League semi-final clash

Portugal has unveiled its official squad for the upcoming UEFA Nations League semi-final, with Cristiano Ronaldo once again selected to lead the frontline.

The announcement was made on Tuesday via the national team's official X (formerly Twitter) handle, showcasing a well-balanced mix of seasoned internationals and rising stars.

In goal, the team will rely on the trio of Diogo Costa, José Sá, and Rui Silva. The defensive unit features notable names such as Rúben Dias, António Silva, Nuno Mendes, Diogo Dalot, Nélson Semedo, Gonçalo Inácio, Nuno Tavares, and Renato

Veiga. The midfield is packed with both experience and young energy, with João Palhinha, Rúben Neves, Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes, Vitorino, João Neves, Pedro Gonçalves, and João Félix all making the list.

Ronaldo is joined in attack by a strong group of forwards, including Rafael Leão, Diogo Jota, Gonçalo Ramos, Pedro Neto, Francisco Conceição, Francisco Trincão, and Rodrigo Mora.

Portugal is set to take on hosts Germany in the Nations League semi-final on June 4, 2025, as they aim to secure a spot in the final and compete for the prestigious European title.



## SSEB Chairman launches semi-finals of 2025 Governor's Cup amid youthful sporting excellence

The Chairman of the Edo State Secondary Education Board (SSEB), Miss Omonzane Ebanehita Sonia, officially kicked off the semi-final stage of the 2025 Governor's Cup with a symbolic ball kick at the Western Boys High School mini stadium.

The matches featured excit-

ing performances from young talents across the state. In the female category, Idia College girls dominated, defeating Umagbae Grammar School girls 6-0 in a stunning display of skill.

In the male category, Ogbe Secondary School boys triumphed 2-1 over Saint Da-

vid Model College boys. The match was competitive and drew admiration from the spectators.

The tournament continued yesterday, with Saint Angela Girl's Grammar School facing Eguare Secondary School girls, and St. Peter's Grammar School boys clashing with Agba Gram-

mar School boys.

Winners from these matches will proceed to the final, scheduled for Children's Day, 27th May 2025, at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium where, they will face Idia College girls and Ogbe Secondary School boys.

Miss Omonzane's presence highlighted the Board's com-

mitment to youth and sports development.

The Governor's Cup is part of the "Catch Them Young" initiative championed by the present state government.

She assured fans of more thrilling matches ahead and praised the young athletes' performances so far.

The Chairman was accompanied by board members and officials, including Alhaji Yusuf Bako, Princess Charity Iziengbe Osifo, Mr. Osawe Osagie, Mrs. Mabel Oboigba, and Mrs. Mabel Ojiefoh.

Their attendance reaffirmed support for grassroots sports development in Edo State.

# FEATURE

## Why NUJ, NBA, ASUU, Clergymen, CSOs, traditional rulers must endorse Gov Okpebholo's anti-cultism fight

BY FRED ITUA

Is the war against cultism in Edo State winnable? Yes, it is—and Governor Monday Okpebholo is demonstrating this with courage, clarity, and commitment. While cultism has long been a deeply entrenched menace in the social and criminal landscape of Edo State—festered in schools, communities, and even political spaces—the narrative is shifting. For the first time in a long time, we are witnessing a government not only speaking against cultism but taking decisive steps to dismantle its roots and consequences.

Governor Okpebholo inherited a state bruised by cult-related violence, from senseless killings on campuses to brutal street reprisals in local government areas. It was a crisis that had, over the years, defied tokenistic responses. But what this administration is offering is not tokenism—it is strategy, backed by law, executed with resolve, and powered by a belief that safety is a right, not a privilege.

Governor Okpebholo's anti-cultism campaign is not just about today's safety—it is about the legacy we leave behind. It is about reclaiming campuses, streets, markets, shrines, and sacred spaces that have been infiltrated by darkness. It is about making sure that a 13-year-old boy in Iruokpen, a girl in Auchi Polytechnic, or a trader in Upper Mission Road no longer lives in fear. It is about showing that governance in Edo State is not about occupying an office—it is about taking responsibility and protecting lives.

This is why the Governor's directive to turn demolished cult dens into symbols of statehood—police stations, youth centers, rehabilitation clinics, and libraries—is profound. These are not random decisions; they are deliberate responses to reclaim physical, psychological, and ideological spaces.

Under Governor Okpebholo's anti-cultism campaign, key successes have been recorded. There has been an increase in the arrests and prosecution of cult leaders and members. In collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), and local security networks, the state government launched a targeted offensive against cultism hotspots across Benin City, Ekpoma, Auchi, and other flashpoints. In the last two months alone, security agencies have arrested over 120 suspected cultists, many of whom are now facing prosecution. Unlike in the past, this administration ensures that arrests do not end in silence—they proceed to the courtroom.

The war against cultism has equally witnessed a disruption of cult activities and recovery of weapons. Intelligence-led operations have led to the disruption of initiation ceremonies, the sealing off of meeting locations, and the recovery of arms, charms, and danger-



ous weapons. The governor's directive to security operatives has been clear: no tolerance, no compromise, no retreat. This has inspired confidence among citizens who now tip off authorities with actionable intelligence.

This audacious campaign has received legislative backing and policy reforms. One of the strengths of this fight is its legal reinforcement. The governor initiated amendments to the state's anti-cultism law, tightening loopholes and providing stiffer sentences for both perpetrators and enablers. The law also empowers community vigilantes and recognized security outfits to legally collaborate with the police on cult-related intelligence and operations. This legislative clarity has removed bureaucratic barriers that often delay justice.

The campaign has also witnessed community mobilization and youth sensitization. Governor Okpebholo understands that arrests alone are not enough; cultism thrives on misinformation, fear, and youthful desperation. The administration has therefore embarked on aggressive youth sensitization campaigns in schools, markets, and worship centers. Working with the Ministry of Education, anti-cultism clubs are being resuscitated in secondary schools, while tertiary institutions are being engaged through student union governments and faith-based fellowships to combat peer pressure and organized recruitment rings.

Another major boost for the campaign is the partnership with religious

*The Governor has equally made a firm commitment to the improvement of the security architecture in the state. The reinforcement of the Edo State Security Corps and coordination with vigilante groups has brought visible presence and quick response to formerly neglected areas*

and traditional institutions. In a shift from past approaches, the state government is leveraging the influence of traditional rulers, pastors, and imams to delegitimize cultism as a means of power. Town halls have been held in Esanland, Edo South, and Edo North where palace chiefs and youth leaders signed public declarations renouncing cultism and pledging support to the Governor's campaign. This has given

the war a cultural and moral backbone.

The Governor has equally made a firm commitment to the improvement of the security architecture in the state. The reinforcement of the Edo State Security Corps and coordination with vigilante groups has brought visible presence and quick response to formerly neglected areas. Governor Okpebholo has also approved funds for logistics and welfare of field operatives—because fighting crime effectively requires that those who risk their lives are motivated and well-equipped.

But this is just the beginning. For this anti-cultism campaign to be sustained and institutionalized beyond media headlines, it must become a people's movement. We therefore call on all critical stakeholders to lend their voice and weight to this war.

To the revered traditional rulers across the state, this is the time to go beyond palace meetings. Public declarations, youth summits, and community watchdog structures must be backed by royal authority. As the spiritual and cultural authority no law enforcement agency can match, these leaders must publicly denounce and de-legitimize cultism during village meetings, festivals, and palace gatherings. They must instruct youth leaders and community chiefs to report cult activities and bar them from masquerading as cultural groups. Also, the enforcement of cultural sanctions on families and compounds known to harbour cultists is key. When the throne frowns, the people listen.

To pastors of megachurches, imams of large mosques, and spiritual leaders, your pulpits must become platforms of truth and safety. Condemn cultism openly and counsel the confused.

To content creators, skit makers, influencers, and celebrities, reject the romanticization of cult culture. Don't make comedy out of tragedy. Use your reach to save lives.

To student leaders, NANS representatives, and campus journalists, be allies, not apologists. Speak up. Advocate reform. Support whistleblowing systems.

To the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), and other professional bodies, we urge you to take public positions in support of the administration's efforts. Host seminars. Write communiqués. Lend legal and moral support.

Let it be said in our time that Edo State stood firm against a generational menace and chose peace over violence. Governor Monday Okpebholo has demonstrated that with leadership, focus, and bold action, the war against cultism is winnable. But he cannot do it alone.

Let every Edo son and daughter, home and abroad, rise to this noble fight. Cultism must die so that Edo may live.

Edo Oyeeeeee!

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