

The Nigerian Observer set for comeback after 10,000-copy-per hour press test

EDITOR

BENIN CITY

The Nigerian Observer Newspaper is closer than ever to returning to newsstands following the successful test run of its state-of-the-art Goss Magnum printing press, capable of producing

10,000 copies per hour.

The test, which lasted over 30 minutes, was overseen by a team of electrical engineer and the press operator and was witnessed by Mr Peter Odibo, General Manager of Bendel Newspapers Corporation, publisher of The Observer titles, along with the newspaper's

editor, Andy Egbon, and other senior management staff.

Engr. Adelugba Ojo Lawrence, who led the test run, confirmed that with all consumables in place, the printing machine is ready for full-scale production.

He noted, however, that the acquisition of a new CTP (Computer to Plate) machine

is necessary to ensure optimal operation and maintain consistent print quality.

Highlighting the machine's versatility, Engr. Lawrence revealed that the press can also produce copies for other newspaper houses, a development expected to generate significant internally generated reve-

nue (IGR) for Edo State.

Following the successful run, the General Manager held consultations with top management staff, with a second strategic meeting scheduled for 10 a.m. today to finalise plans for the newspaper's relaunch.

He urged all staff to remain committed to the goal of re-

turning The Observer to the public promptly.

In preparation for the next phase, the General Manager directed that cleaning of the printing machine and its surrounding environment commence immediately, paving the way for another test run scheduled for next week.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Edo woos investors, showcases 'Made-in-Edo' products at Enugu Trade Fair

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2027 polls: INEC unveils new party rules

ABUJA

Moves to curb spending, rigging risks

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on Tuesday unveiled draft regulations and guidelines for political parties ahead of the 2027 general elections, signalling a major overhaul of the electoral framework following the enactment of the Electoral Act 2026.

INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Amupitan, presented the draft at a consultative meeting with leaders of political parties in Abuja, stressing that the review was imperative to align the

commission's processes with the new law.

He declared that "Nigeria cannot navigate a 2027 horizon using a 2022 map," underscoring the need for reforms driven by emerging realities.

Amupitan urged political parties to pay close attention to Clause 40(4) and (5) of the draft regulations, which address election expenses relating to party primaries and general elections, noting that INEC had undertaken a clause-by-

clause realignment to ensure both legal compliance and operational efficiency.

According to him, the review was informed by empirical findings from the Political Party Performance Index (PPPI), developed with support from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which exposed a disconnect between party constitutions and grassroots practices.

He explained that the draft regulations cover key are-

as such as party registration, mergers, and internal operations, with streamlined processes designed to enhance accessibility while safeguarding democratic standards.

On party administration, the INEC chairman said the new guidelines establish clear rules to govern day-to-day operations, promote accountability, and ensure compliance with the law.

He added that the reforms are aimed at sanitising par-

ty primaries by eliminating opaque processes that often impose unpopular candidates, fuel voter apathy, and trigger avoidable litigation.

Amupitan further stated that the commission had outlined procedures to guarantee fairness and transparency in primary elections, while also introducing measures to ensure that campaigns are conducted peacefully and with respect for citizens' rights.

He noted that the draft includes stricter provisions on political financing, emphasising transparency and accountability in the management of party funds and campaign expenditures, as well as clearly defined conditions for party deregistration to ensure fair-

ness.

The guidelines, he added, also incorporate measurable benchmarks to boost the participation of women, youths, and persons with disabilities in the political process.

He urged political parties to view the draft not as a constraint but as a safeguard for strengthening Nigeria's democracy.

However, in his remarks, the National Chairman of the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC), Yusuf Dantalle, called on the National Assembly to urgently amend the Electoral Act 2026, warning that certain provisions could undermine the credibility of the 2027 elec-

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1ST INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION:

L-R: Executive Secretary, Nigerian Press Council (NPC), Dr Dili Ezughah; representative of the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Malam Ali M. Ali; and Chairperson, International Communication Association (ICA), University of Port Harcourt, Dr Ekaete George, during the 1st International Communication Association (ICA) Nigeria Regional Chapter conference at Nile University, Abuja, on Tuesday.

3 in 4 African births at risk from dirty delivery rooms —WaterAid

LAGOS

A staggering 76 percent of births in Africa occur in healthcare facilities lacking basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, putting mothers and newborns at serious risk, a new report by WaterAid has revealed.

Titled "Born Without Water: The Crisis in Our Delivery Rooms," the study, released to mark World Water Day, surveyed 16 countries across Africa and Asia, including Nigeria, highlighting the dangerous conditions many women face during childbirth.

The report identifies maternal sepsis as a leading cause of death, with one in nine African births linked to infections

caused by poor hygiene.

It further notes that ensuring access to clean water, proper sanitation, and hand washing facilities could cut maternal infections and deaths by at least 50 percent.

While Nigeria has established WASH standards for healthcare facilities, the report highlights persistent gaps in funding, prioritisation, and enforcement, leaving women exposed to preventable risks and undermining national efforts to reduce maternal mortality.

WaterAid Nigeria called on governments and stakeholders to urgently prioritise WASH services across healthcare facilities nationwide to safeguard the lives of mothers and newborns.

Delta approves 700 health jobs to boost services, tackle 'Japa' gaps

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Binance seeks out-of-court deal in tax evasion case

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Ghana and EU sign landmark defence deal to combat militant Islamist threat

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Registration still open for 11th Okpeke road race

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Edo woos investors, showcases 'Made-in-Edo' products at Enugu Trade Fair

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH,
DANIEL-NWOSU
NOHUNWAN LUCY

ENUGU

Edo State has stepped up its drive to attract investment and expand trade, showcasing its economic potential and locally made products at the 37th Enugu International Trade Fair.

The fair, themed "Empowering MSMEs for Global Competitiveness," provided a platform for the state to highlight its cultural heritage and promote export-ready goods to local and international investors.

Commissioner for Business, Trade and Investment, Hon. Omoh Anabor, said Edo's participation reflects a deliberate strategy to position the state as a viable destination for commerce and industrial growth.

He noted that beyond exhibiting products, the state was actively engaging investors and building partnerships that could unlock new economic opportunities.

"The trade fair is important to Edo. We are here not only to showcase our rich culture and

Made-in-Edo goods, but also to attract investors with our exportable products," Anabor said.

He linked the state's growing economic appeal to the SHINE agenda of Governor Monday Okpebholo, which he said has driven improvements in infrastructure, security and small business development across the 18 local government areas.

According to him, the improving business climate has made Edo increasingly attractive to investors, adding that the government is also preparing for its own trade fair later in the year.

Managing Director of the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), Mr Amen Odigie, reaffirmed the government's commitment to ease of doing business, assuring investors of strong institutional support and policy stability.

"Edo is open for business. Security has improved and the environment is enabling. We are ready to work with investors," he said.

Odigie added that the state's investment team has been mandated to promote Edo's opportunities nationwide, en-

gaging directly with potential investors and showcasing its economic reforms.

The Edo pavilion drew significant attention at the fair,

with six state-sponsored exhibitors, including Amineru Foods, Arose Cultural Hub Ltd, Genius Hub, Afrohype Artistry Ltd, Pekosa Foods and

Rotzy Foods, displaying a wide range of products and services.

Top government officials at the event included the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of

Business, Trade and Investment, Mrs Felicia Edokpolor, and the Director of Trade Promotion and Marketing, Mrs Anthonia Afogu.



37TH ENUGU INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR:

L-R: Mr Amen Odigie, Managing Director, Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ESIPO), and Hon. Omoh Anabor, Commissioner for Business, Trade and Investment, at the 37th Enugu International Trade Fair, showcasing investment opportunities in Edo State.

2027 polls: INEC unveils new...

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tions.

Dantalle argued that despite public input during hearings, the final legislation represented a setback that placed undue pressure on political parties, particularly those outside government.

He specifically faulted the mandatory adoption of direct primaries, insisting that political parties should retain the option of indirect primaries as candidate selection remains an internal affair.

The IPAC chairman also criticised the requirement for parties to submit membership registers, including National Identification Numbers, within a tight April 1-21, 2026 window, describing it as impractical

and potentially exclusionary for millions of Nigerians lacking access to registration facilities.

He further demanded the restoration of mandatory electronic transmission of election results to the INEC Results Viewing portal immediately after polling unit announcements, without conditions.

Dantalle expressed concern over what he described as weakened penalties for vote buying in the new law and reiterated calls for the establishment of an Electoral Offences Commission to ensure accountability.

He disclosed that IPAC had already appealed to the National Assembly to revisit and repeal the Act in the interest of a more credible and transparent electoral process.

Edo Varsity graduates 72 first-class students

● Expands global reach

BENIN CITY

The Vice Chancellor of Edo State University Iyamho, Prof. Victor Olawale Adetimirin, has announced that the institution will graduate 72 First Class students out of a total of 850 graduates at its forthcoming convocation ceremony.

Adetimirin disclosed this during a press briefing to herald activities marking the university's 10th Founder's Day and 7th Convocation, which will also feature the award of post-graduate degrees and diplomas, alongside the commissioning of state-of-the-art projects.

He reaffirmed the university's commitment to its founding

vision of becoming a centre of excellence in teaching, research, innovation and community development, noting that this has guided its steady growth and achievements since inception.

According to him, academic excellence at the institution is anchored on an uninterrupted academic calendar and sustained harmony within the university community.

The Vice Chancellor explained that the university has expanded significantly from its modest beginnings of three faculties offering eight programmes to over nine faculties with more than 30 fully accredited undergraduate programmes, all approved by the National Universities Commission and relevant

professional bodies.

He added that student enrolment has risen to about 6,000, reflecting growing confidence among parents, guardians and stakeholders in the quality and relevance of the institution's academic offerings.

"Our graduating students come from diverse backgrounds across Nigeria and beyond, reflecting the university's national spread and global outlook. We have built a culture that prioritises academic integrity, discipline, innovation, entrepreneurship and community engagement," he said.

Adetimirin commended the Edo State Governor and Visitor to the university, Sen. Monday Okpebholo, as well as the Governing Council for their support, pledging that the

institution would continue to produce graduates who are academically sound, professionally competent, entrepreneurial and globally competitive.

He further highlighted the University's international collaborations with institutions, such as the University of Oslo, Nagoya University and Dangguk University, which have secured a prestigious interdisciplinary grant from the Research Council of Norway under the Interpart programme.

The grant, he said, will fund the "Life on Metal Surface" project, a collaborative research initiative exploring interactions between cells, bacteria and metals, while efforts are also underway to attract more international students to the university.

FG, ECOWAS rally media as frontline force against money laundering, terror financing

ABUJA

The Federal Government and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have underscored the critical role of the media in combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism, warning that financial crimes continue to threaten national stability and development.

This position was reinforced by the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) and the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) at a National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) media outreach held on Tuesday in Abuja.

Chief Executive Officer of NFIU, Hajiya Hafsat Bakari, described journalists as indispensable partners in promoting transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny in the fight against illicit financial flows.

"Financial crime thrives in darkness, but accountability flourishes under informed public scrutiny," she said, noting that the engagement with the media represents a strategic partnership rather than a routine exercise.

Bakari warned that money laundering and terrorist financing pose grave risks, as illicit funds often fuel organised crime, corruption, human trafficking, and violent extremism.

According to her, when such financial flows remain

undetected, they weaken institutions, distort economies, and undermine development efforts.

She stressed that responsible and investigative journalism could drive awareness, deter criminal activities, and strengthen accountability mechanisms.

The NFIU boss further described the media as a vital bridge between policymakers and citizens, translating complex financial intelligence into accessible and actionable information.

Urging journalists to go beyond routine reporting, Bakari called for deeper interrogation and analysis of financial crime issues to enhance public understanding and civic vigilance.

Highlighting GIABA's longstanding commitment, she noted that the effectiveness of AML/CFT frameworks depends not only on laws and enforcement agencies but also on public awareness and engagement.

Bakari disclosed that the initiative would support the establishment of dedicated AML/CFT desk officers across media organisations to promote specialised reporting and sustained coverage of financial crimes.

She added that the programme would examine Nigeria's National Risk Assessment on AML/CFT, emerging regional threats, and practical strategies for effective media engagement.

In his remarks, Direc-

tor-General of GIABA, Mr Edwin Harris, said the outreach was designed to deepen journalists' understanding of financial crimes and equip them with the tools to expose illicit financial activities.

Represented by Mr Timothy Melaye, Harris explained that GIABA, a specialised institution of ECOWAS established in 2000, is mandated to protect member states' economies from the proceeds of crime and terrorist financing.

He noted that the body also serves as a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional organisation, ensuring compliance with international AML/CFT standards while conducting research to track emerging trends in financial crimes.

According to him, GIABA promotes the implementation of global standards, fosters regional cooperation, conducts mutual evaluations, and supports member states in establishing Financial Intelligence Units.

Harris said the organisation has recorded significant progress through capacity-building initiatives, technical assistance, and strategic partnerships with international stakeholders.

He urged journalists to leverage the training to uphold ethical standards and play a more proactive role in exposing corruption and financial crimes, describing the media as a critical ally in safeguarding economic integrity across the region.

Acknowledgement not approval, BTC clarifies Pellar's Palace visit

BENIN CITY

The Benin Traditional Council (BTC) has clarified that the controver-

sial visit to the Benin Royal Palace by Habeeb Hamzat Adelaja, popularly known as Pellar, did not receive official approval, stressing that ac-

knowledge of a request letter should not be mistaken for authorisation.

In a press statement signed by its Secretary, Frank Iabor, and made available to journalists in Benin City, the Council said it was compelled to respond due to widespread

misinformation and apparent ignorance surrounding the incident involving Pellar and his manager.

The BTC explained that, in line with standard institutional practice, the submission and stamping of a letter of request by its secretariat merely con-

firm receipt and do not amount to approval by the Palace or the Oba.

"For the avoidance of doubt, the receipt and stamping of any correspondence by the secretariat only serve as acknowledgement and do not in any way imply approval by His Royal Majesty or the Benin Traditional Council.

"In the absence of explicit authorisation, no visit or activity is deemed sanctioned," the statement said.

The Council called on Pellar and his manager to publicly state whether they obtained any formal written approval for the visit.

It also raised concerns over whether their letter disclosed any intention to visit any of the Iloi (Queens), describing the issue as pertinent.

The BTC noted that although Benin tradition does not usually encourage public engagement on such matters, it deemed it necessary to set the record straight in the face of public misconceptions.

It further disclosed that disciplinary proceedings arising from the unauthorised visit are ongoing, adding that Pellar has been invited to the Palace of the Oba of Benin.

The Council, however, said it would refrain from further public commentary as the matter is being handled through appropriate internal channels.

Reaffirming its stance, the BTC pledged to uphold the customs, traditions and sanctity of the Benin Royal Palace, warning against actions capable of undermining its authority.



PANEL SESSION:

L-R: Landry Signe, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution and Executive Director, Thunderbird School of Global Management; Nigeria's Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake; Guinean Minister of Energy, Sekou Camara; and Senior Vice President, Global Head of Origination, U.S. Export-Import Bank, Sarah Whitten, during a panel session on "Critical Minerals in Africa: Meeting Global Demand" on the sidelines of the Powering Africa Summit in Washington, D.C. Alake called for the establishment of regional energy hubs to boost cross-border mining.

Ozoro festival outrage: PANDEF demands police probe, warns against rights abuses

WARRI

The Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) has called for an urgent investigation by the Nigeria Police Force into the alleged harassment and assault of women during a recent festival in Ozoro, Delta State, warning that cultural practices must not override constitutional rights.

In a statement signed by PANDEF's National Spokesman, Obiuewbi Ominimini,

the group strongly condemned the incident, insisting that no traditional activity should infringe on the rights of citizens, particularly non-indigenes residing within the community.

PANDEF noted that Ozoro has long been regarded as a peaceful town, serving as the headquarters of Isoko North Local Government Area and host to the Delta State University of Science and Technology, which attracts a diverse population of students and resi-

dents.

He stressed that all festivals and cultural practices must respect the freedoms guaranteed under the Nigerian Constitution, adding that evolving societal standards require continuous review of traditions to ensure they uphold dignity, safety and the rule of law.

The group commended the swift condemnation of the incident by the traditional ruler and the President General of the kingdom, describing their

response as a necessary step in addressing the situation.

It, however, maintained that those responsible must be brought to justice without delay, emphasising that accountability would serve as a deterrent against future violations.

It further urged community leaders to take proactive measures to prevent a recurrence, insisting that all cultural practices must align with existing laws and modern human rights standards.

Gun duel: Police rescue kidnap victim, launch manhunt for fleeing suspects

ASABA

Operatives of the Delta State Police Command have rescued a 27-year-old kidnapped woman following a gun battle with her captors along the Ibusa/Og-washi-Uku Road, intensifying efforts to apprehend the fleeing suspects.

The operation, carried out by the Special Anti-Kidnapping

and Cyber-Crime Squad on the directive of the Commissioner of Police, Aina Adesola, led to the safe recovery of the victim who had been in captivity since her abduction on March 12.

Police spokesman, Bright Edefe, disclosed that the victim was held at a building site near the Obosi River before operatives stormed the location and engaged the kidnapers in a fierce exchange of gunfire.

The suspects were forced to flee under pressure, abandoning the victim, who was immediately rescued and taken to a hospital for treatment.

A manhunt has since been launched to track down the perpetrators.

In a separate development, the command arrested one Sunday Blessing over an armed robbery incident in Owa-Oyibu, where a Point of Sale operator

was dispossessed of N600,000.

The suspect was apprehended following a distress call that prompted a swift police response, leading to his arrest and the recovery of a locally fabricated Beretta pistol.

Authorities said efforts are ongoing to apprehend other members of the gang.

Police confirmed that the suspect remains in custody as investigations continue.

FG evacuates 708 stranded Nigerians from Niger

Warns against risky migration

KANO

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) on Monday received 708 stranded Nigerians evacuated from Niamey, Niger Republic, as the Federal Gov-

ernment intensified efforts to bring back distressed citizens.

The returnees were received at the Malam Aminu Kano International Airport, Kano, where they were undergoing profiling and documentation.

Dr Nura Abdullahi, Head of

Operations at NEMA's Kano office, said the evacuees arrived at about 4:08 p.m. in 12 buses and comprised 292 male adults and children and 416 female adults and children.

He noted that they were drawn from several states, including Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Benue, Borno, Yobe, Zamfara,

Kaduna, Kogi and Niger.

According to Abdullahi, the evacuation was facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the returnees had been provided with food, temporary shelter and relief materials.

"They have been given blankets, mosquito nets and dignity kits containing toiletries, wrappers, sanitary pads and other essentials," he said.

He added that medical teams from the Nigerian Red Cross were on ground to attend to the sick, while serious cases would be referred to appropriate health facilities.

Abdullahi said arrangements had been concluded to transport the returnees to their respective states after profiling.

He, however, cautioned Nigerians, particularly youths,

against embarking on irregular migration in search of better opportunities abroad.

Also speaking, the Kano Field Coordinator of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), Hajiya Luba Liman, described the evacuation as a "whole-of-government approach."

W.TEC, NAN move to deepen partnership to expand tech access for women

LAGOS

The Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC) has called for stronger collaboration with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) to scale up its programmes targeted at women and girls across the country.

The Executive Director of W.TEC, Mrs Oreoluwa Lesi, made the call during a courtesy visit to NAN in Lagos, noting that the engagement was aimed at strengthening existing ties and widening the reach of the organisation's interventions.

Lesi acknowledged NAN's role in amplifying W.TEC's activities nationwide, saying the agency's support had significantly boosted awareness and credibility.

"Your support has helped us reach more people and build trust in what we do," she said.

She explained that W.TEC, established in 2008 to bridge the gender gap in technology, had grown from a small office in Sura Shopping Complex to impacting over 60,000 girls, women and young people.

Highlighting key initiatives, Lesi said the 'She Creates' Camp was designed to inspire girls to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), exposing them to practical applications of technology.

"The camp allows girls to build things, explore technol-

ogy and see how it applies to their daily lives," she said, adding that professionals were engaged to mentor participants.

She further disclosed that the organisation's After-School Academy provides sustained learning opportunities and is currently being implemented in schools across Lagos, Ogun and Kwara states.

Lesi also pointed to the 'She Can with ICT' programme, which equips women with digital skills to grow their businesses, noting that over 10,000 women across Africa had benefited.

"We have seen women use simple tools like mobile phones to reach more customers and grow their income," she added.

Also speaking, W.TEC External Relations Officer, Mr Yemi Odutola, described NAN as a dependable media partner, expressing the organisation's commitment to deepening the relationship.

Programme Coordinator, Blessed Hamed-Musa, stressed the centre's focus on measurable impact, revealing that 69.6 percent of camp participants reported increased interest in STEM, while 36.7 percent were studying or had studied STEM-related courses.

She added that 85 percent of beneficiaries of the 'She Can with ICT' programme recorded improved digital marketing skills, with many reporting income growth of between 39 and 70 percent.

NEWS

Delta approves 700 health jobs to boost services, tackle 'Japa' gaps

ASABA

The Delta State Government has approved the recruitment of over 700 medical and non-medical personnel to strengthen healthcare delivery and address manpower shortages across its expanding health sector.

Commissioner for Health, Dr Joseph Onojaeme, disclosed this on Tuesday in Asaba, saying the approval by Governor Sheriff Oborevwo reflects a sustained commitment to im-

proving healthcare infrastructure and services.

He explained that the decision was driven by rising demand following key upgrades, including the elevation of General Hospital, Warri, to a Central Hospital and the near-completion of the Mother and Child Hospital in Ekpan.

Onojaeme said 295 personnel would be deployed to the Hospital Management Board, while 120 would be absorbed by the Delta State University Teaching Hospital.

The College of Health Technology, Ovrode, is to receive 100 staff, while the Asaba Specialist Hospital and Warri Central Hospital will get 60 and 12 personnel respectively.

He noted that the recruitment would help cushion the impact of the ongoing migra-

tion of healthcare workers, popularly known as the "Japa syndrome," which has created critical workforce gaps.

The commissioner added that the state's policy of replacing exiting personnel had ensured operational stability, while new projects such as a

State Public Health Laboratory and a psychiatric hospital would further expand services.

He also highlighted investments in modern medical equipment, including three 1.5 Tesla MRI machines and improved dialysis facilities, which have reduced treatment

costs to about ₦45,000 in some centres.

Onojaeme assured that the recruitment process would be transparent and merit-based, covering a wide range of professionals and support staff to enhance service delivery state-wide.

A'ibom rally: Residents back Tinubu, Akpabio, Eno for re-election

ESSIEN UDIM

Residents of Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State have declared support for the re-election of President Bola Tinubu, Senate President Godswill Akpabio and Governor Umo Eno.

The endorsement was made during a mobilisation rally organised by the Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI) in Afaha Ikot Ebak, where new chapter executives and ward structures

were inaugurated.

RHI State President-General, Mr Uwem Okoko, said the initiative would strengthen grassroots mobilisation for the All Progressives Congress (APC), urging residents to consolidate support ahead of future elections.

Coordinator of RHI in Essien Udim, Mr Ntiedo Usoro, pledged to work with party leaders to ensure electoral victory, describing the rally as a demonstration of unity and political resolve in the area.



A DONATION OF GIFT:

L-R: Executive Director Business, NEXIM Bank, Hon. Stella Okotete; Vice Principal Admin, Model Girls Junior Secondary School, AMAC Estate, Mr Shagawo Ishaku and Head of Human Resources Department, NEXIM Bank, Mrs Margaret Udosi, during a donation of gift to the students by NEXIM Bank team to mark 2026 International Women's Day celebration in Abuja on Tuesday.

APC launches digital drive to reach 90m Nigerians ahead of Nat'l Convention

● Schedules Thur global media briefing

ABUJA

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has unveiled a sweeping digital media strategy aimed at reaching 90 million Nigerians nationwide and internationally in the lead-up to its National Convention scheduled for March 27.

Governor Mohammed Bago of Niger State, Chairman of the APC National Convention Sub-committee on Digital and New Media, disclosed the plan on Tuesday in Abuja while inaugurating the committee.

Bago said the initiative is designed to set a new benchmark for political communication in Africa and extends beyond the convention, targeting the successful delivery of President Bola Tinubu in the 2027 elections.

"The mandate is very clear: to deliver APC. We have increased funding to project our achievements beyond the national convention," Bago said, urging digital media handlers within and outside Nigeria to collaborate in broadcasting the successes of the Tinubu administration under the Renewed Hope agenda.

He highlighted APC's growing influence across sub-national levels, stressing the importance of sustaining democracy in Nigeria, which he described as critical to Africa and the world.

Co-chairman of the committee and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Benjamin Kalu, said the digital strategy is central to connecting the party with grassroots members.

He called on committee members to fully leverage digital platforms to showcase the party's democratic credentials and administration achievements.

"This committee is not just about the convention; it is about demonstrating to the world that there is a party in Africa committed to real democracy," Kalu said, noting that the operation is modelled on the sophisticated digital campaigns of the United States' Democratic and Republican parties.

The committee's digital broadcast strategy is built on four pillars: dominance, coverage, mobilisation, and intelligence, ensuring APC's message resonates widely before, during, and after the convention.

NOA rallies stakeholders against open defecation in A'ibom

UYO

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) has called for urgent collaboration among stakeholders to eliminate open defecation in Akwa Ibom, warning of its

grave health and environmental consequences.

State Director of NOA, Mr Mkpoutom Mkpoutom, made the call on Tuesday in Uyo, stressing that the practice exposes communities to diseases such as cholera, typhoid and

diarrhoea.

He said tackling the menace requires collective action, noting that sanitation is not solely the responsibility of government but a civic duty for all citizens.

Mkpoutom urged governments and private investors to ensure access to safe and hy-

gienic toilet facilities in every household, adding that improved sanitation would boost public health and attract development.

He also emphasised the need for sustained public education to drive behavioural change and promote proper hygiene practices across communities.

Lagos cracks down on building collapse, tightens enforcement

LAGOS

The Lagos State Government has reinforced its zero-tolerance stance on building collapse, pledging stricter enforcement of construction standards amid rapid urban growth.

Head of Service, Mr Bode Agoro, gave the assurance on Tuesday at a management retreat of the Lagos State Materials Testing Laboratory Agency (LSMTL) in Epe

He described the policy as critical to safeguarding lives and sustaining the state's economic reputation.

Represented by Mr Abdulrafiu Fashola, Agoro said Lagos must ensure that all construction projects meet quality standards, stressing that substandard materials and poor practices remain major causes of structural failures.

He described LSMTL as central to enforcing compliance,

urging officials to intensify site inspections and maintain strict laboratory testing to prevent compromise.

General Manager of LSMTL, Mrs Olayinka Abdul, said the agency was transitioning into a proactive, world-class regulator, backed by ISO 17025:2017 certification and expanded operational capacity.

She listed achievements since June 2024 to include new laboratory facilities, additional sample collection centres and

mobile compliance units to enhance monitoring and efficiency.

Abdul, however, called for stronger legal backing to punish offenders and emphasised the need for integrity and proper equipment maintenance to sustain progress.

Stakeholders at the retreat underscored the importance of collaboration and continuous training to eliminate building collapse and ensure safer structures across the state.

State police: CSO demands inclusive, coordinated framework

ABUJA

Cleen Foundation has urged a holistic and inclusive approach to the establishment of state police, warning against replicating existing flaws in Nigeria's policing system.

Chairman of its CSO Experts' Session, Prof. Alemika Etannibi, made the call on

Tuesday during a stakeholders' forum, stressing the need for broad consultations involving government institutions, security agencies, civil society and community leaders.

He said such engagement would ensure that any framework is accountable, effective and constitutionally compliant, while preventing state police

from becoming a source of disunity.

Etannibi argued that improving governance, particularly in education, healthcare and social welfare, remains key to addressing insecurity, noting that policing outcomes often reflect the quality of governance.

Also speaking, Mr Ezenwa Nwagwu of PAACA cautioned

against donor-driven motivations, insisting that state police must be rooted in genuine national interest with clear safeguards against executive interference.

Other stakeholders called for sustained advocacy, legal scrutiny and public education to ensure transparency, professionalism and public trust in any proposed system.

HiiL unveils community-driven guide to curb Plateau farmer-herder clashes

JOS

The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL) has unveiled a

guideline aimed at addressing persistent farmer-herder conflicts in Plateau State, with particular emphasis on land use disputes.

The organisation formally launched the document on Tuesday in Jos, describing it as a practical tool developed through extensive field and

desk research.

Speaking at the event, HiiL Country Representative, Ijeoma Nwafor, said the guideline was designed by local stakeholders to tackle recurring tensions between farming and pastoralist communities.

She explained that the in-

itiative, supported by the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING) programme and funded by the UK Government, drew insights from research conducted in three local government areas of the state.

Nwafor noted that findings revealed that beyond land disputes, criminal activities have also intensified the conflicts, though the primary focus of the guideline remains land use.

Describing the document as a "living guide," she urged Plateau residents to adopt and utilise it effectively in resolving disputes.

Earlier, SPRING Team Lead, Priscila Ankut, said the pro-

gramme focuses on promoting peace and strengthening community resilience to climate-related pressures.

She noted that many drivers of violence are linked to competition over natural resources, particularly land, adding that unresolved tensions often escalate conflicts.

Ankut said similar interventions are ongoing in Kaduna, Benue and Katsina states, targeting communities prone to resource-based conflicts.

She expressed optimism that the guideline would equip local actors with tools for preventing and resolving disputes, while promoting fairness and transparency in land management.



EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION:

Administrator of Public Service Institute of Nigeria (PSIN), Ms Imeh Okon (L), presenting the PSIN Training Brochure to the Director-General, Nigerian Tourism Development Authority (NTDA), Dr Olayiwola Awakan, during the latter's visit to explore opportunities for strategic collaboration in capacity building and tourism development at the PSIN Office in Abuja on Tuesday.

Makurdi residents decry blackout amid soaring electricity charges

MAKURDI

Residents of Makurdi, the Benue State capital, have lamented worsening electricity supply despite what they describe as high tariffs charged by the Jos Electricity Distribution Company (JEDC).

Many residents who spoke on Tuesday said the situation has deteriorated, with some communities plunged into prolonged blackout.

They expressed concern that the erratic supply coincides

with intense heat currently being experienced in the area, worsening living conditions.

Mrs Dorathy Kumachivir, a resident of George Akume Way, described the situation as unbearable, noting that irregular power supply has made food preservation difficult.

Similarly, Jessica Ivarave, a food vendor in the High Level area, said she now purchases perishable goods daily due to lack of refrigeration.

She appealed to authorities to urgently address the situation, stressing that the heat has

made it difficult to serve customers cold drinks.

At Aper Aku Estate in North Bank, Mrs Angela Amine said residents often go days without electricity, and when supply is restored, it lasts for less than an hour.

She added that the outage has also triggered water scarcity, as boreholes rely on electricity for pumping.

Other residents, including Johnathan Audu and James Igba, said some areas receive less than 20 minutes of power daily, while others have been without supply for nearly a year due to faulty transformers.

Responding, JEDC Head of Corporate Services, Dr Adakole Elijah, attributed the situation to a significant drop in power allocation from the Transmission Company of Nigeria.

He said the company now rations available electricity, with Band A customers receiving relatively higher supply.

Elijah also identified technical challenges affecting Makurdi North, particularly faults on transmission lines running beneath the River Benue bridge, adding that plans are underway to reroute the lines for improved reliability.

Power generation drop triggers Lagos outages, says Ikeja Electric

LAGOS

Ikeja Electric has attributed the ongoing electricity outages across Lagos to a nationwide drop in power generation caused by inadequate gas supply to thermal plants.

Head of Corporate Communications, Kingsley Okotie, said the development has significantly reduced energy available on the national grid and allocations to distribution companies.

He explained that the shortfall has resulted in intermittent outages and load shedding across the company's network.

Okotie assured customers that available electricity is being distributed as efficiently and equitably as possible, while urging patience as efforts continue to stabilise generation.

The situation has, however, drawn complaints from residents and businesses, many of

whom say unreliable supply has increased dependence on generators and operating costs.

A frozen food trader, Mrs Kemi Adebayo, said she relies heavily on generators to preserve her goods, cutting into her profits.

Similarly, welder Sani Ibrahim described the situation as unsustainable, noting that energy costs now exceed production expenses.

A civil servant, Mrs Roseline George, said the erratic supply has worsened the impact of rising temperatures, forcing many households to rely on alternatives such as rechargeable fans.

Industry experts warn that persistent challenges, including gas shortages, grid instability and sectoral debts, continue to constrain electricity generation, with potential implications for economic productivity if not urgently addressed.

World Water Day: Engineers push gender equity in water access

IBADAN

The Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE) has called for gender-responsive policies in water resource management to promote equitable access for women and girls.

The call was made during the 6th Engineer Gbola Tokun Memorial World Water Day Lecture held in Ibadan on Tuesday.

Chairman of NSE, Ibadan Branch, Mr Ayokunnu Ojede, urged governments and stakeholders to prioritise inclusive water policies that address systemic inequalities in access and infrastructure.

The lecture, organised in collaboration with the Nigerian Institution of Environmental Engineers (NIEE), marked the 2026 World Water Day themed "Water and Gender: Where Water Flows, Equality Grows."

Keynote Speaker, Dr Tolupe Odunola of the Universi-

ty of Cincinnati, warned that global water resources are under severe stress, particularly in regions with weak infrastructure and high vulnerability to climate change.

She noted that women and girls disproportionately bear the burden of water scarcity due to entrenched social norms and unequal access.

Guest Lecturer, Dr Amara Alaka of Imo State Polytechnic, highlighted the physical, economic and health risks faced by women who travel long distances to fetch water.

She stressed the need for gender-sensitive policies that ensure women's participation in water governance and infrastructure planning.

Earlier, NIEE Chairman, Oyo Chapter, Dr Kamarudeen Olaiya, said professionals in engineering and environmental management must drive innovative and inclusive solutions to bridge gender gaps in water access.

Nigeria eyes solar irrigation to boost food security, cut energy costs

ABUJA

Stakeholders in Nigeria's agriculture and water sectors are exploring solar-powered irrigation as a sustainable solution to boost productivity and strengthen food security.

The discussions took place at a workshop in Abuja on scaling climate-resilient irrigation through coordinated partnerships and knowledge sharing.

The event, coordinated by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the International Food Policy

Research Institute (IFPRI) in collaboration with CGIAR, brought together farmers, policymakers, financiers and development partners.

Senior Regional Researcher at IWMI, Dr Adebayo Oke, said the initiative aims to reduce dependence on expensive fuel by harnessing Nigeria's abundant solar energy.

He noted that while the technology exists, access to financing remains a major barrier for smallholder farmers.

Oke emphasised the need for financial institutions and risk-sharing agencies such

as NIRSAL to support farmers in adopting solar systems, alongside providing technical training to ensure effective utilisation.

He stressed that collaboration among government, private sector and development partners is critical to scaling irrigation solutions in a country as vast as Nigeria.

Director of Irrigation and Drainage at the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, Mrs Esther Oluniyi, said the ministry is working with partners to expand access to affordable and reliable irrigation.

She noted that rising fuel costs have made solar alternatives increasingly viable for farmers.

Also speaking, Director of Extension Services at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Dr Olawumi Ayodele, said the Federal Government is prioritising irrigation expansion under President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope agenda.

He disclosed that pilot projects would be implemented in four states to demonstrate improved irrigation practices and enhance year-round farming.

NEWS

Water crisis bites hard in Lagos as residents cry out to Sanwo-Olu

LAGOS

Residents of Agboyi-Ketu Local Council Development Area (LCDA) have appealed to Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu to urgently address the persistent shortage of clean and potable water in the area.

The residents, who spoke with reporters on Tuesday, said the prolonged water scarcity has severely disrupted daily living and increased dependence on costly and sometimes unsafe alternatives.

They urged the state government and local council

authorities to accelerate plans for a sustainable solution, noting that most households now rely on private boreholes, wells, water vendors and sachet water due to unreliable public supply.

The community specifically called for the repair of broken boreholes, provision of new water facilities and improved distribution systems.

A resident, Mrs Funke Adeyemi, described the situation as alarming, saying many families are left with limited and unsafe options.

"We rely mostly on buying water from vendors and sachet

water for drinking. It is expensive and not everyone can afford it daily.

"Sometimes, we even resort to well water, which is not always clean," she said.

Mr Sadiq Bello blamed the crisis on poor infrastructure and lack of maintenance of existing facilities.

"Some of the boreholes provided are no longer functioning, and no one seems to be maintaining them. That is why the problem has persisted.

"Past administrations gave us water tankers and boreholes, but they are no longer working due to neglect," he said.

Miss Kemi Ogunleye called

for greater transparency and swift execution of water projects, stressing that residents need urgent action rather than promises.

The residents also warned that the approaching rainy season could worsen the situation if proactive measures are not taken.

Mr Dele Akinyele noted that flooding could contaminate wells and other water sources, increasing health risks.

Echoing the concern, Mr Chinedu Okafor highlighted the threat of waterborne diseases during the rainy season, urging government to act swiftly to ensure access to safe water.

Navy honours fallen hero with house for family

ABUJA

The Nigerian Navy has donated a two-bedroom bungalow to the family of a deceased rating, Aliyu Aminu, who died in active service in Zamfara in January 2025.

The house, located in Karshi, Abuja, was presented to the widow, Mrs Sahadatu Aminu, on Tuesday by the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Adm. Idi Abbas, represented by Rear Adm. Raheem Taofeek, Director of Veterans Affairs.

Abbas said the gesture forms part of ongoing efforts to support families of fallen personnel and boost morale within the service.

He described the donation as a symbolic but meaningful recognition of the ultimate sacrifice made by the late rating.

"It is because of their selfless service that we are able to sleep peacefully and wake up safely

every day," he said.

The naval chief reaffirmed the Navy's commitment to the welfare of its personnel, promising continued support and improved service conditions.

He also called on Nigerians to support the Armed Forces, noting that national security is a shared responsibility.

Earlier, Rear Adm. Peter Zakaria, representing the Group Managing Director of Navy Holdings Limited, said the initiative reflects the Navy's broader welfare programme.

Speaking on behalf of the family, MWO Isah Daniel expressed gratitude for the gesture, describing it as timely and deeply reassuring.

He said the donation has provided comfort and renewed hope for the bereaved family, adding that it demonstrates the Navy's enduring commitment to its personnel and their loved ones.

Power supply to improve in 2 weeks, Minister promises

ABUJA

Minister of Power, Mr. Adebayo Adelu has assured Nigerians that electricity supply will improve within two weeks, apologising for the current unstable power situation.

Adelabu, briefing journalists in Abuja on Tuesday, said that the improvement will follow repairs to gas pipelines, particularly the Seplat line, and enforcement of domestic gas supply obligations.

"Timely payments to gas suppliers will encourage improved electricity generation,"

he said.

He explained that 75% of Nigeria's power plants depend on gas, while the remaining 25% rely on hydro sources.

"Without adequate gas, turbines remain idle, causing supply disruptions," he noted.

Adelabu added that the sector has attracted over \$3 billion in private investment in the past two years and now operates under a comprehensive electricity policy and strategic framework guiding all stakeholders.

The ministry aims to reach a generation target of 6,000 megawatts before the end of 2026.



INAUGURATION OF THE REPORT:

L-R: Commissioner for Environment in Oyo State, Dr Ademola Aderinto; Chairman, Alluvia Unique Concept Implementation Partner of Oyo SSS Project in Oluyole Local Government Area, Mr Adetunji Lam-Adesina and other participants, during the inauguration of the report on Environmental Hazard and Get Reward App, in Ibadan on Tuesday.

Solid minerals exports fall short of potential —NEPC

CALABAR

The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) has said that the contribution of the solid minerals sector to Nigeria's export earnings remains far below its vast potential.

The Executive Director of NEPC, Mrs Nonye Ayeni, made the assertion on Tuesday at a workshop on developing critical minerals for export in Cross River State.

Represented by the state coordinator, Dr Damian

Omorogbe, Ayeni said Nigeria is richly endowed with minerals such as lithium, zinc, tin, barite and lead, but noted that the sector's earnings have yet to reflect this abundance.

She attributed the gap largely to the dominance of informal operators and structural challenges in moving products from extraction to the international market.

According to her, key obstacles include limited knowledge of export procedures, inadequate documentation, poor access to finance and

failure to meet international standards.

"These challenges often discourage potential exporters or lead to losses due to non-compliance with global trade requirements," she said, stressing the need to build capacity within the sector.

Ayeni added that strengthening exporters' knowledge base is critical to unlocking the sector's contribution to non-oil revenue and overall economic growth.

In her remarks, the Cross River State Commissioner for

Commerce and Industry, Dr Abigail Duke, urged miners to embrace government initiatives designed to reposition the sector.

Represented by the ministry's Permanent Secretary, Mrs Philomema Nyiam, Duke noted that many operators avoid such programmes despite their benefits.

She acknowledged the prevalence of illegal mining but assured that government's focus is on creating frameworks to harness the sector's potential for national development.

Anambra takes TB fight to grassroots, deploys tricycles for mass testing

AWKA

The Anambra State Government has intensified efforts to combat tuberculosis (TB) with the deployment of tricycles to expand mobile testing services across communities.

The initiative was unveiled on Tuesday to mark the 2026 World Tuberculosis Day, with officials describing it as a strategic move to reach un-

derserved and hard-to-access areas.

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Obiageli Uchebo, said the event was a call to action against a disease that remains preventable and curable.

She emphasised that ending tuberculosis requires coordinated efforts involving government, healthcare providers and local communities.

Uchebo noted that Nigeria

remains among countries with a high burden of TB, while Africa accounts for a significant share of global cases due to factors such as HIV co-infection, poverty and malnutrition.

She assured residents that TB testing and treatment services in the state are free and accessible to all.

Earlier, the Programme Manager for TB, Buruli Ulcer and Leprosy Control, Dr

Ugochukwu Chukwulobelu, stressed the importance of early detection and prompt treatment.

He explained that the newly deployed tricycles would enhance outreach programmes and improve case detection in remote communities.

World Tuberculosis Day is observed annually on March 24 to raise awareness and mobilise global action towards eliminating the disease.

Petrol truck crushes 6 in Ibadan tragedy

IBADAN

At least six people were killed on Tuesday when a petroleum truck lost control along the Beere/Ago-

di Road in Ibadan, destroying several tricycles in its path.

Eyewitnesses reported that the truck ran over two tricycles near Beere, killing passengers instantly, before proceeding

to Oje Market Road where it claimed four more lives.

Some survivors were receiving treatment at local hospitals.

One relative of a victim, who had just named his daughter

three days earlier, described the loss as devastating.

The Oyo State Police Public Relations Officer, Ayanlade Olayinka, confirmed the accident but could not provide an exact death toll.

CHANGE OF NAME/ DATE OF BIRTH

I, formerly known as DAUDA LAMIDI, now wish to be known and address as LAMIDI FRIDAY DAUDA, also, my correct date of birth is 11/11/1949, not 1/11/1940 as appeared in some of my documents. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as MISS ISHIOMA RUFINA ENU, now wish to be known and address as MRS. ISHIOMA RUFINA SULE. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

Yelwata massacre trial stalls as defendant collapses in court

ABUJA

The trial of nine suspected terrorists linked to the June 2025 Yelwata killings was on Tuesday stalled after one of the defendants slumped in court.

The third defendant, Alhaji Haruna Abdullahi, collapsed from his seat shortly before

proceedings commenced before Justice Joyce Abdulmalik of the Federal High Court, Abuja.

Prison officials attempted to revive him and later returned him to his seat, but he remained unresponsive.

When the matter was called, prosecution counsel, Rotimi Oyedepo (SAN), informed the

court that the case was scheduled for a trial-within-trial but noted that the defendant had developed serious health complications.

He stressed that the Federal Government was prosecuting, not persecuting, the defendants over their alleged involvement in the Yelwata killings in Guma Local Government Area

of Benue State, adding that the defendant must be medically fit to stand trial.

Counsel to Abdullahi, Ahmed Mohammad, said his client's condition deteriorated in court despite arriving on his own, and urged the court to grant an adjournment to enable him receive medical attention.

Other defence counsel did not oppose the request.

Justice Abdulmalik consequently adjourned the case until March 30 and 31 for contin-

uation of trial and ordered that hearing notices be served on all defendants.

The accused persons, facing a 57-count amended charge bordering on terrorism, pleaded not guilty.

They were alleged to have

carried out the June 13, 2025 attack on Yelwata community, where about 150 persons were killed and several houses razed.

The charge includes allegations of conspiracy, participation in terrorist meetings and orchestrating the deadly assault.



2026 APPSN AGM:

L-R: Financial Secretary, Association of Private Practicing Surveyors of Nigeria (APPSN), Mr Alabi Abayomi; Vice Chairman, Mr Adams Olugbenga; Chairman, Mr Afolabi Olaoluwa and Secretary, Mr John Olayiwola, during the 2026 APPSN Annual General Meeting and Luncheon in Lagos on Tuesday.

Binance seeks out-of-court deal in tax evasion case

ABUJA

Cryptocurrency firm, Binance Holdings Limited, has moved to explore an out-of-court settlement in the ongoing tax evasion case filed against it by the Federal Government.

The company's counsel, Sunday Agaji, disclosed this on Tuesday before Justice Eme-ka Nwite of the Federal High

Court, Abuja.

Counsel to the Federal Government, Moses Ideho of the Federal Inland Revenue Service, confirmed the development, noting that the matter was initially scheduled for continuation of trial.

"My lord, parties are exploring settlement," Agaji told the court.

Following submissions from both parties, Justice Nwite ad-

journed the case until May 12 for a report on settlement.

Binance was re-arraigned on July 12, 2024 on a four-count charge bordering on alleged tax evasion, to which it pleaded not guilty through its Nigerian representative, Ayodele Omotilewa.

The re-arraignment followed the discharge of the firm's executives, Tigran Gambaryan and Nadeem Anjarwalla, after the amended charge listed Binance

as the sole defendant.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is also prosecuting the company over alleged money laundering involving \$35.4 million.

In a separate civil suit, the Federal Inland Revenue Service is seeking about 79.5 billion dollars in damages over alleged economic losses linked to the company's operations in Nigeria.

Mother, trader docked over alleged child marriage in Lagos

IKEJA

A 31-year-old woman, Chiwendu Oma, and a trader, Chisom Ogbonna, were on Tuesday arraigned before an Ikeja Chief Magistrates' Court over alleged unlawful marriage involving a

minor.

The defendants, residents of Ayobo in Lagos State, are facing charges of conspiracy and sexual assault, to which they pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutor, ASP Adegoke Ademigbuji, told the court that the offences were committed in

September 2025.

He alleged that Oma gave her 15-year-old daughter in marriage to Ogbonna, who subsequently molested the girl until she escaped and reported the matter to the police.

According to the prosecution, the offences contravene

relevant provisions of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

Chief Magistrate Omolara Kushanu granted the defendants bail in the sum of N500,000 each with two sureties in like sum.

The case was adjourned until April 8 for mention.

Shettima urges global support for Nigeria's youth skills drive

ABUJA

Vice-President Kashim Shettima has called on international partners, industry leaders, and policymakers to intensify investment in the Federal Government's skills acquisition initiatives targeting millions of Nigerian youths.

Shettima made the appeal on Tuesday in Abuja while inaugurating the National

Skills and Industry Alignment Roundtable Series (Q1 2026).

Represented by the Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Sen. Ibrahim Hadejia, he stressed the need for collaborative investments to create sustainable, growth-driven jobs.

The roundtable, themed, "Bridging Skills Supply and Labour Market Demand," was convened by the Office of the Vice President with support from the

European Union (EU).

Shettima highlighted the importance of coordinated efforts among stakeholders, noting the EU's continued role in strengthening job creation and youth development in Nigeria.

"Nigeria does not have a talent problem. Until skills meet industry demand, job creation will remain below its full potential," Shettima said.

He added that the Tinubu ad-

ministration is moving toward a coherent national system where private sector leadership is matched by government facilitation.

Minister of Housing and Urban Development Ahmed Dangiwa emphasised the importance of skilled labour across the housing sector, while the EU's Massimo De Luca praised the integration of fellowship programmes like 3MTT into a broader employment ecosystem.

Ex-convict jailed 3yrs for N12m money laundering

IKEJA

An Ikeja Special Offences Court has sentenced an ex-convict, Adedokun Oluokun, to three years' imprisonment for laundering N12 million.

Justice Rahman Oshodi delivered the judgment on Tuesday, convicting Oluokun on a one-count charge brought by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The defendant, who pleaded guilty upon arraignment on March 16, was also ordered to retribute N3.5 million to First City Monument Bank (FCMB) within three months.

The court held that the offence constituted money

laundering and noted that the convict was a repeat offender, though it considered his early guilty plea as a mitigating factor.

The EFCC said Oluokun was involved in concealing and converting funds traced to fraudulent withdrawals from FCMB accounts through Point of Sale agents.

The stolen funds formed part of about N3.9 billion allegedly siphoned via unauthorised access to the bank's mobile platform.

The court admitted evidence of a previous conviction, in which Oluokun was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in 2020 for defrauding a foreign national.

Taraba High Courts begin easter vacation March 30

JALINGO

The Chief Judge of Taraba State, Justice Joel Agya, has announced the commencement of the 2026 Easter vacation for High Courts across the state.

The directive, contained in Legal Notice No. 2 of 2026, states that the vacation will

run from March 30 to April 10.

According to the notice, court sittings will be suspended during the period in line with provisions of the Taraba State High Court (Civil Procedure) Rules, 2026.

Regular court sessions are expected to resume after the Easter break.

3 arraigned over alleged forgery of death certificate in Lagos

IKEJA

Three persons were on Tuesday arraigned before an Ikeja Magistrates' Court over alleged conspiracy and forgery of a death certificate.

The defendants, Gloria Agubosim, Olukoya Sunday and Adeite Solomon pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Prosecutor SP Josephine Ikhayere told the court that the

defendants conspired with others at large to forge the death certificate of a deceased military officer in September 2024.

The alleged offence took place in Shomolu, Lagos, and is said to contravene provisions of the Criminal Law of Lagos State.

Magistrate L.A. Owolabi granted the defendants bail in the sum of N300,000 each with two sureties.

The case was adjourned until April 2 for hearing.

25yr-old docked over alleged n25m burglary in Lekki

IKEJA

A 25-year-old woman, Precious Monday, was on Tuesday arraigned before an Ikeja Magistrates' Court in Ogba over alleged burglary and theft of items worth N25 million.

The defendant pleaded not guilty to a three-count charge bordering on conspiracy, burglary and stealing.

Prosecutor SP Josephine

Ikhayere alleged that the defendant, alongside others still at large, broke into a residence in Lekki and carted away valuables including clothing, shoes, a gold chain and a laptop.

The offences are said to contravene provisions of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

Magistrate L.A. Owolabi granted bail in the sum of N500,000 with two sureties.

The case was adjourned until April 15 for hearing.

NEWS

Foreign

At least five killed in massive wave of Russian strikes across Ukraine, officials say

At least five people have been killed in Russian strikes across Ukraine, after a massive overnight aerial bombardment targeted several regions across the country.

A 61-year-old woman was killed when a drone hit an electric train in Kharkiv early on Tuesday, authorities said, while other deaths were reported in Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Poltava.

Officials said the attacks were among the worst in 10 days, and came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had warned of a forthcoming "massive strike" in his nightly address.

Russian strikes targeting energy infrastructure also disconnected Moldova's key power link with Europe, President Maia Sandu said, warning the

situation remained "fragile".

Sirens wailed across Ukraine on Monday night as Russia launched a barrage of missiles and drones at the country. Seven ballistic missiles, 23 cruise missiles, four air-launched guided missiles and 392 drones were used in the attack, the Ukrainian Air Force said in a statement on Telegram.

Air defence units intercepted 25 missiles and 365 drones, it added.

In a post on X on Tuesday, Zelensky said: "These numbers clearly show that more protection is needed to save lives from Russian strikes. It is important to continue supporting Ukraine."

Attacks of this scale have been occurring roughly once a week or every ten days in recent months, and there had

been mounting fears in the past few days that another wave of strikes was imminent.

"Please pay attention to air raid sirens tonight," Zelensky said earlier in his video address to the nation on Monday. "Intelligence says Russia may be preparing a massive strike."

This time the attack focused on cities other than the capital, Kyiv. Damage was reported in eleven regions, Zelensky said.

Among the worst affected was the south-eastern city of Zaporizhzhia, which was struck by six drones followed by six ballistic missiles. One person was killed and nine injured after a residential high-rise building was hit, local authorities said.

Local resident Dymtro Zaiets told Reuters news agency that his family was woken by a

"very loud explosion".

"We quickly gathered our things and ran downstairs, everything was on fire on our floor," he said. "There was smoke, and we took our three-month-old child and ran quickly to the underground shelter. My car is destroyed. All our windows were blown out."

Zaporizhzhia was one of the worst hit regions in the overnight Russian strikes

Elsewhere, at least two people were killed and 12 injured when strikes hit residential buildings and a hotel in the north-eastern Poltava region, governor Vitaliy Dyakivnych said on Telegram.

In Kherson, a civilian was killed when his house came under Russian shelling, the head of the city's military administration, Yaroslav Shanko, said.

Iran war shows norms of international conflicts have been upended

The US-Israeli attacks against Iran, and the threats against its energy infrastructure, as well as Tehran's retaliation on its Gulf neighbours underline how the norms of starting and escalating international wars have been upended.

US President Donald Trump has at least twice threatened to use overwhelming force against Iranian energy facilities. Last week, he said he would "massively blow up" Iran's South Pars gas field if Iran further retaliated against Qatari energy sites. And on Saturday, he said the US would "obliterate" Iran's "various power plants, starting with the biggest one first" if its leaders did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

It comes amid mounting concern that the nature of this war is putting further, unprecedented strain on the global rules-based order.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, founding chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), said the global rules-based order was designed to protect civilians and prevent nations resorting to war other than in self-defence, or when approved by the UN

Security Council.

He told the BBC that the war on Iran amounts to a crime of aggression under international law.

Moreno Ocampo also said Trump's threats to bomb Iranian power plants, as well as attacks by both Iran and Israel on energy infrastructure, do not amount to legitimate targets. He likened such strikes to Russia's attacks on energy sites in Ukraine which led to Russian officials being indicted by the ICC for alleged war crimes.

"The cases of Russia in Ukraine or the US in Iran or in Venezuela is... called a crime of aggression. That means the use of armed forces by a state against the sovereignty, the territorial integrity or the political independence of another state, that's it," said Moreno Ocampo.

"Now we go [from the rules-based system] to the rule of the man, whatever today President Trump decides will be the rule. That's not a viable world," he said.

In response, the White House called Moreno Ocampo's statement "ridiculous". It said Trump was taking "bold action to eliminate the threat posed by a rogue, terrorist regime".



EU-AUSTRALIA TRADE DEAL:

Ursula von der Leyen has inked an EU-Australia trade deal with Anthony Albanese

Australia and EU agree sweeping trade deal in face of global uncertainty

Australia and the European Union have agreed a sweeping free trade deal after eight years of negotiations.

The deal signed in Canberra is worth about A\$10bn (\$7bn; £5.2bn) and was described as a mutual "win-win" by Australia's prime minister and the visiting European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

She described the deal as having a focus on "collective resilience" in a world that is "deeply changing".

As well as removing almost all tariffs on trade, the two sides agreed to increase co-operation on defence and critical minerals.

European carmakers welcomed the deal but farmers in both Europe and Australia were unhappy at export quotas agreed for Australian beef and

lamb.

The amount of Australian beef allowed into the EU is set to increase more than tenfold in the next decade, but Australian farmers had wanted more, while European farmers were opposed to increases.

Tuesday's accord in Canberra is the latest trade deal struck by Brussels as it tries to diversify its global trading relationships, given the fast changing geopolitical landscape and unpredictability of US President Donald Trump.

In January the EU and India announced a landmark trade deal after nearly two decades of on-off talks.

Another major trade deal the EU struck with the Mercosur bloc of South American countries was recently derailed in the European Parliament, amid criticism from the farm-

ing lobby.

"Today we are telling an important story to a world that is deeply changing. A world where great powers are using tariffs as leverage and supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited," von der Leyen told a news conference in Canberra - a nod to Trump's use of tariffs and China's control of the critical minerals market.

She added that "trust matters more than transactions", noting Australia and the EU had a "unique relationship" that was "built for the long term".

What's in the deal? Beef, wine and defence

Under the deal, almost all EU tariffs will be lifted on Australian agricultural products such as wine, fruit and vegetables, olive oil, seafood, most dairy products and wheat and barley.

This will mean a saving of

about A\$37m for local wine producers and exporters, the government said.

For Australian consumers, the deal will mean cheaper European wine, spirits, biscuits, chocolates and pasta.

The deal means Italian-style sparkling wine made in Australia can still be sold as prosecco domestically, though the name will be phased out over 10 years for exports.

Australian producers can also continue to use names including parmesan though feta will be subject to "grandfathering and lengthy phase-out periods".

The issue of food naming rights is sensitive in both Europe and Australia and Australia is now the only country outside of Italy to have secured EU permission to use the name prosecco.

Danes vote as PM Mette Frederiksen seeks third term after Greenland boost

Danes are voting in an election with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's Social Democrats aiming for a third term.

Frederiksen, 48, called the vote months earlier than expected, buoyed by popular support for her handling of US President Donald Trump's threat to annex Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory.

Her Social Democrats have lost support since the 2022 elections and she is facing a strong challenge from two parties on the centre-right, including the Liberal Venstre party of Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen.

Denmark is run by coalition governments and Tuesday's vote will decide whether power will stay with a left-win bloc or move to the right.

Latest opinion polls give Frederiksen's Social Democrats by the far the largest share of the vote, on more than 20%, well ahead of the Liberals and Green Left.

Although the election is not being fought on the Greenland crisis, Frederiksen is gambling that the "Trump bump" that boosted her poll numbers after her defiant stance on Greenland will be enough to hand her a third term in a tight election race.

Denmark, which has long been one of the closest US allies in Nato, has rebuffed Trump's bids to take over Greenland, and the Danes and their European partners sent a military contingent to the island last January.

Broadly-speaking, however, there is a wide consensus in

Denmark on foreign policy, so it is domestic concerns that have dominated the campaign trail.

Instead, the state of the economy and the cost of living are key issues, with Frederiksen proposing a 0.5% wealth tax for the richest 20,000 Danes. The high level of pesticides in drinking water because of pig farming and agriculture has also become a concern for voters, with some parties including Frederiksen's calling for a ban.

However, her party's lead in the polls is not likely to be enough to maintain the 90 seats she needs to hold a majority in parliament.

After a commanding win in 2022, Frederiksen led a coalition across the middle, that saw her Social Democrats team up with the centrist Moderates and right-of-centre Liberals, and all three parties are down significantly in the polls.

Troels Lund Poulsen of the Liberals has emerged as another candidate for prime minister, but he needs a strong showing in Tuesday's vote.

Even with the largest vote share, the Social Democrats are heading for their weakest result in more than a century. In last year's local elections, they slumped to 17%.

The polls suggest neither the "red" left-wing bloc nor the "blue" bloc on the right will be able to form a majority without relying on the centrist Moderates of Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen to act as kingmaker.

Foreign**NEWS****Ghana and EU sign landmark defence deal to combat militant Islamist threat**

Ghana has signed a defence agreement with the European Union (EU) as Islamist militants continue to wreak havoc in neighbouring countries.

The agreement, signed in Accra by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas and Ghanaian Vice President Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, strengthens cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism and cybersecurity.

Ghana is the first African country to make such a deal with the EU, Opoku-Agyemang said.

Though Ghana has so far remained largely untouched by militant violence, the surrounding West African region has become a hotbed of activity by affiliates of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) group.

Tuesday's agreement "signals the EU's determination to support Ghana's efforts at tackling emerging threats both at the national and at the regional levels", Osman Abdul Razak, Ghana's national security coordinator, said at a joint

press conference on Tuesday.

In her address, Kallas said the EU supports West African countries like Ghana to "counter terrorism, strengthen border security and enhance maritime security".

During the visit to Accra, EU representatives delivered drones, anti-drone systems, bomb disposal vehicles, and motorcycles to the Ghanaian military.

In recent years, al-Qaeda and IS affiliates have gained territory in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali. They have also carried out attacks in Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo.

Aid agencies say that over the last decade some two million people have been displaced by the insurgency in Burkina Faso, which lies to the north of Ghana.

Militants often cross over from Burkina Faso to Ghana in regroup when under pressure from Burkina Faso's military, according to several reports. They also use the country to smuggle weapons, food and fuel.

Chad begins relocation of refugees along its border with Sudan

Chad has begun the relocation of refugees from the border with Sudan amid rising insecurity.

The evacuations already began in Ennedi Est Province over the weekend, with the government targeting to relocate at least 2,300 refugees, mostly women and children.

Chad President Mahamat Idriss Deby has directed the military to deploy across the border, signaling retaliatory action after a recent drone attack killed at least 17 people.

The Chadian government said last week that it was going to deploy military across the border to potentially counter recent attacks from the Sudan side, threatening further infiltration into Sudan if attacks persist.

Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees have poured

across the border into Chad since the conflict began. Chad's statement noted that "exceptional exceptions, strictly justified by humanitarian reasons, may be granted" to the border closure.

Chad closed its border for a period shortly after Sudan plunged into chaos in April 2023, when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country.

The war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to United Nations figures, but aid groups say the true number could be many times higher.

The conflict has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with over 14 million people forced to flee their homes. It has also fueled disease outbreaks and pushed parts of Sudan into famine.



LEADER GRANT BAIL:

Tendai Biti, a prominent Zimbabwean politician, is seen before his release at the magistrates courts in Harare, Monday, Feb, 18, 2019.

Zimbabwe opposition leader granted bail amid growing tensions over constitutional changes

Political tensions are rising in Zimbabwe. Opposition leader Tendai Biti has been granted bail after spending the weekend in detention. He was arrested near the Mozambique border alongside an activist, accused of holding a public meeting without notifying authorities.

A court in Mutare released

both on \$500 bail, with orders to report to police every two weeks.

But this case is part of a bigger story. Zimbabwe is facing growing unrest over proposed constitutional changes that could extend President Emmerson Mnangagwa's rule beyond 2028 and shift presidential elections from a public

vote to parliament.

Mnangagwa, who came to power in 2017 after Robert Mugabe stepped down, is already serving his second term under the current constitution.

Critics say the proposed changes threaten democracy and accuse authorities of intimidation, abductions, and

repression. The ruling ZANU-PF party denies wrongdoing, but frustration is mounting as many say economic challenges and corruption remain unresolved.

For many Zimbabweans, this moment is about more than one arrest. It is about the future of how the country is governed.

Search for four missing soldiers after Colombia plane crash kills 66

Rescue workers in Colombia are searching for four people who are missing after a military plane crashed in the south of the country.

Sixty-six members of the Colombian security forces were killed on Monday, when the Hercules C-130 transport plane came down shortly after take-off near Colombia's border with Peru.

Locals were first to the scene, pulling out dozens of injured survivors from the burning wreckage and ferrying them to hospitals on the back of their motorbikes.

An investigation is under way to determine the cause of the accident.

A total of 128 people were on board the transport plane, which was headed from the town of Puerto Leguizamo to Puerto Asis.

In a series of posts on social media, Colombian President Gustavo Petro appeared to blame antiquated military hardware for the accident.

Talking about the victims, but without mentioning the Hercules plane directly, he wrote: "This piece of scrap metal was bought in 2020 and came down, let's ask why".

In an earlier post, he blamed "bureaucratic problems" for holding up his plans to modernise the armed forces' equipment and their aircraft.

"I will allow no further delays, the lives of our young people are at stake," he wrote.

Mobile phone footage shared on social media showed the plane losing height shortly after take-off, followed by a large plume of smoke rising from the crash site and the sound of explosions.

Colombia's defence minister said the sound came from ammunition on board blowing up in the flames.

He added that there was no indication that the plane had come under attack from any of the armed groups which are active in the Putumayo region.

A local farmer told AFP news agency that he had heard

a loud bang before the Hercules crashed into trees near his home. "I felt an explosion in the air and, when I looked up, the plane was flying close to the house on my plot," Noé Mota said.

According to the latest death toll, 58 army personnel, six members of the air force and two police officers were killed in the crash, Commander General Hugo Alejandro López said.

The crash is the second time a Hercules C-130 has been involved in a deadly accident in as many months.

On 27 February, a Hercules C-130 belonging to the Bolivian army, carrying a shipment of banknotes, overshot the runway on its approach to the airport in El Alto, in Bolivia, and crashed into traffic on a nearby highway.

Twenty-four people were killed in that incident.

Ukraine Unesco site damaged as Russia launches 400 drones in deadly daytime attack

Russia has launched an unusual daytime attack on Ukraine, hitting cities across the west of the country with over 400 drones on Tuesday afternoon.

Lviv regional head Maksym Kozlytskyi said the Bernardine monastery, a 16th-Century Unesco site, was damaged. A video posted by Lviv authorities shows a fire burning through the roof of a residential building near the monastery.

Three other western cities, Ivano-Frankivsk, Vinnytsia and Ternopil, were also targeted.

The head of the Ivano-Frankivsk region, Svitlana Onyshchuk, said two people were killed. Four, including a six-year-old child, were injured. Various buildings in the city as well as the maternity hospital were damaged.

Andriy Sadovyi/Telegram A burning monastery Andriy Sadovyi/Telegram

Lviv officials posted images of a residential building on fire next to the Bernardine monastery

In Lviv, Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said 13 people in his city were injured and warned

that the number would increase.

The strikes came hours after a heavy overnight attack left at least five people dead.

A 61-year-old woman was killed when a drone hit an electric train in Kharkiv early on Tuesday, authorities said, while other deaths were reported in Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Poltava.

While four years of war have left virtually no corner of Ukraine untouched, the west of the country has been hit comparatively less intensely

and frequently than other areas nearer the Russian border in the east.

Yurii Ihnat, spokesman of the Ukrainian Air Force, said late on Tuesday afternoon that a "large number of drones" had entered Ukrainian airspace from the north of the country, "effectively moving in columns".

"The geography of the strikes during the daytime was broader than at night... It can be said this was one of the largest attacks within a 24-hour period," he said.



COLOMBIA PLANE CRASH

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10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

FEATURE



“A nation drained: The falling Naira, mass exodus of talent, and rising hunger push Nigeria to the brink”

GENERAL IWU COSMOS JP.

Nigeria, long celebrated as the Giant of Africa, now finds itself grappling with a silent but deepening national emergency. Beneath the surface of political speeches and policy declarations lies a troubling reality shaped by three powerful and interconnected crises—the persistent fall of the naira, the alarming exodus of skilled citizens, and the growing menace of food insecurity. Together, these forces are not only weakening the nation's economic foundation but also threatening its social stability and future prosperity.

The steady depreciation of the naira has become one of the most visible symbols of Nigeria's economic distress. As the currency continues to lose value against major international currencies, the consequences are felt across every sector of society. Import-dependent businesses struggle to survive, production costs soar, and inflation tightens its grip on already burdened citizens. For the average Nigerian, the weakening naira translates directly into higher prices for food, fuel, medicine, and basic services.

The purchasing power of households continues to shrink, pushing more families below the poverty line.

This currency crisis is not merely an economic statistic; it is a daily lived experience. Market traders adjust prices almost weekly, transport fares rise unpredictably, and small businesses face closure due to unstable operating conditions. The lack of confidence in the naira discourages both local and foreign investment, creating a cycle of uncertainty that further weakens the economy. Without deliberate and sustained efforts to stabilize the currency through sound fiscal management and increased local production, the downward trend may persist with even harsher consequences.

Closely linked to this economic strain is the disturbing rise in the mass migration of Nigeria's skilled workforce, popularly referred to as the “Japa” phenomenon. Across various sectors, from healthcare to education and engineering, highly trained professionals are leaving the country in search of better opportunities abroad. This wave of migration is not driven by mere ambition, but by necessity—an urgent response to limited opportunities, poor working conditions, and economic instability at home.

The impact of this brain drain is severe and far-reaching. Hospitals are losing experienced doctors and nurses, leaving the healthcare system

under pressure. Schools and universities are witnessing a shortage of qualified educators, affecting the quality of learning. Industries that depend on technical expertise are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain standards and drive innovation. In essence, Nigeria is exporting the very talent it desperately needs to build its future.

While individuals have the right to seek better lives, the scale of this exodus reflects a deeper national challenge. A country that cannot retain its brightest minds risks stagnation and long-term decline. Reversing this trend requires more than appeals to patriotism; it demands practical reforms that create opportunities, reward excellence, and restore hope among the youth.

Compounding these challenges is the growing crisis of food insecurity. Despite its vast agricultural potential, Nigeria is witnessing a troubling rise in hunger. The cost of staple foods has increased dramatically, making it difficult for many households to afford basic nutrition. Factors such as insecurity in farming regions, inadequate infrastructure, poor storage systems, and limited government support have significantly reduced agricultural productivity.

Farmers, who should be the backbone of food security, are often un-

able to access their lands due to safety concerns. Post-harvest losses remain high due to lack of modern storage and transportation facilities. As supply struggles to meet demand, prices continue to rise, placing essential food items beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. Hunger is no longer confined to rural areas; it is increasingly visible in urban centers, where families are forced to survive on less.

These three crises are deeply interconnected, each reinforcing the other in a dangerous cycle. A weak currency drives inflation and hardship, pushing citizens to seek opportunities abroad. The departure of skilled professionals reduces productivity and innovation, further weakening the economy. At the same time, economic instability and insecurity undermine agricultural output, leading to food shortages and rising hunger.

Breaking this cycle requires urgent, coordinated, and decisive action. Stabilizing the naira must be prioritized through disciplined economic policies, diversification of revenue sources, and support for local industries. To address the brain drain, government and private sector stakeholders must create an enabling environment where talent can thrive—through better wag-

es, improved working conditions, and investment in critical sectors.

Equally important is the need for a comprehensive agricultural strategy that ensures food security. This includes protecting farmers, modernizing farming practices, improving rural infrastructure, and strengthening supply chains. When agriculture is given the attention it deserves, it can become a powerful driver of economic growth and stability.

Above all, transparency and accountability in governance remain essential. Nigerians must see clear, measurable results from policies and leadership decisions. Trust is built when actions align with promises and when the welfare of citizens is placed at the center of national priorities.

Nigeria's current challenges are serious, but they are not beyond resolution. With bold leadership, strategic planning, and collective commitment, the nation can reverse its course and reclaim its promise. The moment demands action, not hesitation.

If the naira is stabilized, if talent is retained, and if hunger is addressed, Nigeria can rise again—stronger, more resilient, and truly deserving of its title as the Giant of Africa.

Sports

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

Sports Commission boss says sports provides platform for advocacy, unity and social change

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE/
RICHARD EWEKA

● assures Cyclist Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke of support

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele has said

that sports, besides competition, provide opportunities and platforms for advocacy, unity and social change.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss made the assertion at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City Edo

State in his welcome address when he received the cycling team of autistic artist, Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke which made a stopover visit on their historic 100-Mile cycling ride by Kanye Tagbo-Okeke.

Hon Enabulele noted that Kanyeyachukwu's journey is a reminder that sports go beyond competition but a platform for advocacy, unity and social change, adding that through the initiative, the autistic artist is helping to break barriers, challenges, misconception and also helping to amplify the voices of persons with disabilities.

The Edo Sports Commission boss commended the Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke and his parents for their courage to embark on a truly inspiring journey of the historic 100-mile endurance cycling ride

from Enugu to Lagos State in commemoration of World Autism Awareness Day celebrated annually on April 2nd.

"We are not just witnessing a sporting activity; we are now a part of a movement that speaks to courage, resilience, inclusion and the limitless potential of the human spirit. We are happy to be a part of your historical journey to making successful global recognition in sports achievement.

"As you endure this particular rigorous journey from Enugu to Lagos, passing through Edo State, we are proud to be part of this historic moment. This visit is particularly significant to us because of your personal connection to Edo State through maternal roots and your commitment in the pursuit of excellence".

Hon. Enabulele proudly stated that Edo State is known for excellence in sports, youths and human capacity development, maintaining that the State remains committed to promoting and encouraging growth regardless of age and gender.

He noted that the State strongly believed that there is ability in disability if given the opportunity to thrive, commending Kanyeyachukwu's courage and determination to pursue global recognition and accomplishments as an autistic artist.

"Your journey, young champion is a beacon of hope as it tells every young Nigerian that no dream is too big and no challenge is insurmountable. We celebrate your courage; we embrace your message and

stand with you in promoting a more inclusive and compassionate society".

In his goodwill message, the Honourable Commissioner for health Cyril Oshomohole commended Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke for his courage, resilience and the power of the human spirit.

He noted that at 16 years of age Kanyeyachukwu has decided to challenge the limit, defile impossibility, as he embarked on 100 miles cycling from Enugu to Lagos which is a great feat to achieved.

"Every great journey is made possible through determination, purpose and belief as your story sends a powerful message to not only young people but all of us that impossibility is truly a myth. We celebrate you and assure you that we are with you all the way". Oshiomhole assured.

The father of the autistic artist and rider

Mr. Togbo Okeke who is also riding with his son said they have been riding from Enugu to Okah, Asaba and now a stop over in Benin, adding that they are riding to Lagos and that they are doing it for autism.

He noted that his son Kanyeyachukwu is living with autism and was diagnosed at age four and has made the Guinness World Records for the largest painting on canvas last year.

Kanyeyachukwu Tagbo-Okeke is a 16 year old autistic artist who defied all odds to embark on this 100-mile endurance cycling ride from Enugu to Lagos in commemoration of World Autism Day on April 2nd.



EDO STATE SPORTS COMMISSION CHAIRMAN HON AMADIN DESMOND ENABULELE RECEIVES AUTISTIC ARTIST AND RIDER KAYEN TAGBO-OKEKE

3 Days to Go: NSC Leadership to lead opening ceremony of 3rd National Para Sports Festival

With just three days to go, anticipation is building for the grand opening ceremony of the 3rd National Para Sports Festival, scheduled to hold on Saturday, March 28, 2026.

The festival, a flagship event in Nigeria's para sports calendar, will bring together athletes with disabilities from across the country to compete in a wide range of sporting events, showcasing resilience, talent, and the unifying power of sports.

The opening ceremony events will be led by the Chairman of the National Sports Commission, Mallam Shehu Dikko, alongside the Director General, Hon. Bukola Olopade. The leadership of the Commission stated that the Games represents Nigeria's strong commitment to the development and promotion of inclusive sports.

Speaking ahead of the festival, Hon. Olopade emphasized that the event is about celebrating courage, breaking barriers, and inspiring a new generation of athletes. The festival is expected to feature events across multiple disciplines, including athletics, wheelchair basketball, para powerlifting, and amputee football.

The National Para Sports Festival serves as a critical platform for talent discovery, athlete development, and

preparation for international competitions, including qualifiers for global events sanctioned by bodies such as International Paralympic Committee. It also aligns with Nigeria's broader agenda of promoting inclusivity, equal opportunity, and social integration through sports.

The National Sports Commission invites all stakeholders, partners, and the general public to be part of this historic event and support the growth of para sports in the country.



MALLAM SHEHU DIKKO, NSC CHAIRMAN

FIBA recognises Kida-led NBBF Board, sets October 15 election deadline

The global basketball governing body, FIBA, has formally recognised the leadership of the Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF) under Musa Kida, while setting a deadline of October 15, 2026, for the federation's next elective congress.

The decision was conveyed in a letter dated March 16, 2026, addressed to the NBBF Secretary, in which FIBA outlined its position on the federation's governance and electoral timeline.

According to the correspondence, the current NBBF board will remain in office until October 15, 2026. FIBA also directed that elections into the federation's governing body

must take place after the conclusion of the FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup, scheduled for September 13, 2026, and no later than the stipulated October deadline.

In addition, FIBA stated that it would not recognise any amendments to the NBBF statutes until the electoral process has been completed.

Reacting to the development, the Director General of the National Sports Commission, Bukola Olopade, urged stakeholders within the basketball community to align with FIBA's directive.

"I want to appeal to all basketball stakeholders to abide by FIBA's decisions. FIBA has spoken, and that should bring

an end to the divisions within the basketball fraternity," Olopade said.

FIBA, in its letter, noted that it has closely monitored governance issues within the NBBF since 2017, particularly during election cycles which have often been marked by disputes. The body recalled that tensions surrounding the federation's leadership previously led to Nigeria's withdrawal from a major international competition and prompted disciplinary measures before stability was restored in October 2022.

The latest directive is expected to provide a framework for a more orderly and inclusive electoral process later this year.



BASKETBALL FEDERATION PRESIDENT ENGR MUSA KIDA

Registration still open for 11th Okpekpe road race



OKPEKPE ROAD RACE

Registration is still ongoing for the 11th edition of the Okpekpe International 10km Road Race, according to Race Director Zack Amodu.

Amodu disclosed that the registration portal opened in early March and has already received an impressive response.

Registration is still open to athletes and non-athletes who wish to participate in our historic race scheduled to hold on May 23, 2026 in Okpekpe in Edo State,' he said.

He explained that intending runners can register either online or physically.

'For those who want to register online, they should visit the race's

website, www.okpekperoadrace.com, while those intending to register physically can either download the registration form on our website or go to Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City, Edo state to pick up one.

'The form in PDF format can be scanned and submitted online via register@okpekperoadrace.com,' Amodu added.

All participants must agree to World Athletics rules and regulations governing road races.

'The official entry form must be completed fully by each intending participant. Completion of the entry form represents acceptance of the terms and conditions for par-

ticipating in the historic race,' Amodu emphasized.

He noted that the race is not only for professional athletes competing for prize money but also for those running for fun, fitness, or charity.

The Okpekpe International 10km Road Race holds the distinction of being the first world-class road running event in Nigeria and West Africa, and the first to be granted a gold label status by World Athletics.

After last year's cancellation due to unforeseen circumstances, organizers say the 2026 edition will return 'stronger, better and in a more glamorous manner

Yenagoa City Int'l 10KM race: World press conference holds April 3rd, kit collections starts on April 1st

With just 12 days to the Yenagoa City International 10KM Race, Bayelsa State and Nilayo Sports Management Ltd is set to host the World Press Conference for the race on April 3, 2026.

The press conference will bring together key stakeholders in athletics, including delegates from World Athletics, government officials, race organizers, and members of the media. The event aims to formally present the race to the global sporting community, highlight its significance, and reaffirm Bayelsa State's readiness to host a world-class competition.

The Yenagoa City 10KM Race has continued to gain international recognition, attracting elite runners from across Nigeria and around the world.

The presence of World Athletics delegates further underscores the race's growing status and alignment with global standards.

As part of pre-race activities, kits collection will commence from April 1 through April 3, 2026, at the Peace Park, Mbiama, Yenagoa.

All registered runners are expected to collect their race kits within this period ahead of race day.

Speaking ahead of the event, organizers expressed

confidence in Bayelsa's preparedness, noting that all logistics have been put in place to ensure a seamless and memorable experience for athletes, officials, and spectators.

The Yenagoa City 10KM Race is not only a celebration of athletic excellence but also a platform to promote health, tourism, and community engagement in Bayelsa State.



International friendly: Brazil, Argentina demand huge fees from South Africa

Ahead of preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, South Africa's senior national team, Bafana Bafana, have reportedly been met with steep financial demands from global heavyweights Brazil national football

team and Argentina national football team for potential international friendly matches.

According to reports, the Brazilian Football Confederation has requested a fee of \$5 million for a friendly encounter with South Africa national

football team.

Similarly, the Argentine Football Association is said to have demanded €5 million to sanction a match involving the reigning world champions.

The proposed fixtures are part of South Africa's broader plan to secure high-profile opposition as they intensify preparations for the global showpiece.

However, the financial requirements from both South American giants could pose a significant challenge for the South African Football Association.

Friendly matches involving top-tier nations such as Brazil and Argentina often attract substantial commercial interest, given their global appeal, star-studded squads, and competitive pedigree.



CARLO ANCELOTTI

SWAN commiserates with NFRA over death of President Sani Zubairu

The Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN) has commiserated with the Nigeria Football Referees Association (NFRA) over the demise of its President, Mallam Sani Zubairu, on Tuesday.

In a letter of condolence addressed to the leadership of NFRA, SWAN President, Mr. Isaiah Benjamin, through the Association's Secretary-General, Amb. Ikenna Okonkwo described Mallam Zubairu as a distinguished administrator with the whistle in his active days as a FIFA Referee.

Part of the letter reads, "On behalf of the National Secretariat of Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN), I write with deep sorrow to extend my heartfelt condolences to the Executive Board and the entire family of the Nigeria Football

Referees Association on the passing of your esteemed President, Mallam Sani Zubairu.

"The news of his demise is a painful loss, not only to the Nigeria Football Referees Association but also to the entire football community in Nigeria. Mallam Zubairu was a distinguished leader whose dedication, integrity, and passion for the development of refereeing in Nigerian football stood him out as a pillar in the game.

"Mallam Zubairu, a jolly good fellow and good partner, has contributed immensely to the growth, organisation, and professionalism of refereeing. He helped to strengthen the credibility of football across the nation. His leadership and commitment will be deeply missed by colleagues, officials, and stakeholders in the football ecosystem.



PRESIDENT SANI ZUBAIRU

Boxing Federation seeks police intervention over alleged unlawful protest



The Nigeria Boxing Federation (NBF) has filed a formal petition with the Lagos State Police Command over what it describes as a planned violent protest allegedly linked to leaders of the Nigeria Boxing Board of Control (NBBofC).

In the petition dated March 23, 2026, and signed by NBF Secretary General Vivian Azimene, the federation raised concerns about alleged unlawful activities by individuals

associated with the NBBofC, including claims of mobilising individuals purportedly posing as boxers to stage a protest.

According to the petition, the proposed demonstration is expected to take place at the boxing facility within the National Stadium Surulere. The NBF expressed fears that such a gathering could disrupt public order and pose risks to lives and property in the area.

The federation urged police authorities to investigate the al-

legations, prevent any unlawful assembly, and ensure adequate security around the stadium premises. It also called for appropriate legal action against those found culpable if any acts of violence, vandalism, or theft occur under the guise of protest.

The petition specifically mentioned Rafiu Ladipo and Remi Aboderin in connection with the alleged plans.

The development comes amid ongoing tensions between the NBF and the

NBBofC, with the federation accusing the latter of attempting to incite members of the boxing community. The dispute is reportedly linked to recent reform efforts within the sport aligned with the agenda of the National Sports Commission, led by Chairman Shehu Dikko and Director General Bukola Olopade.

As of the time of filing this report, there has been no official response from the NBBofC regarding the allegations

FEATURE

Profiling of Nigeria: Gideon Eze's predicament in Qatar

At the airport in Qatar, they asked where I was coming from, I said Nigeria. Then an official made a statement - Gideon Eze.

Gideon Eze, a Nigerian data analyst, said in an interview with The Punch that he is a graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and works with both an international and a local company.

He explained that on May 7, 2025, he left Abuja around 1 p.m. on a Qatar Airways flight to Dallas to visit his wife, with a stopover in Doha. He said he arrived at the airport around 10 p.m. after an eight-hour journey.

He stated that he was traveling with two bags, including his laptop bag and another containing his clothes and a mannequin head he had purchased in Abuja to learn hair plaiting. According to him, he had been practicing with tutorials on TikTok and carried the mannequin in his hand luggage to continue learning while abroad.

He added that during airport screening, officials noticed the mannequin head and questioned him about it. He explained what it was, but they later claimed something might be inside it. He said he was unaware of any such contents, after which they carried out a swab test and screened it for narcotics.

When asked what the airport officials discovered after the test, Gideon Eze said that the result came out negative. However, he explained that the first set of officials asked him to wait as they needed to escalate the matter to security for further checks using more advanced machines, as they believed they had detected a dense area inside the mannequin head on their screen.

He stated that he agreed, and security personnel were called in. According to him, the officer examined the item and asked questions about where he purchased the mannequin. He told them it was from a popular market in Nigeria and also said he did not know what was inside the head.

He added that they decided to conduct another round of checks, and he consented. After the additional screening and tests, the result still came out negative.

He further stated, "It was while they were questioning me about where I was coming from and where I was going that I told them I was travelling to visit my wife in the US. They persistently asked where I was coming from, and I told them Nigeria. Then one of the officials made a statement."

"He said, 'Nigeria, too much problem.' Immediately he made that statement, everything changed—from routine checks on my items to suspicion that I was carrying narcotics. So, they immediately escalated the matter to the head at the airport."

He said that among the airport officials, there was a white woman with

a European accent, while the others were Arabs speaking Arabic, which he could not understand. He explained that when the issue was escalated to her, she returned with additional officials who surrounded him, making it appear as though he was a major drug suspect, and attracting the attention of other people at the airport.

He added that the woman said they needed to open the mannequin to check what was inside and explained that it would have to be torn open. He told them he had no objection.

He said the situation became uncomfortable for him, so he allowed them to proceed with whatever checks were necessary, trusting the process, and maintaining that he was certain the mannequin head did not contain any drugs, as he had purchased it from a busy market like Maraba.

WHAT DID THE AIRPORT OFFICIALS DISCOVER AFTER THE TEST?

It came out negative, but the first line of officials at the airport said I should wait because they would need to escalate the matter to security so they could bring more machines to ensure that it did not contain narcotics. According to them, there was a dense area they could see in the head of the mannequin from their screen.

I said no problem, so they called security. The officer came, looked at it, and asked me a few questions about where I got the mannequin. I told them it was from a popular market in Nigeria. They asked if I knew what was inside the head, and I said I did not know.

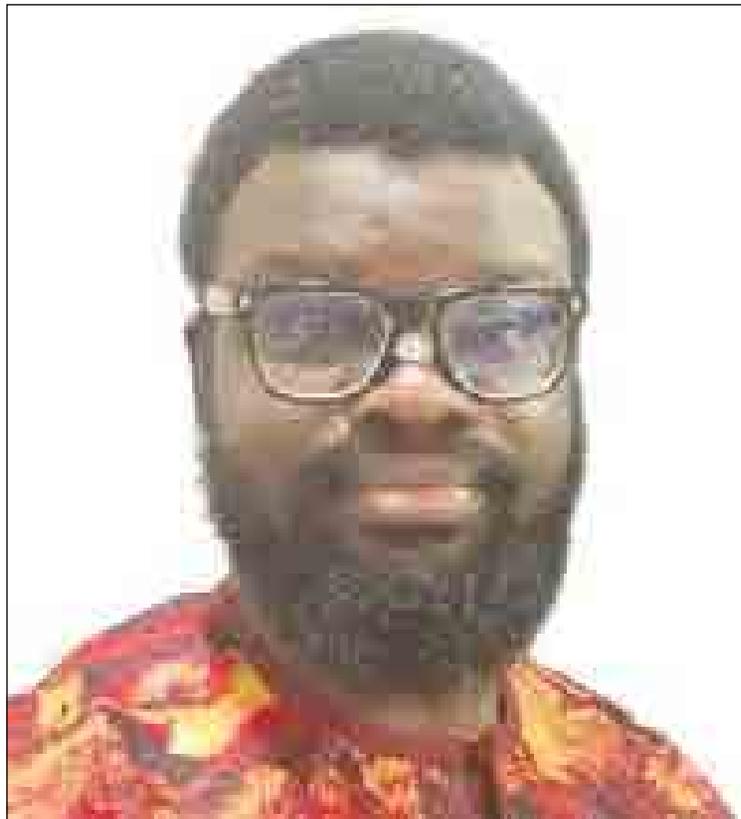
After that, they said they wanted to check again, and I said, 'No problem, check anything you want. Just go ahead.' So, after checking and even doing another test, it still came out negative.

It was while they were questioning me about where I was coming from and where I was going that I told them I was travelling to visit my wife in the US. They persistently asked where I was coming from, and I told them Nigeria. Then one of the officials made a statement.

WHAT DID HE SAY?

He said, 'Nigeria, too much problem.' Immediately he made that statement, everything changed—from routine checks on my items to suspicion that I was carrying narcotics. So, they immediately escalated the matter to the head at the airport.

There was one white woman with a European accent, but the other ones were Arabs, and they were speaking Arabic, so I could not understand them. When they escalated the matter to her, she later came with other airport officials. They surrounded me as if they had caught a major drug suspect, and everyone at the airport started staring at me.



Gideon Eze

When the matter got to the woman, she said they needed to open the mannequin to ascertain what was inside. She said they would need to tear it, and I said, 'No problem, you can open it.'

The situation was already getting to a point where I was no longer comfortable. So, I told them to do whatever they needed and ensure due process, because I was sure that whatever was inside the head was not drugs. One cannot go to a busy market like Maraba and buy drugs.

WHAT WAS THEIR NEXT ACTION?

After the checks, they took me to the security post and asked whether I had luggage on the plane. I said yes, and they brought it out and searched it. From the screen, I could see my bag being searched.

They brought out my clothes, food items, and everything. They ran everything through the machine twice. Two different sets of officials conducted the checks, but they found nothing. After the entire search, I missed my flight because the process lasted from 10 pm till around 4 am.

My stopover was just three hours, so I was meant to continue my journey around 1 am. I told them I would miss my flight, and they said I should not worry—they would put me on another one. So, I stayed there till 4 am.

WHAT HAPPENED THE NEXT MORNING?

At about 4 am, the female official returned, confirmed that nothing incriminating was found, and direct-

ed that I be released. As I was being processed for another flight, another security officer intervened, spoke in Arabic, and I was subjected to fresh searches by customs.

The stones were tested again and confirmed harmless, yet officials conferred among themselves and halted my departure. Instead of putting me on a flight, I was taken to an office where I overheard repeated references to "cocaine" during phone calls, despite earlier tests proving otherwise. My phone, passport, and belongings had already been seized, leaving me unable to contact anyone. I was moved from one office to another for hours without explanation, growing increasingly anxious.

Later, I was told I would be taken to a police station for a confirmatory test that would last two hours. Trusting the process, I cooperated. However, I was suddenly handcuffed and put in a bus. Instead of a brief test, I was taken to prison.

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE IN DETENTION LIKE?

When I was taken to the prison, they stripped me naked and subjected me to all manner of invasive searches. I did not understand why nobody was explaining anything to me because I did not understand Arabic, and most of them did not understand English.

They inserted objects into my anus in search of drugs. They opened my luggage and destroyed most of my clothes and laptop while searching for drugs. They even collected my urine as a sample. I complied, believing that once everything came out negative, I

would be released.

Instead, they threw me into prison. The experience there was terrible. I nearly died because I do not smoke, yet smoking was everywhere. Nobody spoke to me.

I could not eat because I could not adapt to their food. My mum was devastated, and my wife was struggling because she could not reach me.

DID THEY ALLOW YOU TO MAKE A CALL?

I was eventually allowed to call my wife. I told her what was happening and that I had been in a Qatar prison for six weeks.

What troubles me most is why a report alleging I carried 684 grammes of cocaine was sent to the US despite negative tests. Everything changed once they saw my Nigerian passport and said, 'Nigeria, too many problems,' suggesting profiling.

YOU MENTIONED THAT YOUR VISA WAS REVOKED. CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

They sent a report to the US, and my visa was revoked. When I came out, I could no longer continue my journey. I was given a document to sign, written in Arabic. I assumed it was a release document.

Later, I discovered it contained details of what they alleged against me. I had taken a snapshot because I no longer trusted them. My visa had already been revoked without my knowledge.

WHAT STEPS DID YOU TAKE AFTERWARDS?

I reported the matter to the Nigerian Embassy in Doha. They wrote to Qatar's Foreign Ministry twice, but there has been no response.

Through the embassy and a human rights official, Mr Kazeem, I obtained a document from the public prosecution in Qatar confirming my innocence. However, the airline and airport authorities have not retracted their report, and they refused to release the forensic report.

WHY WAS YOUR WIFE'S VISA REVOKED?

It was because of the same report. The incident has affected our entire family financially and emotionally. Qatar Airways has also not refunded part of my ticket and initially banned me, only to lift the ban later.

DO YOU PLAN TO SEEK REDRESS?

Yes. I will pursue justice to clear my name and seek compensation. The Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority has invited Qatar Airways, but they have not responded.

WHAT RESOLUTION DO YOU SEEK?

We want the report retracted, our visas reinstated, and compensation for the damages. This is something I will never forget.