

# Reps push for independent electoral body to oversee LG polls

The House of Representatives has taken a significant step towards reforming local government elections by advancing a bill to establish the National Local Government Electoral Commission.

The proposed body aims to standardise and oversee elections for Chairmen, Vice

Chairmen, and Councillors across the country, ensuring greater transparency and fairness at the grassroots level.

Sponsored by Deputy Speaker, Benjamin Kalu and presented by Majority Leader, Prof. Julius Ihonvbere, the bill seeks to create an independent commission responsible for conducting elections, regulating political

parties, and maintaining an accurate voter register.

The draft legislation also proposes an amendment to Section 153 of the 1999 Constitution to grant the commission the authority to oversee local polls and enforce electoral laws.

If passed, the commission will consist of a Chairman and 37 members representing each

state and the Federal Capital Territory.

The President will appoint the Chairman and board members based on recommendations from the National Council of State, subject to Senate confirmation.

The commission will also be required to submit periodic reports to the President, National

Assembly, and the public, reinforcing accountability in local governance.

Beyond election management, the commission will play a crucial role in educating voters and ensuring compliance with campaign finance laws.

By setting election timetables, overseeing political parties, and monitoring can-

didates, it aims to prevent irregularities that have long plagued local government elections.

In a related development, the House also advanced another bill sponsored by Kalu, seeking to mandate the executive to present any international treaty signed by Nigeria to the National Assembly within 180 days for ratification.

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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# Edo gov't declares state of emergency on public schools

## ● Earmarks 3,000 hectares for farming

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has declared a State of Emergency on public schools, condemning their appalling and deplorable conditions as a disgrace.

During an inspection tour of schools in Ikpoba-Okha and

Egor Local Government Areas of Edo South Senatorial District, the governor was visibly disturbed by the shocking state of decay in schools, even in urban areas where better facilities were expected.

At Army Day Secondary School in Ikpoba-Okha and

Evbareke Secondary School in Egor, the governor was met with scenes of collapsed buildings, leaking roofs, crumbling walls, and classrooms filled with broken furniture.

He was horrified to see students struggling to learn in dilapidated structures, with no

proper desks or chairs, forcing some to sit on the bare floor.

The stench of neglect was everywhere, overgrown weeds, abandoned school blocks, and surroundings that looked more like ruins than places of learning.

Governor Okpebholo expressed outrage at the total

absence of basic amenities, including running water, toilets, and even electricity.

Many schools had no perimeter fencing, leaving students vulnerable to intruders. The roads leading to these schools were nearly impassable, destroyed by years of erosion and neglect, making it difficult for teachers and pupils to even reach their classrooms.

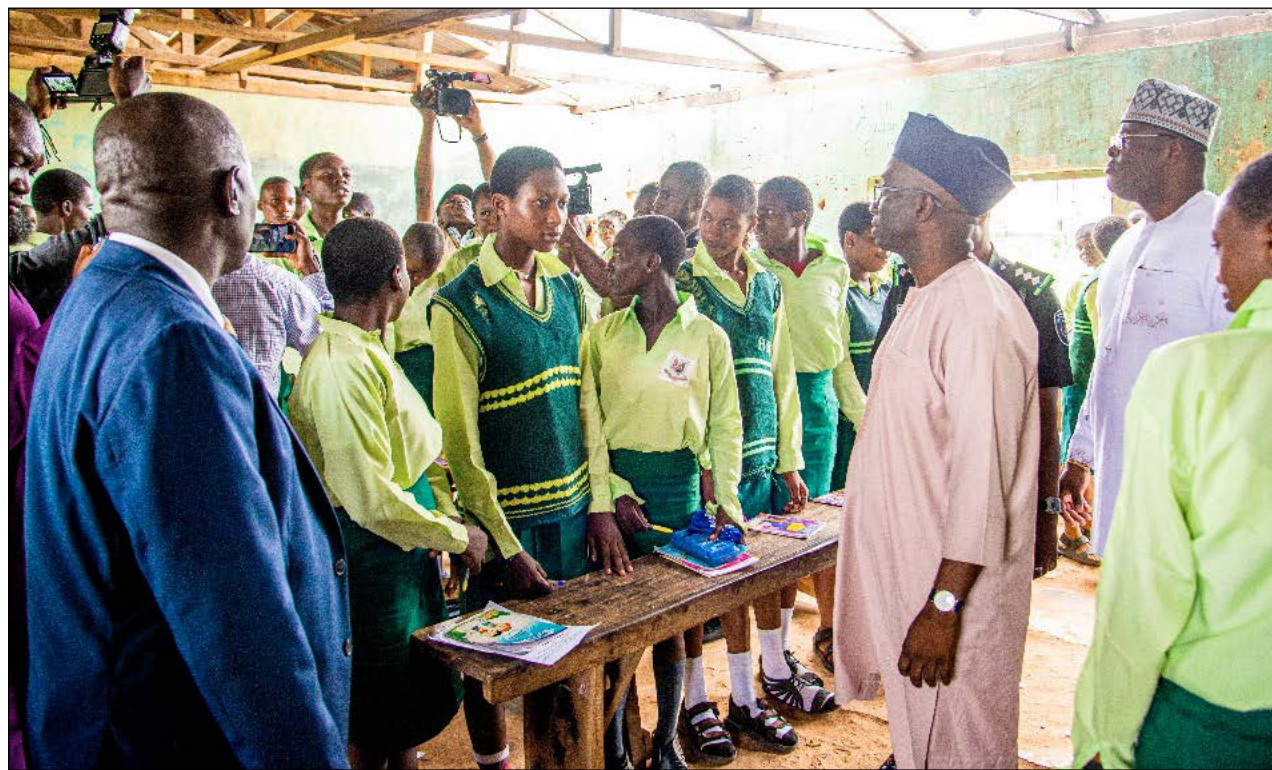
Determined to put an end to what he called a "shameful and unacceptable" situation, the governor announced immediate action, starting with the

worst-hit schools.

He assured residents that his administration would waste no time in rehabilitating public schools, ensuring they become safe and functional learning spaces.

Edo State Commissioner for Education, Paddy Iyamu, admitted that reports of students enduring such extreme hardship had been piling up, with many forced to learn in roofless classrooms under the scorching sun or heavy rain.

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### WORKING TOUR:

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State interacting with students in one of the schools he visited during his working tour of schools in Ikpoba Okha and Egor Local Government Areas of the state.

## Judge steps down from Natasha's case after Akpabio's petition

Justice Obiora Egwuatu of the Federal High Court in Abuja has stepped down from a case involving suspended Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

Justice Egwuatu was assigned to hear the suit, but on Tuesday, he announced that he would no longer handle the matter.

He made this decision after Senate President Godswill Akpabio wrote a petition questioning his impartiality.

Although the case was scheduled for hearing, when the court clerk called it up, the judge ruled that he was stepping aside.

He said he would return the case file to the Chief Judge, who would assign it to another judge.

On March 4, Justice Egwuatu issued an interim order stopping the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions from proceeding with disciplinary actions against Akpoti-Uduaghan.

She was accused of violating Senate rules.

The judge ruled that the disciplinary process should not continue until the case was decided.

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# Court adjourns ruling in aiding suicide case to May 22, 2025, as Judge threatens bench warrant

Justice B. O. Quadri of the Federal High Court, sitting in Benin City, has adjourned ruling till 22 May 2025 on a preliminary objection filed by Dele Igbinedion, counsel to Jessica Iguodala Oghomwen, one of the defendants in the case of aiding the suicide of Mrs Lilian Omokhuale, daughter of Omoruyi Oloton, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Uyi Technical Limited.

The judge also issued a stern warning and threatened to issue a bench warrant against Blessing Jatto, another defendant in the case, which bears suit number FHC/B/C/2024 if she fails to appear at the next adjourned date.

The defendants in the suit include Jessica Iguodala Oghomwen, Vincent Uhumwangho, Blessing Jatto, and Chukwudi Mudiaga.

In November 2024, Justice Quadri had issued a bench warrant against Jessica Iguodala Oghomwen for failing to appear in court to face the charges brought against her by the police.

At the 4 February 2025 court sitting, P. O. Odion, representing the prosecution, informed the court that Jessica Oghomwen had deliberately refused to appear, treating the court with contempt despite being fully aware of the charges.

He emphasised the difficulty in ensuring her presence and stated that INTERPOL's assistance was necessary to enforce the bench warrant.

E. O. Afolabi, assisted by D. Ogbankwa, reminded the court that O. I. Asenoguan, who had previously taken Jessica on bail, was responsible for producing her in court, but had since withdrawn from the case.

At a prior hearing, Jessica's former counsel, O. I. Asenoguan, had apologised on her behalf, explaining that she was indisposed and currently in Germany.

However, her new counsel, Dele Igbinedion, questioned why no effort was made to verify the validity of her absence.

In the circumstance, Igbinedion filed a Motion on Notice, urging the court to quash the charges against Jessica and vacate the bench warrant.

However, the prosecution counsel, P. O. Odion, argued that he had not been served with the new motion, following an amendment to the charge sheet that reduced the number of defendants from five to four.

He accused Jessica's counsel of deliberately delaying the hearing by failing to serve the court process on the prosecution.

During proceedings, Jessica's counsel eventually served the prosecution after seeking the court's permission to effect the service during proceedings.

The prosecution then requested an adjournment to review the documents and respond appropriately.

Following the proceedings, Douglas Ogbankwa, representing the petitioner, and Dele Igbinedion, counsel to the defence, spoke to journalists.

The case has been adjourned to May 22, 2025 for further hearing.

## Tinubu, Oborevori alliance driving unprecedented devt in Delta —Oghenesuvwe

The strong political alliance between President Ahmed Bola Tinubu and Delta State Governor, Hon Sheriff Oborevori, continues to bring significant benefits to Deltans, driving socio-economic growth and infrastructural development across the state.

Speaking on a live radio public affairs programme, the Director General of the Delta State Orientation and Communications Bureau, Dr Fred Latimore Oghenesuvwe, stated that the visit of Nigeria's First Lady, Senator Olufemi Tinubu, would further strengthen federal presence in Delta, facilitating more projects and development initiatives.

Oghenesuvwe highlighted Governor Oborevori's growing influence in national politics as a strategic effort to sustain development and position Delta as a key player in Nigeria's economic and political landscape beyond 2027.

He emphasised the governor's commitment to intergovernmental diplomacy, respect for constituted authorities, and pragmatic leadership, all of which contribute to advancing Delta's development agenda.

As the Public Relations Executive of the Delta State Chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Oghenesuvwe noted that Governor Oborevori's leadership has enhanced the state's reputation, attracting both local and international investors who see Delta as a viable economic destination.

He stressed that the governor's commitment to the MORE Agenda, which prioritises economic remodelling, prudent resource management, accountability, and transparency, continues to reshape the state's economic landscape.

According to Oghenesuvwe, President Tinubu's economic policies are already yielding results in Delta through various federal initiatives. He also pointed out that President Tinubu recently entrusted Governor Oborevori to represent him at the flag-off ceremony of the Phase 2A Access Road of the Niger Bridge, demonstrating a strong bond of trust and collaboration between the federal and state governments.

He added that the First Lady's visit would further boost Delta's infrastructural and economic development, reinforcing the state's position as a thriving hub of growth in Nigeria.



OGHENESUVWE

## Judge steps down from Natasha's...

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He also gave the defendants 72 hours to explain why the court should not stop them from investigating the senator without following the rules laid out in the 1999 Constitution, the Senate Standing Order 2023, and the Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act.

Justice Egwuatu allowed the senator to serve legal documents on the defendants using substituted means.

The court ordered that the documents be given to the Clerk of the National Assembly or pasted at the National Assembly premises.

They were also to be published in two national newspapers. The interim order came after the senator filed an urgent application.

However, despite the court's ruling, the Senate Committee still held its meeting and suspended her for six months.

Later, after the defendants applied, Justice Egwuatu amended his earlier order.

He removed the part that prevented the Senate from taking any action while the case was ongoing.

Meanwhile, Akpabio's legal team, led by Kehinde Ogunwumiju, questioned the court's authority to interfere in Senate affairs.



75TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION:

Akwa Ibom State Governor, Pastor Umo Enno (left), with Archbishop Joseph Ekuwem, on the occasion of the 75th birthday celebration of Archbishop Ekuwem, at Sacred Heart Parish, Aka Offot, Uyo.

## Edo govt declares state of emergency on public...

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He commended the governor's decision to witness the crisis firsthand, stating that no child in Edo State should be subjected to such harsh conditions.

Chairman of the State Secondary Education Board, Omonzane Ebanehita, confirmed that schools had repeatedly cried out for help, but their pleas had been ignored for years.

Vice Principal of Students Affairs, Mrs Mary Izewingie, recalled that despite desperate attempts by staff and students to carry out minor repairs, the scale of damage had made their efforts futile. With each rainy season, classrooms flooded, and sections of buildings collapsed further.

Governor Okpebholo assured the people of Edo that his administration would prioritise public schools, vowing to restore dignity to education by transforming these crumbling institutions into places where students could learn in safety and with pride.

Meanwhile, the Edo State Government has started the cultivation of 3,000 hectares of

farmlands across the three Senatorial Districts of the State.

Already, it has commenced the cultivation of 60 hectares (148 acres) in Iguoriakhi, Ovia South West Local Governments Area, Edo South Senatorial District of Edo State for the commencement of this year's farming season.

The move by Edo State Government is the first phase of the back to farm project of Governor Monday Okpebholo, whose administration has keyed into President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda, part of which is food sufficiency for the nation.

Governor Okpebholo was taken on an inspection tour of the farm settlement by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. Osagie Peter.

Okpebholo, after inspecting the farm, noted that his administration would replicate the farm settlement in Edo Central and Edo North to ensure food sufficiency in the State.

He explained that his administration is keying into the Federal Government's plan to feed the nation with the initiative.

The Governor assured the farmers of support to ensure ad-

equated food production during this year's farming season.

"We have embarked on our drive to embrace agriculture, which we will use to grow and develop the Edo economy.

"This is the second time I have entered the bush for the purpose of ensuring we produce food for our people. We have cleared large numbers of hectares of land as we are ready to clear more. We will clear about 3,000 hectares as we have embarked on the first stage. We will still have similar farm settlements in Edo Central and Edo North.

"We are ready to farm, and we are not going back in line with Mr President's Renewed Hope Agenda, which is part of feeding the nation. We have keyed into the agenda. As far as Edo State is concerned, it is back on the farm."

On his part, the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Agriculture Edo State, Dr. Peter noted that about 250 farm heads will benefit from the first phase of the project.

He noted that the Government's Iguoriakhi Farm Settlement, with about 2,300 hectares of farmlands, already has a significant portion allocated to permanent crops, such as palm and

rubber trees.

"Welcome to the Government's Iguoriakhi Farm Settlement. It was acquired in 1962, and it is 2,350 hectares. A great part of it has been dedicated to permanent crops, including oil palm and rubber.

"We have already cleared about 60 hectares (148 acres), ready for tractorization. By the time we are through with the tractorization, about five hectares will be given to a farm group. This place will be able to accommodate 250 active farm heads, and it will guarantee food security in Edo South and beyond.

"I welcome you to the farm for you to see how far we have gone as there is still some work left in the tractorization before our farmers can come here and we will give them seeds as promised so that they will be able to produce food for the people of Nigeria. We will start planting with inter crops, maize, and cassava."

The Governor and his entourage also visited the Benin Owena River Basin Development Authority Integrated Farm at Obayantor in Ikpoba-Okah Local Government Area, Edo South, in Edo State.

# Stakeholders speak on dangers of irregular migration as exhibition holds in Benin

HAMEED BRAIMAH

The International Organization for Migration, IOM says it has since 2017 in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria, has fa-

cilitated the safe and voluntary return of over 45,000 stranded Nigerians from different transit and destination countries.

Of this number, Edo State holds 19% of making it the top State of return of migrants as

part of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme.

This was disclosed yesterday by the Head of Sub Office, IOM Nigeria Khan Arshad at the opening of an art exhibition

titled "We Speak Their Names in Hushed Tones" by Nigerian artist Omoregie Osakpolor in Benin City.

Khan said the international development agency was out to seek collaboration with stake-

holders with a view to exploring ways of discouraging people especially the youths from embarking on irregular migration because of the hazards associated with it.

The art exhibition he noted was put together to draw judicial attention to fate of missing migrants and the attendant trauma by relatives.

He said that since 2019, IOM has supported Edo State in developing a comprehensive migration governance framework, culminating in the Edo State Migration Action Plan (2024-2029).

"This plan harnesses the potential of migration while promoting social and behavioral change initiatives for safe migration. A key strategy is the use of arts and cultural projects to engage communities, communicate the complexities of migration, and highlight the impact of irregular migration on families.

"In line with this approach, IOM is supporting the exhibition "We Speak Their Names in Hushed Tones" by Nigerian artist Omoregie Osakpolor, a powerful tribute in honor of migrants who lost their lives, reflecting on the pain of their families while fostering community dialogue on informed migration choices", Khan explained.

Khan commended stakeholders for their support which he said remained instrumental in advancing the rights and well-being of individuals affected by human trafficking and irregular migration. With support from the Italian Embassy and in collaboration with both

state and non-state actors, IOM is currently implementing the "Managing Migration Through Development (MMDP) 2.0" project in Edo State.

He charged participants at the event to be ambassadors of the campaign against irregular migration, insisting that "if you must migrate, use the proper channel"

In her welcome address, representative of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism Francisca Adedoyin spoke of the essence of the exhibition which according to her was to use art to talk about those hurts missing migrants relatives are not able to speak about.

She expressed the State government's appreciation of the collaborative efforts among stakeholders in checking irregular migration

In his remarks, the art exhibitor Mr Omoregie Osakpolor said he was moved to embark on the project deploying a collection of photos of missing migrants to help affected relatives find solace after engaging with persons with similar pains. Through such interactions, Osakpolor said, affected relatives might find closure as regards the pain and trauma associated with the 'loss' of a dear one.

A key factor of the exhibition was that it brought together relatives of missing migrants who freely interacted sharing experiences.

This initiative seeks to strengthen migration governance while ensuring the protection of migrants' rights and fostering community engagement.



**UNICAL 50TH ANNIVERSARY:**

FCT Minister, Dr Nyesom Wike; Acting Governor of Cross River State, Peter Odey; Senate President Godswill Akpabio; his wife, Dr Unoma Akpabio, and Vice Chancellor, University of Calabar, Prof. Florence Banku Obi, during the 50th anniversary celebration of the university and award of doctorate degrees (honoris causa) on Wike, Akpabio, others in Calabar. PHOTO: OMOYE AMINU

## Expert lauds Gov Okpebholo for signing Edo Electricity Bill 2025 into law

LUCKY EFESE

The Group Managing Director of New Hampshire Capital, an investment firm in the power sector, Odion Omonfoman has commended Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for signing the Electricity Bill 2025 into law.

The new law repeals the Edo State Electricity Law 2022 and establishes a framework for intra-state electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and regulation. It is expected to create a more reliable and investor-friendly power sector in the state.

Omonfoman, consultant on power to the Nigeria Governors' Forum said that the new law would lead to increased

competition and greater private sector investment in power generation.

According to him, the new law provides a stable and transparent regulatory framework, which will attract investment, expand electricity access, and support industrialization.

It is designed to position Edo State as a leader in sub-national electricity reform, creating new opportunities for both local and international investors in power generation, mini-grid solutions, and renewable energy development.

Omonfoman said that the law lays the foundation for decentralising power generation and distribution to meet the electricity demands of industries, businesses, and households across the state.

The focus on market liberalisation, regulation, and sustainable energy development, he said is expected to drive economic growth, enhance energy security, and serve as a model for other states undertaking power sector reforms.

The new law aligns with the Electricity Act 2023, which states the authority to regulate electricity within their jurisdictions.

With the law, he said that Edo State strengthens its position as one of the leading sub-national governments taking control of their power infrastructure to reduce dependence on the national grid and promote industrial and economic growth.

It also provides for the creation of key regulatory and institutional bodies, including the Edo State Electricity Reg-

ulatory Commission (ESERC), which will oversee licensing, tariffs, compliance, and consumer protection.

Additionally, the Edo State Electrification Agency will focus on expanding electricity access to rural communities, while the Edo State Electricity Transmission Company will manage intra-state transmission infrastructure in coordination with the national grid.

The legislation further provides for the establishment of the Edo State Electricity Advisory Council, composed of industry experts and stakeholders to guide power sector development as well as promotes renewable energy in line with global sustainability goals and ensures consumer protection and service accountability.

## Evboyare community appeals to Edo govt over lack of basic amenities

The people of Evboyare Community, located off Benin-Auchi Road in Uhumwonde Local Government Area of Edo State, have appealed to the state government to provide essential amenities to improve their living conditions.

Speaking during the community's annual Ikhuanedion ceremony over the weekend, the Village Head (Odionwere), Pa Vincent Osahemwimda, highlighted the community's urgent need for infrastructure, including access roads, a town hall, a

market, a police station, primary and secondary schools, a health-care centre, electricity, and a water borehole. He stressed that the provision of these facilities would enhance agricultural productivity, thereby contributing to increased food production in Edo State.

Pa Osahemwimda explained that Ikhuanedion is a yearly tradition where the people of Evboyare honour their ancestors through sacrifices, seeking peace, security, love, progress, and development for their com-

munity. He noted that the majority of residents are peasant farmers who play a crucial role in sustaining food production in the state. However, he lamented that traders from the northern and western parts of Nigeria now dominate the market, buying up their produce in large quantities.

Other community members who voiced their concerns during the ceremony included Pa. John Enobakhare (Elder), Mr. Osayande Evans (General Secretary), Mr. Obosa Osarena (Oka-Evbo), and Mr. Felix

Aigbedion (Oka-Eghele), all of whom echoed the need for urgent government intervention to improve their standard of living.



PA OSAHEMWIMDA

## US imports 2 million barrels of jet fuel from Dangote refinery

The United States imported over two million barrels of aviation fuel from the Dangote refinery in March.

The refinery confirmed this in a statement on Tuesday, saying this attests to the "unparalleled quality" of the refinery's products and the trust that the international community places in the Dangote refinery.

Quoting data from ship-tracking service Kpler, it was said that six vessels carrying around 1.7 million barrels of jet fuel from the Dangote refinery arrived at US ports this month.

Another vessel, the Hafnia Andromeda, is set to arrive at the Everglades terminal on March 29 with approximately 348,000 barrels of jet fuel.

It was learnt that the shipments from the Dangote refinery, with a capacity of 650,000 barrels per day highlight its potential to reshape global fuel trading dynamics, establishing a new swing supplier in the Atlantic Basin.

"This shipment to the United States follows three cargoes of jet fuel, totalling around 130

million litres, exported from Nigeria to Saudi Arabia by the Dangote Petroleum Refinery. The refinery has already demonstrated its ability to compete with European refiners on gasoline exports, and these jet fuel shipments to the United States could challenge the economics of domestic producers in the world's largest fuel-consuming nation," the statement read.

Economist and Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprises, Dr Muda Yusuf, stated that the export of jet fuel to the United States by the Dangote refinery is a point of pride for Nigeria.

"Nothing could be more prideful for us as a country than the fact that we now have a refinery producing products that can be exported to the United States. It speaks to the quality, standards, and trust that international communities have in the Dangote refinery because these are markets that don't compromise on quality. They have stringent standards, and if they deem it worthy to import from Nigeria, it is a source of great pride," he said.

## NEWS

# Nigeria partners OECD to tackle illicit financial flows

The Ministry of Finance has announced a strategic collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to address illicit financial flows and strengthen Nigeria's economic framework.

According to a statement shared on the Ministry of Finance's X account, the OECD emphasised its growing engagement in Africa through partnerships with the African Union, regional blocs, and direct country-level initiatives.

The partnership was formalised during a courtesy visit by Carlos Conde, Head of the Middle East and Africa Division at OECD, to Wale Edun, Nigeria's Honourable Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy.

Nigeria was identified as a key partner in West Africa, with discussions focusing on economic priorities such as capital market development, regional integration, sustainable finance, and investment in human capital.

"Discussions focused on Nigeria's economic priorities, including capital market development, regional integration, curbing illicit financial flows, sustainable finance, and investment in human capital," the statement noted.

The OECD also outlined its

technical support offerings, including assistance in digitalization, governance, and statistical systems.

Edun welcomed the collaboration, highlighting the importance of harmonised data systems to drive reforms, attract investments, and create opportunities for Nigeria's youth.

In January, Minister Edun commended President Bola Tinubu for implementing critical reforms that have stabilised Nigeria's economy and reclaimed 5% of GDP previously lost to inefficiencies.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Edun noted that the removal of wasteful subsidies and the adoption of market-driven pricing mechanisms for petroleum products and foreign exchange have been pivotal in achieving this milestone.

"These steps have set the stage for the return of foreign direct investments," Edun stated, citing significant commitments from Shell and TotalEnergies, which announced \$5 billion and \$3 billion investment decisions, respectively. These developments reflect renewed confidence in Nigeria's economic potential.

In December 2024, Edun led a delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on behalf of President Tinubu and the

Presidential Economic Coordination Council to strengthen the economic partnership,

focusing on enhancing export credit, insurance frameworks, and market access between the

two nations.

The minister said, "What we have brought back is for-

eign exchange. What we have brought back is jobs for Nigerians."



**60TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION:**

Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 General Elections, Mr. Peter Obi; former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo; former governor of Imo State, Rt. Hon. Emeka Ihedioha; former Commonwealth Secretary-General, Dr. Emeka Anyaoku, and former Vice-President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, during the 60th birthday celebration of Ihedioha, in Abuja.

## CBN making progress in stabilising FX market, curbing inflation —Cardoso

The Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Olayemi Cardoso, has said the bank is beginning to see signs of progress in stabilising the foreign exchange (FX) market and curbing inflation, as recent policy reforms start to yield results.

Cardoso stated this during an engagement with scholars from the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) at the CBN headquarters in Abuja.

The scholars were visiting Nigeria as part of the Africa Trek initiative, which also included a stop in Ghana.

The visit marked the first time a Harvard Africa Trek delegation would visit the Central Bank of Nigeria.

The delegation was com-

prised of 50 students from 19 countries, including representatives from Harvard Business School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and Stanford University.

In a statement issued by the CBN on Tuesday, Cardoso, who is an HKS alumnus and the first African elected to the global HKS Alumni Board of Directors, reiterated the Bank's commitment to driving policy-oriented solutions and strengthening trust in Nigeria's financial system.

"As we reset the Bank, we are committed to being a hub for thought leadership. The exposure you gain from institutions like Harvard is invaluable, and we see this as an opportunity to build long-term alliances," Cardoso said.

While addressing Nigeria's

macroeconomic outlook, he acknowledged existing challenges but pointed to key indicators suggesting improvement.

He noted that the FX market is beginning to stabilise and that inflationary pressures are gradually moderating.

The statement read, "Addressing Nigeria's economic landscape, Mr Cardoso acknowledged recent challenges but highlighted progress in stabilizing the foreign exchange market and curbing inflation."

Cardoso also highlighted the growing interest from international institutions as a positive signal. He referenced recent visits from senior executives at JP Morgan, Citi Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as evidence of renewed

investor confidence.

"These are individuals who base their decisions on data and trends, not sentiment. Their interest reaffirms that we are on the right path," he added.

President of the Harvard Kennedy School Alumni Association of Nigeria, Adaora Ndukwe, and the HKS Nigeria Trek Delegation Lead, Sheffy Kolade, commended the CBN for hosting the students and for its continued engagement with future policymakers.

The Africa Trek is designed to facilitate direct interaction between emerging global leaders and key African policymakers.

It serves as a platform for discussions on governance, innovation, economic development, and the strategic role of central banks in national growth.

## Tinubu hails Jonathan on Sunhak Peace prize win

President Bola Tinubu has congratulated former President Goodluck Jonathan on winning the 2025 Sunhak Peace Founders' Award.

The Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, disclosed this in a statement on Tuesday.

He said Tinubu commended Jonathan for his consistent advocacy for peace and democracy, describing it as a patriotic effort that has earned him global recognition.

"The President states that Dr Jonathan's winning the Sunhak Peace Award affirms his bold efforts in peacebuilding and promoting democracy in Afri-

ca and beyond.

"The President recalls the former President's historic acceptance of the results of the 2015 presidential election and his peaceful handover of power to an opposition party, which bolstered the nation's democratic profile," the statement read.

The Sunhak Peace Prize, awarded by the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee, recognises individuals and organisations making significant contributions to world peace and human development.

By honouring Jonathan, the committee acknowledges his work in mediation, conflict resolution, and democratic advocacy across the African continent.

## Senate confirms Nwaku as NCoS Controller General

The Senate has confirmed Sylvester Nwaku as the new Controller General of the Nigeria Correctional Service (NCoS).

His appointment by President Bola Tinubu on December 13, 2024, followed the retirement of Haliru Nababa.

The confirmation came after the Senate Committee on Interior, led by Senator Adams Oshiomhole, presented its report for consideration.

Lawmakers unanimously adopted the committee's recommendation during plenary on Tuesday, officially approv-

ing Nwaku's appointment.

While announcing the confirmation, Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, charged Nwaku with the critical task of securing correctional facilities nationwide.

Akpabio expressed hope that under Nwaku's leadership, the era of frequent jailbreaks in the country would come to an end.

His charge comes days after 12 persons escaped from the Medium Security Custodial Centre in Koton Karfe, Kogi State, in the early hours of Monday, leaving one correctional officer dead.

## Reps seek NJC's input in judges' removal

A bill seeking to amend the 1999 Constitution to make mandatory the recommendation of the National Judicial Council before the removal of heads of Nigerian courts, passed a second reading in the House of Representatives on Tuesday.

The bill, which has been referred to the House Committee on Constitution Review, was sponsored by the Speaker, Mr Tajudeen Abbas.

Leading the debate on the general principles of the bill, Edo lawmaker, Marcus Onobun, said that the intent of the bill is to alter Section 292(1)(a) (i) and (ii) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria such that the heads of Nigerian courts – "Chief Justice of Nigeria, President of the Court of Appeal, Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, President of the National Industrial Court, Chief Judge of the High Court of the Federal Capital

Territory, Abuja, Grand Kadi of the Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and President, Customary Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (all of who may be removed by the President on an address by Senate), and Chief Judge of a State, Grand Kadi of a Sharia Court of Appeal or President of a Customary Court of Appeal of a State (all of who may be removed by the Governor of the appropriate state on an address by the appropriate State House of Assembly), shall only be removed from office upon prior investigation by the National Judicial Council of the allegations laid out in the address by Senate or the state legislatures respectively carried out and concluded within six weeks in line with the Supreme Court judgment in *Elelu-Habeeb & Anor. v. A-G of the Federation & 2 Ors.* (2012) 13 N.W.L.R. (Pt. 1318) 423."

According to him, Section 292(1)(a)(i) and (ii) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) clearly states the procedure for removing the heads of Nigerian courts.

Section 292 (1) provides that "A judicial officer shall not be removed from his office or appointment before his age of retirement except in the following circumstances – (a) in the case of – "Chief Justice of Nigeria, President of the Court of Appeal, Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Chief Judge of the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Grand Kadi of the Sharia Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja and President, Customary Court of Appeal of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, by the President acting on an address supported by two-thirds majority of the Senate;

"Chief Judge of a State,

Grand Kadi of a Sharia Court of Appeal or President of a Customary Court of Appeal of a State, by the governor acting on an address supported by a two-thirds majority of the House of Assembly of the State."

Onobun, however, expressed worry that the procedure laid down does not include a role for the National Judicial Council in the removal of the aforementioned heads of courts.

He further argued that Section 292(1)(b) anomalously provides that "In every other case outside the removal of the heads of courts, i.e. other justices, judges, kadis, etc., the recommendation of the National Judicial Council shall be a requirement to carry such removal through.

"There is also nothing in the provisions to suggest that the Chief Executive and the Legislature, acting between them, need to substantiate their action with evidence."

## Foreign

## NEWS

## Sixth night of protests in Turkey as Erdogan hits out at unrest

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has blamed opposition parties for provoking a "movement of violence" as protests in the country continued for a sixth night.

Unrest began in Istanbul last Wednesday when the city's Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu - Erdogan's main political rival - was detained on corruption charges.

Imamoglu said the allegations against him were politically motivated, a claim Erdo-

gan has denied.

Turkey's main opposition party, the Republican People's Party's (CHP), which announced Imamoglu as its presidential candidate on Sunday, said the demonstrations will end on Tuesday, without saying what the next steps would be.

Erdogan has labelled the demonstrations "evil" and blamed the opposition for "disturbing the peace of our citizens with provocations".

Speaking from Ankara, Turkey's capital, Erdogan called for

the protests to end and said that "instead of responding to allegations", opposition parties had "made the most vile and unlawful statements in our political history for [the past] five days".

On Monday, vehicles carrying water cannons were seen close to the city hall, though protests appeared to be largely peaceful with no repeat of the fierce clashes seen on Sunday.

Lydia, one of the demonstrators, told AFP that the Turkish authorities were "hunting us like pests", adding: "They

sprayed pepper spray on us like insecticides."

Young people - many of whom may not know any other government than this one under Erdogan - have played an important role in the protests.

They have differing political views and do not appear to be affiliated with a particular political movement at the protests. They are rallying against the government, but they do not hesitate to criticise the opposition as well.

Asked if she is afraid of the

potential repercussions of demonstrating, one woman told the BBC: "There is nothing left to lose."

Another, a 25-year-old woman who attended Sunday's protest, said she was afraid before - "but now I'm just angry".

In figures released before Monday evening's gatherings, the Turkish government said 1,133 people had been arrested since the protests began.

With the CHP apparently ending its rallies in Istanbul, it is unclear if other spontaneous protests will continue.

CHP leader Ozgur Ozel spoke to the thousands gathered on Monday night, telling the crowd that the demonstration was "an act of defiance against fascism".

Ozel said he would visit Imamoglu in jail in Silivri on Tuesday. He added that the

CHP would appeal for him to be released pending trial, and for his trial to be shown live on state broadcaster TRT.

Imamoglu was confirmed as the CHP's candidate for Turkey's 2028 presidential election on Monday, despite being in custody. The selection vote was symbolic as he had been the only person running.

He had spent the previous night in jail after being formally arrested and charged with "establishing and managing a criminal organisation, taking bribes, extortion, unlawfully recording personal data and rigging a tender". He was also suspended from his post as mayor.

Prosecutors had also accused him of "aiding an armed terrorist organisation", but this was not included in the charges.



**PROTESTER SPRAY PEPPER:**

Lydia, a protester, said Turkish authorities "spray pepper spray on us like insecticides"

## Rwanda planning to attack Burundi, says President

Burundi's president has told the BBC he has seen "credible intelligence" that Rwanda plans to attack his country.

Evariste Ndayishimiye also said that Rwanda had tried to launch a coup a decade ago in Burundi, akin to "what it's doing in the Democratic Republic of Congo" now.

Rwanda has already hit back, calling the president's comments "surprising" and insisting that the two neighbours are co-operating on security plans for their shared border, which has been shut for over a year.

Despite extensive UN evidence, Rwanda has always denied arming and backing the M23 rebel group, which has recently seized large parts of eastern DR Congo alongside Rwandan troops.

Rwanda has also denied links to the resurgent Red Tabara rebel group, which President Ndayishimiye says is a proxy force similar to the M23 and is being supported by Rwanda to destabilise Burundi.

"They would say it's an internal problem when it's Rwanda [who is] the problem. We know that he [Rwanda's President Paul Kagame] has a plan to attack Burundi," Ndayishimi-

ye added.

"Burundians will not accept to be killed as Congolese are being killed. Burundian people are fighters.

"But now we don't have any plans to attack Rwanda. We want to resolve that problem by dialogue."

At the heart of Ndayishimiye's comments was a call for peace and the full implementation of an agreement between the two nations - a peace deal that had been signed in previous years but, according to Burundi, had not been honoured by Rwanda.

"The people who did the 2015 coup [were] organised by Rwanda, and then they ran away. Rwanda organised them - it went to recruit the youth in Mahama camp. It trained them, it gave them arms, it financed them. They are living in the hand of Rwanda," he alleges.

"If Rwanda accepts to hand over them and bring them to justice, the problem would be finished."

Ndayishimiye added: "We are calling on our neighbours to respect the peace agreements we have made."

"There is no need for us to go to war. We want dialogue, but we will not sit idle if we are attacked."

"We don't have anything to ask [of] Rwanda [in return], but they refuse because they have a bad plan - they wanted to do what they're doing in the DR."

The Rwanda-Burundi border remains closed long after Red Tabara rebels carried out several attacks on Burundian soil.

While the situation with Rwanda is critical, it is not Burundi's only problem.

To the west, the ongoing conflict in mineral-rich DR Congo has reached a boiling point with rebel groups, militias, and foreign parties vying to control the country's valuable resources.

## Five takeaways from leaked US top military chat group

Washington DC is still digesting a serious security breach at the heart of the Trump administration.

It's the story of how a journalist - the Atlantic magazine's Jeffrey Goldberg - was added to a Signal platform messaging group which apparently included Vice-President JD Vance and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, in addition to National Security Adviser Mike Waltz.

The topic being discussed was attacking the Iran-backed Houthi group in Yemen.

Goldberg said he had seen classified military plans for the strikes, including weapons packages, targets and timing, two hours before the bombs struck.

What are the main revelations in a nutshell.

Vance questions Trump's thinking

On the military action, Goldberg reported that the account named JD Vance wrote: "I think we are making a mistake."

The vice-president said targeting Houthi forces that are attacking vessels in the Suez Canal serves European interests more than the US, because Europe has more trade running through the canal.

Vance added that his boss was perhaps unaware of how US action could help Europe.

"I am not sure the president is aware how inconsistent this is with his message on Europe right now," Vance said. "There's a further risk that we see moderate to severe spike in oil prices."

The vice-president went on to say, according to Goldberg, he would support the consensus but would prefer to delay it by a month.

Goldberg reported in his article that spokesman for JD Vance had later sent him a statement underlining that

Trump and Vance had had "subsequent conversations about this matter and are in complete agreement".

Since coming to power, Trump has castigated his European Nato allies, urged them to increase defence spending and generally insisted that Europe needs to take responsibility for protecting its own interests.

Blame for 'free-loading' Europe

Arguments over why the US could - and should - carry out the military strike against the Houthis did not sway Vance.

He said to the defence secretary, "If you think we should

do it let's go. I just hate bailing Europe out again."

Hegseth reciprocated:

"I fully share your loathing of European free-loading. It's PATHETIC."

A group member, only identified as "SM" suggested that after the strike, the US should "make clear to Egypt and Europe what we expect in return".

"If Europe doesn't remunerate, then what?" he asked.

"If the US successfully restores freedom of navigation at great cost there needs to be some further economic gain extracted in return," the user continues.

## Grandparents arrested on suspicion of toddler's murder in French Alps

Four people, including the grandparents of Emile Soleil, have been arrested over the two-year-old's disappearance and death in the French Alps in July 2023.

The two other people arrested on suspicion of voluntary homicide and concealment of a corpse are adult children of Emile's grandparents, prosecutors said in a statement.

The grandparents' lawyer, Isabelle Colombani, told AFP on Tuesday morning that she had no comment, having "only just heard" about the development.

Last year, some of the tod-

dlers' bones and clothes were found by a hiker near the home of Emile's maternal grandparents in the French Alps, where the boy had gone missing the previous summer.

But prosecutors at the time said that the remains offered no further clues as to the cause of Emile's death, adding that it could have been as a result of "a fall, manslaughter or murder".

Tuesday's sudden twist, in a case that seemed to have gone cold, made headlines in France, where the search for Emile has been extensively covered by the media. When the toddler dis-

appeared, dozens of journalists flocked to Haut-Vernet, often outnumbering the 25 residents of the tiny Alpine hamlet.

The last sighting of Emile had been on 8 July 2023, when two neighbours saw him walking by himself on the only street in the village.

Police were alerted by his grandmother shortly afterwards. Hundreds of people joined police, sniffer dogs and the military in a search the following day.

Initially, French reports focused on Emile's grandfather - but his lawyer said that she

hoped investigators would not "waste too much time on him to the detriment of other lines of inquiry".

Emile's remains were found days after police summoned 17 people - including members of Emile's family, neighbours and witnesses - to reconstruct the final moments before the boy disappeared.

The toddler's funeral took place in February this year. Soon after, his maternal grandparents said that "silence had made space for truth" and that they could no longer "live without answers".

**NEWS****Foreign****Man swallowed by Seoul sinkhole found dead**

A man who fell into a large sinkhole in South Korea's capital Seoul has been found dead, according to the local fire department.

The man was riding his motorbike in the Gangdong district when the road caved in at about 18:30 local time (09:30 GMT) on Monday.

Rescuers found his body underground on Tuesday morning around 11:00 local time, about 50m (164ft) from where he had fallen in.

A car driver was also injured in the incident, which has gone viral on South Korean social media.

A dashcam video widely circulating online appears to show the moment the road caved in near a traffic junction. It shows the motorcyclist falling into the hole, while a car travelling in front of him narrowly escapes it.

Earlier on Tuesday, rescuers found a mobile phone and the motorcycle in the hole which is 20m wide and 20m deep, according to local media.

The man, said to be in his 30s, has yet to be named by authorities.

Kim Chang-seop, head of Gangdong fire station said at an earlier briefing that there were 2,000 tons of soil and water mixed inside the hole.

Authorities have yet to re-

veal the cause of the sinkhole.

A report recently submitted to the Seoul city government showed that 223 sinkholes occurred in the city in the past decade.

These were caused by poor infrastructure management, ageing or damaged pipes, long-term subsidence and accidents caused by excavation work.

In January, a truck driver went missing after his vehicle fell into a sinkhole at a junction in the Japanese city of Yashio.

Last August, a search for a woman who disappeared into a pavement sinkhole in Kuala Lumpur's city centre was called off after a week.

One of the most common reasons for a sinkhole is when rocks like limestone or chalk break down. Sometimes this process can happen gradually, where the depression becomes larger over time.

In other instances, the limestone sits below another layer of rock, which means that as it gets dissolved there are no immediate signs at the surface.

The overlying rock, sometimes clay or sandstone, will then suddenly collapse into the depression beneath - this is called a collapse sinkhole.

But human activities such as excavation works can also accelerate the formation of sinkholes or cause the ground to collapse in a similar way.



**20M-WIDE SINKHOLE:**

Rescue operations are under way at the 20m-wide sinkhole in Seoul

**Japan court dissolves controversial 'Moonies' church**

A court in Japan has ordered the disbandment of the controversial Unification Church, which came under scrutiny after the shock killing of former prime minister Shinzo Abe in 2022.

The alleged assassin had confessed that he held a grievance against Abe because of the ex-leader's ties with the church - he blamed the church for bankrupting his family.

Japan's education and culture ministry sought the church's dissolution and accused it of manipulating followers into making huge donations and other financial sacrifices.

But the church, more popularly known as the "Moonies", argued that the donations were part of legitimate religious activities. It can appeal to overturn Tuesday's ruling.

The order handed down by

a Tokyo district court will strip the church of its tax-exempt status and require it to liquidate its assets, but it will still be allowed to operate in Japan.

During their investigation, authorities found that the church coerced followers into buying expensive items by exploiting fears about their spiritual well-being.

They interviewed nearly 200 people who said they were victimised by the church.

The Unification Church, which was started in South Korea, has established a presence in Japan since the 1960s. The name "Moonies" was derived from the name of its founder, Sun Myung Moon.

It has drawn controversy even before Abe's assassination for teaching that marriage is central to spiritual salvation. It is known for holding mass wedding ceremonies involving thousands of couples.

Since 2023, some 200 former believers who said they were forced to donate to the group have demanded compensations amounting to 5.7 billion yen (\$38.5m) in total, according to their lawyers.

Investigations following Abe's assassination revealed close ties between the secretive sect and many conservative ruling-party lawmakers, leading to the resignation of four ministers.

An internal investigation by former prime minister Fumio Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party found that 179 of its 379 lawmakers had interacted with the Unification Church.

The relationships ranged from attending church events to accepting donations and receiving election support.

The revelations about the extent and level of involvement of the controversial church and the LDP shocked the nation.

**Palestinian Oscar winner attacked by Israeli settlers detained, activists say**

A Palestinian Oscar winner has been attacked by Israeli settlers, activists who witnessed the event say, before being detained by the Israeli military.

Hamdan Ballal, who co-directed No Other Land, had his house in the Israeli-occupied West Bank surrounded by settlers during an attack on Monday, the activists said.

His co-director Yuval Abraham said Mr Ballal was beaten by settlers then taken by soldiers while in an ambulance. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said no Palestinian had been detained from an ambulance. Mr Abraham said on Tuesday afternoon that Mr Ballal had been freed.

The IDF said three Palestinians and an Israeli had been detained on suspicion of "rock hurling" at security forces.

The five activists from the Center for Jewish Nonviolence group (CJNV) said they had gone to the village to document the incident and had come under attack themselves, with settlers smashing their car windows, and punching and hitting them with sticks.

Earlier, an activist who was at the scene told the BBC the three detained Palestinians, including Mr Ballal, were injured in the settler attack and had been held at an Israeli police station in the West Bank.

They are suspected of throwing stones and injuring a young

settler shepherd and were interrogated, the activist said, adding that they had access to a lawyer.

The attack began at about 18:00 (16:00 GMT) on Monday, when around a dozen masked settlers mounted an attack in the village of Susya, according to the activists.

Mr Ballal's house is reported to have been surrounded by the settlers.

Yuval Abraham, the Israeli director who won the Oscar this month alongside Mr Ballal, said people had been injured and properties destroyed in the attack.

The activist who spoke to the BBC said they had complained to the Israeli soldiers that they were under attack.

They said the army initially watched the attack, then approached only as the assault on the car was ending.

The soldiers then refused to pursue the settlers, leaving them free to attack houses on the other side of the hill, the activist said.

The IDF confirmed that soldiers and police had arrived to disperse the confrontation.

They said rocks had been "hurled" at security forces.

"In response, the forces apprehended three Palestinians suspected of hurling rocks at them, as well as an Israeli civilian involved in the violent confrontation," the IDF said.

"The detainees were taken for further questioning by the

Israel Police. An Israeli citizen was injured in the incident and was evacuated to receive medical treatment."

No Other Land - which picked up best documentary at the 97th Academy Awards - follows the fight over Masafer Yatta, a community of about 20 villages, and the friendship between Adra and Abraham.

Israel has occupied the West

Bank since 1967. Israeli settlements in the territory are considered illegal under international law, though Israel disputes this.

They have expanded over the past 55 years, becoming a focal point for violence and conflicting claims over land.

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in 2023, settler violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank has surged.

**India comedian won't apologise for joke that angered politicians**

Popular Indian comedian Kunal Kamra has refused to apologise after jokes he made during a stand-up show angered supporters of a top politician in Maharashtra state.

Clips of the jokes - some of them were directed at the state's Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde - had gone viral.

Members of the Shiv Sena party, which is led by Shinde, vandalised the hotel in Mumbai - the capital of Maharashtra - where the show was held.

A police case was also registered against Kamra and politicians from the state's ruling coalition have asked him to apologise.

In a statement released on Monday night, Kamra said he would "co-operate with the police and courts for any lawful action" taken against him.

"But will the law be fairly and equally deployed against those who have decided that vandalism is the appropriate

response to being offended by a joke?" he added.

Police arrested 12 people for the vandalism at the hotel, which housed a comedy club where the show was filmed. They were later released on bail.

As the controversy raged, Shinde said he did not support the vandalism, but added that "the other person should also maintain a certain standard".

"There is freedom of expression. We understand satire. But there should be a limit," he told BBC Marathi.

Kamra is a well-known name in the Indian comedy scene, with his political satire and stand-up shows getting millions of views on social media.

In his latest show - called Naya Bharat (New India) - Kamra refers to Shinde's 2022 defection from the Shiv Sena party which triggered a major political crisis in the state.

The move led to a split in the Shiv Sena - India's Election

Commission later recognised Shinde's group as the "real" Shiv Sena. The party is now part of the governing coalition in Maharashtra along with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Nationalist Congress Party.

In the show, Kamra sang a parody of a Bollywood song where he indirectly referred to Shinde as a traitor, outraging his supporters.

It's not clear when the show was filmed at the hotel but the reactions this week were swift.

After Shiv Sena workers ransacked the venue, the studio Habitat - which often hosted stand-up comedy shows - said it was shutting down until it figured out "the best way to provide a platform for free expression without putting ourselves and our property in jeopardy".

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Mumbai's civic authorities, also demolished some structures at the

hotel, citing alleged building violations.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who is from the BJP, criticised Kamra, asking him to apologise. "None of us are against freedom of speech. We support satire or even political satire and we do not paint it differently," he said.

Both he and Shinde accused Kamra of speaking on behalf of the opposition.

A lawmaker from Shinde's party also said in a video that Shiv Sena workers would pursue Kamra across the country and he would be forced to leave India.

In his statement, Kamra said he would not "hide under [his] bed", waiting for the outrage to die down.

"As far as I know, it is not against the law to poke fun at our leaders and the circus that is our political system," he said.

Opposition leaders have supported Kamra.

# Sports

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

## World Cup: Super Eagles stumbled against Zimbabwe as South Africa open 6-points advantage



The chances of the Super Eagles of Nigeria to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, yesterday suffered a setback as the team were forced to a 1-1 draw by visiting Zimbabwean National team in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state.

The Super Eagles were cruising to a 1-0 lead that could have pushed them to the second place in Group C after Victor Osimhen's fantastic header had broken the deadlock for them in the 74th minute.

Laxity suddenly crept in while they were playing for time. Zimbabwe took advantage as Tawanda Chirewa latched on a loose ball by Ekong and scored a 90th-minute goal that tumbled Nigeria from a possible second position to fourth again.

Just before Zimbabwe's Tawanda Chirewa scored the equaliser, Lesotho had offered a helping hand levelling at 1-1 in the corresponding match with Rwanda.

South Africa may have taken a clear break from the field of six teams in the Group C of the World Cup qualifying series after beating Benin Republic 2-0 away from

home while the Super Eagles were frustrated with a 1-1 draw at home in the duel with Zimbabwe.

Barring the decision of FIFA regarding their fielding of an ineligible player in a matchday

5 duel with Lesotho last week, South Africa have amassed 13 points nearly twice the seven that the Super Eagles have been able to gather.

Nigeria now have to look

forward to the next match, still at home, against Rwanda in August. At that time, Lesotho will be playing their home match against Bafana Bafana in South Africa.

## Ex-FIFA chief Blatter, Platini cleared in corruption case

Former FIFA President Sepp Blatter and France soccer great Michel Platini were both cleared of corruption charges by a Swiss court on Tuesday, two and a half years after they were first acquitted of the offences.

The pair, once among the most powerful figures in global soccer, were cleared of fraud at the Extraordinary Appeals Chamber of the Swiss Criminal Court in the town of Muttenz, near Basel.

The hearing came about after Swiss federal prosecutors appealed against their 2022 acquittal at a lower court. Both men had denied the charge.

"After two acquittals, even the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland must realise that these criminal proceedings have definitively failed. Michel Platini must finally be

left in peace in criminal matters," Platini's lawyer Dominic Nellen said in a statement.

The case related to a 2 million Swiss franc (\$2.26 million) payment Blatter authorised for Platini, a former captain and manager of the French national team, in 2011.

The payment was a consultancy fee paid to Platini for work carried out between 1998

and 2002, which the Frenchman said had been partly deferred because FIFA lacked the funds to pay him in full immediately.

The scandal, which emerged in 2015 when Platini was president of European soccer's ruling body UEFA, ended his hopes of succeeding Blatter, who was forced out of FIFA over the affair.



## Lobi Stars eye crucial points in midweek clash with Abia Warriors

Lobi Stars will square off against Abia Warriors in a crucial matchday 31 fixture of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) at the

Umuahia Township Stadium. Initially scheduled for the weekend, the encounter has now been moved to Wednesday, March 26, with kickoff set

for 4:00 PM.

Meetings between these two sides have often been engaging, with Lobi Stars historically holding an advantage over their Southeastern counterparts. The reverse fixture in Lafia saw Lobi Stars come from behind to secure a commanding 3-1 victory on matchday 11, further underlining their dominance in this fixture.

Coach Tony Bulus and his team will approach this match with a sense of urgency, knowing that a positive result in Umuahia could be pivotal in their quest to climb out of the relegation zone. Every point matters at this stage, and Lobi Stars will leave nothing to chance as they look to navigate this chal-

lenging phase of the season.

For Abia Warriors, currently sitting in third place, the stakes are equally high. Playing in front of their home crowd, they will be eager to maintain momentum in their push for a continental spot. Their determination to secure all three points will add an extra layer of intensity to this contest.

With both teams having clear objectives, the match promises to be a highly competitive affair, with tactical discipline, physicality, and moments of quality likely to shape the outcome. Lobi Stars will aim to extend their strong record against Abia Warriors, while the hosts will look to turn the tide in their favor.



## Djokovic battles past Carabelli to reach Miami last 16

Novak Djokovic is through to the last 16 of the Miami Open after a 6-1 7-6 (7-1) win over a spirited Camilo Ugo Carabelli.

The Serb, seeded fourth, looked on course for a comfortable victory against the Argentine world number 65 when he took the first set in just 34 minutes and broke early in the second.

But lucky loser Ugo Carabelli began to show more resistance, breaking back immediately and forcing the tie-break.

But the 24-time Grand Slam champion showed his class and comfortably took the tie-break

7-1 to seal victory.

The win moves Djokovic onto 411 wins in ATP Masters 1000 events, moving him ahead of Rafael Nadal and into top spot on the all-time list.

The 37-year-old, seeking a seventh Miami Open title, will play Lorenzo Musetti in the last 16 after the Italian beat Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6 6-2 6-3.

Elsewhere, Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, seeded ninth, is out after a 7-6 (7-4) 6-3 defeat to American 24th seed Sebastian Korda, while Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov beat Russian Karen Khachanov 6-7 (7-3) 6-4 7-5



## NPFL 25: Kwara United management reads riot act to technical crew

The management of Kwara United has issued a stern warning to its technical crew, urging them to step up and ensure a strong finish to the 2024/25 NPFL season.

In a statement released on Monday, the Club Chairman, Mr. Kumbi Titiloye, through the General Manager, Mallam Bashir Badawiy, apologized to fans and supporters for the team's recent poor performances.

He emphasized that the club's management does not interfere in team selection but expects better results moving forward.

The club expressed deep dis-

appointment over the recent loss to Akwa United, where they fell short despite playing in front of their home supporters.

However, the management remains optimistic about bouncing back against Nasarawa United on Wednesday.

Kwara United also appealed to fans to continue supporting the team, assuring them of an improved performance in the coming games.

Currently 13th on the NPFL table after 30 matches, Kwara United will face Nasarawa United on Wednesday at 4 PM in Ilorin. The match will be broadcast live on Startimes



# SPORTS

## South Africa could forfeit win over Lesotho for fielding Teboho Mokoena

As it happened to the Super Eagles on the road to the Russia 2018 World Cup, South Africa may suffer match forfeiture for fielding an ineligible player in their last 2026 World Cup qualifying match last week against Lesotho.

South Africa won the match 2-0, but the Group C leaders may forfeit the match for fielding a player who had been cautioned twice before the match.

The player in question is Teboho Mokoena who was issued a yellow card in South Africa's opening match with Benin in November 2023 and then in the match day 4 encounter with Zimbabwe last year June.

In the match against the Be-

nin Republic on 18 November 2023, Teboho Mokoena was given a yellow card by Sudanese referee, Mahmood Ismail in the 54th minute. Again in the match with Zimbabwe Mokoena also got cautioned by Egyptian referee Mohamed Maarouf Eid Mansour in the 52nd minute.

The player was fielded last week in the 2-0 defeat of Lesotho. South Africa currently leads Group C with 10 points. Should the match be ruled as forfeiture, South Africa's total will drop to seven while fifth-placed Lesotho, currently with five points will rise to eight points.

It was in similar circumstances that Nigeria fielded an ineligible Shehu Abdullahi

against Algeria on 10 November 2017.

The match ended in a 1-1 draw but was overturned by FIFA and Algeria was awarded a 3-0 win.

Nigeria's Abdullahi Shehu played in this game even though he should have been suspended for picking up yellow cards in two previous qualifiers.

The defender was cautioned in the Super Eagles 1-0 win over Zambia in October that sealed Nigeria's spot in Russia, having been shown a yellow card in the first leg of their second-round tie against Swaziland in November 2015. The Nigeria Football Federation was also fined \$10,000 for the oversight.



## Edo Queens battle Abia Angels, set sights on fifth away win

EDWARD OSEGHE

Edo Queens Football Club, defending champions of the Nigeria Women's

Football League (NWFL), battle hosts Abia Angels Football Club today in the Matchday 9 of League title campaign. Edo Queens, currently with

20 points from 8 matches in group A, set sights on fifth away win with unbeaten records since the beginning of the new season.

Despite interest from the homers in today's encounter, the Ancient City based ladies are not ready to drop any point, and are ready to overpower the Abia Ladies. A win in this crucial away match would further guarantee the team a spot in the Super 6 where winners of the league will be the team that will fly the country's flag at the CAF Women's Champions League showpiece for 2025 season.

Recall that Edo Queens spanked Abia Angels 5-0 at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in

the Matchday 1 of the league.

The Week 9 game according to the NWFL fixtures will kick off at 1:00pm local time at the popular Umuahia Stadium in Abia State.

Meanwhile, coach Moses Aduku has called for maximum concentration from the Edo Queens, adding that a win in Wednesday game will brighten their chances of staying on top and also keeping the hope of Super 6 alive.

Aduku made this disclosure while addressing the players on Monday in Umuahia.

"We are here for real business, and so I want us to remain focused. Let them know that you are the defending champions.

"You are aware that Edo Queens have not loss any game, so we should try and maintain that record. See every game as war. You humbled them in Benin by 5-0, you can still do same. Last season they defeated us in Benin,

but we came to their home and beat them.

"I believe we can do it again. I have so much confidence in you girls and by the special grace of God we will go back to Benin with our three points," Aduku said.



## NFF wants FIFA to deduct three points from South Africa for fielding ineligible player Vs Lesotho

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) has initiated a formal complaint with FIFA, seeking to have three points deducted from South Africa's tally in the ongoing 2026 World Cup qualifiers, according to Own-GoalNigeria. The complaint stems from South Africa's decision to field an ineligible player, Teboho Mokoena, in their recent 2-0 win over Lesotho.

According to FIFA's rules, a player who accumulates two yellow cards in separate matches is required to serve a one-match suspension. Mokoena had received yellow cards in previous matches against Benin Republic and Zimbabwe, rendering him

ineligible to play against Lesotho. However, he played for 81 minutes in the match, sparking controversy and prompting the NFF to take action.

The NFF's complaint is based on the premise that South Africa's actions constituted a serious breach of FIFA's rules and regulations. By fielding an ineligible player, South Africa gained an unfair advantage over their opponents, which could have significant implications for the outcome of the qualifying campaign.

If FIFA upholds the NFF's complaint, South Africa could face a three-point deduction, which would significantly impact their chances of qualifying for the 2026 World Cup. The ruling

could also have a ripple effect on the qualifying campaign, potentially altering the dynamics of the group and the fortunes of other teams involved.

The NFF's decision to pur-

sue the matter with FIFA demonstrates their commitment to upholding the integrity of the game and ensuring that all teams compete on a level playing field.



## Forest ready to activate Osimhen's €75m release clause

Premier League Nottingham Forest is interested in acquiring the services of Super Eagles red-hot striker Victor Osimhen from Napoli.

The Tricky Trees is showing interest in the Nigerian, who is currently on loan at Galatasaray from Napoli until the end of the season.

According to Teamtalk, the club is reportedly willing to meet the necessary wage demands, though it remains

uncertain whether Osimhen would view Nottingham Forest as a viable option.

Osimhen's contract includes a release clause set at €75 million, and Napoli is eager to sell him during the summer transfer window.

It has been indicated that club owner Evangelos Marinakis is ambitious and willing to invest heavily to attract big names, to position the club among the elite in both England and Europe.