

# 2027: INEC to begin nationwide voter revalidation from April 13

● **Good policy, wrong timing —Yiaga Africa**

**ABUJA**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced plans to conduct a comprehensive nationwide voter revalidation exercise in preparation for the 2027 general elections.

The directive, communicat-

ed through an internal memo dated March 2 and signed by INEC Secretary Dr. Rose Oriaran-Anthony, was sent to all resident electoral commissioners across the country.

According to the memo, the exercise is aimed at ensuring a "credible and up-to-date voter register," a priority highlighted

during the commission's strategic retreat held in Lagos earlier this year.

INEC plans to adopt a hybrid model for the revalidation, allowing citizens to participate, both online and at physical centres.

Physical centres will be set up across local government

areas, registration areas, and polling units nationwide.

To facilitate smooth operations, the commission will deploy INEC Voter Enrollment Devices (IVEDs), assigning two devices per local government and one device per registration area and polling unit.

Each device will be staffed by a combination of INEC personnel and members of the

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), with two personnel assigned per device.

Preparatory activities for the exercise are already underway.

Voter education and public awareness campaigns commenced on March 1 and are scheduled to run until June 5.

The first phase of the physical revalidation at the local government level will take

place from April 13 to May 2.

This will be followed by revalidation at registration areas from May 5 to 11 and at polling units from May 13 to 19.

The printing of permanent voter cards (PVCs) for newly registered voters is scheduled for June 4 to July 3, with PVC collection at registration areas set for

CONTINUES ON PG 2

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**PRP woos Atiku, Obi, Kwankwaso as ADC crisis deepens**

—Pg 6

# Rising costs, supply disruptions: Africa faces looming health crisis

**ABUJA**

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) has raised alarm over potentially severe shortages of essential medical supplies, warning that rising costs and global supply chain disruptions could trigger a public health crisis across the continent.

Speaking at the agency's weekly high-level regional press briefing in Abuja on

Thursday, Dr Jean Kaseya, Director-General of Africa CDC, said that the ongoing Middle East crisis has sharply increased the cost of key inputs and transport for critical health commodities.

Materials such as polyester used in mosquito nets have surged by up to 40 percent, while shipping expenses have soared due to war-related taxes and fuel surcharges reaching \$4,000 per container.

"These rising costs, com-

bined with delays in freight and disruptions in supply chains, threaten the timely delivery of medicines, vaccines, and other essential health products across Africa," Kaseya said.

He emphasised that Africa's heavy reliance on imports from China and India leaves the continent extremely vulnerable to external shocks, putting millions of lives at risk.

He warned that the situation could escalate from economic pressure into a full-blown pub-

lic health crisis, with shortages of vaccines, malaria prevention tools, and essential medicines potentially affecting millions of people across Africa. "Vulnerability ranges from rising costs to lives at stake; price hikes and shortages risk evolving into a public health crisis," he said.

Dr Kaseya highlighted the Africa CDC's Africa Health Security and Sovereignty (AHSS) Agenda, a strategic framework aimed at strengthening health systems. The agenda focuses

on five pillars: enhanced leadership, coordinated pandemic preparedness, sustainable domestic health financing, digital transformation of health systems, and local manufacturing of health products to reduce

reliance on imports.

Pointing to the Democratic Republic of Congo as a model, he noted how political commitment and innovative fi-

CONTINUES ON PG 2



**VISIT TO NAN:**

Managing Director, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Malam Ali Muhammad Ali (R) receiving a souvenir from the President, Risk Management Society of Nigeria (RIMSON), Dr Abbas Idris, during the latter's visit to NAN's headquarters in Abuja on Thursday.

## Reconstructed Oba market ready in 2 weeks, contractor assures Okpebholo

RICHARD EWEKA

**BENIN CITY**

The long-awaited reconstruction of the historic Oba Market in Benin City is set for completion and handover to the Edo State Government within the next two weeks, the contractor handling the project, Engr. Shahid Mahmud, has disclosed.

Mahmud gave the assurance on Thursday while speaking to journalists at the project site, shortly after an unscheduled inspection visit by Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo. He said work on the market has reached 97 percent completion, with only finishing touches left.

According to him, "The stores upstairs are almost 100 percent completed, as we only have minor maintenance work to do downstairs. We are currently handling the ground

flooring and tiling, but we have deployed more manpower to ensure the project is delivered within the next two weeks."

He explained that the once fire-ravaged Oba Market has now been transformed into a modern commercial complex with a mall-like structure.

The rebuilt facility features about 450 open shops on the ground floor, equipped with solar-powered lighting, ceiling fans, and other modern amenities designed to enhance trading activities.

Governor Okpebholo, who was taken round the facility by the project site manager, inspected various sections of the reconstructed market and expressed satisfaction with the quality and pace of work.

The governor recalled his campaign promise to rebuild the market and provide a more conducive and secure

CONTINUES ON PG 2

**STEM bootcamp inspires Edo girls**

—Pg 3

**2027: APC convention sets stage for victory —Sam Onuigbo**

—Pg 4

**Mozambique clears IMF debt early**

—Pg 9

**World Cup: DR Congo declares public holiday after historic World Cup Qualification**

—Pg 16

# Kaduna civil servants threaten strike over delayed salary adjustments

## KADUNA

Civil servants in Kaduna State may soon down tools as the National Public Service Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) has threatened industrial action over persistent delays in implementing consequential salary adjustments for workers on Grade Level 07 and above.

The warning came in a communiqué issued following a meeting of the State Administrative Council (SAC) of the JNC.

The council expressed frustration at what it described as “deliberate delay and unnecessary dilly-dallying” by the Kaduna State Government,

despite extensive consultations and engagements.

According to the JNC, a State Minimum Wage and Consequential Adjustments Committee set up by the government in October 2024 completed its assignment and submitted its report in November 2024, but implementation has yet to begin.

The council noted that a staff verification exercise intended to remove ghost workers, initiated in January 2025 and initially scheduled to last three months, dragged on until December 2025 without corresponding salary adjustments.

Multiple letters, including those dated October 2, 2025, and January 14, 2026, appealed

for action, but yielded no results.

“The governor subsequently directed the constitution of a negotiating review committee comprising labour leaders and government officials. The committee has since completed its assignment and submitted its report, yet no positive response has been received,” the communiqué stated.

The JNC called on the State Government to urgently approve and implement the review committee’s recommendations before April salaries are paid.

Failure to comply, it warned, would lead to the boycott of the 2026 May Day celebrations and potential full-scale strike action across the state civil service.

The council further highlighted that 35 other states had implemented consequential salary adjustments following the 2024 minimum wage approval, leaving Kaduna workers at a disadvantage. Rising inflation, it noted, has eroded the N72,000 minimum wage, and only workers on Grade Levels 01 to 06 have benefited from

recent adjustments, leaving senior civil servants excluded.

“Core civil servants in Kaduna State are facing severe economic hardship due to the lack of reasonable salary adjustments,” the communiqué said.

The statement was jointly signed by the JNC Chairman, Danjuma Yusuf, and Secretary, Musa Muhammed.

## Rising costs, supply disruptions: Africa...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

financing mechanisms, such as import levies and mandatory health insurance can reduce donor dependence and expand domestic coverage.

“Health financing alone is only half the battle; stewardship, efficiency, and integrated systems are equally critical,” Kaseya said.

He urged African governments to implement and sustain reforms that strengthen domestic ownership of health priorities, improve operational efficiency, and reduce fragmentation in health systems.

Kaseya stressed that failure to act could leave Africa exposed to future pandemics, seasonal disease outbreaks, and disruptions in essential health services caused by geopolitical conflicts or global economic shocks.

Dr Kaseya in his brief added that achieving health sovereignty will require a combination of strong political will, innovative financing, and structural reforms, ensuring Africa’s health systems are resilient and capable of protecting populations despite international supply challenges and escalating costs.

## 2027: INEC to begin nationwide voter...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

November 18 to 24. Additionally, INEC will generate a PDF register for revalidated voters over 14 days, starting June 15.

The printed display of the voter register will run from July 7 to 20, and registers will be publicly displayed at registration areas from August 18 to 24.

The final register of voters for the 2027 elections will be published and presented on December 15.

This is in advance of the presidential and national assembly elections scheduled for January 16, 2027, and the governorship and state assembly elections set for February 6, 2027.

Dr. Oriaran-Anthony urged resident electoral commissioners to complete all necessary preparations, including sourcing additional personnel, configuring enrollment devices, and ensuring proper logistics, to guarantee a seamless and credible revalidation process.

The exercise underscores INEC’s commitment to strengthening electoral integrity and addressing concerns over the accuracy of the voter register, which has been a recurrent issue in previous elections.

Meanwhile, a Civil society organisation, Yiaga Africa, has described the proposed nationwide voter revalidation exercise by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as a sound policy introduced at the wrong time.

The organisation’s Executive Director, Mr Samson Itodo, in

a statement issued on Thursday in Abuja, acknowledged the urgent need to sanitise Nigeria’s voter register by removing errors, duplicate entries and names of deceased persons.

He noted that while the planned revalidation exercise represents a commendable step towards improving the credibility of the register, its timing raises serious concerns.

“The much-talked-about INEC revalidation exercise is definitely a great approach to clean up the register. However, the timing of the exercise is deeply problematic,” Itodo said.

According to him, key details of the exercise, including its framework, scope, procedures and implications, are yet to be made public, a situation he warned could undermine transparency and public confidence.

He stressed that voter revalidation carries significant political and electoral consequences, making proper timing and openness critical to its success.

“This is a case of a good policy implemented at the wrong time. The 2027 electoral cycle already has one of the most compressed timelines for electoral activities, and it is evident that the system is overstretched,” he added.

Itodo pointed out that continuous voter registration is still ongoing, while political party primaries are expected to commence in the coming weeks. He also cited delays in the release of funding to INEC as an additional strain on the commission’s preparations.



### PRESENTING COMMITTEE'S REPORT:

Chairman, Edo State House of Assembly Ad-hoc Committee set up to look into the petition by Mrs. Umeadi Ereyuwa against the Edo State University, Iyamho, Hon Jonathan Ibhamawu (right) presenting the Committee’s report to the Clerk of the House, Alhaji Yahaya Omogbai, during the house plenary recently. The petition is titled, “Unjust Termination of Employment and Maltreatment.” PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN

## AI could be lifeline for digitally excluded Nigerians —Expert

### ABUJA

Artificial Intelligence (AI) could help bridge Nigeria’s digital divide by making technology accessible to millions who face literacy and language barriers, a leading researcher has said.

Dr Ibitomi Olusegun told journalists in Abuja on Thursday that AI-powered voice interfaces and local language models could simplify digital

interactions for non-literate users in rural communities.

He explained that speech-to-text and text-to-speech technologies allow users to access services in their native languages, reducing reliance on formal education or English proficiency.

AI chatbots configured in indigenous languages, he said, could provide farmers, traders, and artisans with real-time information on markets, weath-

er, and financial services.

“Digital exclusion in Nigeria is largely driven by language and literacy gaps, but AI can personalise access, making technology intuitive and accessible to underserved populations,” Olusegun said.

He added that offline-capable AI tools are vital for remote areas with poor internet connectivity, enabling continued access to essential services without constant data access.

Collaboration among government, academia, and pri-

vate-sector players, he stressed, is key to developing inclusive AI tailored to Nigeria’s linguistic diversity.

Olusegun also called for policies that support local data development, ethical AI use, and affordability, alongside awareness campaigns to build trust and encourage adoption of AI tools among rural dwellers. He concluded that properly harnessed, AI could reduce inequality and unlock economic opportunities for millions currently excluded from Nigeria’s digital space.

## Autism Day: Edo moves to end stigma, push inclusive policies

### BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has renewed its commitment to ending stigma and advancing inclusive policies for persons living with autism, as it joined the global community to mark World Autism Awareness Day 2026 on Thursday.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, the state underscored the need for greater awareness, understanding, and protection of the rights of individuals on the autism spectrum, describing the condition as a lifelong developmental disorder that affects communication, in-

teraction, and perception.

The Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Eugenia Abdallah, stressed that every individual living with autism deserves dignity, equal opportunities, and the support required to lead a fulfilling life.

She called for the building of

a more inclusive society where persons with autism are neither stigmatised nor marginalised but embraced and empowered, urging families, educators, caregivers, and the wider public to demonstrate patience, compassion, and understanding.

CONTINUES ON PG 4»

## Reconstructed Oba market ready in 2 weeks, contractor...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

environment for traders, noting that the project stands as a fulfilment of that pledge.

“You can see what is happening here. We came here previously to assess the progress of work.

“During our campaign, we promised to rebuild this market, and today we have fulfilled

that promise to the traders. What you see here is a clear demonstration of that commitment,” he said.

Okpebholo also attributed the success of the project to the support of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, whom he described as instrumental in ensuring steady progress.

“President Tinubu is always quick to ask about the progress

of work at the market and how I am managing the challenges faced by traders. Each time I brief him, he ensures funds are released, and that is why you see the level of progress achieved here today,” the governor added.

The Oba Market, one of the most prominent commercial hubs in Benin City, was severely damaged by major fire

incidents in 2020 and again in 2025 during the administration of former Governor Godwin Obaseki, leaving traders counting heavy losses.

The reconstruction project is expected to restore the market’s economic vibrancy while providing modern facilities aimed at preventing future disasters and improving the overall trading environment.

## NEWS

# Okpebholo reforms transform schools, empower youths — Aide

RICHARD EWEKA

## BENIN CITY

The Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Students' Welfare and Development, Hon. Mubarak Jimah, has commended Governor

Monday Okpebholo for reforms which he said, have prioritised education and youth empowerment in the State.

In his address at the maiden edition of the Vision and Value Conference 2026, held in Benin City, Jimah said that the reforms

undertaken by the Okpebholo-led administration have transformed schools across the state into modern centres for learning, equipped with tools for the digital age.

He stressed that the future of Edo State lies, not in oil, politics, or the past, but in its youth, whom he described as builders, innovators and leaders of today and tomorrow.

"The future of Edo State lies

in the youth, and this vision aligns with the bold reforms of Governor Monday Okpebholo, whose administration has prioritised education and youth empowerment, as schools are being transformed into modern centres for learning, equipped with tools for the digital age.

"Youth-focused initiatives are opening doors for creativity, innovation and entrepreneur-

ship. These reforms remind us that the government believes in the youth and is investing in them to build a future where Edo youths can thrive.

"The insight gained here is not just for jobs, but for creating opportunities, shaping industries and transforming communities. Together, we will build an Edo State where education is strong, opportunities are abundant and the future is limitless," he said.

Also speaking at the event, the daughter of the Edo State Governor, Barr. Oghogho Okpebholo, urged Nigerian youths to look beyond their limitations and channel their potential into meaningful ventures that would make them self-reliant amid growing socio-economic uncertainties.

She noted that the conference focused on the need for youths to rise above prevailing socio-economic challenges by investing their time, resources and energy in productive ventures.

Barr. Okpebholo urged youths to rise above challenges through creativity, integrity and productivity.

"This conference is not just an event, but a movement dedicated to bridging the gap between education and the

corporate world. It recognises a simple, but powerful truth: 'The future of Edo State and Nigeria lies in the hands of the youths.'

"I have a clear vision to use knowledge as a tool for impact, anchored on strong values, discipline and integrity. Education is not just about passing courses, but preparing for responsibilities, and that is what this conference represents.

"Your degrees may open the door, but your character will determine how far you will go. Your skills may get you noticed, but your consistency will make you indispensable. Your ambition may start the journey, but your discipline will sustain it.

"Nigeria today stands at a critical point. While challenges exist, within them lie opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, ethical leadership and bold ideas," she said.

In her goodwill message, the Coordinator, Office of the Edo State First Lady, Mrs Edesili Okpebholo Anani, represented by the Executive Chairman of BTVET, Barr. Onomen Briggs, said that the conference was strategically designed to equip, connect and inspire future professionals in the state.



## A MEDIA BRIEFING:

Edo State Commander of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Dr. Mitchell Ofoyeju (right) presenting an award of Best WADA Facilitator to Deputy Commander of Narcotics, Hope Aigbogun at a media briefing in Benin City recently.

## Ebonyi traders plan 'Appreciation package' for Nwifuru

### ● As Gov hails Ebonyi ICT University with 187 pioneer students matriculate

MAXWELL OKECHUKWU

## ABAKALIKI

Traders across the 13 Local Government Areas of Ebonyi State have concluded plans to present an appreciation package to Governor Francis Ogbonna Nwifuru in recognition of what they described as improved business conditions in markets across the state.

The resolution followed a meeting between the management of the Ebonyi State Ministry of Markets Development and Parks, the Chairman of the Ebonyi State Market Development Board and traders' representatives, held at the office of

the Commissioner for Markets Development, Prof. Nwogo Ajuka Obasi, at Ochudo Centenary City, Abakaliki.

The meeting, which drew a large attendance of traders, including market chairmen and secretaries, focused on assessing ongoing activities in various markets, the role of government, and areas where traders expect further intervention to enhance business operations across the state.

During the interaction, traders expressed satisfaction with the administration of Governor Nwifuru, noting that government policies have created a more conducive environment for their businesses.

Speaking on behalf of the traders, participants said that they were unanimous in their decision to convey their appreciation formally, disclosing that plans were underway to present a package to the governor once arrangements were finalised.

Responding, the Commissioner, Prof. Ajuka, acknowledged the concerns and expectations raised by the traders, particularly in relation to improving their business activities.

He expressed appreciation for their support for the governor and assured them of the government's continued commitment to market development and stability.

Ajuka further assured that the present administration would not tolerate the imposition of leadership in markets, a practice he said had previously led to crises in several markets across the state.

He advised market leaders to carry their members along in decision-making processes to sustain peace and progress in the markets.

Meanwhile, the Ebonyi State University of ICT, Science and Technology has held its first matriculation ceremony, with 187 pioneer students at its permanent campus in Ofereke-Agbaja, Izzi Local Government Area of the State.

## Jos killings: NAS demand action

## LAGOS

The National Association of Seadogs (Pyrates Confraternity) has strongly condemned the killing of at least 30 residents in the Anguwan Rukuba area of Jos, Plateau State, describing the incident as part of a disturbing pattern of unchecked violence across Nigeria.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the association's Cap'n, Dr Joseph Oteri, expressed outrage over what it

termed the persistent inability of authorities to safeguard lives, warning that the continued bloodshed reflects a deeper failure of state protection.

Oteri said the repeated loss of innocent lives in Jos and other parts of the country had become intolerable, stressing that the sanctity of human life must never be treated with indifference.

"We are deeply saddened and outraged by the recurring killings in Jos and other communities across Nigeria. Every Nigerian life matters and

must be protected with the full weight of the law," he said.

He noted that the frequency of such attacks raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of existing security measures, urging the Federal Government to move beyond routine condemnations and demonstrate genuine political will to halt the violence.

According to him, the pattern of attacks across Plateau State and beyond has subjected citizens to avoidable fear, trauma and loss, adding that failure to act decisively only emboldens perpetrators.

"The government must stop

playing politics with the lives of Nigerians and take concrete steps to end these senseless killings," Oteri said.

The group further called for the strengthening of security agencies through improved funding, equipment and accountability, insisting that perpetrators must be swiftly identified, arrested and prosecuted.

It also advocated enhanced intelligence gathering, faster emergency response systems and closer collaboration between security operatives and local communities as part of efforts to prevent further attacks.

## STEM bootcamp inspires Edo girls

### ● Imaguero College tops competition

## BENIN CITY

In a concerted effort to encourage girls to pursue careers in engineering and other science-based disciplines, the Osaide Foundation has organised a two-day "Next Gen Bootcamp" in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), in collaboration with the Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria.

Speaking to journalists during the bootcamp themed, "Bright Minds, Bold Futures: Learn, Lead, Thrive," the founder, Engr. Dr. Patricia Nekpen Opene-Odili, disclosed that 50 students drawn from 10 girls' schools across Edo State participated in the competition.

She explained that the initiative was designed, not as a monetary pursuit, but as a platform to spark interest in science among young girls, build their confidence, and expose them early to opportunities in engineering and related fields.

"I am the founder of Osaide for Girls in Science and Engineering Foundation. My passion stems from my early years when career talks in schools were dominated by doctors, pharmacists and lawyers, with little or no representation from engineers," she said.

Opene-Odili further recounted her experience studying engineering, noting that female students were significantly underrepresented.

"In a class of about 63 students, we were only two girls.

That experience ignited my passion to bring more girls into the engineering profession," she added.

She noted that even during her professional career prior to retirement, the number of women in engineering remained low, reinforcing the need for mentorship and deliberate support for young girls.

According to her, the foundation is focused on "catching them young," especially indigenous students, and providing them with opportunities to explore and excel in science.

In her remarks, the Chairman of the Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria, Benin Chapter, Engr. Perpetual Oby Obeta, urged the participants to believe in their abilities and not be deterred by the male dominance in the engineering field.

She emphasised that success in engineering requires dedication, particularly in mathematics and other science subjects.

Also speaking, the Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Works, Engr. John Obanor, encouraged the students to take full advantage of the competition to improve academically.

He urged them not to underestimate themselves, but to recognise their unique potential to compete on equal footing with their male counterparts.

Obanor commended the Osaide Foundation for the initiative and called for its sustainability to further promote interest in science among girls.

# Gas leak crisis: Rivers govt releases ₦100m, deploys relief to Bille

## PORT HARCOURT

The Rivers State Government has approved an immediate ₦100 million intervention fund for the Bille community in Degema Local Government Area following a disturbing gas emission incident that has threatened lives and the environment.

The Secretary to the State Government, Dagogo Wokoma, announced the donation during an on-the-spot assessment visit to the riverine community on behalf of Governor Siminalayi Fubara.

He described the financial support as part of interim measures to cushion the impact of the environmental hazard, which residents say has persisted since November 2025.

Wokoma disclosed that, beyond the cash relief, the state government would immediately provide potable water and essential medical services to affected residents, pending a

comprehensive solution to the crisis.

He assured the community that the government remained committed to addressing the root cause of the gas emissions, noting that the governor was deeply concerned about the health and wellbeing of the people.

“Although the governor could not be physically present due to pressing engagements, he is fully briefed and determined to tackle the environmental challenge at its source,” Wokoma said, adding that the current intervention was only a temporary measure to ease suffering.

He urged residents to remain calm and law-abiding while supporting ongoing government efforts to resolve the crisis.

Earlier, Chairman of the Council of Chiefs of Bille Kingdom, Bennet Dokubo, commended the government’s swift response but warned that the situation posed serious health risks.

Describing the development

as unprecedented, Dokubo said the community’s waterways had become visibly contaminated.

“If you go into the river, you

will see the entire environment bubbling and emitting a strong odour. This is something we have never experienced before. It is dangerous to human

health,” he said, urging urgent and decisive intervention.

Members of the government delegation also inspected sections of the affected waterways,

where gas was observed floating on the surface, heightening fears of escalating environmental and public health consequences.



**AN INSPECTION VISIT:**

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (middle), with other government officials, during an inspection visit to the reconstructed Oba market in Benin City

## 2027: APC convention sets stage for victory —Sam Onuigbo

### ABUJA

Chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Sam Onuigbo, has said the party’s successful national convention has laid a solid foundation for victory in the 2027 general elections.

Onuigbo, a former member of the House of Representatives and an aspirant for Abia Central Senatorial District, said the convention, held in Abuja between March 27 and 28, demonstrated unity and organisational strength within the ruling party.

He noted that the emergence of a new National Working Committee led by Nentawe

Yilwatda and Ajibola Basiru through consensus reflected broad-based acceptance.

The APC stalwart commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu for fostering internal cohesion and reducing tensions within the party.

According to him, recent economic reforms, including fuel subsidy removal, student loan schemes and exchange rate unification, had helped stabilise the economy and positioned the country for long-term growth.

He added that the party would build on the unity achieved at the convention to prosecute future elections successfully.

## Farmers demand proof before adopting new ‘MoorBeta’ chicken breed

### LAGOS

Poultry farmers in Lagos State have expressed cautious optimism over the Federal Government’s newly approved ‘MoorBeta’ chicken breed, insisting that its adoption will depend on proven productivity and profitability.

Chairman of the Poultry Association of Nigeria (PAN), Lagos chapter, Mojeed Iyiola, said the association would subject the breed to practical testing before embracing it for commercial production.

The Federal Ministry of Livestock Development re-

cently approved the indigenous meat-type breed for commercialisation to boost poultry output and strengthen food security.

However, Iyiola said farmers needed empirical evidence of egg production, survival rate and longevity before committing to the breed.

He warned against patronising unverified hatcheries, noting that substandard day-old chicks with high mortality rates could cripple poultry businesses.

“We will adopt it if it proves productive in real conditions, not just on paper,” he said.

## Easter: FRSC deploys 1,019 personnel, vehicles in Rivers

### PORT HARCOURT

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has deployed 1,019 personnel, patrol vehicles and special marshals across Rivers State to ensure safe and hitch-free Easter celebrations.

The Acting Sector Commander, Iheanachor Obele, disclosed this in a statement issued by the Public Education Officer, Doris Ebor.

He said the operation would include 15 patrol vans, one heavy-duty tow truck and 400 special marshals strategically

positioned across major routes.

Obele explained that the deployment was in line with the corps’ statutory mandate to guarantee safe roads and seamless interstate travel during peak festive periods.

He, however, raised concerns over increasing cases of reckless driving, particularly among youths in Port Harcourt, warn-

ing that speeding motorcades had contributed to fatal crashes.

The FRSC boss urged motorists to adhere strictly to traffic regulations and encouraged the public to report traffic violations via the toll-free line 122 or 0700.

He also called for synergy among security agencies to ensure effective service delivery throughout the Easter period.

## Umo Eno urges women to embrace cooperative scheme

### UYO

Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State has called on women in the State to take advantage of the government’s ward-level cooperative initiative aimed at boosting economic empower-

ment.

Speaking at the April Government House Covenant Service in Uyo, Eno said the programme would be non-partisan and open to all women at the ward level, regardless of political affiliation.

He urged participants to

report any attempts to politicise the registration process, stressing that the initiative was designed to strengthen rural economies and promote self-reliance.

The governor also cautioned host communities of the Ibon Icon Hotel and Golf Resort,

Nwaniba, against interfering in its operations, noting that the land was lawfully acquired and compensation duly paid.

He maintained that the facility must operate on a profit-driven model to remain sustainable while still benefiting host communities.

## Tinubu lands in Lagos for easter, project inauguration

### ABUJA/LAGOS

President Bola Tinubu on Thursday evening arrived in Lagos to observe the Easter holiday and inaugurate major infrastructure projects, following a condolence visit to Plateau State.

Tinubu had earlier departed Jos, where he commiserat-

ed with victims and families affected by the recent deadly attack in Angwan Rukuba.

His aircraft landed at the Presidential Wing of the Murtala Muhammed International Airport at about 7:20 p.m., where he was received by Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, alongside senior government officials and other dignitaries.

During his visit to Plateau, the President met with bereaved families, former governors, traditional rulers and top government officials to assess the security situation.

He directed security agencies to track down and apprehend those responsible for the killings. “The perpetrators must be brought to justice,” Tinubu said,

assuring affected communities of the Federal Government’s commitment to restoring peace.

The visit formed part of efforts to address the crisis and reassure residents of improved security measures.

While in Lagos, Tinubu is expected to inaugurate key infrastructure projects executed by the Sanwo-Olu administration.

## Autism Day: Edo moves to end stigma, push...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 2

Abdallah also commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for his continued commitment to the welfare and protection of vulnerable groups in the state.

She further lauded Edesili Okpebholo Anani for her sus-

tained advocacy and initiatives targeted at improving the lives of women, children, and persons with special needs.

Reaffirming the ministry’s resolve, the commissioner said efforts would be intensified to promote early diagnosis, improve access to quality educa-

tion and healthcare services, and strengthen social inclusion for persons with autism.

She urged stakeholders across sectors to scale up awareness campaigns, eliminate discrimination, and create enabling environments that allow individuals with autism to thrive and con-

tribute meaningfully to society.

The ministry also called on residents of Edo State to embrace diversity and support ongoing efforts to build a more compassionate and inclusive society, noting that every individual, regardless of condition, possesses unique abilities and valuable contributions.

## NEWS

## Policing not police duty alone, Lagos CP seeks public partnership

## LAGOS

The Commissioner of Police in Lagos State, Mr Fatai Tijani, has called for stronger collaboration between the police and the public, stressing that effective policing cannot be achieved without active citizen participation.

Tijani made the call on Thursday at a security stake-

holders' meeting held at the POWA Hall, Ikeja, as part of activities marking National Police Week 2026.

"Policing is not a job for the police alone. Every individual has a role to play in ensuring the safety of our communities," he said.

The commissioner noted that the Police Week activities were designed to deepen community engagement, build

trust and strengthen partnerships between law enforcement agencies and residents.

He underscored the importance of timely and credible information from the public, noting that security agencies rely heavily on intelligence to prevent crime.

"We cannot be everywhere at the same time. That is why we need the support of residents. If you see something unusual, re-

port it promptly," he said.

Tijani also expressed concern over the increasing involvement of youths in social vices, particularly cultism, urging parents, guardians and community leaders to take proactive steps in guiding young people and instilling positive values.

He added that tackling such challenges requires sustained community engagement and collective responsibility.

The commissioner further warned against electoral violence as the country approaches another election cycle, urging political actors and residents to conduct themselves peacefully.

"We do not want any form of violence during elections. Lagos has maintained relative peace, and we must work together to preserve it," he said.

He assured residents of adequate security arrangements ahead of the Easter celebrations, noting that officers would be strategically deployed across churches and other public places.

"There is no cause for alarm. We are committed to protecting lives and property, and residents can go about their lawful activities without fear," he added.

Tijani maintained that Lagos remains one of the safest states in the country, attributing this to sustained efforts by security agencies and cooperation from residents, while urging continued vigilance.

"We will continue to do everything within our capacity to keep Lagos safe, but we need the support of everyone to sustain the peace we all enjoy," he said.



## MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME:

Founder of JAM-Initiative, Mrs Josie Mudasiru (R), presenting a pack of sanitary pad to one of the beneficiaries, Salome Markus, during a mentorship program for Adolescent Girls to commemorate 2026 International Women's Day celebration at Pegi Village Area of Kuje, organised by JAM Initiative, Abuja. With them is the Founder, Al-Masareef Foundation in Abuja.

## NGO deepens psychosocial support for persons with disabilities

## ABUJA

The Sterling Inclusive Education and Development Initiative (SIEDI) has strengthened efforts to promote mental health, safety and resilience among Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and disability rights advocates across Nigeria.

The organisation made this known during its inaugural inclusive Psychosocial Support Session held in Abuja on Thursday.

Executive Director of SIEDI, Ms Patience Agbam, said the initiative focuses on building inclusive support systems while empowering advocates championing disability rights nationwide.

The session, supported by Protection International, is part of a broader project aimed at strengthening the protection and resilience of disability advocates through structured psychosocial interventions.

Agbam explained that the programme featured wellness-focused activities such as interactive games, cardio dance workouts and guided exercises designed to relieve stress and promote emotional balance.

"SIEDI remains committed

to advancing inclusive support systems that prioritise the mental health, safety and resilience of PWDs and those championing their rights," she said.

She added that the six-month pilot project, which runs monthly until June, aims to reach 10 direct beneficiaries and 60 indirect beneficiaries, including families and community members.

Programme Manager at Disability Advancement Initiative, Nwora Amaka, urged PWDs to speak out against discrimination and demand fair treatment at all times.

"Silence denies offenders the opportunity to learn and change. Speaking out ensures accountability," she said.

Participants, including Mr Alexander Okoroafor of Technology Beyond Disability Initiative and Ms Catherine Akor of Neil Life Foundation, commended the programme for providing a platform for engagement, shared experiences and emotional support.

They called for expansion of the initiative, noting that sustained psychosocial support is vital for strengthening advocacy and building a more inclusive society.

## Dangote, NNPC, Offor lead N30bn push for nat'l food bank

## ABUJA

Nigeria's organised private sector has pledged over 30 billion dollars and N500 million in support of the National Food Bank programme aimed at tackling food insecurity and malnutrition across the country.

The initiative, driven by the Office of the Wife of the President, had its Trust Fund officially inaugurated on Thursday in Abuja, drawing key business leaders, government officials and stakeholders.

President of the Dangote Group, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, commended the Wife of the President, Sen. Oluremi Tinubu, for the initiative, describing

it as a timely intervention for vulnerable households, particularly women and children.

He emphasised the importance of private sector participation in national development and pledged N20 billion over the next five years to support the programme.

Dangote also cited previous collaborations such as the CEO Corps for Nutrition and COVID-19 response efforts as evidence of the impact of public-private partnerships.

Similarly, the Group Chief Executive Officer of NNPC Limited, Mr Bayo Ojulari, announced a contribution of N10 million expansion fund over five years, alongside plans to leverage strategic partnerships

to enhance implementation.

Ojulari noted that the initiative aligns with the company's social responsibility to support livelihoods, create jobs and promote stability beyond the energy sector.

Also, the Founder of the Sir Emeka Offor Foundation, Sir Emeka Offor, donated N500 million to the National Community Investment Programme, reaffirming his commitment to improving the welfare of vulnerable Nigerians.

The community food bank programme, a core component of the initiative, is designed to tackle food insecurity, strengthen agricultural value chains and ensure transparency through robust governance frameworks modelled after the Bank of Agriculture.

Organisers said the programme aims to improve nutrition, empower smallholder

farmers and enhance household resilience nationwide.

Private sector partners reiterated their readiness to collaborate with government and stakeholders, stressing that collective action is essential to building a Nigeria where no child goes to bed hungry.



ALIKO DANGOTE

## FG debunks viral claim of missing manhole covers on Eko bridge

## LAGOS

The Federal Ministry of Works has dismissed a viral social media report alleging that manhole covers on Eko Bridge had been removed, describing the claim as false and misleading.

The Federal Controller of Works in Lagos, Mr Olufemi Dare, told reporters on Thursday that inspections carried out by officials confirmed that no such incident had occurred.

"It is not true. We have checked round," Dare said.

He urged residents to disregard

the message, warning that such misinformation could cause unnecessary panic among motorists.

Dare advised road users to continue using the bridge while adhering strictly to traffic rules, particularly speed limits.

He also cautioned individuals spreading false information

to desist, describing such actions as mischievous.

The controller reaffirmed the commitment of the Federal Ministry of Works, under the leadership of Minister Sen. Dave Umahi, to ensuring the safety of federal roads and bridges across the State

## Easter: Limit travel, avoid speeding, FRSC warns motorists

## SANGO-OTA, OGUN

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has advised motorists to restrict travel to essential journeys and avoid speeding during the Easter celebrations to reduce road accidents.

The Itoji Unit Commander, Mr Babatunde Gold, gave the advice on Thursday in Ota, stressing the need to prevent avoidable loss of lives during the festive period.

He noted that fewer vehicles on the road would translate to reduced risk of crashes.

"Motorists should, as much as possible, reduce their pres-

ence on the roads. When they must travel, they should do so responsibly and avoid dangerous practices such as driving against traffic," he said.

Gold urged drivers to comply with all traffic regulations and ensure their vehicles are roadworthy before embarking on any journey.

He also called for cooperation with FRSC officials, noting that special patrols would be deployed to manage emergencies and curb reckless driving.

The Federal Government has declared Friday, April 3 and Monday, April 6 as public holidays to mark the Easter celebrations.

# ADC diaspora kicks as INEC delists David Mark-led NWC amid court battle

ABUJA

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) Diaspora Chapter in the United States has faulted the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) over the removal of the party's National Working Committee (NWC) led by former Senate President, David Mark, from

its official portal.

The group warned that the development could disrupt party administration, particularly as the leadership dispute remains before the courts.

In a statement jointly signed by its Chairman, Hon. Safiyanu Ali (Maibiyar), and Secretary, Hon. Adeolu Balogun, the chapter expressed concern that actions taken during ongoing

litigation could raise questions about due process and institutional independence.

INEC had earlier announced plans to delist the David Mark-led NWC and suspend dealings with any faction of the party pending the determination of a substantive suit before the Federal High Court, Abuja.

The Commission's National Commissioner and Chairman of the Information and Voter Education Committee, Mr Mohammed Haruna, said the decision followed a review of relevant court rulings.

"The court directed parties to maintain the status quo in the leadership dispute within the ADC," Haruna stated.

He explained that INEC's action was in compliance with the judgment of the Court of Appeal in Appeal No. CA/ABJ/145/2026: Senator David Mark v. Nafu Bala Gombe & Ors., as well as a pending case before the Federal High Court.

Haruna further disclosed that the Commission received separate letters dated March 16 from two law firms representing different interests within

the party.

Reacting, the ADC diaspora chapter stressed the need for transparency and strict adherence to established procedures in managing party affairs.

It urged stakeholders to remain committed to democratic principles and the rule of law, while calling on national leaders, including Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, Rabiu Kwankwaso, Ibrahim Babangida, Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan and Aliyu Gusau, to support efforts aimed at strengthening democratic institutions.

The group also encouraged citizens to remain law-abiding and actively engaged in the democratic process, while urging the National Assembly to sustain its constitutional oversight responsibilities.

It further called on the international community, including the United Nations, to closely observe developments within Nigeria's democratic space, adding that it would continue to explore lawful channels to address concerns surrounding party leadership and institutional processes.

## Easter travel slumps as high diesel costs ground passengers

LAGOS

Transport operators across Lagos have lamented low passenger turnout ahead of Easter, blaming soaring diesel prices and worsening economic hardship for the decline in travel.

Operators who spoke with newsmen on Thursday said the usual festive rush had yet to materialise, with many Nigerians unable to afford rising fares.

Mr Christian Omoh, Manager of Bonnyway Transport, Jibowu branch, said passenger traffic had dropped sharply compared to the same period last year.

He attributed the situation to the high cost of diesel, now selling between N1,800 and N1,900 per litre, which has forced operators to increase fares.

"Last year, we charged between N20,000 and N21,000 to the East, but fares now range from N30,000 to N35,000," he said.

Omoh noted that transporters who previously operated two to three full trips daily now struggle to fill even half a bus.

Similarly, Mr Ajayioba Gabriel, Branch Manager of Chisco Transport Nigeria Ltd., said

that the anticipated Easter rush had not begun.

"Fueling a bus now costs between N600,000 and N700,000, with diesel rising from about N850 to over N1,900 per litre," he said.

He added that fares for luxury buses have increased from N35,000 to about N40,000, while standard fares from Lagos to the East now range between N30,000 and N37,000.

Gabriel noted that many operators are barely breaking even, as high operating costs continue to erode profits.

Passengers also decried the situation, with many cancelling travel plans.

Mr Chinedu Okafor, a trader heading to Enugu, said fares had nearly doubled compared to last year.

"It is not easy. Many people are reconsidering their trips," he said.

Miss Chioma Onyebuchi said she had shelved plans to travel to Imo due to the high cost, while Mr Kehinde Bello described the usually busy motor parks as unusually calm.

Both operators and passengers called on the Federal Government to address rising fuel costs and stabilise the petroleum sector to ease the burden on Nigerians.

## FAAN seeks fresh investment as Nigeria positions for aviation growth

LAGOS

The Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) has highlighted vast investment opportunities in the country's aviation sector, reaffirming Nigeria's status as one of Africa's most promising air transport markets.

The Managing Director of FAAN, Mrs Olunmi Kuku, made the call on Thursday at the maiden Nigerian Aircraft Acquisition and Investment Summit in Lagos.

She urged investors and stakeholders to deepen partnerships that would drive long-term growth, describing the sector as resilient despite global economic pressures.

According to her, Nigeria's large population, strategic lo-

cation and diversified economy position it as a natural aviation hub for West and Central Africa.

Kuku said ongoing reforms, including airport digitalisation, improved safety measures, enhanced inter-agency coordination and cost-efficiency initiatives are aimed at creating an investor-friendly environment.

She identified key investment areas to include terminal upgrades, cargo and logistics services, commercial real estate, maintenance and repair operations, and aviation training.

"FAAN does not see investors as counterparties to be managed, but as partners to be engaged," she said, stressing the agency's commitment to continuous dialogue and policy refinement.



A COURTESY VISIT:

L-R: Chairman, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Oyo State Council, Comrade Akeem Abas; Oyo State Central Senatorial District Aspirant, Dr Ademola Ali and a member of the union, Mr Adewuyi Onigbide, during a courtesy visit of Dr Ademola to the NUJ Press Center in Ibadan on Thursday.

## PRP woos Atiku, Obi, Kwankwaso as ADC crisis deepens

LAGOS

The People's Redemption Party (PRP) has intensified efforts to rally opposition leaders, including former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Mr Peter Obi and Dr Rabiu Kwankwaso, to unite under its platform amid the deepening leadership crisis in the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

The Lagos State Chairman of the party, Mr James Adeshina, made the call on Thursday while reacting to the turmoil within the ADC, which has been adopted by some prominent opposition figures ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Adeshina, a former Lagos State Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) Chairman, described the crisis as a serious threat to opposition cohesion and Nigeria's democratic balance.

"Nigeria's political landscape is once again witnessing turbulence; this time, within the African Democratic Congress (ADC)," he said.

"What should have been a strong alternative platform is now entangled in internal disputes, leadership struggles and uncertainty."

He warned that the crisis weakens the ability of opposition forces to provide credible alternatives, creating room for

unchecked dominance and heightening fears of a drift toward a one-party state.

According to him, while both the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and ADC grapple with leadership challenges, the PRP remains a stable and credible alternative devoid of internal wranglings.

He called for bold and decisive action from opposition leaders, urging them to rethink strategies and collaborate in what he described as a shared mission to rescue Nigeria.

"I therefore extend a sincere invitation to key figures and stakeholders within ADC and beyond; leaders, such as Atiku

Abubakar, Rauf Aregbesola, Peter Obi, Rabiu Kwankwaso and others to approach the PRP," he said.

He argued that PRP, as Nigeria's oldest political party, offers a legacy of discipline, unity and ideological clarity, noting that it has largely avoided the internal crises affecting other parties.

"The truth is simple: Nigeria does not need multiple weak opposition parties; it needs one strong, united force capable of challenging the status quo," Adeshina added.

He described the ADC crisis as a wake-up call for stakeholders to rise above party loyalties and pursue a broader national agenda.

## N52.9m paid to families of 10 fallen police officers

ENUGU

The Enugu State Commissioner of Police, CP Mamman Giwa, on Thursday presented cheques totalling N52.9 million to 10 families of police personnel who died in the line of duty.

Giwa, who made the presentation on behalf of the Inspector-General of Police, Mr Olatunji Disu, said the gesture formed part of activities marking the 2026 National Police Day celebration themed

"Community Partnership: Building Trust."

He urged beneficiaries to make prudent use of the funds by investing in genuine and profitable ventures.

"I urge you to make judicious use of the money by investing it in genuine and profitable business ventures," he said.

The police commissioner cautioned recipients against falling prey to fraudulent investment schemes and advised them to seek divine guidance

before committing the funds.

"Be wary of friends or relatives who may try to lure you into dubious quick-return investments. Remember, you have dependants with responsibilities such as school fees and other expenses," he added.

Responding on behalf of the beneficiaries, Rev. Charles Ugwuagu, Regent of Oboji Enugu Autonomous Community, whose brother was among the deceased officers, expressed gratitude to the IGP and the command for the gesture.

"We appreciate the diligence and compassion that made this support possible," he said.

The National Police Day celebration commenced earlier in the week with environmental sanitation, a health outreach and public engagement on Monday, followed by a walkathon on Tuesday and sensitisation on electoral violence and road safety on Wednesday.

The grand finale is scheduled for April 7 at Eagle Square, Abuja, featuring a ceremonial parade and procession.

## NEWS

## JUDICIARY

# Court refuses order against Senator Kingibe over ADC membership dispute

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Thursday refused to grant an ap-

plication seeking to restrain Senator Ireti Kingibe from parading herself as a member of the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

Justice Peter Lifu, who delivered the ruling, directed that the plaintiffs, two executive members of ADC in Wuse Ward, Abuja must first serve Kingibe with a notice to show cause why the reliefs sought should not be granted. The court adjourned the matter to

May 20 for hearing of all pending applications, including a preliminary objection filed by the senator's counsel, Marshall Abubakar.

The plaintiffs, Mr Okezu Kanayo, Chairman of ADC Wuse Ward, and his Secretary, Mr Isaiah Samuel, had filed the

suit after Kingibe allegedly disregarded her suspension from the party.

Their lawyer, Kolawole Olowookere, SAN, argued that Kingibe continued to hold parallel meetings, issue press statements as an ADC member, and use her security detail to intimidate ward executives, creating a state of anarchy.

"The defendant/respondent's actions constitute a flagrant disregard for the internal dispute resolution and disciplinary mechanisms of the party,"

Olowookere submitted.

Kingibe, meanwhile, maintained that the court lacked jurisdiction over the matter, seeking to have the suit struck out and for N10 million in costs.

Justice Lifu, however, exercised his discretion in favour of the senator, allowing the matter to proceed to a full hearing.

This case underscores ongoing tensions within the ADC, which has recently experienced internal rifts over party leadership and disciplinary issues, particularly in the FCT.



PLENARY:

Chairman, Edo State House of Assembly Committee on Physical Planning, Urban Housing and Regional Development and Commerce and Industry, Hon Lecky Mustapha (left), presenting his Committee's report on a Bill for a Law to Establish the Edo State Housing Estate and Real Estate Regulation Agency to the Clerk of the House, Alhaji Yahaya Omogbai, during plenary recently.

PHOTO: GODWIN ISEGUAN.

## Woman sentenced to 3yrs for hemp trafficking

IBADAN

A Federal High Court in Ibadan on Thursday sentenced Sadiya Afolabi to three years' imprisonment for possession and trafficking of 900 grams of Cannabis Sativa.

Justice Nkeonye Maha convicted Afolabi after she pleaded guilty to two charges of unlawful possession and dealing in narcotics. Prosecutor Mrs A.A. Balogun told the court that the offences occurred on February 15, 2024, at Oje in Ibadan, fol-

lowing intelligence-led operations by NDLEA officers.

The judge took into account that Afolabi was a first-time offender who expressed remorse and a willingness to reform.

The two sentences will run concurrently, and the seized cannabis will be destroyed.

This case forms part of ongoing efforts by the NDLEA to combat drug trafficking across southwestern Nigeria, with authorities emphasising deterrence and strict enforcement of Section 11(c) of the NDLEA Act, Cap N30, Laws of the Federation 2004.

## Court dismisses Sowore's suit against DSS, Meta

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Thursday dismissed a fundamental rights enforcement suit filed by Omoyele Sowore, publisher of Sahara Reporters, against the Department of State Services (DSS) and Meta Platforms Inc.

Justice Mohammed Umar held that Sowore's claims, which alleged violations of his

rights to fair hearing, freedom of expression, and association, lacked merit.

The court awarded a total of N1.5 million in costs against Sowore, N500,000 each to the DSS, its Director-General and Meta.

Sowore had challenged the takedown of a Facebook post in which he described President Bola Tinubu as a "criminal," following which Meta allegedly deactivated his account

on instructions from the DSS.

Sowore argued that the action deprived him of his constitutional rights.

Justice Umar ruled that the right to fair hearing under Section 36(1) of the 1999 Constitution applies only to judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings, not actions by private companies like Meta.

On freedom of expression, the judge noted that constitutional rights are not absolute

and must be exercised without harming the reputation or rights of others.

"The DSS and its DG, in reporting the applicant's post to Meta, acted within the law. Meta's actions were conducted under its own policies and independent judgment," the judge added.

The ruling highlights the balance between constitutional freedoms and corporate or state regulatory powers, particularly in the digital space.

## Farmer faces court over alleged cutlass assault

OKITIPUPA (ONDO)

A 34-year-old farmer, Soji Ayetan, appeared before the Okitipupa Chief Magistrates' Court, Ondo State, on Thursday, charged with assaulting a colleague with a cutlass.

According to the prosecutor,

Insp Ayodeji Omoyeigha, the incident occurred on February 2, around 12:30 p.m., at Atan farm-land in Ode-Ajagba, Irele Local Government Area, following a dispute over land boundaries.

Ayetan allegedly attacked the complainant, Chief Lisa Edaomola, causing bodily injuries.

Ayetan pleaded not guilty to

two charges of assault and misdemeanour under Sections 517 and 355 of the Criminal Code, Cap.37, Vol. 1, Law of Ondo State, 2006.

The court granted bail of N100,000 and one surety of equal amount, who must reside within the court's jurisdiction and provide proof of two years'

tax payment.

The matter was adjourned to April 17 for continuation of proceedings.

Incidents of farm-related disputes escalating to violence have been rising in parts of Ondo State, reflecting the challenges of land ownership and communal tensions in rural communities.

## Igbo leader decries morgue culture, urges swift burial of dead

AWKA

Chief Rommy Ezeonwuka, Chairman of the Ogidili Igbo Foundation, has condemned the prolonged preservation of corpses, describing the practice as unchristian and alien to Igbo culture.

Speaking with journalists in Awka on Thursday, Ezeonwuka criticised what he termed the "celebration of dead bod-

ies" in Igbo land, urging an end to the practice.

He called on governors of Southeast states to take urgent steps to decongest mortuaries across the region, noting that the prolonged storage of corpses has overwhelmed both public and private facilities.

Ezeonwuka urged the people, as they prepare for Easter, to reflect on the biblical account of the death and burial of Jesus Christ, and embrace

prompt burial practices to allow the deceased continue their "eternal journey."

While noting that funeral ceremonies could be postponed, he stressed that interment should take place shortly after death.

"Preserving dead bodies is not our culture in Igbo land; it is alien to us," he said.

"In the past, when someone died, they were buried within 24 hours. Family members could

wait briefly for close relatives to pay their last respects, but burial was done before noon.

"There was no mortuary business then. Today, families leave corpses in morgues for over a year. What is the joy in holding corpses hostage when their spirit is gone?"

Drawing from the Bible, he cited the burial of Jesus Christ, noting that Joseph of Arimathea ensured His immediate burial.

## Young man gets 6 months for stealing window frames

KAFANCHAN (KADUNA)

A 25-year-old man, Samuel Ponring, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment by a Customary Court in Kafanchan for stealing aluminium window frames from Solid Rock Primary and Secondary School.

Judge Mrs Patience Baryat imposed concurrent sentences for criminal trespass, mischief, and theft, with fines offered as

an alternative.

Ponring had been apprehended by security guards while attempting to remove two aluminium frames valued at N70,000.

He confessed to the crime and pleaded for leniency.

The court's sentence reflects the judiciary's focus on curbing petty crime in Kaduna State, which has seen a rise in thefts targeting schools and other community facilities.

## EFCC seeks permanent forfeiture of 57 properties linked to Malami

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has called on the Federal High Court to permanently forfeit 57 properties allegedly linked to former Attorney General and Minister of Justice Abubakar Malami, SAN, to the Federal Government.

In a motion filed by EFCC lawyers Jibrin Okutepe, SAN, and Ekele Iheanacho, SAN, the commission argued that the respondents failed to present sufficient evidence to overturn an interim forfeiture order issued earlier this year.

The properties, which include assets owned by Malami and several companies, are suspected to be proceeds of unlawful activities. Investigations involved financial audits, verification of property owner-

ship documents, and valuation of assets in multiple states, including Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano, and the FCT.

EFCC highlighted that Malami's official earnings between 2015 and 2023, including salary, allowances, estacodes, and severance totalled approximately N355 million, far below the estimated value of the properties in question.

The agency submitted that the assets were acquired without necessary permits or approvals and are disproportionate to his known lawful income.

The commission is seeking final forfeiture under Section 17 of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud-Related Offences Act, 2006, emphasizing that the proceeding is non-conviction based and intended to recover assets suspected to be proceeds of corruption and abuse of office.

## Foreign

## NEWS

**'Be serious... don't speak every day': Macron criticises Trump approach to Iran war**

The Iran war requires a "serious" approach that does not change every day, Emmanuel Macron has said, in an apparent reference to US President Donald Trump's seemingly contradictory remarks about the conflict.

"This is not a show. We are talking about war and peace and the lives of men and women," the French president told journalists upon arrival in South Korea for a state visit.

"When you want to be serious you don't say every day the opposite of what you said the day before," Macron added.

"And maybe you shouldn't be speaking every day. You should just let things quieten down."

Macron was answering questions on the US-Israel war in Iran, which has now entered its second month. France and other European countries have supported some of the US operations in the region, but have

so far resisted getting dragged into the war.

Trump and his administration have so far offered mixed messages on the conflict, at various times suggesting that a ceasefire was near, that the war had already been won or that the US was going to fight on.

Macron also addressed Trump's recent comments in which the US president said he was reconsidering his country's membership of Nato.

"Alliances like Nato are valuable because of what is unspoken – meaning the trust behind them," Macron said, arguing that casting doubt on one's commitment to the organisation emptied it of its substance.

Partners sign agreements and show up if issues arise, Macron added, "rather than commenting on them every day to say that you will or will not respect them".

"I feel like there is too much chat-

ter, it's all over the place," he said.

He added he was unwilling to comment on an operation that the US and the Israelis "decided on by themselves", Macron said. "They then lament that they are alone in an operation they decided on alone. It's not our operation."

Macron also mentioned the US strikes on Iran in June 2025, which Trump said had "obliterated" Iranian nuclear facilities.

However, in the wake of the February 2026 war the US president said it was the "last best chance to strike at Iran's nuclear weapons programme".

"I remind you that six months ago were told that everything had been destroyed and all had been sorted out," Macron noted.

He argued that international observers were needed to check the nuclear development situation in Iran, and a framework

to prevent further enriching.

"You still have today and you'll still have in the future people who have the know-how, hidden laboratories, etc. So it's not targeted military action even lasting a few weeks which can sort out the nuclear problem for good."

Trump has been on the offensive against France, which he accuses of failing to help in the war on Iran.

At a private lunch on Wednesday, Trump mocked Macron by imitating a French accent and saying that his wife Brigitte "treats him extremely badly" and that Macron was still "recovering from the right to the jaw".

Trump was likely referring to a 2025 video which showed Macron being shoved in the face by Brigitte.

Macron dismissed the comments as "neither elegant nor up to standard".

**Man dies in storm as Saharan dust shrouds crete**

A man has died near Athens as a storm hits parts of Greece with gale-force winds and flooding, while a Saharan dust storm enveloped the island of Crete.

The man was found under a car in the Nea Makri rural area early on Thursday, according to the fire department.

Storm Erminio has flooded streets, closed some schools and moored ferries. Meanwhile, some flights were disrupted on Crete on Wednesday after dust from an African storm filled the air, turning the sky reddish-orange.

The weather is expected to be bad on Thursday in most areas of the country "with long-lasting and intense rains and storms and possibly with local hail", according to the national meteorological service.

A red warning is in place in Crete, mainly in the west and south, from midday until late on Thursday night.

The fire department received 674 calls for assistance from Wednesday through to the early hours of Thursday morning. The majority were in the Attica region that encompasses Athens, with most calls concerning fallen trees.

High winds have kept ferries moored in ports, with Greek media reporting some departures may resume on Thursday, weather permitting.

Streets as well as the basement of the local police station in Nea Makri were flooded. A bridge was knocked down on the island of Poros and vehicles have reportedly been swept away. Some schools have also been closed.

**US lifts sanctions on Venezuelan interim leader Delcy Rodríguez**

The United States has lifted sanctions on Venezuela's interim president, Delcy Rodríguez.

The move comes less than three months after US forces seized the country's previous leader, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife in a military raid in Caracas and took them to New York to face drug trafficking charges.

Rodríguez, a close ally of Maduro who served as his vice-president, had been placed on the sanctions list in 2018, with the US accusing her of undermining democracy.

She was sworn in as interim president by Venezuela's National Assembly, which is dominated by Maduro loyalists, days after the US raid and has been described by Trump as "a terrific person".

Rodríguez welcomed her removal from the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List.

Those named on the list have their assets in the United States blocked and US nationals are barred from doing business with them.

In a post on X, Rodríguez called it "a significant step in the right direction to normalise and strengthen relations between our countries".

White House spokeswoman Anna Kelly said the move showed the progress that had been made "between our two countries to promote stability, support economic recovery, and advance political reconciliation in Venezuela".

"As President Trump has said, Delcy Rodríguez is doing a great job and is working with the United States very well," Kelly added.

Opposition activists in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, however, were critical of the move, arguing that the US should exert pressure on Rodríguez to release all political prisoners still held in the country's jails.

The release of political prison-

ers had been one of the key demands US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had made of Rodríguez in the wake of Maduro's removal.

And while the National Assembly has passed an amnesty law and hundreds of detainees have been freed, prisoners' rights group Foro Penal says that almost 500 political prisoners remain behind bars.

The lifting of sanctions is the latest sign of warming relations between the Trump administration and Rodríguez's team.

Earlier this week, the US officially reopened its embassy in Caracas, seven years after closing it.

A Venezuelan diplomatic team has also been dispatched to the US to reopen its embassy in Washington.

In the months since Maduro's removal from office, several high-level US delegations have travelled to Venezuela to discuss how the US can expand its access to Venezuela's oil and mineral wealth.

Critics of Rodríguez however have bemoaned the fact that there has been little talk of democratic elections.

Opposition leader María Corina Machado, who has been living in exile since leaving Venezuela to collect the Nobel Peace Prize she was awarded in December, met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Tuesday.

Despite having been sidelined by Trump in favour of Rodríguez, Machado struck an optimistic note, calling the meeting "excellent" and praising the secretary of state's "dedication to democracy, freedom and Venezuelans' well-being".

Speaking to Fox News after the meeting, Rubio insisted that the US was making progress in Venezuela.

Pointing to the three-prong plan he said the US was pursuing, he assured viewers that Venezuela had moved into the second phase: that of recovery.



**FRANCE PRESIDENT:** Macron calls Trump's remarks on his marriage 'inelegant'

**Infant shot dead on New York street by men on motorbike, police say**

A seven-month-old girl was shot and killed while being pushed along a street in New York City during "broad daylight", police said.

Police believe the baby was the unintended victim of a suspected gang-related shooting.

Footage from the scene shows two men driving a motorbike against the flow of traffic through the Williamsburg, Brooklyn, neighbourhood. A man on the back of the motorbike takes out a gun and fires "at least two rounds", New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch said at a news conference.

The bike then crashed and the suspected shooter was apprehended, but a "massive" manhunt was under way for

the driver, she said.

"A life that had barely begun was taken in an instant," New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani said.

"Today is a devastating reminder of how much more work there is to be done to combat gun violence across this city."

Several adults and children, two of whom were in carriers, had been on a street corner when the shooting occurred.

The seven-month-old's parents ran for cover in a nearby shop, where they realised their child had been shot, the BBC's US partner CBS reported.

"All the kids started ducking in the corner. The family went to the store and the mom started screaming when she noticed the baby was bleeding from

[her] head," witness Bernius Maldonado told CBS.

Footage from inside the shop, published by the New York Post, shows the moment the child's mother, as she's about to pick up the infant, notices the injuries.

The mother then becomes hysterical, and starts jumping up and down with her hands clasped behind her head.

Emergency services were called at 13:21 local time (17:21 GMT).

The child was taken to nearby Woodhull Hospital where she was pronounced dead. Police reported no one else killed or injured in the incident.

"As a mother, I cannot imagine the pain that this family is feeling or the grief that they now carry with them," Tisch

said. "It is unspeakable."

Footage seen by police showed the suspects crashing into a car shortly after fleeing the scene.

Both suspects were thrown from the moped - but the rear passenger landed so hard he lost "both of his shoes", Tisch said.

An ambulance was called for the injured man who was brought to Brooklyn Hospital, where he was then taken into police custody.

Investigators said they believe he fits the description of the shooter, based on the clothing he was wearing and his appearance, but he was taken into custody as part of an unrelated investigation.

No one has been charged in the shooting.

## NEWS

## Foreign

## Magnitude 7.4 earthquake hits off Indonesia, killing one

A 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck in the Molucca Sea off Indonesia's Ternate island early Thursday, killing at least one person.

The quake, which struck at 06:48 local time (22:48 GMT) at a depth of 35km, sparked tsunami warnings which have since been withdrawn.

A 70-year-old woman in North Sulawesi died after being crushed by building debris, and another person broke their leg after jumping off a building, Indonesia's national news agency Antara reported.

While the region experiences high levels of seismic activity, some residents told the BBC this was one of the strongest earthquakes they have felt in at least the past six years.

The Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center initially warned that tsunami waves less than 0.3m (1 ft) "were possible" along the coasts of Guam, Japan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Taiwan. The tsunami alert was lifted after two hours.

Journalist Isvara Safitri, who lives in central Manado, recalled how furniture in her room shook for several seconds.

"It was really strong... My head even felt dizzy," Safitri told BBC Indonesian.

Even the roads outside the house were shaking, she said, adding that the earthquake "feels like the strongest" she's experienced over the past six years.

Yayuk Oktiani, who lives in Bitung, a city on the north-eastern coast of Sulawesi, said she often experiences tremors, "but they're never as strong as this one".

Oktiani was at the market when "everything started shaking". Several stores experienced power outages and as the tremors got stronger, people fled, she told the BBC.

She headed straight for her child's school, which is located "very close" to the sea.

"The situation there was chaotic... The teachers immediately told parents to bring their children home, even though they had only just arrived," she told the BBC.

In Ternate, resident Budi Nurgianto said the walls in his house vibrated for what felt like more than a minute. He rushed outside, into a scene of panic.

"There were many people outside... I even saw some people leaving their house without having finished their shower," he told AFP news agency.



**SCHOOL IN KAMPALA:**

Worried parents gathered outside the school in Kampala after news of the attack spread.

## Four toddlers stabbed to death at Ugandan nursery school

Four children - aged between one and three - have been "brutally stabbed and killed" at a nursery school in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, police said.

The three boys and a girl were killed instantly, said a police spokesperson, who added that the suspect had used more than one knife during the attack.

A 34-year-old man has been detained but "the motive behind the killings is still under investigation", Uganda's police force added in a brief statement on X.

Angry parents had tried to lynch him before he was detained, news agency AFP quotes police spokesperson Racheal Kawala as saying.

Kawala said the suspect had visited the school earlier this week to enquire about enrolling his child and was told to return on Thursday.

"He paid for admission [and] after that proceeded and at-

tacked these children, killing four of them instantly," she said.

The other 10 children who were in the Ggaba Early Childhood Development Program School at the time have been handed back to their parents, she added.

Investigators are at the scene and Kawala said more details would be provided later. Police chief Abas Byakagaba and other senior officers have also been at the school and have been briefed on what had happened.

Byakagaba urged the public to remain calm while the police continue to do their work.

The tragic incident has sent shock waves across the country, raising serious concerns about the safety of learners in the East African nation.

Videos of the aftermath being shared on social media show images of crowds of angry and distressed people, believed to be parents seeking news of their children.

## Guinea-Bissau: Civil society activist Vigário Luís Balanta found dead

Vigário Luís Balanta, a Guinea-Bissau civil society activist and a critic of the country's military junta, was found dead on Tuesday.

Balanta's body was found in the Ndam area, about 30 kilometres from the capital Bissau, according to local media.

Reports from media and fellow activists say the 35-year-old advocate was violently attacked and beaten to death.

The Civil Society Social Pact, a civil society organisation, paid tribute to an "inspiring figure for the youth of Guinea-Bissau, who advocated for building a dignified future in the country, rather than resorting to emigration," according to remarks reported by RFI.

The organisation, of which Balanta was the spokesperson, also called for an independent investigation into his death, with the involvement of the Guinean League for Human

Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Vigário Luís Balanta was the president of the Pó di Terra revolutionary movement and a vocal critic of Guinea-Bissau's transitional authorities.

He denounced the country's protest ban and demanded the publication of the results of the presidential and legislative elections held in November 2025.

The military junta led by General Horta N'tam has ruled the country since a coup toppled former president Umaro Sissoco Embaló after the latest elections.

The transitional government condemned Balanta's "violent death" in a statement on Tuesday. Authorities also described the crime as "barbaric" and demanded an immediate investigation into the circumstances of the event.

## Iranian nobel laureate suffered suspected heart attack in prison, family says

The brother of Iranian Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi says he fears her life is in imminent danger after she suffered a suspected heart attack in prison in north-western Iran.

Hamidreza Mohammadi, who is based in Norway, told the BBC that the 53-year-old human rights activist was found unconscious in her bed by fellow inmates at Zanjan Prison last week.

She was taken to the prison infirmary but officials refused to transfer her to a hospital despite her history of heart and lung problems, he said. She also suffers from severe blood

pressure fluctuations.

He demanded that she be released immediately for a thorough medical examination.

He also warned that strikes and explosions near the prison since the start of the US-Israeli war with Iran a month ago had only added to her stress.

"This war has had a terrible effect on prisoners in Iran. If the prison gets hit, if the prisoners need immediate medical attention, they will not get anything and their lives are in danger," he told the BBC's Newsday programme.

"It's been really difficult for her family... Her children have gone through a lot. Now they experience very uncertain time when they don't know even if in the future there will be any peace or if their mother is going to live or die."

Narges Mohammadi, the vice-president of the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Iran, was awarded the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize for her activism against female oppression in Iran and promoting human rights.

She has spent more than a decade of her life in prison. In 2021, she began serving a 13-year sentence on charges of committing "propaganda activity against the state" and

"collusion against state security", which she denied.

In December 2024, she was given a temporary release from Tehran's notorious Evin prison on medical grounds.

She continued campaigning while undergoing treatment and was arrested in the north-eastern city of Mashhad last December after giving a speech at the memorial ceremony of a fellow human rights activist. Her family said she was taken to hospital after being beaten on the head and neck during the arrest.

A few weeks later, protests against Iran's clerical establishment swept across the country. At least 6,508 protesters were killed and 53,000 others arrested in an unprecedented crackdown by security forces on the unrest, according to the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA).

In early February, Mohammadi was sentenced by a Revolutionary Court in Mashhad to an additional seven-and-a-half years in prison after being convicted of "gathering and collusion" and "propaganda activities", her lawyer said.

She was transferred without warning the following week to Zanjan prison and has been al-

lowed only limited communication with her family since then.

Last Sunday, her legal team and one family member were allowed to visit her in prison under heightened surveillance.

The Free Narges Coalition said in a statement on Tuesday that "her general health was extremely poor, and she appeared pale and weak with significant weight loss when brought to the visitation room by a prison nurse".

It then cited Mohammadi's cellmates as saying on 24 March that she had been "found unconscious in her bed with her eyes rolled back" and that this lasted for more than an hour. She was carried to the prison infirmary by fellow inmates, where medication was administered to restore her consciousness, the coalition added.

"Despite this medical emergency and evident indications of a heart attack, authorities refused to transfer Mohammadi to a hospital or allow her to visit a specialist."

Mohammadi also reported that she had suffered debilitating headaches, nausea and double vision since her violent arrest, and that bruises were still visible on her body, according to the coalition.

## Mozambique clears IMF debt early

Mozambique has fully repaid its debt to the International Monetary Fund, clearing more than 630 million dollars ahead of schedule. At the start of March, the country still owed over 515 million in Special Drawing Rights.

By the end of the month, that figure had dropped to zero, making Mozambique the only country among dozens to fully settle its IMF credit during that period.

The early repayment could

strengthen the government's position as it looks to secure new financial support. A previous IMF programme, approved in 2022, was suspended in 2025 after only part of the funds had been disbursed.

Mozambique had originally been expected to continue repayments through 2029, but that timeline has now been wiped out.

Discussions are already underway about a potential new programme, aimed at supporting economic stability and re-

inforcing ties between Mozambique and the IMF.

While officials have yet to comment publicly, clearing the debt is widely seen as a key step toward unlocking future funding.

Mozambique has a low-income, developing economy that relies heavily on agriculture, natural resources, and foreign investment.

Around 60-65% of the population lives below the national poverty line, with higher rates in rural areas.

# Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

## Filmmaker or audience: Who is king?

The people make the king. Without the subject, there is no king. The king needs a palace, a throne and the people to create a cultural balance. Therefore, in the world of movies, who is king? The filmmaker or the audience? As witnessed by the people for over a century, we have noticed that the darkened theater has always served as a secular cathedral where a specific power struggle unfolds. It is a loudly silent tug-of-war over the soul of the audio-visual medium.

On one side of the lens stands the Filmmaker, the visionary architect who claims the right to create and lead. On the other side of the screen sits the Audience, the ultimate benefactor of the creation, whose attention and capital validates the entire business of the show.

In the contemporary landscape of streaming algorithms and elevated horror, the question has never been more pressing. This has led to a question like, In the kingdom of cinema, who truly wears the crown?

To argue that the filmmaker is king is to boldly defend the sanctity of Auteur Theory, whose perspective suggests that a movie is the singular expression of its creator's mind and soul. When we watch movies, irrespective of their genres, we are not just consuming content as we may think, the fact is, we are at that moment trespassing into a meticulously curated world.

The filmmaker-as-king model posits that true art cannot be democratic. If a director spends his scarce time wondering what a focus group in my village or city thinks of a third-act twist, the art becomes diluted. It becomes content, safe, and designed for maximum digestibility.

Until a creator creates, there is no creation. While the filmmaker as creator may know what he wants, the audiences rarely know what they want until they see it. The filmmaker dictates the trend and the audiences follow.

Cinema is a window to the filmmaker's mind before the world. Therefore, if we do not see the filmmaker as king, the window is just a mirror reflecting the audience's existing biases back at them. History always smiles at creators and their creation, and the filmmakers would always be remembered with their names inscribed on the soul of history as creative risk takers, and not for the demographic data of the people who sat in seats to watch and appreciate their creation.

In this process of creating, the audience is a guest. Their role is to watch, interpret, appreciate and perhaps be transformed. They are subjects to the filmmaker's sovereign imagination.

However, a king needs a throne, the people and without a kingdom he is merely a person in a fancy re-



galia. We all know that without the audience, a film is just a series of chemical reactions on a strip of celluloid or a collection of binary code on a hard drive. Without the human presence and gaze, the completion of the creation by the filmmaker is not achieved. In contemporary society, the film audience has moved from being passive observers to active participants. They do this via the social media, box office metrics, and review bombing. The audience exerts a level of control that would have been unthinkable during the Golden Age of Hollywood.

Cinema is the most expensive art form in existence. Unlike a poet who needs only a pen, a filmmaker needs more. He needs money. That money is an investment in the audience's time. If the "subjects" decide to revolt and stay home, that ultimately brings the reign of the filmmaker to an abruptly end. Traditionally, the filmmaker's intent matters less than the audience's experience, the moment the movie is released. The genre of any movie is determined and defined by the audience. If a director intend the mood of some scenes to be tragic, but the audience instead finds it hilarious, the film instantly becomes a comedy. The audience holds the pen to defines the reality of the work.

In the age of infinite choice, the audience's "click" is the ultimate vote. They decide which movies are relevant and which should be relegated to the digital bargain bin. However, we cannot discuss this power dynamic between the filmmaker and the audience without acknowledging the "Grey Eminence" behind the throne: The Algorithm. Today, the tension is not just between the creator and the consumer; it's between both of them and the data. Subconsciously, streaming platforms now use "Completion Rates" and "Hook Points" to tell filmmakers how to pace the storyline of their movies and also lead audiences to what they should like. This creates a feedback loop where the filmmaker power of creation is pressured to serve the audience's predicted desires before the audience even know they have them. In this scenario, the king and his

subjects are both under the control and influence of the Data. Does that make data king? No. Does it make data a prominent voice in the kingdom? Yes.

I might be wrong but methink that perhaps the mistake in all these lies in the metaphor of "King" itself, which implies a hierarchy of dominance. The greatest moments in cinema history occur not when one side conquers the other, but when they exist in a state of productive unison and tension. Consider the career of most auteur filmmakers with distinct movie visual languages, yet possess an almost supernatural sensitivity to the audience's pulse. They do not pander; they communicate.

No filmmaker creates from nothing to emptiness. They create with a purpose and for such creations to be viewed and appreciated. Therefore, any filmmaker who ignores his audience entirely, would be faced with an exercise in vanity, like a monarch talking to himself in an empty palace with nobody around. Conversely, when an audience would need to see a movie, the creation of a filmmaker to enable them dictates every beat of life of that movie, otherwise their results, decisions would be sterile, an illusion that lacks the spark of life.

If we however define a King as the one who holds the power to create, that ultimately is the Filmmaker. He is the source, the spark, the breath and the architect. But if we define a King as the one who holds the power of life and death over the work, that definitely is the Audience. The filmmaker brings the wine, but the audience brings the thirst. One provides the dream; the other provides the belief that makes the dream real. Such is the life of the filmmaker and the audience in the world we live in. This goes to show that the crown is actually the experience itself. It doesn't belong to the person behind the camera or the person in the theatre seat. It exists in the silent light that passes between them. Cinema, which is the bridge that connects the filmmaker to the audience is not a dictators but a conversation, and in this regard no one is king as everyone is simply, and profoundly, heard.

## TATAFO



### ACTING NA CAREER?

Anoda day don land and I hope all of us de kule even dooh say Naija don Balablu finish. As de mata com de so, na how to survive all of us com de now. Wetin make me bring dis yanings be say, to even survive nowadays for Naija, person suppose get job wey go de giv am kuza wellemlly. So dia for, abeg acting na work? I no say na work but wetin I mean be say person fit take as job to take de pay rent, feed family and pay bills for Naija?

Abeg, make we talk true instead of to de tink say I de yan to fall actors hands, whoosai, instead na to make us quick use awa tongue to count awa teeth to de sure say we neva comot from de lane of survival wey we de since. I rememba for de olden days for Naija, if pikin tell him papa say he wan to com be actor, de kain corna eye wey go greet am plus even chop slap join sef, reach to let am no say him don mis-yan. Our parents as a dat time beliv say acting na for pipo wey no get focus, wey dust cover dem eyes, pipo wey just wan dey play arand, or pipo wey no go school. Dem want say make you be Doctor, Lawyer, or Engineer. But as tins don com be so for dis 2026, de tori don change finish.

De short ansa to dat kwesion na, Yes, acting na ogbonge career! But wait o, e still get as e be. No be just to show ya face for camera and start to cry or laugh, naim go make kuza de pour laik water oooo. Work wey steady difrent from wetin oyinbos dem de call hobby. If you wan take acting as ya bread and butter, you gats ready to work laik person wey de search and dig for gold. Nollywood no be wetin e be bifor. If Una rememba, dat time na "home video" wey the sound and picture go dey shake, naim we de do dat time, bifor we com expert and don carri awa film enta global stage.

All of us no say all de ogbonge film platforms de land Naija to do films or buy from de producers, but again, if una rison am no be evri day mata. Bicos, if you as actor do one or two films today com de wait fill mani months befor anoda job land, dat na kasala. Again, na true say som actors kuza long pass railyway but na how mani out of the thousands upon thousands de dat kain level for Naija? Som pipo de yan am say kuza de wella for film only if you sabi de work. How na?

If una notice, una go see say mani pipo de go univasiti to go study acting and how to do film. Dat one show say, de world don de no wetin de and also de invest kuza put. I no go lie, na true but de actors dem don jabrata pass de pipo wey de do de films. Mani pipo wey nor even near skool sef don even popular and get kuza pass de ones wey jus graduate from univasiti.

You no fit jus wake up one morni

say you wan be actor bicos you sabi "do drama" for inside ya house. Acting na wetin person suppose learn wella, and laik doctor work, you must to need mani tools to take enta de proper track. Talent na de first tin and foundation wey you must get, but training na de building. You fit get nashora talent, but you need to learn how to control ya bodi and voice, how to use ya bodi and voice take enta beta karacta. Even if you no go Univasiti go study Theater Arts, or film skool, you gets attend film festivals, workshops and masterclasses to fit make de pipo love ya acting. Dis industri no be for soft pipo. You go go auditions tire, dem go tell you plenti "no" for de difrent audition tire. Sometimes kpakpa, dem no go even call you back. You gats get heart of stone to fit kontinu even wen tins dry laik desert.

For dis film bizness, who you no, follow mata wella. No be say you need to do "rub my back, I rub your back" with producers and directors bicos you be girl, but you need to sabi directors, producers, and fellow actors wey go de giv you hope for ya talent and wia film auditions for de shele. Also de attend film premieres, join acting guilds, and follow de right pipo for sosha media.

Make we no lie giv awa sef, de kuza no de start to jus flow sharp-sharp. As a Jonny-jus-com actor, you fit even de use ya transport kuza go set. Dis tins I de yan you so na real bicos de hustle de real. I swear, go do mani free jobs or small-pay jobs jus to build ya own "showreel" wey be video wey go show ya work). As person wey de focus, e get wia you go do reach, you go com begin de get steady work. Pipo go com begin de recognize ya face. You don becom popular be dat. Dis time so, you fit begin pay ya bills and flex ya sef. Dis na wia de big boys and girls de. If you reach here, ya name alone na brand and na so difrent companies go de purshu you with endorsements.

I no go lie you, de acting work de pay, but e de take time. No be "get rich quick" mata at all. But as acting sweet reach, na so e get him own wahala laik de one I yan bifor. Work nor de com steady and If you no sabi save kuza, hunger and bills go almost kpai you. If you don start to get small fame, how you go take stay for de game so dat kuza go de flow in laik river wota? Na to first de humble. Nobody wan work with actor wey get too much iyanga. If you de hard to manage for set, walahi, ya career don jam rock be dat as producers go start to run from you.

So dia for, you must learn how to manage ya brand wella bifor e jam Olu-mo rock Always check wetin you dey post for sosha media plus how you de behave for public. Bicos, na ya brand naim be wetin go bring endorsements for you oooo!

# ArtsWorld

with Francis Odupute  
08023680030



## Creative philanthropy: How a theatre troupe turned street children into music, drama & dance starlets

Yes! Indeed, “everyone is a product of his mind.” You think you’re handicap and physically challenged hence your excuse for inability to make ends meet or make a difference? Wait until you meet young, audacious and multi-talented Sanni Awal Itopa, an orphan and one of the street children now calling the shots in a growing theatre troupe popularly known as ANGELINA THEATRE TROUPE in the ecotourism-rich town of Okene in Kogi State.

Young Sanni was the toast of the day to many participants when his cultural dance group performed to add pep to the opening ceremony of the 1st international Visual Art Teachers Workshop held at the Federal College of Education in Otite, Okehi LGA, Kogi State, recently. The skilful and distinctive stunts displayed by the physically challenged young man amid his cultural dance team mates attracted side comments from highly impressed and excited participants, and when some newsmen later cornered the leadership of his group outside the hall, more imbuing discoveries were made.

When a graduate of Theatre Art from the University of Ibadan once hit the streets of Okene in quest of young talents, what was he expecting? As far as he was concerned, Onsachi Peter Adeiza’s vision was clear, and his passion to make a difference knew no bounds, the odds notwithstanding. Speaking to the press at the occasion, the Angelina Theatre Troupe director explained that “When I came home, I began to go round advertising that I needed young people, who were on the streets helplessly, to come, let’s start doing something artistically that will help us in life. And by God’s grace

*We are determined to make the entire world a better place through our theatre activities. Presently the Angelina theatre troupe is at the pre-production stage of a mega movie production, which would be coming up very soon*

we’ve been able to take a good number of them out of the streets.”

Pointing at Sanni, the physically challenged dancer, Peter said, “...he is an orphan. Though he’s still in this state, he’s an orphan. We embarked on secondary school youth enlightenment activities; we do music, drama and dance. I went to his school then, that is, Community Secondary School, Ogamunana and he was there as one of the students. I saw him and I said would you like to be one of us? He said if I allowed him to... Okay, everyone ought to register financially with a token to come in; I told him just come with us and he came with us, since then...”

“The first thing I did with him was to build his mind because everyone is a product of his mind. I built his mind that made him believe that nothing anyone with double hands can do that he cannot do. As you see him he fetches water from the well by himself, washes his clothes by himself and takes his

bath and every other thing that you can do with both of your hands he can also do by himself. He’s a potential actor, he has had a song done on CD, he sings now and right now he’s a student in the department of Accountancy here in Kogi State University, Lokoja, he’s in year one...this is how we’re moving up and down to get money to source for his school fees...so as we do performance here today, any little we get he takes his share and saves for his school fees as well, like every other one of us does. So he really believes that he can do more than you can do with your two hands.”

Another spotlight in the group was little miss Precious Isoiza Peteq Tanki, a beautiful girl of about seven years of age whose graceful and energetic dance steps added verve to the performances by Angelina Theatre Troupe at the occasion. The duo of physically challenged Sanni and little Precious kept both the high table and the pew at the occasion on their feet

with rounds of applause renting the air for their energy, dexterity, creativity and rhythmic dance steps alongside their teammates in the cultural dance performance. Indeed, this is what the youngsters know best how to do very well in order to eke a living, to pay their school fees and stay off the streets of Kogi.

But there is more to Angelina Theatre Troupe; according to a release to the Press, the troupe is actually “the professional theatre troupe in Kogi State.” They are involved in Theatre for Development (TFD) and Community Theatre. Onsachi Peter Adeiza, the present Director who studied theatre arts at the premier University (University of Ibadan) said that the troupe is out to educate, inform, transform, correct the ills of the society, discourage violence and encourage peace. He added that they have been working selflessly and endlessly to promote the good culture of Ebiraland and that of Africa as a whole.

According to Director Peter Adeiza, “The Angelina theatre troupe through her own effort has been moving from one secondary school to another to hold youth enlightenment programmes through Drama, Music and Dance since they started in April 2008. They even organise free tutorial classes for S.S.C.E. G.C.E. JAMB U.T.M.E. etc and fill in the gap when teachers are on strike for whatever reason. Many of the benefactors of this programme are graduates from Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education etc. While some are under-graduates and others are seeking admission. They have been able to pick and help many orphans, handicapped and less privileged from the various streets of the community

and engage them in artistic activities rather than leaving them to become the workshop of the wicked ones.

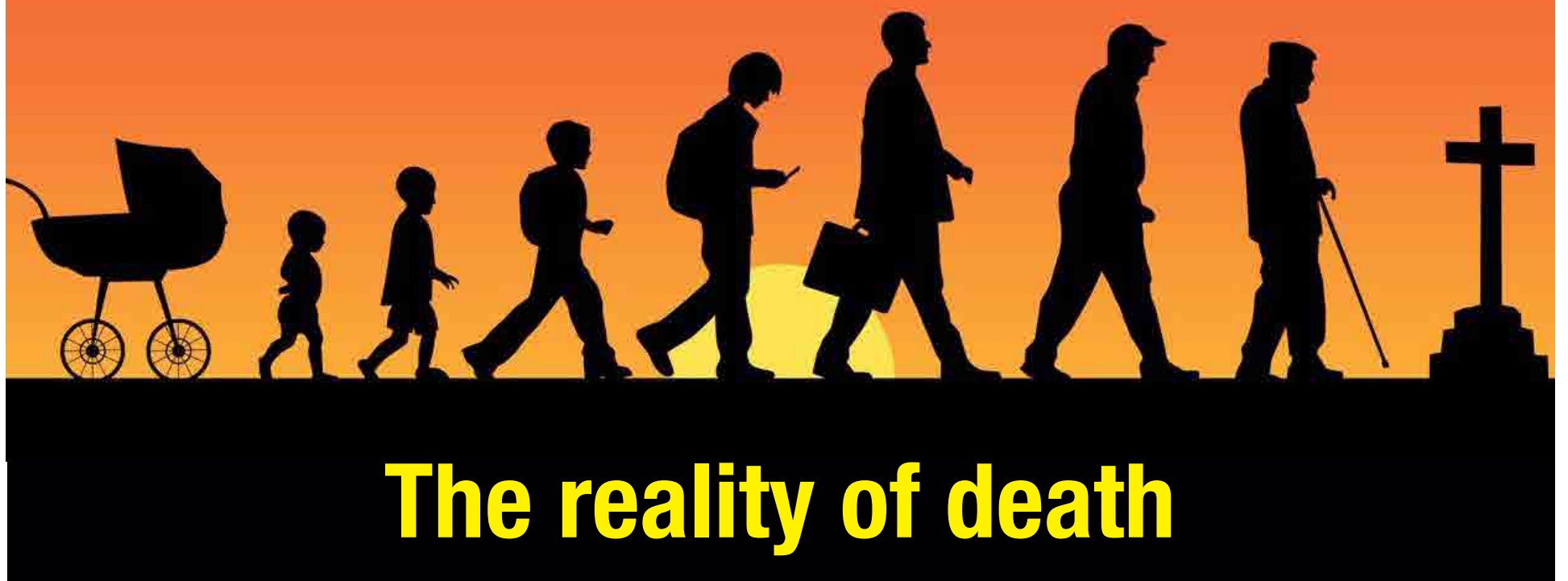
“However, while attending to the youth enlightenment and empowerment, the troupe did not spare the Ebiraland art and culture development. They have worked endlessly and are still working on the modernisation of the crude musical art of the land. Now, the Angelina Theatre Troupe has successfully modernized the Ebiraland ancient Ikede Music by introducing the total use of western musical instruments like Key-board, guitar, Flutes Trumpet, Saxophone, etc, into it. The combination of this Okanga Obanyi (Big drum) and this western music instrumentation produces the most creative, informative, educative, melodious, and danceable music of this time.”

Onsachi Peter Adeiza told *The NIGERIAN OBSERVER* that he has been able to train professional dancers, singers, actors, directors special make-up artists, costume designers, props managers, directors Of Photography, etc, over the past five years and they are trained for free so that they can make ends meet through the art for themselves. The troupe is open for membership at all working hours or days and membership is not targeted at those who are good only but those who want to be good.

“Angelina Theatre INSTITUTE is also open and admission is on now for six months professional TOTAL THEATRE TRAINING for just six months in F.C.E, Okene. We are determined to make the entire world a better place through our theatre activities. Presently the Angelina theatre troupe is at the pre-production stage of a mega movie production, which would be coming up very soon”, he said.

# Friday Sermon

## The Real Truth About DEATH



## The reality of death

IMAM MUSAH LUKEMAN

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, we seek His help and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our bad deeds. Whoever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whoever He allows to stray, none can guide.

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, without a partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His servant and messenger.

O servants of Allah! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and do not die except in a state of Islam.

Dear brothers and sisters in Islam, Today's khutbah is about a reality that no one can escape, death.

Allah says in the Qur'an: "Every soul shall taste death. Then to Us you will be returned." (Surah Al-'Ankabut 29:57)

Death is certain. It does not distinguish between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the powerful and the weak. It is a journey that every single one of us will take.

Allah also says: "Wherever you may be, death will reach you, even if you are in fortified towers."

(Surah An-Nisa 4:78)

No matter how much we try to avoid it, delay it, or forget it, death will come at its appointed time.

### THE PURPOSE OF REMEMBERING DEATH

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Remember often the destroyer of pleasures, death." (Tirmidhi)

### WHY SHOULD WE REMEMBER DEATH?

Because remembering death: Softens the heart; Reduces attachment to this dunya; Encourages repentance; and Motivates good deeds.

When a person truly remembers death, he begins to prepare for what comes after it.

### THE SHORTNESS OF THIS LIFE

Allah reminds us: "And the life of this world is nothing but a deceiving enjoyment." (Surah Aal 'Imran 3:185)

This life is temporary. No matter how long we live, it is short compared to the Hereafter. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveler."

(Bukhari). A traveler does not become attached to the road, he is always preparing to reach his destination. Our destination is the Hereafter.

### PREPARATION FOR DEATH

Dear Muslims, the intelligent person is the one who prepares for death before it comes. Allah says: "O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul look at what it has sent forth for tomorrow." (Surah Al-Hashr 59:18)

Ask yourself: Are we consistent in our prayers? Are we sincere in our

actions? Are we seeking forgiveness regularly? Are we helping others and giving charity?

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busyness, and your life before your death." (Al-Hakim)

### THE REALITY AFTER DEATH

After death comes the grave, either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a pit from the pits of Hell. Then comes resurrection, judgment, and accountability.

Allah says: "So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it." (Surah Az-Zalzalah 99:7-8)

### REPENT BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

Allah calls us to repent: "And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed." (Surah An-Nur 24:31)

Do not delay repentance. Death can come suddenly without warning.

I say these words of mine, and I ask Allah for forgiveness for me and for you. So seek His forgiveness, for He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. And peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his family, and all his companions.

### O servants of Allah,

Fear Allah and prepare for death. Increase in good deeds, for you do not know when your time will come.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "The wise person is the one who controls himself and works for what comes after death." (Tirmidhi)

### WHAT BENEFITS AFTER DEATH?

When a person dies, all his deeds stop except three: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah), beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who prays for him." (Muslim)

So invest in: Charity, Knowledge, Raising righteous children, and Supplication.

O Allah, make us among those who remember death and prepare for it.

O Allah, grant us a good ending (husn al-khatimah). O Allah, forgive our sins, accept our deeds, and admit us into Jannah. O Allah, protect us from the punishment of the grave and the Hellfire.

Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression. He reminds you that you may take heed.

Imam Lukeman Musah is the Chief Imam of Central Mosque, Dawah Frontier Academy, Okpella, Etsako East.



*When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: ongoing charity (sadaqah jariyah), beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child*

# Feature

## #1.15trn approved, not disbursed: The full story of how Hon. Mascot exposed the missing capital funds

ENTIRE OGBEBOR

The scene at the House of Representatives Appropriation Committee hearing on Wednesday, February 25th was tense, dramatic, and defined by one man's relentless pursuit of answers.

Hon. Alex Mascot Ikwechegh, member representing Aba North/ Aba South Federal Constituency and a key member of the Aids and Loans Committee, took centre stage as he confronted the Minister of Finance, Wale Edun, over the unexplained disappearance of capital project funds—despite trillions of naira in loans and record-breaking revenues.

What began as a routine budget defence quickly escalated into a high-stakes interrogation when Hon. Ikwechegh revealed a disturbing pattern:

- N1.15 trillion had been raised and specifically approved by the National Assembly to fund 30% of the 2025 capital budget

- Multiple loans had been secured, including:

- \$1.2 billion for digital infrastructure
- \$500 million for economic stimulus
- \$500 million for MSMEs (approved December 2025)

- \$500 million from the African Development Bank (November 2025) for economic governance and energy transition

- A recent executive request for \$21 million, 15 billion Yen, and 4 billion Euros

Yet, despite this avalanche of borrowed money and strong revenue performance by agencies like FIRS, Customs, and others, capital projects across Nigeria remain at zero disbursement.

Hon. Ikwechegh, visibly frustrated, walked the Minister through the figures with surgical precision:

"With all these funds put together... I want you to enlighten us on why the 2024 budget is yet to be fully implemented, and why the 2025 budget has only been funded 34%—most of which is recurrent expenditure."

He then delivered the question that silenced the room:

"I want you to enlighten us on why our capital projects still remain at



Hon. Alex Mascot Ikwechegh



President Bola Ahmed Tinubu

zero. Talking about our country. This is our country. Are you not in Nigeria? Why the capital of the Nigerian government remains at zero in 2026?"

When pressed, Minister Wale Edun shifted responsibility to the Minister of State for Finance, Doris Uzoka-Anite, claiming she handled disbursements.

This deflection infuriated committee members. If the substantive Minister of Finance cannot account for N1.15 trillion approved for capital projects, who can?

The session became rowdy. Lawmakers shouted, demanding answers. Some called for the ministers to resign. The committee had no choice but to adjourn the hearing to Thursday, February 26th, summoning the Minister of State to provide the clarity the nation deserves.

Speaking after the heated exchange, Hon. Ikwechegh framed the issue in stark legal terms:

"If this infraction is identified, it means there has been misappropriation of funds—which is a crime."

His point is simple but devastating: funds were approved by the National Assembly. Funds were borrowed from international lenders. Funds were generated by revenue agencies. Yet those funds never reached the capital projects they were intended for.

Where did the money go?

For ordinary Nigerians, this is not abstract parliamentary procedure. It means:

- Roads in constituencies like Hon. Ikwechegh's Aba remain unmotorable
- Hospitals lack equipment despite health sector allocations
- Schools remain unbuilt while contractors go unpaid
- Jobs are not created because infrastructure projects are stalled

When capital projects are at zero, development stops. When develop-

ment stops, Nigerians suffer.

Wednesday's performance cements Hon. Alex Mascot Ikwechegh's reputation as one of the House's most dogged advocates for transparency. Armed with facts, fortified by his position on the Aids and Loans Committee, and unafraid to confront powerful ministers, he demonstrated what legislative oversight should look like.

His constituents in Aba North/ Aba South—a commercial hub crippled by infrastructural neglect—have found a champion willing to ask the hard questions at the highest level.

All eyes were on Thursday's resumed hearing, where Minister of State for Finance, Doris Uzoka-Anite, was summoned to account for the missing N1.15 trillion.

At that hearing, Uzoka-Anite confirmed that N1.15 trillion was indeed approved for capital projects. However, she revealed that disbursement

protocols require multiple sign-offs, and that certain "pre-disbursement conditions" had not been met by some ministries.

She argued that while the funds exist, they cannot be released until:

- Project documentation is complete
- Procurement processes are finalized
- Ministries submit required feasibility reports

But committee members, armed with the Health Minister's earlier testimony that he received only N38 million of his N286 billion allocation, demanded to know: if protocols were the issue, why were some ministries given the runaround while others weren't?

In what observers described as Thursday's defining moment, Hon. Ikwechegh rose again and asked:

"Mr. Chairman, can the minister tell this committee which specific ministry met all conditions and still did not receive funding? If none existed, why was N1.15 trillion approved when the government knew conditions weren't met?"

The minister could not provide a single example.

The questions Hon. Ikwechegh has raised will not go away:

- If capital funds were approved, where are they?
- If they were misappropriated, who is responsible?
- If this is a crime, who will be held accountable?

Hon. Alex Mascot Ikwechegh has done what effective legislators do: followed the money, asked the tough questions, and refused to accept bureaucratic evasions.

Whether the Minister of State provided answers on Thursday—or whether Nigerians are left with more questions—one thing is clear: Hon. Ikwechegh has placed a spotlight on what may be one of the most significant financial infractions in recent National Assembly history.

And as he reminded the committee, if funds were approved but never reached their destination, that is not poor administration.

That is a crime.

## Edo State Government steps up safeguarding cultural assets

The Edo State Government is stepping up efforts to tackle encroachments on art, culture, monuments across the State.

To this end, Edo State Commissioner for Arts, Culture & Creative Economy, Chris Okaeben has welcomed the proactive steps taken by the Edo State Committee on Protection of Government Property in safeguarding government facilities.

Hon. Okaeben expressed this welcoming Wednesday when he received the Edo State Committee on the Protection of Government Properties led by its Chairman, Mr. Eugene Okolose, to congratulate him on his appointment.

Okaeben expressed appreciation for the visit and commended the Committee for its dedication to protecting public assets.

He emphasised the importance of

protecting public facilities, monuments, creative hubs, saying it would enhance cultural development and promote tourism and the creative economy.

"The Ministry plays a strategic role in promoting the State's cultural heritage and creative industry, hence it is essential that government properties are protected for sustainable growth in line with Governor Okpebholo's Shine agenda."

Highlighting the role of the Ministry in boosting revenue generation, the Commissioner said, putting the right policies in place, the State's enormous art, culture and creatives can significantly contribute to the State's economy.

"You need to see how Edo's rich, art, culture, entertainment, craft, fashion, film, music, among other creatives have taken Edo to the global

stage," he said excitedly.

He stated that the Ministry is gearing up to make this year's Edo Festival (EDOFEST), a talk of the town event, that would attract global attention.

"We are ensuring this year's EDOFEST and other art, culture and creative activities get the expected attention. The world will hear more of Edo South, Centre and North through their various art, food, dress amongst others," Okaeben said.

The Commissioner advised members of the public to desist from encroaching into the Benin moat noting that the moat remains a Benin heritage to be preserved and protected.

"I commend my staff on official duty who sent in a video recording of illegal structures on the moat. He advised the Committee on the Protection of Government Property to assert its authority by disallowing the build-

ing of illegal structures on moat and other cultural heritage sites,"

He assured the Taskforce of the Ministry's readiness to work with relevant agencies and stakeholders to protect cultural infrastructures. "We will promote a peaceful environment for artists, creatives and cultural practitioners to thrive," Okaeben concluded.

Chairman of the Edo State Committee of the Protection of Government Properties, Mr. Eugene Okolose told the Commissioner they were in his office to congratulate him on his appointment and to collaborate with the Ministry in securing and preserving public facilities under the Ministry.

"We are here to formally congratulate you on your appointment and to reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding government-owned cultur-



al, artistic and creative assets across the State. Effective protection will enhance cultural

development and promote tourism and the creative economy," Okolose said.

**MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS UNIT**

## FEATURE

# Social Media Healthcare Content: Why gatekeeping should be a collective responsibility

OBOH SYLVESTER

The current pervasive democratization of e-medicine and e-health information, and other related medical issues across the globe, has continued to give society a sufficient reason for concern.

To this end, the persuasive evolution of social media, which has become, for instance, a primary source of health information for millions, has manifestly transformed how people access medical knowledge in the hands of content creators and everyday users.

From Facebook to TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and many. Content creators regularly deploy these social media platforms to generate health solutions for arthritis, virality of men, one-all solution and an antidote to old age, and many more. It is important to emphasize that the democratization of information has its benefits; it has also created a dangerous vacuum where misinformation thrives unchecked.

The health consequences to users are no longer theoretical but real. Over the period, particularly since

the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has witnessed how false health claims could spread faster than any potent disease itself. From unverified treatments to conspiracy-driven narratives about health management, remedies from local herbs and concoctions, this unresearched medical misinformation not only undermined public trust but also cost lives. This phenomenon, described by the World Health Organization as an “infodemic,” exposed a glaring weakness in our digital information ecosystem.

At the heart of the problem is the absence of effective gatekeeping. Unlike traditional media, where editorial processes ensure a level of accuracy and accountability before uploading to the public, social media operates on algorithms designed to maximize engagement—not truth. Content that is sensational, emotionally charged, or controversial is more likely to go viral, regardless of its scientific validity. In such a situation, individuals without medical training can easily position themselves as experts, dispensing advice that may be misleading or outright harmful.

This lack of accountability poses

serious risks. Increasingly, people are turning to social media for diagnosis and treatment guidance, often resorting to self-medication or delaying professional care. The result is a growing public health concern that extends beyond individual harm to systemic strain on healthcare systems.

Gatekeeping is not about censorship, just as healthcare content cannot be treated like other forms of online expression. The stakes are simply too high because, and in this case, it is about safeguarding lives of the people. Just as pharmaceuticals and medical practice are regulated, it is therefore very expedient to fully regulate the flow of medical information in the digital space.

This responsibility must be shared across multiple fronts to proactively strengthen content moderation systems, verify licensed healthcare professionals, and adjust local algorithms to prioritize credible and researched sources.

Government agencies, including regulatory bodies like NAFDAC must spread their control to the digital sphere and enforce penalties where necessary. This will no doubt contribute to the standards for online health

communication.

Equally important is the role of the medical community itself. Healthcare practitioners must prioritize ethical guidelines for digital engagement, dissemination of medical health information. They must actively counter misinformation with evidence-based content. To be silent in the face of manifest falsehood only allows it to escalate.

There is the urgent need to improve public health knowledge. Citizens must be equipped with the necessary skills evaluate the information they come across online, simply because, a well-informed public is the strongest defense against misinformation.

We must not allow the principle of freedom of expression to hurt the safety of the public. We must be careful enough to understand that the digital revolution has changed how we consume information, hence we must protect the integrity of the generality of our healthcare. Our efforts in this regard, therefore, must be deliberate, coordinated action to the extent that social media should serve as tools for health promotion, not a trajectory for deathtrap.



*This responsibility must be shared across multiple fronts to proactively strengthen content moderation systems, verify licensed healthcare professionals, and adjust local algorithms to prioritize credible and researched*

## Tribute to a colossus: Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien

JUSTIN UWADIA

Providence linked me with Pa Daniel Eghobamien either in 1995 or 1996. Before then, his school, Nosakhare Model Education Centre, NOMECE, Benin City, was being constructed. I lived within the vicinity (Edo House to be precise) and passed through that route almost on a daily basis, especially when going to my place of work, Edo Broadcasting Service, EBS. I needed a ‘farm’, a word used by EBS Newsroom Staff as a place where they collect adverts. Journalists love ‘farms’ and they guard it jealously. The more ‘farms’ you have, the happier you are. In EBS, most Journalists respected themselves by not going to the ‘farms’ of their colleagues, either to sow or harvest. Sadly, as at that time, I had no ‘farm.’ Therefore, whenever I passed there and saw workers on site, I had one prayer request: ‘God link me to the owner of this school in order that I start handling its adverts on completion.’ The Bible says if you ask, you will receive.

One Saturday morning, while alone as Duty Editor on Radio desk, a man, on royal-like attire came to EBS. He said he was a Chief from Ondo State on a visit to Nosakhare Model Education Centre. He said he wanted me to write a news report about his inspection of educational facilities in the school, which he lauded. He paid for the news item and I wrote the report. Before he left, he gave me a bottle of wine and told me to go to the Proprietor, Pa Eghobamien’s house, which he described, to collect his portrait. God was at work here. How could I be looking for a link with the owner of the NOMECE and there I was, somebody came to me and gave me the description? It was akin to the proverbial ‘finding in your shokoto what you are seeking in Sokoto.’ The news item was to be used on EBS TV same day. Therefore, after

completing my Radio desk job, I went to Pa Eghobamien’s house along Upper Mission Road. When I rang the bell, Pa Eghobamien came out and asked who I was. I told him the story about the Chief who sent me. He acknowledged knowing him but said the Chief ought to have the picture. He said he would not give it to me. I was disappointed and left. I was on the road waiting for a cab when Pa Eghobamien sent someone to call me and gave me the picture, with a charge to return it. His initial refusal was playing a mind-game to ensure I was who I claimed to be.

The news item was used that evening in the EBS TV Comprehensive News without the picture because the cameras had technical problems. The next day, I returned the picture to Pa Eghobamien. He refused to collect it and told me he was going to sue EBS for breach of contract. I panicked all the way to EBS: My first advert was going to lead to litigation? I reported to my boss, Barr. Humphrey Otasowie, who assured me that it would be used again that day. Indeed, it was used. The next day, I went to Pa Eghobamien’s house and gave him the picture. He was satisfied. Because mobile phone was not in existent then, Pa Eghobamien asked me for my address. He assured me that whenever he had need for advertisement for NOMECE, he would call me. From 1996 to when I retired and thereafter, Pa Eghobamien called me for adverts for not only NOMECE but for the Master Bakers Association, when he was the Chairman. If the School had adverts and Pa Eghobamien did not call me, he would instruct the Executive Director of NOMECE, Mrs. Merry Omobude to call me.

At close watch, Pa Eghobamien did not compromise standards. He was also very generous. On a festive period, I bought him a small gift and took it to his house. He expressed

appreciation and asked me to accompany him to his school, Nosakhare Model Education Centre. He went in and came out with a very big turkey, one of the biggest I had seen. I thanked him profusely. My family had so much meat to eat during the period. The next Christmas, I also sent him a gift and he was so appreciative. About two weeks later, he called me and asked I should see him at home. I did some thinking. I recalled that the year before, ‘epa’ gave me a very big turkey because I gave him a small gift. I decided not to go to his house. Two weeks later, he called me and asked why I did not come to his house. I lied to him that I forgot. Again, he directed that I should come to his house because he had an advert for me. All Journalists love adverts. I

quickly went there. However, rather than an advert, Pa Eghobamien went inside his room and brought out a bulky envelope. I counted the money and asked where was the advert? He said there was no advert but for my Christmas. Indeed, before Abraham, there were men, as they say. I knelt down and thanked him. Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien was a generous helper and giver. On many occasions that I went to his house, before leaving, he would tell his bakery workers to give me large/family size of bread. God used him to bless me spiritually and financially.

Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien loved God and loved the things of God. Many times when I went to his house for adverts, before 7 am, I met Pa Eghobamien conducting

morning prayers with his household. He would tell me to join them. On several occasions, I saw people, especially Christians, ask for financial assistance. He obliged. He single-handedly built Oyakhilome Temple, an imposing edifice of the Assemblies of God Church, along Ekenwan Road, Benin City. I was with him when he made a wish - if he could connect back to the man who led him to Jesus Christ in order to thank him and show him appreciation if need be. Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien was a good man but according to Goodnews Echie: ‘goodmen must die but death cannot kill their names.’ History will be kind to ‘epa.’ But Historians and Researchers must unearth more about the life and times of Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien: how a man, from a humble beginning, started manufacturing bread, from local oven, rode on bicycle selling and distributing bread, (Plymouth Brown Bread and Nosakhare Bread), ventured into the Education Sector and nurtured minds from kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary, (Nosakhare Model Education Centre, NOMECE and Nosakhare College of Education), and many other businesses, thereby becoming a huge employer of labour. Ironically, he never worked for government; he, nor his children had no political appointment or had government contracts for people to insinuate he made his mark through pillaging of our collective patrimony. In my opinion, Pa Eghobamien achieved his feat through diligence and God’s grace. He attested to these in the book, When God Favours a Man, a biography of Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien. Pa Eghobamien’s story can be likened to the tales of transformation from rag to riches or from grass to grace.



Pa Daniel Nosakhare Eghobamien

May his soul rest in peace.

# How Okpebholo's cloud will give Edo sovereign digital lungs

PATRICK AHKERE EBOJELE, PHD

The launch of Edo Cloud by the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo has breathed new life into the state's digital governance journey, while also bringing to light the deep structural flaws in the former fraudulent e-governance platform inherited from the previous government. That administration made efforts to digitise public service processes, but with a system was weighed down by legal, technical and operational weaknesses that eventually made a full overhaul unavoidable.

With Edo Cloud — a fully state-owned, home-grown digital platform — Edo State has reclaimed control of its digital infrastructure and repositioned itself as a leading example of sustainable e-governance in Nigeria.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the failed e-governance platform was the absence of full state ownership. While it supported paperless governance and digital workflows, Edo State Government did not own the intellectual property behind the system. In practical terms, the state was running its daily operations on a platform it did not fully control — a risky position for any serious government.

Closely connected to this was restricted backend access. Government officials could not independently manage, modify or fully control the platform without relying on external consultants. This created a dangerous dependency that weakened institutional autonomy and exposed government operations to avoidable risks.

Another major concern was limited data sovereignty. Without full ownership, the state could not guarantee complete control over its data. In today's digital world, where data security and privacy are central to governance, this was a significant vulnerability.

Sustainability was also a problem. With no internal control or ownership, the long-term future of the platform depended heavily on external parties. Any breakdown in that relationship could disrupt government operations, slow service delivery and reverse years of digital progress.

The system also lacked flexibility. It was not modular enough to support easy upgrades, expansion or integration of new services without heavy technical intervention. This slowed innovation and made it harder for the platform to evolve alongside the growing needs of the civil and public service.

On top of all this, technical dependency became a burden. Routine maintenance, updates and troubleshooting required outside support, increasing operational costs and limiting opportunities for in-house technical capacity development.

These defects may not have been obvious to the public, but they posed serious long-term risks to governance stability, service continuity and digital independence — risks the Okpebholo administration chose not to ignore.

Upon assuming office, Governor Monday Okpebholo ordered a thorough review of the state's digital governance framework. According to the



Governor Monday Okpebholo

Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, the Governor found it unacceptable for Edo State to “breathe through the nostrils of another” — a clear reference to the state's digital dependency.

Instead of patching a system that was fundamentally flawed, the administration chose a bolder and more sustainable path: building a fully state-owned, home-grown platform that would permanently resolve issues of ownership, control, security and sustainability.

That decision marked a turning point in Edo's digital governance journey. The outcome of that bold choice is Edo Cloud — a state-owned cloud platform designed, built, managed and maintained entirely within Edo State's technology ecosystem.

As part of its rollout, over 70 E-Governance Champions were trained at the John Odigie-Oyegun Public Service Academy (JOOPSA) in Benin City on the platform's interface, functionality and deployment strategy. The training brought together civil servants from various ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), alongside technical experts and key stakeholders.

Declaring the workshop open, Dr. Okungbowa described Edo Cloud as a major leap forward in the state's digital transformation, noting that it is more robust, secure and user-friendly than the former system.

Unlike the old platform, Edo Cloud guarantees full data sovereignty, ensuring that Edo State alone owns, controls and manages its digital infrastructure and data assets.

It also provides unrestricted backend access, empowering government

technical teams to independently manage, modify, upgrade and maintain the system without external interference.

Another key strength of Edo Cloud is sustainability. Because it is fully state-owned, the platform eliminates long-term dependence on third parties, reduces operational costs and ensures continuity of service regardless of political transitions.

Technically, Edo Cloud features a modular architecture that supports continuous upgrades, easy integration of new services and seamless expansion across MDAs. This ensures the platform grows with the needs of the civil and public service.

Speaking on the technical design, Dr. Benjamin Ben, who led the development team, explained that Edo Cloud offers improved data control, a unified user experience, enhanced scalability and automated workflows.

He said the platform was deliberately designed to be simple and intuitive, making it easier for civil servants across MDAs to adopt and use.

Unlike the former system, which often required external technical support, Edo Cloud enables independent usage and internal support. E-Gov Champions are now equipped to train and assist their colleagues, reducing the need for constant outside intervention.

“With what we have done, there will be no need for micro-managing. The E-Gov Champions will provide support for their community. This aligns with His Excellency's directive that civil and public servants should be able to do their jobs independently,” Dr. Ben said.

The Head of IT Infrastructure and

System Engineering at the Edo State Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), Engr. Courage Adaghe, stressed that Edo Cloud is fully state-owned, guaranteeing security, sustainability and flexibility.

He explained that the platform was built, managed and maintained entirely within Edo State's technology ecosystem, ensuring local capacity building and institutional knowledge retention.

“The platform will serve as a one-stop digital solution for public service operations. It was fully built, managed and maintained within Edo State's technology ecosystem,” he said.

This local ownership model stands in sharp contrast to the former platform, where core control remained outside the state.

Beyond its technical advantages, Edo Cloud is designed to strengthen transparency, accountability, efficiency and citizen participation. By digitising workflows, reducing paperwork and automating processes, the platform is expected to significantly improve service delivery across MDAs.

Dr. Okungbowa noted that the adoption of Edo Cloud will enhance transparency and accountability, improve governance processes, reduce bureaucracy and position Edo State once again at the forefront of digital public service administration in Nigeria.

He also urged E-Gov Champions to act as ambassadors of the new system, noting that resistance to change often comes from poor communication and lack of understanding.

One of the participants, Mr. Ogbewe Osaro Anthony, E-Gov Champion from the Edo State Social Investment Programme Office, commended

Governor Okpebholo for approving a fully state-owned platform.

He described Edo Cloud as richer in content, more flexible and better suited to public service operations than the previous system, adding that its features would significantly enhance collaboration and productivity across MDAs.

This feedback reflects growing confidence within the civil service that Edo Cloud is not just a replacement system, but a transformational tool.

The former e-governance platform denied Edo state ownership, restricted access, limited sustainability, poor scalability and heavy external dependency — made it unsuitable for long-term governance stability.

Now Governor Okpebholo's Edo Cloud has tackled these weaknesses directly by delivering a platform that is fully state-owned, secure, sustainable, scalable, user-friendly and locally managed.

With the Edo Cloud now operational, Edo State has not only reclaimed control of its digital future but has also set a new standard for sub-national digital governance in Nigeria.

In an era where data sovereignty, institutional autonomy and service efficiency define governance success, Governor Okpebholo's bold investment in a home-grown cloud platform stands out as a visionary and future-proof decision.

Edo State is no longer borrowing digital breath — it now owns its digital lungs.

• Ebojele is Chief Press Secretary to Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo

## FEATURE

# Beyond popularity is the power of structure

ENGR. MIKE O. ENAHORO, PHD

The danger of division, and how unity in politics as well as the myth of votes lies around Jonathan, backed by Atiku and Obi against Tinubu can achieve great results is the crux of my writeup today.

As a continuation of our last analogy on the 2027 presidential election titled "Let Me Be Clear: ADC Is Not PDP But A Desperation Leading To Nothing\*", let me be clear once again: the African Democratic Congress (ADC) is unlikely to risk its presidential ticket on Mr. Peter Obi as long as the "Presidential ticket mafia, former Vice President Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, remains interested in the 2027 race. Their likely strategy would be to pressure Obi into accepting the role of running mate, backed by a promise of Atiku's single-term presidency, an arrangement that is neither realistic nor credible.

If Obi refuses the vice-presidential slot, the same forces would simply turn to another person, after first drawing him into the party's primary process with assurances, only to later manipulate the outcome in Atiku's favor. Once Obi has participated in the primary, he would be politically constrained from moving to another platform. I believe, however, that Peter Obi is too discerning to fall into such a trap.

Assuming the ADC decides to hand its ticket to Peter Obi, a large section of the North would then prefer to endure President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's remaining hardship second term rather than support a candidate they fear could pursue two full terms. Though they may send Engr. Dr. Rabiu Kwankwaso to Obi but after the primaries, the likes of Aminu Tambuwal, and his co travelers within the ADC would likely queue behind Tinubu, seeking political relevance ahead of 2031 leaving Obi and others.

Having deposited the above, it is important to note that the attached image features candidates A, B, C, and D. Their profiles are presented based on the major executive offices they have held throughout their political careers. Candidate A has served as President, Vice President, Governor, and Deputy Governor; Candidate B is currently serving as President and has also served as Governor; Candidate C has served as Vice President and was once Governor-Elect; while Candidate D has served as Governor.

It is on the above premise this piece rests: in every election season, Nigerians are reminded, often through painful experience, that votes alone do not win elections. What ultimately determines victory is the combination of popular support and a resilient, functional political structure. When a political movement confuses crowd size, online popularity, or public sympathy with real organizational capacity, it creates a dangerous illusion. This was the fatal weakness of the Labour Party in the 2023 general election, and it remains the most misunderstood lesson in Nigerian politics today.

If Labour had possessed a deeply rooted and nationally coordinated structure in 2023, its "victory" would not have been so easily contested or undermined. The issue was not that Nigerians failed to vote. The issue was that there was no effective machinery



to defend those votes from polling units to ward collation centres, from local governments to state and national collation hubs. Elections are not won by speeches in Abuja, celebrity endorsements, or social media trends. They are won, defended, and sustained by grounded political systems that operate quietly but relentlessly across the country.

A political structure is not a logo, a rally crowd, or a viral hashtag. It is a living network of trained party agents, ward coordinators, mobilizers, legal defenders, observers, data handlers, and result-verification teams present in every polling unit, every ward, every local government, every state, and every national collation centre. Where this system is absent, even the most popular movement becomes vulnerable to institutional manipulation. Enthusiasm cannot replace structure. Where structure is weak, the political system will always prevail.

This is why, after every disputed election, the same ritual follows: "Go to court." But court battles are not a substitute for political organization. They are merely what remains when a party has already failed to protect its mandate through structure. Once results are altered along the collation chain and there is no immediate, coordinated resistance, the outcome becomes almost impossible to reverse.

As Nigeria looks toward 2027, these same mistakes are re-emerging in new forms. Atiku Abubakar is widely believed to be reflecting on the strategic error of 2023, his failure to choose Nyesom Wike as running mate, which weakened internal cohesion and fractured his base. There is now growing speculation that this error can be "corrected" through a political alliance with Peter Obi under the African Democratic Congress (ADC). Yet this assumption ignores a fundamental truth: political structure cannot be borrowed at the last minute.

The ADC is unlikely to surrender its presidential ticket to Obi, just as Obi's core supporters are unlikely to accept Atiku as a compromise or secondary option. These camps are built on different emotional, ideolog-

ical, and organizational foundations. Without a shared, deeply rooted political system, any alliance formed at the top will collapse under the realities at the grassroots. Momentum without structure is unsustainable. Popularity without organization is fragile. Institutional politics will always overpower emotional politics.

Winning an election is not a single moment; it is a long, defensive process that begins at the polling unit and ends only when the mandate is securely protected. Without a structure that can monitor, record, challenge, and defend results at every stage, victory remains temporary. Even when the people vote, the system can still rewrite the outcome.

The tragedy of Nigerian politics is not voter apathy; it is the absence of durable political structures. Elections are not won by chants, rallies, or online outrage. They are won and defended by disciplined political machinery that understands the terrain of power. Until political actors stop mistaking votes for structure, history will continue to repeat itself, mass enthusiasm, disputed outcomes, institutional manipulation, and endless

court battles.

The growing assumption that the combined popularity of Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi can automatically defeat President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2027 is therefore built on a fragile foundation. Their supporters do not share the same political ideology, organizational culture, or strategic vision. Atiku's base is rooted in elite networks, traditional party structures, and long-standing political alliances. Obi's movement, by contrast, is driven by youthful protest energy and deep distrust of conventional politics. These two worlds do not naturally align. What one side sees as experience, the other sees as the problem. What one side celebrates as pragmatism, the other condemns as compromise.

Anger against the ruling party is not enough to win power. Opposition votes scattered across multiple platforms will only guarantee one outcome: the return of the APC. The ruling party does not need to be loved to win; it only needs its opponents to remain divided, emotional, and structurally weak.

To successfully challenge President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the opposition

must abandon ego-driven ambitions and collapse behind a single candidate with national acceptability, historical legitimacy, and an existing political structure that can protect votes from the grassroots to the centre. That candidate is former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, and that platform is the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

Jonathan represents a bridge across generations, regions, and political cultures even though he's considered a weak man. He carries the legacy of national leadership without the bitterness that often follows political office. His presidency, though not perfect, remains a symbol of stability, restraint, and unity to many Nigerians and of course, with global applause. More importantly, he commands respect across party lines and across regions, making him a unifying figure capable of drawing support from both Atiku and Obi camps.

The PDP remains the only opposition party with a truly national, tested structure, functional at the polling unit, ward, local government, state, and federal levels. While others rely on social media energy and temporary coalitions, the PDP possesses the machinery to mobilize voters, defend results, and sustain governance.

Anything short of this strategic unity will simply recycle the errors of 2023 in a different format to the favor of the incumbent. Divided opposition, emotional campaigns, and personality-driven movements will once again hand victory to the APC. When the election is lost and excuses begin, many will finally understand what could have been done, but by then, the opportunity will have passed.

The choice before the opposition is clear: unite under structure and shared leadership, or continue on separate paths and guarantee the return of the APC to power. My suggestion is clear: Que behind Jonathan/Kwankwaso ticket for 2027 in a one off project for the due, assure Atiku/Obi for 2031, and after should be Obi/?. This is the only way to go, to take Nigeria out from the hand of evil APC. History is watching. So is the Nigerian electorate.



*Without a structure that can monitor, record, challenge, and defend results at every stage, victory remains temporary. Even when the people vote, the system can still rewrite the outcome.*

# Sports

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

## 3rd National Para Games: Enabulele hails team Edo on impressive performance in Abuja

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

● **as team Edo surge to 2nd position**

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, yesterday commended Team Edo for their outstanding performance at the 3rd National Para Games in Abuja.

Team Edo finished second on the medal table with 25 Gold, 14 Silver and 15 Bronze medals as competition came to an end in the Federal capital City, Abuja.

The Edo State Sports Commission boss described the team's medal haul as a reflection of the resilience, discipline, and determination that define the competitive spirit and strong character of an average Edo person.

Enabulele specifically praised Para Table Tennis athletes for delivering on their promises. Ivie Edogawerie Peculiar delivered a remarkable performance, clinching two gold medals in the Women's Open Singles and Class 10 events, while Blessing Aiwekhoe also impressed, winning gold in the Class 5 Women's Singles and the Mixed Doubles alongside Olowe. Ada Okungbowa secured bronze in the Men's Singles Class 5, while Kazeem Adejunye added another bronze in the Men's Class 4 category of the para table tennis event.

In Para Cycling, Favour Ojebu stood out with two gold medals and one silver, while Samuel Okojie contributed a gold medal to the tally. Cynthia

Wanogho further strengthened the team's performance in Para Powerlifting, winning gold in the 50kg division.

Enabulele also acknowledged additional medal successes recorded in Para Powerlifting and Para Taekwondo, noting that their efforts have significantly boosted team Edo's overall standing.

He said that he was confident that team's momentum, he urged the athletes to remain focused and disciplined as the competition reaches its climax.

Team Edo featured 47 athletes in 10 sports, including Para Athletics, Swimming, Badminton, Cycling, Canoeing, Karate, Powerlifting, Table Tennis, Taekwon-

do, and Wheelchair Tennis.

Events held at two venues — Jabi Lake for Canoeing, and the Moshood Abiola National Stadium for the rest sports.

Edo State has now climbed to second place on the medals table with 25 gold, 14 silver, and 25 Bronze medals. Enugu State leads with 36 gold medals, while Bayelsa, Lagos, Rivers, Plateau, Imo and Osun states occupy third, fourth, 5th, 6th and 7th positions respectively.

Enabulele reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to sustained investment in athlete development at all levels.

Curtains will be drawn on the competition on Friday, April 3, 2026.



TEAM EDO PARA TABLE TENNIS

## World Cup: Global heavyweights, African surge headline expanding 2026 World Cup line-up

The road to the 2026 FIFA World Cup has begun to take definitive shape, with a blend of traditional powerhouses, emerging nations and first-time qualifiers securing places at the tournament to be jointly hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19.

The three host nations — the United States, Mexico and Canada — automatically qualified, each bringing contrasting World Cup pedigrees.

While the United States' best finish remains a third-place outing in 1930, Mexico boast two quarter-final appearances (1970 and 1986), and Canada continue their search for a first knockout-stage breakthrough after previous group-stage exits.

Defending champions Argentina headline the South American contingent after sealing qualification on March 25, aiming to add to their three titles (1978, 1986, 2022). Five-time winners Brazil also return, extending their record as the only nation to feature in every World Cup, while Uruguay — champions in 1930 and 1950 — reinforce South America's rich pedigree.

Asia has produced a mix of regulars and newcomers. Japan and South Korea continue their consistent presence, with the latter's fourth-place finish in 2002 still the continent's benchmark. Iran and Australia also return, while Uzbekistan and Jordan make history with their first-ever World Cup qualifica-

tions, underlining the region's growing competitiveness.

Africa has emerged as one of the biggest stories of the qualification series, with a strong and diverse representation. Morocco, fresh from their historic semi-final run in 2022, lead a pack that includes Egypt, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast and Tunisia. South Africa also returns to the global stage, while Cape Verde are set for a historic debut.



## World Cup: DR Congo declares public holiday after historic World Cup Qualification

Authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo declared Wednesday a public holiday following the national team's historic qualification for the FIFA World Cup—their first appearance in 52 years.

The Leopards secured their place at the global tournament on Tuesday night after a dramatic

1-0 extra-time victory over Jamaica in the intercontinental playoff. Defender Axel Tuanzebe emerged as the hero, scoring the decisive goal in the 100th minute of a tense encounter.

In a statement, the Ministry of Labour and Employment described the triumph as "historic," announcing a nation-

wide day off to allow citizens to "celebrate in unity, fervour and national pride." The declaration led to widespread closures across the capital, Kinshasa, with banks and shops shutting their doors in observance.

However, the late announcement—made around 08:00 local time—meant that some businesses proceeded with normal operations, catching employers off guard.

The victory sparked jubilant celebrations across Kinshasa, with fans pouring into the streets shortly after the final whistle, which came just before 01:00 local time on Wednesday. In the Kingabwa district, supporters chanted and danced, revelling in a moment of national pride.

"This victory makes us proud... I feel so emotional and happy," one fan told the BBC, reflecting the mood in a country long affected by conflict and instability.



DR CONGO

## International Friendlies: Super Eagles to play Poland & Portugal in June

Fresh from defeating one FIFA World Cup-bound team (Iran) and drawing with another (Jordan) in the city of Antalya, Turkey, three-time African champions Nigeria are looking forward to a very exciting summer, as they are set for battles against Poland and FIFA World Cup-bound Portugal during the FIFA window for friendly matches in June.

NFF's FIFA Match Agent, Jairo Pachon of Eurodata Sport, confirmed on Thursday that the clash with Poland will take place at the PGE Narodowy Stadium in the country's capi-

tal, Warsaw on 3rd June, while the clash with Portugal will take place in Portugal on 10th June, with a venue to be announced in the coming days.

The game against the Seleção das Quinas — name of the Portugal senior men team — will be the last game for the hosts before they fly to the far west to take part in this summer's FIFA World Cup finals being jointly hosted by USA, Canada and Mexico.

The Cup holders, Super Eagles, are also scheduled to defend their crown at this year's Unity Cup Tournament in London, taking place 26th – 30th May.



# NFF inaugurates electoral panels, vows credible elections



NFF President, Ibrahim Gusau, Director-General and Chief Executive Officer of the National Institute for Sports (NIS), Philip Shaibu, NFF 1st vice president, Felix Anyansi-Agwu, and NFF General Secretary, Mohammed Sanusi, at the inauguration on Thursday in Abuja.

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) on Thursday inaugurated its Electoral and Appeals Committees to oversee elections into its Executive Committee for 2026–2030.

NFF President, Ibrahim Gusau, who performed the inauguration at the Secretariat in Abuja, urged fairness, transparency and integrity.

Gusau charged members to act without bias or pressure, stressing the importance of credibility in strengthening Nigerian football governance.

"We expect diligence, neutrality and courage," Gusau said.

"This process must inspire confidence locally and internationally as a model of transparent football administration."

He added that the federation would support the committees fully to deliver credible elections acceptable to all stakeholders.

Speaking on behalf of the committees, Matthew Burka'a pledged professionalism and accountability throughout the exercise.

"We will conduct a free, fair and credible election that reflects global best practices and earns the trust of the football community," Burka'a assured.

He noted global attention from FIFA, CAF and stakeholders, promising the exercise would set a benchmark for future sporting and political elections.

"We understand the weight of expectation. This election will stand as a reference point for integrity, not just in football but in governance," he added.

Members of the Electoral Committee include Burka'a, Babagoni Grema, Bature Musa, Ayibaye Temedie and Olugbenga Omole, with Arinze Anughele and Abayomi Omoyimi as alternates.

The Appeals Committee comprises Justice C.J. Aneke, Benjamin Sati and Abdulmalik Awwal, with Emmanuel Obafemi and Ayi Ukpayam as alternates.

NFF General Secretary, Mohammed Sanusi, will serve as secretary to both committees in line with statutory provisions.

The elections into the NFF Executive Committee will hold on Sept. 26 in Lafia, Nasarawa State.

Dignitaries at the event included Philip Shaibu, Felix Anyansi-Agwu, Silas Agara, George Aluo and other senior NFF officials.

## Gov Diri draws the curtain as Wrestlers smile home with prize money at 4th Governor Diri National Wrestling classics

The Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Douye Diri, has declared close the 4th Governor Douye Diri National Wrestling Classics after a week of intense bouts on the mat in Yenagoa.

Speaking at the closing ceremony on Wednesday, Governor Diri, lauded the level of competition from various participants, describing them all as winners and urged those who missed out on podium finish not to be discouraged, rather use the disappointment as a tool for improvement.

Diri noted that Nigeria and Bayelsa have been a fertile ground to breed young athletes in wrestling, expressing his belief that soon Nigerian will produce more world champions.

"Let me appreciate all the participants. eventually, you all are winners. In every championship, you will have the gold, silver, and bronze medalists. A good sports man is the one who participates and completes it and you all have done just that."

"Nigeria and indeed Bayelsa State have been a fertile ground for wrestling and in Africa, Nigeria is a force to reckon with and my prayer is that we will not just rule Africa alone we will produce more standard world champions." Diri said.

The President of the Nigeria Wrestling Federation who was represented by the 1st Vice President, Chris Amkpila, appreciated the passionate drive for sports development of Governor Douye Diri, stressing that the drive has seen the Governor consistently support Wrestling Federation activities without hesitation.

Chris noted that this year's edition witnessed tremendous upgrades and innovative ideas compared to previous ones as the Wrestling Federation President, through collaboration from the Nigeria Customs Service, gave accommodation, which served as the games village resulting to athletes' comfortability. Also, free meals, busses were stationed to convey them to bout venues.

He expressed gratitude to the people of Bayelsa State for the hospitality and warmth given to the various delegates, saying Indeed Bayelsa is a beautiful place, and hinted that the Federation is looking forward to being back again for the next edition.

In his earlier welcome address, the Commissioner for Sports Development, Bayelsa State, Honourable Daniel Igal, said that unprecedented heights were recorded in the history of Nigerian sports Federations, as all athletes were paid fees for participating in a national championship, which



4TH GOVERNOR DIRI NATIONAL WRESTLING

## Golf: AUDA-NEPAD backs 2026 All Africa challenge trophy

Jabiru Tsauri, National Coordinator and CEO of AUDA-NEPAD Nigeria, has pledged strong support for the 2026 All Africa Challenge Trophy.

Tsauri spoke during a courtesy visit by Lami Ahmed, President of the Ladies Golf Association of Nigeria (LGAN), and her delegation on Wednesday in Abuja.

He described the championship as a milestone for Nigeria's sports diplomacy and economic growth, highlighting its potential continental impact.

"I am delighted to receive the LGAN delegation. Their vision aligns with national development goals, and we will provide the needed backing," Tsauri said.

He said women's golf development deserved national attention,

urging support for athletes and administrators to elevate Nigeria's global sporting profile.

Tsauri commended LGAN for securing hosting rights, describing the feat as "credible and laudable," while reaffirming his role as Patron and Continental Ambassador.

"Nigeria has the capacity, population strength, and hospitality to host over 30 African nations."

"We will showcase our unity and leadership on the continent through this championship," Tsauri said.

Earlier, LGAN President, Lami Ahmed, said the visit sought a strategic partnership with AUDA-NEPAD Nigeria.

"We are here not just as sports administrators but as

patriots committed to national prestige and Africa's unity through sport," Ahmed said.

She disclosed Nigeria would host the championship from Nov. 1 to Nov. 7 under the theme 'Uniting Africa Through the Greens.'

Ahmed said the event would support President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Initiative by boosting tourism and the sports economy.

"To host Africa successfully, we need strong institutional backing. AUDA-NEPAD represents the continent's developmental heartbeat," she said.

She appealed for AUDA-NEPAD Nigeria's endorsement as the championship's official institutional anchor.

Ahmed also invited Tsauri to serve as LGAN Patron and Continental Ambassador, citing his leadership and Pan-African influence.

"With your support, we will project Nigeria's strength, hospitality, and leadership to the world," she added.

The championship is expected to attract female golfers, officials and delegates from over 30 African countries, strengthening Nigeria's status as a sporting hub.

## NFF appoints Akeem Busari as Head Coach of U17 Girls, Flamingos

The Executive Committee of the Nigeria Football Federation has endorsed a recommendation by the Federation's Technical and Development Committee for the appointment of Coach Akeem Ishola Busari as the Head Coach of the U17 Girls National Team, Flamingos.

Busari comes into the job with robust experience and deep understanding of women's football terrain, and replaces Coach Bankole Olowookere who has been with the Flamingos for many years, including leading the team to win the bronze med-

als at the 2022 FIFA U17 Women's World Cup finals in India.

Busari's immediate task is to lead the Flamingos in the soon-to-commence race for a spot at the 2026 FIFA U17 Women's World Cup finals, which will be hosted by Morocco. The Flamingos are on standby to face the winner of the preliminary clash between Niger Republic and Guinea, with the first leg away from home in the third week of next month.

The new Flamingos chief strategist is presently the Head Coach of Pacesetter Queens Football Club of Ibadan.



AKEEM BUSARI



A courtesy visit by Lami Ahmed, President of the Ladies Golf Association of Nigeria (LGAN) with Mallam Sheu Dikko.



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# Jehovah's Witnesses: When faith becomes fatal

Religion has, for centuries, served as a moral compass for humanity. It offers meaning to suffering, provides a framework for ethical living, and gives hope to millions navigating the uncertainties of existence. Yet history equally shows that when doctrines are interpreted rigidly or applied without regard for human realities, faith can sometimes become a burden rather than a blessing. Few religious debates illustrate this dilemma more starkly than the long-standing blood transfusion doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses.

For decades, the denomination has maintained a strict theological stance prohibiting the acceptance of blood transfusions by its members. The policy, rooted in their interpretation of certain passages of the Bible, has meant that adherents are expected to refuse blood even in life-threatening circumstances. To believers within the fold, obedience to this doctrine represents an act of faith and loyalty to divine command. However, to many observers outside the faith, the policy has raised troubling ethical and humanitarian questions.

Recent developments suggest that even within the organisation itself, there may be a gradual reconsideration of certain aspects of this long-held doctrine. The reported review allowing autologous blood storage and transfusion, where an individual's own blood may be stored and later used for medical purposes, appears to indicate a cautious shift. While the adjustment may seem minor on the surface, it has nonetheless reopened a long-standing conversation about the consequences of rigid doctrinal positions on matters of life and death.

For many critics, the central issue has never been theological debate alone; it has been the human cost. Across different countries, numerous accounts exist of members of the faith who declined blood transfusions even when medical experts insisted that the procedure was necessary to save their lives. In several of these cases, the refusal resulted in preventable deaths—individuals who might have survived had they accepted standard medical treatment.

The controversy becomes even more poignant when examined in the context of developing countries such as Nigeria, where healthcare challenges are already severe. In a system struggling with limited infrastructure, scarce medical resources and rising cases of complex illnesses, the decision to reject life-saving medical procedures can have devastating consequences not only for individuals but also for families and communities.

One particularly heartbreaking case that recently stirred public emotion involved a Nigerian woman, Mensa Omolara, popularly known on X as AuntieEsther, who battled cancer. Her illness had drawn the sympathy of many compassionate Nigerians who



rallied together to support her financially, with a whopping sum of N30.7 million raised in December 2025.

The substantial donations were raised to enable her to undergo surgery and treatment that could potentially prolong her life. It was an inspiring demonstration of collective humanity. People of different faiths and backgrounds uniting to save a stranger.

Yet, despite the outpouring of goodwill, the woman reportedly refused a blood transfusion because of her religious beliefs as a member of the Jehovah's Witness faith.

Medical professionals had emphasised that the procedure was necessary for the success of the surgery. Without it, the chances of survival were dangerously slim. Still, bound by doctrinal conviction, she maintained her refusal. In the end, the worst fears were realised. The young woman succumbed to her illness, leaving behind grieving relatives and a public grappling with a painful question: could her death have been avoided?

The ethical dilemma here is profound. On one hand, freedom of religion is a fundamental human right. Every individual has the liberty to practise their faith and adhere to its doctrines without coercion. Religious diversity is an essential feature of democratic societies, and no state should impose belief systems on its citizens.

On the other hand, when a doctrine directly affects the preservation of human life, it inevitably raises difficult moral questions. Should institutional religious authority possess the power, directly or indirectly, to influence decisions that lead to preventable deaths? Where should society draw the line between respect for faith and the responsibility to safeguard life?

Critics argue that the blood transfusion doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses represents an example of theological rigidity that fails to adapt to evolving

medical knowledge. Blood transfusion is not a reckless medical experiment; it is a well-established procedure that has saved millions of lives worldwide. From trauma victims and accident survivors to women experiencing severe complications during childbirth, blood transfusion remains one of the most critical interventions in modern healthcare.

To refuse such treatment entirely, critics contend, is to place doctrinal interpretation above the intrinsic value of human life. Moreover, the recent reconsideration of aspects of the policy, such as allowing autologous blood storage, inevitably raises another troubling question: if certain modifications can now be introduced, does this not imply that the earlier restrictions may have been unnecessarily severe?

For families who have lost loved ones over the years, such developments can be emotionally difficult to reconcile. If doctrinal interpretations can evolve today, what does that say about those who died yesterday under the weight of the previous rules?

This is where the debate becomes deeply philosophical. Religious leaders are, after all, human beings. They interpret sacred texts through lenses shaped by culture, tradition and historical context. While believers may view these interpretations as divinely guided, history has repeatedly shown that religious doctrines can and do change over time.

The central concern, therefore, is whether doctrines that carry life-and-death consequences should be subject to deeper scrutiny and compassion.

The case of the Nigerian cancer patient, AuntieEsther, illustrates the tragic tension between faith and survival. Her decision, though personally sincere, was made within a doctrinal environment that strongly discourages blood transfusions. Such teachings often place immense psychological

pressure on adherents who fear that accepting blood may be interpreted as disobedience to divine instruction.

For devout believers, the choice is not merely medical; it is spiritual. They may perceive compliance with the doctrine as a test of faith, even when the consequence is fatal. This raises another troubling question: can genuine free choice exist when spiritual consequences are attached to medical decisions?

Critics argue that such circumstances blur the boundary between voluntary belief and institutional influence. When individuals are taught from childhood that accepting blood transfusion could jeopardise their relationship with God, the psychological weight of that belief becomes formidable.

In such situations, declining medical treatment may feel less like a choice and more like an obligation. Beyond individual tragedies, the broader social impact cannot be ignored. Families left behind must live with the emotional aftermath of decisions shaped by doctrine. Children grow up without parents; spouses struggle with grief; communities lose productive members.

While the faith community may interpret such sacrifices as demonstrations of spiritual loyalty, the human consequences remain painfully real.

None of this discussion seeks to ridicule or demonise believers. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are widely recognised for their dedication, discipline and commitment to their faith. Many are known for their peaceful conduct, strong family values and diligent evangelism. Their sincerity is rarely in doubt.

However, sincerity alone does not resolve ethical dilemmas. Throughout history, well-intentioned beliefs have sometimes produced unintended harm. When this occurs, moral cour-

age demands a willingness to reassess longstanding assumptions.

Religious institutions, like all human organisations, must periodically reflect on whether their teachings continue to serve the well-being of their adherents. Faith should ideally uplift life, not endanger it.

The emerging shift in policy regarding autologous blood transfusion may therefore represent an opportunity, perhaps even a turning point.

If the leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses is willing to reconsider aspects of the doctrine in light of medical realities, it could pave the way for deeper dialogue about the broader issue of blood transfusion. Such dialogue would not necessarily undermine the spiritual integrity of the faith; rather, it could demonstrate compassion and responsiveness to the realities faced by believers in modern society.

After all, the preservation of life lies at the heart of many religious teachings. Most moral traditions emphasise the sanctity of human life as one of the highest values. Compassion, mercy and the alleviation of suffering are principles celebrated across religious boundaries.

It would therefore be tragic if doctrines intended to honour God ultimately resulted in avoidable human suffering. The story of the Nigerian woman who lost her battle with cancer should remain a solemn reminder of the stakes involved in this debate. Her death has become more than a personal tragedy; it symbolises the painful intersection between faith, doctrine and medical necessity.

Perhaps the most haunting question her story leaves behind is simple yet profound: if faith is meant to sustain life and hope, should it ever require a believer to reject the very treatment that could keep them alive?

As societies continue to advance scientifically and medically, religious traditions will inevitably encounter new ethical crossroads. The challenge will always be to balance fidelity to spiritual convictions with the responsibility to protect human life.

For the Jehovah's Witnesses, the conversation about blood transfusion remains one of the most sensitive and consequential issues in their history. The recent reconsideration of certain policies suggests that change, however gradual, is possible. One can only hope that future reflections within the organisation will continue to place compassion and the value of human life at the forefront.

Because in the end, doctrines may evolve, interpretations may change and institutions may reform but a life lost can never be restored.

*Odaro, a columnist, lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi.*