

# Resident doctors to begin nationwide strike Tue

The Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) has announced plans for a nationwide engagement beginning Tuesday April 7, following the Federal Government's review of the Professional Allowance Table policy framework and constructive dialogue.

The Secretary General, Dr Shuaibu Ibrahim, disclosed this in a statement, noting the decision followed extensive

consultations among members nationwide, reflecting shared commitment to strengthening healthcare delivery and collaboration efforts.

He explained the resolution was reached during an Extraordinary National Executive Council meeting held virtually, where participants encouraged continued engagement with government to achieve mutually beneficial out-

comes for doctors and patients.

According to the association, the planned action will commence at 12 a.m. Tuesday, involving members across federal, state, and private institutions, while maintaining openness to dialogue and timely resolution efforts ongoing.

The association emphasised the importance of reinstating the Professional Allowance Ta-

ble, describing it as vital to enhancing welfare, boosting morale, and supporting retention of skilled medical professionals across the country nationwide.

It highlighted the need for prompt payment of promotion and salary arrears owed to resident doctors, expressing optimism that ongoing discussions would facilitate resolutions that benefited practitioners

and the healthcare system.

NARD further encouraged timely release of the 2026 Medical Residency Training Fund, noting that improved funding would enhance training opportunities, professional development, and overall capacity within Nigeria's healthcare sector going forward.

The association reiterated the importance of settling outstanding allowance arrears, expressing

confidence that collaborative efforts between stakeholders would ease financial pressures and reinforce commitment among resident doctors serving communities nationwide effectively.

Members were encouraged to remain united and focused, as leadership underscored that ongoing engagement aimed to secure fairness, strengthened working conditions, and promoted a more resilient and responsive healthcare system nationwide.

# The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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**Fuel-hike fuels food crisis as Lagos markets record 'crowds without sales'** —Pg 5

# Okpebholo unveils electricity power decentralisation plan

## ● As Tinubu approves N3.3trn plan to clear power sector debts

RICHARD EWEKA

**UROMI**

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has unveiled a comprehensive plan to decentralise electricity supply, as part of efforts to tackle persistent

power challenges and reduce the state's dependence on the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC).

The governor disclosed this at the 52nd Annual Convention of the Uromi Community Association of Nigeria (UCAN) held at Uromi City

Hall in Esan North-East Local Government Area, where he described erratic electricity supply as a major constraint on economic growth and business operations across the state.

Okpebholo said his administration was already putting modalities in place to improve effi-

ciency in the power sector and ensure more reliable electricity for residents and businesses.

Highlighting ongoing efforts, he revealed that the state had flagged off a 100 megawatt power project in Benin City, with plans underway to establish another 100MW facility in

Edo Central Senatorial District.

According to him, the initiative would decentralise electricity distribution and extend stable supply to communities in Edo Central and Afemai.

"The issue of electricity is very important because it has

become a problem for us as a people," the governor said, adding that his administration was committed to delivering projects that would improve the quality of life for Edo residents.

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**EASTER VISIT:**

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (4th left) flanked by members of the State House of Assembly. From left: Richard Edosa, Oredo West; Majority leader, Hon. Jonathan Ibhama, Esan West; Deputy Speaker, Hon. Osamwonyi Atu, Orhionmwon Constituency I; Speaker, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, Owan West; Hon. Osadolor Uzamere, Ovia North East Constituency II; Hon. Frank Omosigho, Oredo East and Kingsley Ugabi, Etsako East, when the Speaker of the House led principal officers and members on Easter visit to the Governor at his residence in Irrua, Esan Central Local Government Area of the state.

## ...Hails EDHA-Executive synergy, seeks sustained cooperation

- Commissions rebuilt POWA market, donates N200m to fire victims
- Urges unity, renewed faith among Christians at Easter

**BENIN CITY**

The Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly (EDHA), Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, has reaffirmed the legislature's continued support for the policies and programmes of the administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo, pledging collaboration to ensure the fulfilment of electoral promises to the people.

Agbebaku, alongside principal officers and members of the Assembly, paid an Easter visit to the Governor at his country home in Irrua, Esan Central Local Government Area.

Speaking on behalf of the 24-member House, the Speaker commended the Governor for what he described as notable achievements recorded

since assuming office on November 12, 2024.

"Today, we are in your country home to celebrate Easter with you and to let you know that you are doing great work for Edo people. We promise to support you as a House and assure you that every budget you submit will be properly considered and approved to enable the implementation of the SHINE agenda for the benefit of Edo people," he said.

He added that the House would continue to collaborate with the Executive to advance development across the state.

Agbebaku further noted that the construction of the first flyover in Edo State under the current administration would remain a landmark achieve-

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## Okpebholo unveils electricity...

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He assured that development would be spread evenly across the three senatorial districts, stressing that his government remains focused on impactful projects.

Okpebholo also linked the achievements recorded in his first year in office to the support of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, expressing optimism that Edo State would deliver 2.5 million votes for the President in the 2027 general election.

He said he had advised the President not to visit Edo for campaign activities but to come only for the commissioning of completed projects, reflecting confidence in his administration's performance.

The governor, however, criticised the immediate past administration led by Godwin Obaseki, accusing it of hastily commissioning uncompleted projects.

He cited the Stella Obasanjo Hospital as one of such projects, noting that his administration was committing substantial resources to complete it.

Earlier, the Ojuoromi of Uromi, HRH Anselm Edejiye II, drew attention to key developmental challenges in Edo Central, particularly the abandonment of the Ahojie Township Stadium project.

The monarch stressed that reviving the stadium would enhance youth engagement, promote sports development, stimulate economic activities, and strengthen community pride.

"Sports and recreation are vital to the development of any society, especially for our youth," he said, urging the government to prioritise the project.

As part of its broader energy reform efforts, the state government had recently performed a groundbreaking ceremony for a 100MW power generating plant and a 300 metric tonnes per day LNG facility at the Taihu Industrial Park in Ologbo, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, with plans to replicate similar projects in Edo Central to further boost electricity supply and industrial growth.

Meanwhile, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has approved a N3.3 trillion payment plan to settle longstanding debts in Nigeria's power sector under the Presidential Power Sector Financial Reforms Programme.

The repayment plan followed a comprehensive final review of legacy liabilities that have burdened the sector for over a decade.

The development was disclosed in a statement issued on Sunday by the President's spokesperson, Bayo Onanuga.

According to the statement,

the debts, accumulated between February 2015 and March 2025 across the power value chain were subjected to verification, after which N3.3 trillion was agreed upon as a full and final settlement aimed at ensuring a fair, transparent and credible resolution.

Implementation of the plan has commenced, with 15 power generation companies already signing settlement agreements valued at N2.3 trillion.

The Federal Government has also raised N501 billion to support the initial phase of the payments, out of which N223 billion has been disbursed to beneficiaries, while additional payments are ongoing.

The Presidency said the intervention is expected to improve liquidity across the power value chain and stabilise electricity generation nationwide.

It added that enhanced funding would enable power plants to sustain operations, ultimately improving the reliability of electricity supply to homes and businesses.

Onanuga noted that the reforms would strengthen investor confidence, attract fresh investments, and generate employment opportunities within the sector.

Special Adviser to the President on Energy, Olu Arowolo-Verheijen, described the initiative as a critical step towards restoring confidence in the power industry.

"This programme is not just about settling legacy debts; it is about restoring confidence across the power sector and ensuring the system works more reliably," she said.

She further explained that the initiative would ensure prompt payment to gas suppliers, thereby enabling power plants to operate more efficiently and sustainably.

Arowolo-Verheijen added that the reforms form part of broader efforts, including improved metering systems and service-based tariffs tied to electricity supply quality, aimed at enhancing efficiency and accountability.

She noted that the government is prioritising power supply to industries, businesses and small enterprises to stimulate economic growth and job creation.

"The goal is simple: more reliable power for homes, stronger support for businesses, and a system that works better for all Nigerians," she said.

Tinubu also commended stakeholders for their support in addressing longstanding challenges in the sector and advancing ongoing reforms, confirming that the next phase of the programme, known as Series II, will commence within the current quarter.

## ...Hails EDHA-Executive synergy

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

ment in the state's history.

Responding, Governor Okpebholo thanked the lawmakers for maintaining a harmonious working relationship with the Executive, which he said had contributed significantly to the progress recorded within the past year.

He noted that the synergy between the two arms of government had fostered unity and

enabled the administration to achieve measurable gains in infrastructure development.

"I am very happy that since I assumed office in November 2024, you have created a peaceful atmosphere for this administration to achieve its goals and implement policies that have moved the state forward," the governor said.

He urged the Assembly

CONTINUES ON PG 5»

# Okpebholo celebrates Oshiomhole at 74

## ● Lauds enduring leadership legacy

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has paid tribute to former Governor and Senator representing Edo North, Adams Aliyu Oshiomhole, on the occasion of his 74th birthday, commending his enduring contributions to governance

and national development.

In a goodwill message, the Governor described Oshiomhole as a leader whose career has been defined by courage, integrity, and a strong commitment to public service.

He highlighted Oshiomhole's journey from labour leadership to his tenure as Governor of Edo State, noting

that his administration laid the foundation for reform-driven governance and restored public confidence in leadership.

Okpebholo also acknowledged his role as former National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), where he promoted unity and progressive ideals nationwide.

He further praised the senator's continued representation of Edo North Senatorial District, noting that his contribu-

tions in the National Assembly remain impactful.

"As you mark this milestone, we celebrate your achievements and the values you embody. Your guidance and mentorship remain invaluable," the Governor said.

He prayed for continued good health and many more years of service, describing Oshiomhole as a leader whose legacy continues to inspire future generations.



APC LG PRIMARY ELECTION:

Hon. Dennis Idahosa, Edo State Deputy Governor (left) and Hon. Ikponmwonso Omorodion, Commissioner for Livestock Development, Edo State and Returning Officer for the APC Local Government Primary Election in Ovia South-West Local Government Area, during the election held at Iguobazuwa.

## 2026 hajj: Edo secures Pilgrims' visas, ramps up final preparations

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board has announced the approval of visas for intending pilgrims from the state for the 2026 Hajj, marking a significant milestone in the build-up to the annual pilgrimage.

The development was disclosed during a recent briefing by the board's leadership, where officials expressed satisfaction with the level of progress recorded so far.

Chairman of the Board, Mal-

lam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, said the visa approval by Saudi authorities underscores the board's commitment to ensuring a seamless pilgrimage for Edo participants.

According to him, "Preparations are ongoing, and we are making steady progress. The approval of visas for our intending pilgrims is a significant step forward, and it shows that we are on course for a successful Hajj exercise."

He added that the board would, in the coming weeks, commence screenings along-

side comprehensive education and sensitisation programmes to guide pilgrims on the spiritual, health, and logistical requirements of the pilgrimage.

Uduimoh stressed that the sensitisation initiatives are designed to equip pilgrims with the requisite knowledge to ensure compliance with Hajj rites and international travel protocols.

Also speaking, the Executive Secretary of the Board, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkadir, urged intending pilgrims and the general public to remain patient and prayerful, especially amid prevailing uncertainties in the Middle East.

"This Hajj 2026, if you are an intending pilgrim from Edo State, do not grieve if you did not make the list of prospective participants.

"And if you were shortlisted, remain hopeful, but cautious, as the situation in the Middle East is still uncertain. Ultimately, only Allah knows what will happen. May Allah grant us what is best," he said.

The board reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding the welfare of all Edo pilgrims, assuring that necessary arrangements are being put in place to guarantee a hitch-free and spiritually fulfilling pilgrimage.

## Igbinedion University wins Sub-Saharan Africa Huawei ICT title, advances to global finals

EDWARD OSEGHE

Nigeria's leading private university, Igbinedion University, Okada (IUO), has clinched first place in the Sub-Saharan Africa stage of the Huawei ICT Competition, winning the grand prize in the Network Track category.

Team IUO outperformed competitors from across the region to secure the top spot, earning the right to represent Nigeria at the Huawei ICT

global final in China.

IUO is the only private Nigerian university to qualify for this prestigious international stage, where it will face winners from Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Americas, and other African regions.

The Huawei ICT competition, organised in collaboration with universities and UNESCO-IBE, evaluates practical skills in networking, cloud computing, computing innovation, and emerging technologies such as AI and IoT.

Participants progress through national, regional, and global stages, competing with tens of thousands of students worldwide.

"This achievement demonstrates the growing strength of private institutions in developing ICT talent in Nigeria," said an IUO spokesperson.

"It also reflects the impact of the university's Huawei ICT Academy, which equips students with skills that meet global industry standards."

The Network Track tests

expertise in communication networks, routing, switching, security, and 5G/cloud integration.

IUO's success highlights the university's investment in ICT training and partnerships with Huawei, contributing to bridging Nigeria's skills gap in digital technologies.

The team is set to depart for China in the coming weeks to contest the global final, aiming to position Nigeria's private institutions at the forefront of international ICT innovation.

## NEWS

# APC picks 18 chairmanship, 192 councillorship candidates for Edo LG polls

MIKE OSAROGIAGBON

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Edo State has elected chairmanship and councillorship candidates for the July 11, 2026 local government elections, following a direct primary held on Friday, April 3, 2026, across the state's 18 local government areas and 192 wards.

The exercise, supervised by an official of the party's Nation-

al Secretariat, Hon. Abdullahi Bello, was widely commended for its peaceful and orderly conduct. Bello, who also serves as Kogi State Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, described the primaries as largely rancour-free, reflecting the maturity of party members across Edo State.

Edo APC Chairman, Emperor Jarret Tenebe, said the emergence of the candidates

signalled a call to duty, urging them to work diligently to secure victory for the party in all local government areas. He stressed the need for unity and commitment among party faithful ahead of the polls.

At the end of the exercise, returning officers across the 18 local government areas announced results and presented successful candidates.

In Etsako West, Romeo Imoike emerged with 2,209 votes,

while Eriamatoe Christopher secured the Ovia North-East ticket with 3,410 votes. Dame Vera Sadoh, who polled 2,164 votes, clinched the Etsako Central ticket, emerging as the party's only female chairmanship candidate in the state.

Other chairmanship candidates include Ernest Oyaole Aitalege (Owan East), Sino Eric Osawaru (Ikpoba-Okha), Osaro Osa Eribo (Egor), Enahoro Aikpokpo (Owan West), Austin Imafidon (Uhunmwonde), and Sunday Akiotu Ekpeson (Etsako East).

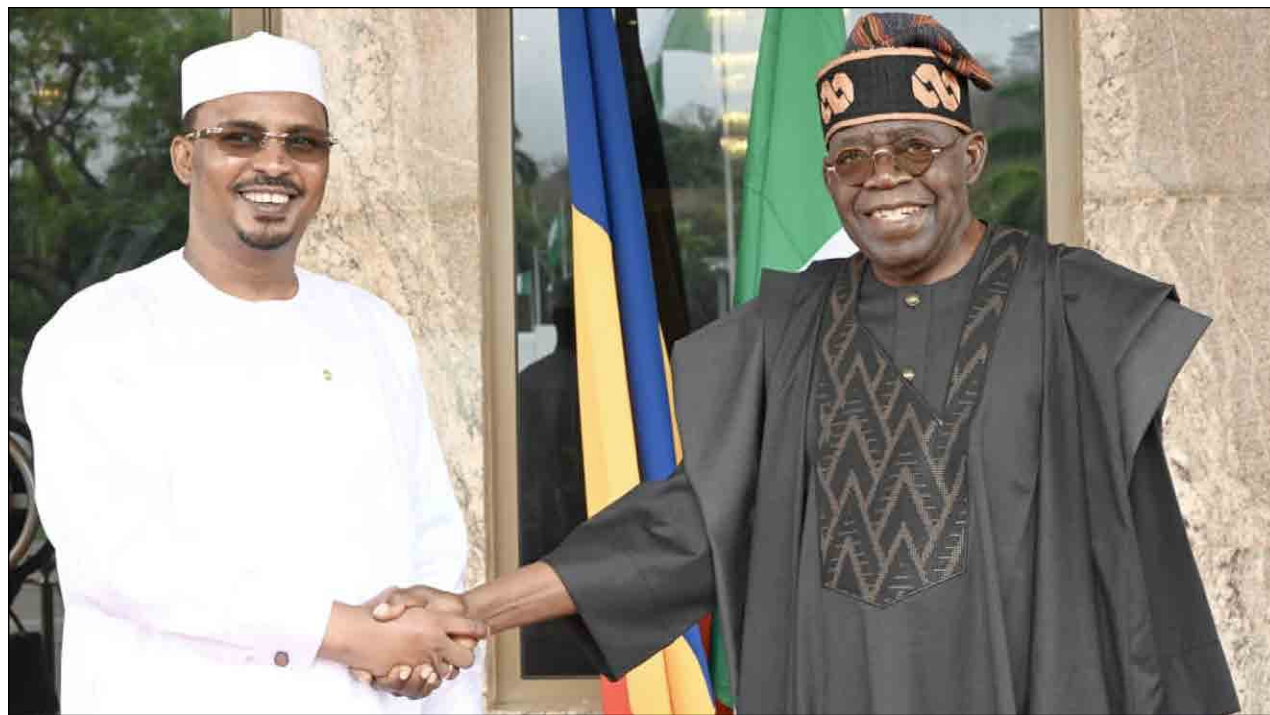
Also elected were Gabriel

Iduseri (Oredo), who recorded the highest votes with 5,933, Osarobo Osaro Anthony (Ovia South-West), Prince Abdullahi Momodu (Esan Central), Thompson Osagie (Orhionmwon), and Tega Amiegbbehor (Esan South-East).

Others are Prince Saturday

Iyoha (Esan North-East), Azemegbe Endurance (Igueben), Robert Akande (Akoko-Edo), and Ebhodaghe Blessing (Esan West).

The party expressed optimism of sweeping victory in the forthcoming local government elections



**TINUBU WELCOMES DÉBY-ITNO:**

President Bola Tinubu (R) welcoming visiting President Mahamat Idriss Déby-Itno of Chad at the Presidential Villa in Abuja recently.

## Troops, NDLEA nab 26 in Bayelsa drug raid

PHILIP JEREMIAH EKE

### BAYELSA

Troops of the 16 Brigade, in collaboration with operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), have arrested

26 suspects during a raid in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa State.

The operation, carried out at about 7:00 a.m. on April 1, targeted criminal networks and illicit drug activities in the state.

Security sources disclosed that among those arrested was a soldier of the 343 Artillery Regiment who had been absent without official leave since 2019.

Items recovered during the operation include two locally

made pistols and a substantial quantity of hard drugs and other illicit substances.

All suspects and recovered items have been handed over to the NDLEA for further investigation and possible prosecution.

## Bayelsa to inaugurate power plant, 630-metre bridge, new roads

PHILIP JEREMIAH EKE

### YENAGOA

The Bayelsa State Government is set to inaugurate its independent power project, alongside a 630-metre Angiama-Oporoma bridge and a newly constructed dual carriage road in Yenagoa.

Governor Douye Diri disclosed this during the March edition of the monthly Praise Night at the King of Glory Chapel, Government House, Yenagoa.

He said the 60-megawatt gas-fired turbine plant located in Elebele community, Ogbia Local Government Area, is 99 per cent completed and would be test-run ahead of its inauguration by President Bola Tinubu.

Diri noted that the project

would boost socio-economic development and industrial growth, adding that electricity consumption would be metered under a pay-as-you-go system to prevent overbilling.

"For 30 years, there has not been a steady power supply in our state. We are bringing 60 megawatts, far more than the maximum 24 megawatts currently supplied from the national grid," he said, urging residents to be patient.

He also highlighted the significance of the Angiama-Oporoma bridge, recalling that former Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo performed its groundbreaking, and noted it is key to the ongoing Agge road project.

The governor added that the dual carriageway linking New Yenagoa City to the NLNG

Road at Gbarantoru would serve as a bypass to the Yenagoa-Mbiama road, while the first phase of the Nembe-Brass road is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

Diri urged political actors to maintain peace and avoid

inflammatory rhetoric as political activities intensify.

Delivering a sermon titled "In Everything Praise God," Chaplain of Bayelsa Medical University, Prof. Steven Olali, encouraged residents to cultivate gratitude and faith.

## CGCC clears controversial N4bn debt to Wema Bank, Pastor Bakare confirms

### LAGOS

Pastor Tunde Bakare, Serving Overseer of Citadel Global Community Church (CGCC), on Sunday announced that the church has fully settled its N4 billion debt to Wema Bank Plc for the construction of its landmark Citadel edifice.

The announcement came during the church's 37th anniversary thanksgiving service in Lagos.

Bakare said the repayment, completed in March, was funded from the sale of a church property at Akilo Road, Ogba.

The debt, part of a N4.5 billion loan from Wema Bank and additional loans from Zenith Bank, Fidelity Bank, UBA, and Unity Bank, had drawn widespread media attention in 2021 due to claims of non-repayment.

Bakare clarified that the loans were fully secured by church property and all other bank ob-

ligations had been settled.

"It is a matter of integrity to repay debts. We are grateful to our members and partners who stood by us. The completion of the Citadel building shall now proceed in peace," Bakare said.

The church's Citadel building houses both the CGCC headquarters and the Citadel School of Government, and is part of Bakare's long-term vision to develop educational and religious institutions in Lagos.

He dismissed rumours of financial mismanagement, calling them "mischief and lies" that caused unnecessary embarrassment.

Bakare also said that negotiations were ongoing to settle interest on the Wema Bank loan, which he expected to be concluded soon.

"Our approach to debt repayment is a demonstration of good faith, transparency, and commitment to our principles," he added.

## Okpella corps members hail Danco over new lodge

LAMAI CASSIUS

### OKPELLA

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members serving in Okpella, Etsako East Local Government Area of Edo State, have commended Hon. Anamero Dekeri, popularly known as DANCO, for constructing a Corpsers' Lodge in the community.

The corps members, accompanied by their Community Development Service (CDS) coordinator, paid a courtesy visit to the lawmaker's country home to express appreciation for the project.

They said the facility has ended the long-standing challenge of securing accommoda-

tion faced by newly deployed corps members, describing it as timely and impactful.

Corpers' Liaison Officer, Mr. Obiora Victor, noted that the lodge would eliminate the stress of searching for housing, enabling corps members to focus on their primary assignments.

Other corps members, including Miss Ogunade Aisha, Oyaleye Felicia and Oyebaniji Joshua, praised the initiative, describing it as a demonstration of commitment to youth welfare and grassroots development.

Responding, Hon. Dekeri assured them of continued support, promising that furnishing and security installations for the lodge would be completed soon.

## Etsako Central Chairman presents N7.319bn 2026 budget

LAMAI CASSIUS

### FUGAR

The Chairman of Etsako Central Local Government, Hon. Cephias Yakubu, has presented a proposed 2026 budget of N7,319,354,422.31 to the legislative arm for consideration and approval.

Tagged the "SHINE Agenda," the budget is aimed at completion of ongoing projects and economic emancipation through poverty reduction, wealth creation, and agricultural and industrial development.

Yakubu said the budget aligns with the policy direction of Governor Monday Okpello and is designed to deliver development to rural communities through critical infrastructure.

He disclosed that the proposal includes recurrent expenditure of N3,847,382,031.33 and capital expenditure of

N1,380,225,662.60.

The chairman explained that the increase over the previous year's budget was due to the impact of fuel subsidy removal, exchange rate fluctuations, rising production costs, and inadequate energy supply.

He added that priority would be given to completing ongoing projects, rural development, road maintenance, and investment in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Yakubu appreciated councillors, staff, traditional rulers and party leaders for their support, noting that peace and cooperation have enabled the council to record significant progress.

Leader of the legislative arm, Hon. Marwan Yusuf, commended the chairman for fostering a cordial relationship between the executive and legislature, assuring speedy consideration and approval of the budget.

# Labour, experts seek urgent policy review on retirement age

## LAGOS

Labour leaders and key stakeholders on Sunday renewed calls for a comprehensive review of Nigeria's retirement age policy, citing shifting economic realities, workforce demands and the need to retain experienced personnel in critical sectors.

Speaking in separate interviews in Lagos, the stakeholders argued that extending the retirement age had become imperative, though they cautioned against a blanket approach that could undermine opportunities for younger Nigerians.

Chairperson of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Lagos State Council, Comrade Funmi Sesi, described the current retirement age of 60 for civil servants as outdated and no longer reflective of present-day realities.

She noted that many workers remained physically active and intellectually capable well beyond that age.

Sesi advocated raising the retirement age to at least 65 years, stressing that doing so would enable experienced workers to continue contributing meaningfully to national development.

"It is long overdue for the government to review the retirement age. Many workers at 60 are still agile, experienced and willing to serve," she said, adding that forced retirement, especially amid persistent pension challenges, was not in workers' best interest.

She pointed out that sectors such as academia already operate extended retirement thresholds, with professors retiring at 70 and other academic staff at 65, urging that similar considerations be extended to other categories of workers.

According to her, many workers acquire vast experi-

ence and specialised skills over decades of service, and the nation stands to benefit more by retaining them rather than retiring them prematurely.

Sesi also linked the issue to the growing brain drain, noting that skilled professionals were leaving Nigeria for countries with more flexible retirement policies.

"Nigeria should not be left behind in aligning with global best practices," she added.

Executive Secretary of the Employers Association for Private Employment Agencies of Nigeria, Mr Jide Afolabi, described retirement as a critical life phase that should guarantee dignity, financial security and fulfilment.

"Unfortunately, in Nigeria today, many retirees face uncertainty, hardship and delayed entitlements. Fixing the pension system is key. Workers should not wait for years to access their benefits," he said.

Afolabi noted that extending the retirement age could help preserve institutional memory and allow workers more time to prepare for life after service.

He emphasised that senior employees often possess invaluable expertise that is difficult to replace.

However, he warned that a blanket extension could slow career progression and limit job opportunities for younger Nigerians.

He recommended a sector-specific approach, particularly for healthcare, education and technical fields where skilled manpower is scarce, adding that any extension should be based on competence, performance and health status.

Trustee of the Employment and Labour Lawyers Association of Nigeria, Mr Jamiu Akolade, also called for a balanced approach, noting that while an extension could aid

knowledge transfer and mentorship, it must not shut out younger workers from employment opportunities.

Similarly, civil servant Mr Tunde Olanipekun described the proposal as beneficial but cautioned against poor implementation, warning it could worsen youth unemployment and frustration.

He advocated flexibility in application, suggesting that workers should be allowed to retire earlier or later depending on individual needs and performance, with priority given to critical sectors.

Another civil servant, Mr Fidelis Ekejuru, supported the extension, arguing that it would improve workers' well-

being. He noted that many retirees become inactive after leaving service, sometimes leading to health challenges.

"Allowing them to remain in service longer could help them stay productive and healthier," he said, while also calling for improved welfare packages, including healthcare and social benefits, to support retirees.

The stakeholders stressed that beyond any adjustment in retirement age, urgent reforms in pension administration remained critical.

They maintained that any policy must strike a balance between retaining experienced workers and creating opportunities for Nigeria's growing youth population.



**SHALLIPOPI VISITS THE PALACE:**

His Royal Majesty, Omo N' Oba N' Edo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Oba Ewuare 11, Oba of Benin with Crown Uzama, aka Shallipopi, during the singer's visit to the Palace recently.

## Anambra Police raise alarm over masked VIP security operatives

### AWKA

The Anambra State Police Command has raised concern over the growing practice of masked security personnel providing protection to Very Important Personalities (VIPs) in the state.

The Police Public Relations Officer, SP Tochukwu Ikenga,

disclosed this in a statement on Sunday, warning that the trend poses serious security risks.

While acknowledging that certain operations may require tactical discretion, Ikenga said masking identities without proper authorisation undermines accountability and public trust.

"Such practices not only pose a potential threat to public safety but also undermine trust, accountability and the

integrity of inter-agency collaboration," he said.

He stressed that identifiable security personnel remain crucial for coordinated operations, particularly in an environment requiring synergy among multiple agencies.

According to him, the use of masks makes it difficult to verify the legitimacy of operatives and could be exploited by criminal elements posing as security agents.

The command, therefore, urged all security agencies operating in the state to ensure their personnel are properly identified during routine and protective duties, noting that exceptions should only apply to clearly defined and authorised tactical operations.

The police reaffirmed their commitment to professionalism, accountability and public trust in the discharge of their constitutional responsibilities.

## Police nab suspected Kidnap kingpin, recover AK-47 in Oyo

### IBADAN

The Oyo State Police Command has arrested a suspected notorious kidnapper allegedly terrorising parts of the state and neighbouring areas, recovering an AK-47 rifle and live ammunition.

The Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Ayanlade Olayinka, disclosed this in a statement on Sunday in Ibadan.

He said the suspect was apprehended in Ikoyi-Ile, Orire Local Government Area, following a joint security operation aided by credible intelligence from members of the public.

According to him, a vigilant resident had reported sighting three armed men moving around forests and farmlands in the area.

Acting on a tip-off, operatives led by the Divisional Police Officer of Ikoyi-Ile Division launched a coordinated search, combing surrounding

bushes, which led to the arrest of one suspect.

Items recovered include an AK-47 rifle with breach number 6628/2274, six rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition and three cartridges.

Olayinka said the suspect had confessed to involvement in multiple kidnapping operations along the Ogbomosho-Ikoyi-Ile axis and was cooperating with investigators.

Further findings revealed that he had long been on the command's watchlist and is linked to cross-border criminal activities.

The Commissioner of Police, Mr Abimbola Olugbenga, has ordered the transfer of the case to the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) for thorough investigation, while a manhunt has been launched for other members of the gang.

The command reassured residents of its determination to rid the state of kidnapping, banditry and other violent crimes.

## Easter: Delta Speaker urges hope, unity amid nat'l challenges

### ASABA

The Speaker of the Delta State House of Assembly, Mr Dennis Guwor, has called on Christians to embrace hope, unity and renewal as they celebrate Easter, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In an Easter message issued on Sunday through his

Chief Press Secretary, Nkem Nwaeke, Guwor described the season as a powerful reminder of the triumph of life over death and light over darkness.

"Easter remains the cornerstone of the Christian faith, commemorating the sacrificial love and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ," he said.

He urged Christians to reflect on Christ's virtues and

apply them as practical tools for building peaceful, just and united societies.

Acknowledging Nigeria's current challenges, the Speaker stressed the need for resilience, unity and collective action, urging citizens and leaders to work together towards peace, security and prosperity.

"The message of Easter assures us that no situation is be-

yond redemption. It calls us to remain steadfast, support one another and work collaboratively for a better future," he said.

Guwor also reaffirmed the commitment of state legislatures to enacting laws that promote good governance, social justice and economic development, while assuring that the assembly would continue to prioritise the welfare of the people.

## Easter: Cleric warns against worldly influence, urges steadfast faith

### KADUNA

Cleric, Rev Fidelis Barry of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), has urged Christians to resist worldly influences and remain steadfast in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Barry made the call during

an Easter sermon at ECWA English Church, Sabon Tasha, Kaduna, on Sunday.

He lamented what he described as a gradual shift in the church from a transformed and distinct body to one conforming to worldly standards.

"Gradually, the church is moving from being unique and

transformed to a community that conforms to the pattern of the world," he said.

The cleric described Easter as a period for deep reflection on the resurrection of Christ and its transformative impact on believers, noting that the resurrection signifies victory over sin and death.

He added that Christ's resurrection affirms God's acceptance of His sacrifice as full atonement for humanity's sins, offering believers assurance of divine intervention despite life's challenges.

Barry also prayed for peace in Nigeria, particularly calling for an end to the killings in Jos.

## NEWS

# Fuel-hike fuels food crisis as Lagos markets record 'crowds without sales'

## LAGOS

Rising fuel prices are driving a sharp surge in food costs across Lagos, leaving traders struggling with dwindling sales and consumers battling shrinking purchasing power.

Alhaji Abiodun Kosoko, Baba Loja General of Agbado Oke-Odo LCDA, blamed escalating transport costs for the spike in food prices, warning that the situation is squeezing traders and deepening hardship for households.

Speaking during a visit to Ile

Epo Market, Kosoko described a troubling disconnect between heavy market traffic and actual sales, noting that while markets remain crowded, buyers are purchasing far less than before.

He explained that most food items are transported from northern and neighbouring states where production is higher, but rising fuel prices, long distances and multiple levies along supply routes have significantly inflated final market prices.

"People come to buy food-stuffs but leave with less than

planned. There are turnouts but no turnover," he said.

Kosoko warned that the trend threatens the survival of small-scale traders, many of whom depend on quick turnover to avoid losses from perishable goods, and urged the Federal Government to intervene through fuel subsidies or transport support.

He noted that a bag of rice, previously sold for ₦50,000, now sells between ₦56,000 and ₦58,000, depending on brand and supply conditions.

A meat seller, Mr Hammed Adekunle, said customers of-

ten accuse traders of profiteering, despite rising costs across the supply chain.

"They think I inflate prices, but suppliers keep raising costs beyond my control," he said, adding that livestock, feed and transport costs have surged, leaving sellers with little choice but to increase prices.

Shoppers also lamented the worsening situation. Mrs Sola Ogunbade, a teacher, said she now prioritises essential items and often leaves out key food-stuffs to stay within budget.

Similarly, Mrs Mary Chukwu, a mother of three, said her family meals have been reduced to basic survival, with little room for balanced nutrition.

Mr Funbi Idowu described

the Easter season as the most difficult his family has faced, noting that celebrations have been scaled down drastically.

"We can't afford a whole chicken. We will celebrate Easter quietly and hope things improve," he said.

## Easter: NGO takes anti-drug campaign to Lagos schools, parents

## LAGOS

A Non-Governmental Organisation, Straight Out of Navy Town (SONT), has intensified efforts to combat drug abuse through a wide-reaching awareness campaign targeting students and parents.

The initiative, held at the Multi-purpose Sports Complex in Navy Town, Ojo, focused on educating young people about the dangers of substance abuse and the long-term consequences on their future.

General Coordinator of SONT, Mr Ayodeji Ogunyemi, said the campaign became necessary due to the alarming rise in drug use among youths, warning that it is eroding the potential of young minds.

He said the Easter period provided an opportunity to reach both students and parents at home, allowing for broader engagement.

The group conducted out-

reach visits to schools, churches and mosques within Navy Town, alongside rallies aimed at reinforcing the anti-drug message.

Ogunyemi urged parents to remain vigilant and confront the issue openly, warning that silence and stigma often worsen the problem.

Also speaking, Ms Blessing Clark of SheSparks Empowerment Initiative said her organisation partnered with SONT to support the girl-child, noting that drug abuse could derail their future aspirations.

A clinical psychologist at the Nigerian Navy Reference Hospital, Mrs Chineye Onuoha, emphasised early intervention, warning that experimentation with drugs often begins through exposure at social events.

Students who participated in the programme said they learned the importance of resisting peer pressure and adhering to proper medication use, pledging to share the message with others.



## STATION OF THE CROSS:

Christian faithful, from SS. Joachim and Anne Catholic Church, Ijegun, Ikotun, during a station of the cross on Good Friday in Lagos.

## 'We 'll defeat terrorism' —Tinubu

### ● Unveils Ogun airport, new airline

## IPERU, OGUN STATE

President Bola Tinubu has reaffirmed his administration's resolve to defeat banditry and terrorism while accelerating infrastructure development to boost economic growth.

Speaking on Saturday during the inauguration of the Gateway International Airport

in Iperu, Tinubu declared that the Federal Government remains committed to restoring security across the country.

"We will win over banditry and terrorism," the president said.

He described infrastructure as critical to strengthening Nigeria's economic corridors and commended Governor Dapo Abiodun for transforming Ogun State's aviation land-

scape.

Tinubu inaugurated the airport alongside the state-owned Gateway Airline and other projects, including roads and housing developments, praising Abiodun for what he called visionary leadership.

"In less than seven years, you have demonstrated commitment, vision and patriotism to grow Nigeria," Tinubu said, adding that increased federal allocations are being put to effective use.

He also stated that ongoing reforms are repositioning Nigeria as a respected and competitive global player, insisting that his administration's investments remain people-focused.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo described the airport as a landmark achievement, noting that it significantly reduces travel time to his residence compared to landing in Lagos.

Senate President Godswill Akpabio lauded Tinubu's reforms, saying they have eased states' financial burdens, particularly in salary payments.

## Easter: Jonathan urges leaders to embrace sacrifice, selflessness

## ABUJA

Former President Goodluck Jonathan has called on leaders to rise above personal interests and embrace

sacrifice, humility and service in the spirit of Easter.

In his Easter message, Jonathan urged Nigerians to remain hopeful despite current challenges, stressing that the

season symbolises faith, redemption and victory.

"True leadership demands that we live above personal interest and serve with sacrifice, humility and sincerity,"

he said.

He encouraged citizens not to lose faith in Nigeria, noting that the country has overcome difficult periods in the past.

## Easter: Dangiswa calls for unity, renewed commitment to nat'l growth

## ABUJA

Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Ahmed Dangiswa, has urged Nigerians to

embrace unity, sacrifice and resilience as the nation pursues development.

In his Easter message, Dangiswa described the season as a reminder of hope, renewal

and collective responsibility, noting that these values are essential for national progress.

He reaffirmed the Federal Government's commit-

ment to expanding access to affordable housing and building sustainable communities, while calling for renewed dedication to inclusive growth.

## ...Hails EDHA-Executive synergy

### «CONTINUED FROM PG 2

to sustain the cooperation, stressing that more could be achieved in a peaceful and united environment.

Also, Governor Monday Okpebholo has commissioned the rebuilt Police Officers' Wives Association (POWA) market complex in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area, following its destruction by fire about four months ago.

The Governor, who had earlier pledged to rebuild the market, said the commissioning fulfilled that promise, while also announcing a N200 million support package for affected traders.

The fund, he explained, would assist shop owners who lost goods during the January 11, 2026 fire incident, which destroyed over 25 shops at the Ekpoma Police Division.

"We all remember this market. A few months ago, there was a fire incident here. We came to assess the damage, commiserate with the victims, and promised to rebuild the market. Today, that promise has been fulfilled," he said.

He added that the government would compile the names of affected traders to ensure transparent disbursement of the N200 million support fund to aid their recovery.

The Governor had visited the site shortly after the incident in January and pledged immediate intervention.

He also indicated that similar

efforts were ongoing to rebuild the Oba Market in Oredo Local Government Area, which was also affected by fire, with the contractor expected to hand over the project in the coming days.

Meanwhile, Governor Okpebholo, has called on Christians in the state and across Nigeria to embrace unity, hope, and renewed faith as they celebrate Easter.

In his Easter message, the Governor described the season as a sacred period symbolising sacrifice, love, hope, and redemption, urging Christians to reflect on the teachings and life of Jesus Christ.

He said Easter represents the triumph of light over darkness and life over death, encouraging citizens to remain resilient despite prevailing challenges.

Okpebholo appealed to residents to promote peace, unity, and mutual respect, regardless of religious or ethnic differences.

He reaffirmed his administration's commitment to good governance, economic growth, and improved welfare for the people, stressing the importance of collective effort in building a prosperous Edo State.

"Let this Easter season inspire us to renew our faith in God and in one another as we work together towards a better future for our dear state," he said.

The Governor also urged prayers for sustained peace, progress, and development in Edo State and Nigeria, particularly as the 2027 general elections approach, and wished Christians a joyful celebration

# IG cracks down on viral stop-and-search abuse, summons officers to Abuja

LAGOS

The Inspector-General of Police, Mr Olatunji Disu, has ordered of-

ficers captured in a viral stop-and-search video in Lagos to report to the Force Headquarters in Abuja for disciplinary proceedings.

The directive, disclosed on Sunday by Force Media Officer CSP Aliyu Giwa via his X handle, follows widespread outrage over footage showing officers allegedly harassing ci-

vilians in Satellite Town.

According to Giwa, the officers are to appear on Wednesday to face disciplinary action, underscoring the Force's renewed emphasis on accounta-

bility and professionalism.

The video, which surfaced on Saturday, showed officers stopping a vehicle, ordering occupants out, and taking one individual aside for a search away from public view.

"The Nigeria Police Force values concerns of the public, which continue to reinforce

our commitment to accountability and professional standards," Giwa said.

He assured Nigerians that appropriate sanctions would follow the outcome of the disciplinary process, reiterating the Force's commitment to discipline, justice and institutional integrity.

## FRSC, police recover stolen vehicle in Ekiti through digital tracking

ABUJA

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has recorded a breakthrough in the fight against vehicle theft with the recovery of a stolen car in Ekiti State using its National Vehicle Identification Scheme (NVIS).

According to Corps Public Education Officer, Mr Osondu Ohaeri, the discovery was made during routine checks at the NVIS Desk Office in Ado Ekiti.

He said discrepancies in the chassis number of a 2006 Toyota Camry raised suspicion, prompting further verification through the NVIS database.

The corrected details matched a vehicle reported stolen two years ago, leading to swift coordination with law enforcement.

Police operatives from Irewolede Police Station in Ilorin later recovered the vehicle in Emure-Ekiti.

Ohaeri described the operation as a testament to effective inter-agency collaboration and the importance of digital tracking in combating automobile-related crimes.

He urged Nigerians to ensure proper vehicle documentation and verification, reaffirming the Corps' commitment to enhancing road safety and national security.

## Easter brings hope amid challenges, Shettima tells Nigerians

ABUJA

Vice-President Kashim Shettima on Sunday assured Nigerians that the economic and security challenges currently confronting the nation are temporary, promising brighter days under President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda.

In an Easter message issued by his spokesperson, Stanley Nkwocha, Shettima emphasised that the administration remains committed to peace, economic recovery, and long-term prosperity.

He said the path to national renewal often demands patience, collective sacrifice, and shared determination.

"We have endured difficult times, but Nigeria has never been defined by adversity. By our collective will, shared sacrifice, and abiding faith, we shall overcome the challenges before us," Shettima said, noting that the government's reform agenda targets key areas including job creation, infrastructure development, and improved governance.

Shettima urged Nigerians to remain united and continue supporting ongoing reforms, stressing that national progress requires endurance and a shared sense of purpose.

He warned against divisive tendencies, emphasising that Nigeria's diversity, cultural, ethnic, and religious remain one of the nation's greatest strengths.

Reflecting on Easter's signif-

icance, the Vice-President said the Christian festival offers a message of sacrifice, hope, and renewal.

"Easter reminds us that no hardship lasts forever. It is the story of light piercing through darkness, hope rising from the shadows of pain, and faith prevailing over fear. It is a call to courage, resilience, and the unwavering belief in the promise of Nigeria," he said.

The Easter message comes as the country continues to grapple with inflation, rising unemployment, and security challenges across parts of the North-East and Middle Belt. Analysts say the government's Renewed Hope Agenda seeks to combine economic stimulus measures with security interventions to stabilise the nation and boost investor confidence.



SHETTIMA



PRIMARY ELECTION:

Hon. Charity Amayaenvbo, Chairman of the APC Primary Committee presenting Hon Osarobo Anthony, the Ovia South-West Local Government Council, chairmanship candidate for the forthcoming Local Government Council election in Edo State to members of the party after he was declared winner of the primary election held at Iguobazuwa, headquarters of the local government area.

PHOTO: MOSES OBOH

## FCT residents hail free medical outreach, back

ABUJA

Residents of Byazhin Community in Kubwa, Bwari Area Council of the FCT, have commended a medical outreach organised by the Dr Patrick Ezie Campaign Organisation, describing it as a timely intervention in addressing healthcare gaps.

The outreach, which ran from Saturday to Sunday, at-

tracted a large turnout, with over 250 residents benefiting from free medical services.

A resident, Mr Kings Etta, described the initiative as unprecedented in the community, noting that it gave residents a sense of belonging.

"We did not expect such a massive turnout. People kept coming and inviting others," he said.

Etta and other community

members expressed support for Dr Ezie's ambition to represent AMAC/Bwari Federal Constituency on the platform of the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

ADC officials in the area, including Ward Vice Chairman Mr Binna Zolo and Kubwa Ward Chairman Mr Akpama Michael, praised the outreach, particularly for assisting residents who cannot afford hos-

pital care.

Dr Ezie said the programme included free screenings for blood pressure, blood sugar, BMI, HIV and malaria, as well as deworming for children.

He revealed that cases of hypertension and minor surgical conditions were identified, pledging free treatment and promising to rehabilitate the community's Primary Health Centre.

## Police bust cult meeting in Ondo, arrest 5 suspected Eiye members

AKURE

The Ondo State Police Command has disrupted a suspected cult gathering in Akungba-Akoko, arresting five alleged members of the notorious Eiye Confraternity.

The command's spokesperson, DSP Abayomi Jimoh, said

the operation followed credible intelligence indicating that suspected cultists were converging at a residential building.

He identified the suspects as Adesuye Dare, Ayeerun Joshua, Ojo Omole, Adu Dele and Akeju Idowu.

According to him, the suspects were caught chanting cult slogans and exhibiting

behaviours consistent with cult activities, raising concerns about public safety.

Operatives of the Special Anti-Cultism Squad swiftly cordoned off the area and apprehended the suspects.

Jimoh said preliminary investigations confirmed links to the Eiye Confraternity, a group associated with violent crimes

and threats to public order.

He added that the suspects are in custody and assisting investigations, while efforts are ongoing to uncover a wider network.

The Commissioner of Police, Adebowale Lawal, commended the operatives and members of the public for their collaboration, reiterating the command's zero-tolerance stance on cultism.

## Abuja traders count losses as electricity power crisis deepens

ABUJA

Traders across the Federal Capital Territory have raised alarm over crippling losses as prolonged power outages threaten the survival of their businesses.

Business owners in Karu, ACO Estate, Dei-Dei and Dutse described the situation as frustrating, saying unreliable

electricity has forced many to rely heavily on expensive diesel.

Mr Andrew Okorie, who operates a cold room in Karu, said he spends nearly ₦20,000 daily on diesel, leaving him with little or no profit.

"It's not funny at all. I am barely breaking even," he said.

Restaurant owner Mrs Agnes Odiase lamented erratic

supply, saying power rarely lasts an hour at a stretch, while barber Mr Segun Ayomide said he had doubled haircut prices from ₦500 to ₦1,000 to cope with fuel costs.

A fashion designer, Mr Raymond Okon, said the outages had made it difficult to meet customer demands, while Mrs Caroline Uneru, a drinks seller, said her business was collapsing due

to inability to refrigerate goods.

The Nigerian Independent System Operator attributed the situation to persistent gas supply constraints affecting thermal power plants.

Minister of Power, Mr Adebayo Adelabu, has, however, assured Nigerians that supply would improve within two weeks, apologising for the current situation.

## NEWS

## JUDICIARY

# Benue tops Nigeria's displacement crisis as rights violations surge —NHRC

ABUJA

Benue State has remained a major flashpoint in Nigeria's worsening internal displacement crisis, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has disclosed, warning of a deepening

protection emergency across affected regions.

Executive Secretary of the commission, Dr Tony Ojukwu (SAN), made this known at the presentation of the January and February Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) dashboard in Abuja, where he was

represented by the Director of Legal Services, Ms Rabi Anwar.

He said data from the two months revealed a persistent and growing crisis, with Human Rights Monitors reaching 10,884 IDPs across 3,754 households.

Of this figure, 6,003 were children, representing 36 per-

cent of the affected population.

Benue recorded the highest number of displaced persons at 4,178, followed by Borno with 3,411, underscoring the severity of insecurity in both states.

Ojukwu attributed the trend to repeated attacks on farming communities in Benue and sustained insurgent activities in Borno, which have also disrupted access to farmlands.

The commission further documented 527 asylum seekers, largely in Taraba and Borno, as well as 1,159 refugees, with the same states hosting the highest number of refugee households.

A total of 2,119 returnees were also recorded, 95 per cent of whom were children.

Ojukwu described the broader human rights situation as bleak, noting that over 5,048 cases of rights violations were documented.

These include limited access to education and healthcare, violations of socio-economic rights such as food and shelter, restrictions on movement, gender-based violence, and child protection concerns.

He added that 69 monitoring visits to detention facilities revealed troubling conditions,

including prolonged detention, poor feeding, and unsanitary environments, particularly in Taraba and Benue.

In response, the commission conducted 502 community outreach sessions, reaching 9,185 individuals with information on human rights, gender-based violence prevention, and reporting mechanisms. Cross River, Benue, Katsina and Adamawa accounted for over half of the beneficiaries.

The dashboard, presented by project coordinator Dr Benedict Agu, was developed in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to track and respond to the realities facing displaced populations across 11 states, including Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Borno, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara.



**CORONATION AND PRESENTATION OF STAFF:**

A cross section of traditional rulers, during the coronation and presentation of Staff of office to three high chiefs promoted to Oba in Ibadan by the Governor of Oyo State, represented by the Deputy Governor, Alhaji Bayo Lawal at the Mapo Hall in Ibadan recently.

## NGIJ moves to partner NILDS on legislative reporting, accountability

ABUJA

The Nigerian Guild of Investigative Journalists (NGIJ) has initiated moves to partner the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) to strengthen legislative reporting and deepen democratic accountability.

The proposal was presented during a courtesy visit by the NGIJ President, Malam Abdulrahman Aliagan, and his delegation to the institute in Abuja.

Aliagan described the engagement as strategic, noting

that both institutions share a common goal of strengthening democracy, promoting accountability, and advancing good governance.

He said while NILDS focuses on legislative research and capacity building, NGIJ complements these efforts through investigative and public-interest journalism.

According to him, the guild's Governance Assessment Visits across states including Kogi, Bayelsa, Ondo, Kwara, Osun and Kaduna have enhanced public discourse and accountability at the subnational level.

He outlined proposed areas of collaboration to include training on legislative processes, joint research, policy dialogues, data sharing, and fellowship programmes for journalists and researchers.

Aliagan also informed the institute of plans to host the Dele Giwa Memorial Annual Lecture on Investigative Journalism in June to mark Democracy Day, requesting the NILDS Director-General, Prof. Abubakar Suleiman, as keynote speaker and the use of the institute's auditorium.

Responding, the Director-General, represented by Director of Legal Services, Prof. Ibrahim Danwanka, de-

scribed the proposal as timely and beneficial, noting NILDS' expanding role in supporting legislatures across Nigeria and other African countries including Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Togo.

He emphasised the specialised nature of legislative reporting and the need for journalists to acquire deeper knowledge of parliamentary processes, assuring that the requests would be conveyed to the DG for consideration.

Both parties expressed optimism about formalising the partnership to enhance governance and democratic institutions through knowledge-driven journalism.

## Court jails couple 15yrs each for baby trafficking in C'River

CALABAR

The Federal High Court in Calabar has sentenced a couple, Esther and Eyo Udo, to 15 years imprisonment each for baby trafficking.

The convicts were arraigned by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking

in Persons (NAPTIP) on four counts bordering on the buying and selling of children for exploitation.

Delivering judgment, Justice Ijeoma Ojukwu found them guilty on all counts and sentenced Esther to 15 years imprisonment with an additional fine of N2 million.

The sentences are to run concurrently from the date of judgment.

The court also ordered the arrest of one Oluchi Judith, alleged to be involved in multiple trafficking operations and currently at large.

Prosecution told the court that Esther sold her newborn baby for

N300,000 to the suspect, and that the couple also bought a one-year-old boy for N150,000 before reselling him for N400,000.

They were charged under relevant provisions of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015, but had pleaded not guilty, leading to a full trial.

## Mechanic jailed 1yr for stealing church amplifier

KAFANCHAN (KADUNA)

A Customary Court in Kafanchan has sentenced a 24-year-old mechanic, Usman Sagir, to 12 months imprisonment for stealing an electronic amplifier

from a church.

Sagir was charged with criminal trespass and theft after he was caught with the stolen amplifier valued at N250,000.

The prosecutor, ASP Esther Bishen, told the court that the incident was reported by one

Des Dave, who discovered the theft during a rehearsal at the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

The complainant reportedly pursued and apprehended the defendant after spotting him carrying the amplifier along Jos Street.

Sagir pleaded guilty and sought leniency.

The court sentenced him to six months imprisonment or a fine of N20,000 for trespass, and another six months or N30,000 fine for theft, with both sentences to run concurrently.

## 2 dead, several injured in Ibadan multi-vehicle crash

IBADAN

The Oyo State Police Command has confirmed that two persons died while several others were injured in a multiple accident at Soka Junction along the Ibadan-Lagos Expressway.

The Command's spokesperson, DSP Ayanlade Olayinka, said the accident occurred at about 10:10 p.m. on Saturday and involved a HOWO truck driven by Abdullahi Bashiru.

According to him, the driver lost control due to excessive speed and rammed into vehicles and pedestrians, damaging several cars including a Toyota Venza and a BMW.

The Commissioner of Police, Abimbola Olugbenga, commiserated with the families of the deceased and wished the injured speedy recovery.

Police have commenced investigations, urging motorists to adhere to traffic regulations and avoid reckless driving.

## Rising egg prices push staple beyond reach for many in Abuja

ABUJA

Escalating egg prices have placed the staple food item beyond the reach of many residents of the Federal Capital Territory, with consumers and traders blaming heat, rising transport costs, and expensive poultry feed.

A market survey shows that a crate of eggs now sells between N5,900 and N7,500, forcing many households to cut back on consumption or abandon it altogether.

Traders attributed the surge to reduced supply caused by hot weather conditions, which

affect poultry productivity, as well as increased logistics costs driven by high fuel prices.

Consumers lamented the impact on household budgets, with some describing eggs as a "luxury item," while others said they now opt for alternative protein sources, such as beans.

Bakers and small business owners also reported adjusting their prices upward to cope with rising input costs.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics indicates a marginal year-on-year increase in egg prices, reflecting broader inflationary pressures in the food sector.

## Police dismiss bomb scare, link Kaduna explosion to CNG bus

KADUNA

The Kaduna State Police Command has dismissed reports of a bomb blast at Mando Motor Park, clarifying that the incident involved a compressed natural gas (CNG)-powered bus.

Police spokesperson DSP Mansir Hassan said the explosion, which occurred around 3:00 a.m. at the premises of Silver Luxury Travel, was caused by overfilling of the vehicle's

gas tank.

He said no casualties or property damage were recorded, and normal activities have since resumed in the area.

The Commissioner of Police, Muhammad Rabiu, has ordered a full investigation, while operatives of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit were deployed as a precaution.

The command urged the public to verify information before dissemination to avoid panic over security-related incidents.

## Foreign

## NEWS

## Pope Leo calls on global leaders to choose peace in his first Easter Mass

Thousands of worshippers flocked to St Peter's Square on Sunday to hear Pope Leo XIV deliver his first Easter Mass address as pontiff.

Framed by white roses on the central balcony of the Vatican's basilica, the pope called on "those who have the power to unleash wars" to choose peace.

"On this day of celebration, let us abandon every desire for conflict, domination and power, and implore the Lord to grant his peace to a world ravaged by wars," he said.

The first US-born pope has become a vocal critic of the Iran war, and has used recent public addresses to denounce global conflicts and urge de-escalation.

Pope Leo waved to the

crowd gathered in the square before delivering his "Urbi et Orbi" blessing - Latin for "to the city and the world".

St Peter's Square was decorated with bright spring blooms, with rows of daffodils and thousands of purple, red and white flowers arranged for the Easter Mass.

"We are growing accustomed to violence, resigning ourselves to it, and becoming indifferent to the deaths of thousands of people," the pope said in his address.

"Let those who have weapons lay them down. Let those who have the power to unleash wars choose peace."

In a break with recent tradition, Leo did not explicitly name any country or conflict in his message.

He paid tribute to his predecessor, Pope Francis, who gave his final address on Easter Sunday last year hours before his death.

Referring to the Easter story of Christ's resurrection, three days after he was nailed to the cross, he said Jesus had been "entirely nonviolent" in the face of suffering.

For Christians, Easter is the most important date in the liturgical calendar, marking the resurrection of Christ - a central tenet of the faith.

Reuters Swiss guards line up, wearing their traditional, colourful uniforms and helmets with red feather plumes.

As bells rang out across the Vatican and the crowd applauded, Leo concluded his blessing by offering Easter greetings in

several languages, including Latin, Arabic and Chinese.

The pope also announced that he would return to the basilica on 11 April to lead a prayer vigil for peace.

Leo has repeatedly denounced ongoing global conflicts in recent weeks, using a series of Holy Week addresses to warn against what he has described as a growing indifference to war and suffering.

In his sermon during Saturday night's Easter vigil, the pontiff urged believers not to feel numbed by the scale of global conflicts but to work actively for reconciliation.

He made a rare direct appeal to Donald Trump on Tuesday, urging the US President to find an "off-ramp" to end the conflict with Iran.

## How downed F-15 US airman was rescued inside Iran

The US has rescued the missing crew member of the US F-15 fighter jet which was shot down on Friday over southern Iran.

President Donald Trump confirmed the rescue on social media on Sunday morning after the US military "pulled off one of the most daring Search and Rescue Operations" in its history. The officer is "now SAFE and SOUND!" he added, though in a later post Trump said he had been "seriously wounded".

Two crew members were on board the jet, and both ejected from the plane. One of them had already been rescued by US forces.

Iranian officials said the warplane was shot down by its air defence system.

Details around the rescue operation and how it unfolded are still emerging. Here is what we know so far.

### How was the officer rescued?

The US and Iran were in a race to locate the missing crew member after the jet was downed over southern Iran.

The exact circumstances of the US rescue remain unclear, but one person familiar with the operation described it as a "huge" combat search and rescue mission in southern Iran.

Trump paused a number of other operations in Iran to focus on the rescue, directing dozens of special operations forces personnel to the effort, the BBC's US partner CBS reported.

"This type of raid is seldom attempted because of the danger to 'man and equipment.' It just doesn't happen!" the president said on social media.

The rescue of crew members of a downed jet is one of the most complex and time-sensitive operations - known as combat search and rescue (CSAR) - that the US military and its allies prepare for.

The missions are often conducted by helicopters, which fly low over enemy territory, alongside other military aircraft that conduct strikes and patrol the area.

In his social media post, Trump said the airman - a colonel - "was behind enemy lines

in the treacherous mountains of Iran, being hunted down by our enemies, who were getting closer and closer by the hour".

Officials told US media that the crew member spent more than 24 hours on his own, hiding in the mountains with a handgun. He was said to have hidden in a mountain crevice and hiked up a 7,000ft (2,000m) ridge line.

The president added the airman's location was monitored "24 hours a day" by officials who were planning the rescue operation.

After he was rescued, he was flown to Kuwait to receive treatment for his injuries, CBS said quoting US officials.

Media reports said the CIA played a crucial role in the rescue mission by tracking the airman in a mountain crevice and passing his exact location to the Pentagon.

The agency engaged in a deception campaign inside Iran, reports said. While the rescue attempt was taking place, it spread word the airman had already been found and was being extracted.

Trump said the US military sent dozens of aircraft into Iran and claimed the operation was carried out without any Americans being killed or wounded.

Iranian state media reported that troops from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) shot down a US drone searching for the missing airman.

Earlier, Iran had said it wanted to find the missing American alive and had offered a reward to citizens for help in finding them.

The crew of a downed jet are highly trained for such situations.

"Their number-one priority is to stay alive and to avoid capture," Jennifer Kavanagh, director of military analysis at think tank Defense Priorities, told the BBC.

"They're trained to... try to get away from the ejection site as quickly as possible, and to conceal themselves so that they are safe."

They're also trained on survival techniques so that they can go without food or water, or find resources from the local terrain, for as long as possible, Kavanagh said.



US EAGLE JETS:

Photo of two F-15E Strike Eagle jets

## Aid groups warn Iran war is hindering food and medicine from reaching millions

Aid groups are warning that the war in the Middle East has upended their ability to get food and medicine to millions of people around the world in need, and that the suffering will deepen if the violence continues.

Not only has the conflict cut off vital shipping routes, creating a global energy crisis, it's also disrupting supply chains for aid groups, forcing them to use costlier, more time-consuming routes.

Key pathways such as the Strait of Hormuz have been effectively shuttered and routes from strategic hubs such as Dubai, Doha and Abu Dhabi have also been impacted. Transport costs have spiked with higher fuel and insurance rates, meaning less supplies can be delivered with the same amount of money.

The World Food Program says it has tens of thousands

of metric tons of food heavily delayed in transit. The International Rescue Committee has \$130,000 worth of pharmaceuticals intended for war-torn Sudan stranded in Dubai and nearly 670 boxes of therapeutic food meant for severely malnourished children in Somalia stuck in India.

The U.N. Population Fund says it's delayed sending equipment to 16 countries.

The United Nations says this is the most significant supply chain disruption since COVID, with up to a 20% cost increase on shipments and delays as goods are rerouted.

"The war on Iran and disruption to the Strait of Hormuz risk pushing humanitarian operations beyond their limits," said Madiha Raza, associate director for public affairs and communications for Africa for the International Rescue Committee.

Even when the fighting stops, the shock to global supply chains could continue to delay lifesaving aid for months, she said.

Longer and more costly routes

The war has forced organizations to find new ways to transport goods, with some bypassing the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal and rerouting vessels around Africa, adding weeks to the delivery.

Others are using a hybrid of methods, including land, sea and air, increasing costs.

Jean-Cedric Meeus, chief of global transport and logistics for UNICEF, said his agency is using a mix of land and air routes to send vaccines to Nigeria and Iran in order to get them there in time for the vaccination campaigns, but the costs have soared.

Before the war, UNICEF sent

vaccines to Iran by plane directly from vendors around the world. Now it's flying the vaccines to Turkey and driving them into Iran, which has increased costs by 20% and has added 10 days to the delivery time, he said.

Save the Children International, which would normally send supplies by ocean freight from Dubai to Port Sudan, will now have to truck the goods from Dubai through Saudi Arabia and then by barge across the Red Sea, it said. The route adds 10 days and increases costs by about 25%, at a time when over 19 million Sudanese face acute food insecurity. The delay puts more than 90 primary health care facilities across Sudan at risk of running out of essential medicines, it said.

The spike in prices also means organizations have to choose what to prioritize.

## Cameroon parliament votes to create vice president post

Cameroon's parliament on Saturday approved a bill creating the position of a vice president despite protests by the opposition.

200 lawmakers voted in favor of the text, while 18 rejected it.

Four votes were declared invalid.

Debate on the constitutional amendment had only started on Thursday in the capital Yaounde.

Veteran opposition leader Maurice Kamto had called the

bill an attempt at a power grab in an address on Friday.

According to the text, the vice president would take over in the event of the president's death, resignation or incapacity with no obligation to hold elections.

President Paul Biya who won reelection controversially last October is 93.

Supporters of the amendment say the move would strengthen institutional stability and ensure continuity in leadership.

**NEWS****Foreign****Iran says it destroyed four US army aircraft**

Iran's joint command claimed on Sunday that the aircraft were destroyed during the complex rescue of an airman whose fighter jet was shot down on Friday.

Iran's state TV quoted the Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters as saying the aircraft, which included two C-130 military transport aircraft and two Black Hawk helicopters, were destroyed in the province of Isfahan, where the rescue took place.

Earlier Sunday, Iran's state TV aired a video showing what it claims are parts of a U.S. aircraft that they had shot down and a photo of thick black smoke rising into the air.

The claims could not be independently verified.

Officials from Iran and Oman discuss transit through the Strait of Hormuz

The Omani Foreign Ministry posted on social media Sunday that deputy foreign ministers and experts from both countries met to discuss "a number of visions and proposals" to ensure "smooth transit" through the strait.

Oman has often served as a mediator between the US and Iran in the past.

Saturday's meeting came two days before U.S. President Donald Trump's renewed deadline for Iran to open up the Strait of Hormuz was due to expire.

Trump had warned of "devastating consequences" if Iran doesn't comply by Monday.



**UNLOAD MEDICAL AID:**

Employees unload medical aid provided by UNICEF and the World Health Organization for displaced people at Rafik Hariri International Airport in Beirut, Lebanon, on Wednesday.

**Russian and Egyptian FMs hold talks in Moscow**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held talks with his Egyptian counterpart Badr Abdelatty in Moscow on Friday.

The ministers discussed bilateral relations as well as the international agenda, particularly the situation in the Middle East.

Both Russia and Egypt support "an immediate cessation of hostilities and a return to the political and diplomatic process," Lavrov said after the talks.

The Russian minister also noted that the draft resolution submitted by Bahrain regarding the Strait of Hormuz, currently under discussion by the United Nations Security Council, could either derail possible negotiations or "be used to retroactively legitimize the aggression against Iran."

Abdelatty stressed the importance of negotiations, saying that "everyone is losing, the world is losing and the region is losing."

**Congo to take third-country deportees from the US under new deal**

Congo will receive some migrants as part of a new deal under the Trump administration's third-country program, its government said Sunday, the latest such African nation to receive migrants being deported from the U.S.

The deportees will start arriving in Congo this month, the Congolese Ministry of Communications said in a statement, without further details on the date or the number of deportees expected.

It described the arrangement as a "temporary" one that reflects Congo's "commitment to human dignity and international solidarity." It would come with zero costs to the government with the U.S. covering the needed logistics, it said.

The U.S. has struck such

third-country deportation deals with at least seven other African nations, many of them among countries hit the most by the Trump administration's policies that have restricted trade, aid and migration.

The Trump administration has spent at least \$40 million to deport about 300 migrants to countries other than their own, according to a report released recently by the Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Lawyers and activists have raised questions over the nature of the deals with countries in Africa and elsewhere. Several of the African nations that have signed such deals have notoriously repressive governments and poor human rights records — including Eswatini, South Sudan and Equatorial Guinea.

**Africa faces growth slowdown due to war on Iran —Report**

The Middle East war "presents a serious risk to Africa", the African Union and the African Development Bank (AfDB) said in a report seen by AFP Saturday.

The conflict threatens to increase the cost of living and curtail growth on the continent, the report warned.

The Middle East accounts for 15.8 percent of Africa's imports and 10.9 percent of its exports, the report noted.

"The conflict, which already has triggered a trade shock, could quickly turn into a cost-of-living crisis across Africa through higher fuel and food prices, rising shipping and insurance costs, exchange rate

pressures, and tighter fiscal conditions," it added.

The growth rate of most African countries continues to be slower than before the Covid pandemic, it noted.

"A loss in output growth of 0.2 percentage points on Africa's GDP is projected for 2026 if it (the conflict) exceeds six months," it said.

"The longer the conflict lasts and the more severe the disruption to shipping routes and energy and fertilizer supplies, the greater the risk of a significant growth slowdown across the continent."

Reduced deliveries of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Gulf will impact fertilizer

production, limiting its availability during the crucial planting period up to May, it added.

Currencies hit

The report was compiled by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

According to recent data from the AfDB, the currencies of 29 African countries have already depreciated, increasing the cost of servicing external debt, making imports more expensive and reducing foreign exchange reserves.

Some countries could see some short-term gains, such as Nigeria for its oil exports or Mozambique for its LNG.

The rerouting of ships around Cape of Good Hope could benefit ports in Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia and Mauritius.

Kenya is establishing itself as a logistics hub in East Africa, while Ethiopian Airlines, the leading carrier in Africa, is serving as an "emergency air bridge" between the continent, Asia, and Europe, the report noted.

But these gains are likely to be uneven and will not offset the consequences for inflation, budgets, and food security in Africa, they warned.

Above all, the current crisis could hit the costs of humanitarian aid and divert donor funds towards other priorities.

**Hungary alleges plot to blow up gas pipeline ahead of election**

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has convened an emergency meeting of the National Defence Council after explosives were found near a pipeline that transports Russian gas to Hungary.

The discovery in a border area of neighbouring Serbia comes as Orban's party is badly trailing in opinion polls ahead of crucial elections next Sunday.

Opposition leader Peter Magyar accused him of "panic-mongering" orchestrated by "Russian advisers", days after security experts warned of a possible "false flag" oper-

ation that could be blamed on Ukraine.

Orban, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has resisted EU calls to abandon Russian energy imports since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

In recent weeks Hungarian security experts have raised the possibility of a staged operation, either on Hungarian or Serbian territory, intended to arouse enough sympathy for Orban to help his Fidesz party win the election - or to give Orban an excuse to declare an emergency and postpone or cancel the vote.

Serbian President Alexander Vucic, a close ally of Orban, informed the Hungarian leader of the discovery on Sunday morning.

Two rucksacks full of explosives and detonators were found by the Serbian army near the village of Tresnjevac in the Kanjiza district, about 20km (12 miles) from the point where the TurkStream pipeline crosses into Hungary.

"Our units found an explosive of devastating power," Vucic said in a post on Instagram. "I told PM Orban that we would keep him updated on the investigation."

Hungary receives between five and eight billion cubic metres of Russian gas a year through the TurkStream pipeline, which both Hungary and Slovakia depend on for Russian gas.

Balint Pasztor, president of the Vojvodina Hungarian Association, and another key Orban ally, posted on Facebook: "If the investigation proves that we were not the primary target after all, but rather Hungary's

supply lines, then this makes it even clearer: the terrorist attack was planned with the aim of bringing down Viktor Orban."

Fidesz has made hostility to Ukraine a cornerstone of its election campaign.

At election rallies Orban has told supporters that low heating and fuel prices in Hungary are only possible thanks to cheap Russian oil and gas, both of which arrive in Hungary by pipeline - oil through Ukraine, and gas through the Balkans.

Orban alleges that a "Kyiv-Brussels-Berlin" axis is conspiring to stop Hungary getting cheap Russian fuel, to impose their "puppet" prime minister Magyar in the upcoming election. A Tisza government, Orban says, would also drag Hungary into a European war against Russia.

Orban has already accused Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky of imposing "an oil blockade" on Hungary, because no Russian oil has arrived through the Druzhba pipeline, which crosses Ukrainian territory, since the end of January.

**Senegal cuts official travel as high oil prices put new pressure on budget**

Speaking at a youth event in the coastal city of Mbour, Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko pointed to the escalating prices of oil to justify the measure.

Sonko said he had canceled his own planned trips to Niger, Spain and France, Reuters reported, in an effort to cut costs.

Oil prices have edged close

to \$115 a barrel from about \$80 before the war on Iran.

The west African country is facing a financial squeeze since the termination of a lending program by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over debt misreporting.

The country faces a budget deficit of nearly 14 percent of GDP and public sector debt

estimated at 132 percent of national output at the end of 2024.

The current government accuses the administration of ex-president Macky Sall, who ruled from 2012 until 2024, of having concealed the true extent of the budgetary situation.

An International Monetary Fund team that visited Senegal

a year ago confirmed that officials had made false statements regarding budget deficits and public debt for the 2019-2023 period.

The IMF has suspended a \$1.8-billion aid programme it had agreed in 2023, pending further information and commitments from Senegal's new authorities.

# Feature

## Boosting Edo State economy potential

RAYMOND OSOGBE

Edo State Economy under Governor Monday Okpebholo's watch, is undergoing surgery, with critical reforms writes.

Edo State is actively boosting its economic, agricultural, and technological potential through a multi-sectoral approach focused on attracting foreign and local investment, improving infrastructure, and digitalizing its workforce.

Key initiatives under the "Making Edo Great Again" (MEGA) and "S.H.I.N.E." agendas led by Governor Monday Okpebholo, focus on transforming the state into a modern business hub.

**Key areas and strategies to boost Edo State's potential include:**

### 1. AGRICULTURE AND AGRO-INDUSTRIALIZATION

**Large-Scale Partnerships:** The state has secured massive investments, such as a \$100 million FDI into Presco Plc by SIAT NV, to expand palm oil plantations and boost agri-business.

**Crop Specialization:** Development is anchored on high-potential crops, including oil palm, rubber, cocoa, cassava, and yam, with partnerships with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the German Embassy to improve food security and increase production.

**Contract Farming:** Fallow lands are being opened up for investors, encouraging mechanised agriculture and boosting employments.

### 2. TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL ECONOMY

**Advanced Job Ready Tech Skills Program:** The Edo State Ministry of



GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

Education is partnering with Google to train over 800 students in data science, AI, and machine learning to enable them to work remotely in the global digital economy.

**Infrastructure Development:** The state is laying over 2,000 kilometers

of fiber optics to connect all 18 local government areas, establishing a tier-four data center to enhance e-government and foster a digital ecosystem.

### 3. ENERGY AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

**Power Sector Reforms:** The state is

*Development is anchored on high-potential crops, including oil palm, rubber, cocoa, cassava, and yam, with partnerships with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the German Embassy to improve food security and increase production.*

focusing on gas-powered energy, leveraging infrastructure like the Ossimo Power Plant to provide 24-hour electricity for industrial growth.

**Alternative Energy:** The government is encouraging investment in solar and biomass to ensure sustainable, uninterrupted power supply.

### 4. TOURISM, ARTS, AND CULTURE

**Tourism Master Plan:** With a goal to generate N2 trillion in revenue, the state is investing in cultural sites like the Benin World Heritage Bronze

Casting site, traditional festivals, and modern leisure infrastructure.

**Cultural Heritage:** The state is leveraging its history to boost hospitality, focusing on developing landmarks in Benin City, Edo North (e.g., Ososo), and regional waterways.

### 5. INVESTMENT PROMOTION AND "EASE OF DOING BUSINESS"

**Edo State One-Stop Investment Center (ESOSIC):** This center streamlines regulatory processes, aiming to make Edo the preferred investment destination by reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks for investors.

**Diaspora Engagement:** The establishment of the Edo State Diaspora Agency is intended to leverage the expertise and capital of Edo indigenes abroad for development.

### 6. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SECURITY

**Water Transport Development:** The state is investing in marine security, including procurement of gunboats and building modern jetties (e.g., at Ologbo), to utilize waterways for commerce.

**Regional Connectivity:** Major road projects, such as the rehabilitation of the Benin-

Asaba Expressway are being prioritized to improve economic flow.

These efforts are supported by a strong emphasis on "Made-in-Edo" products, increasing SME capacity through partnerships with the Bank of Industry (BOI) and the Edo State Investment Promotion Office (ES-IPO) to ensure sustainable, long-term growth.

*Absolutely Edo is good to go on a supersonic flight, with Okpebholo as Pilot in-Chief.*

## NDDC @25: Driving development across region

MATTHEW OKAGHA

The quest to fast-track development across communities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region led to the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. However, the lofty vision behind OMPADEC was undermined by inefficiency, poor project execution, and allegations of corruption, which limited its overall impact.

In response, the Federal Government replaced OMPADEC with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, with a broader and more strategic mandate. The Commission was tasked with addressing persistent infrastructural deficits and socio-economic challenges across the nine oil-producing states of the federation.

The NDDC was envisioned as a vehicle for sustainable transformation—driving rapid, balanced, and holistic development, while fostering economic prosperity, social stability, ecological regeneration, and political peace in the region. Structurally, it

operates through a Governing Board, with offices spread across the oil-producing states to ensure grassroots reach and effective coordination.

Like many public institutions, the NDDC has not been without its challenges. Frequent leadership changes, political interference, and corruption concerns have, at different times, slowed its progress and eroded public confidence. These setbacks have often overshadowed its developmental strides.

Despite these hurdles, the Commission has, over the past 25 years, recorded measurable impacts in key sectors. Its interventions span healthcare delivery, educational support, economic empowerment, road construction, agriculture, communications, security, community development, and rural electrification. These efforts have contributed to improving living standards in several Niger Delta communities.

A notable shift is emerging under the current Governing Board led by Chinedu Ebie. The leadership has demonstrated a clear commitment to repositioning the Commission by promoting transparency, strengthening

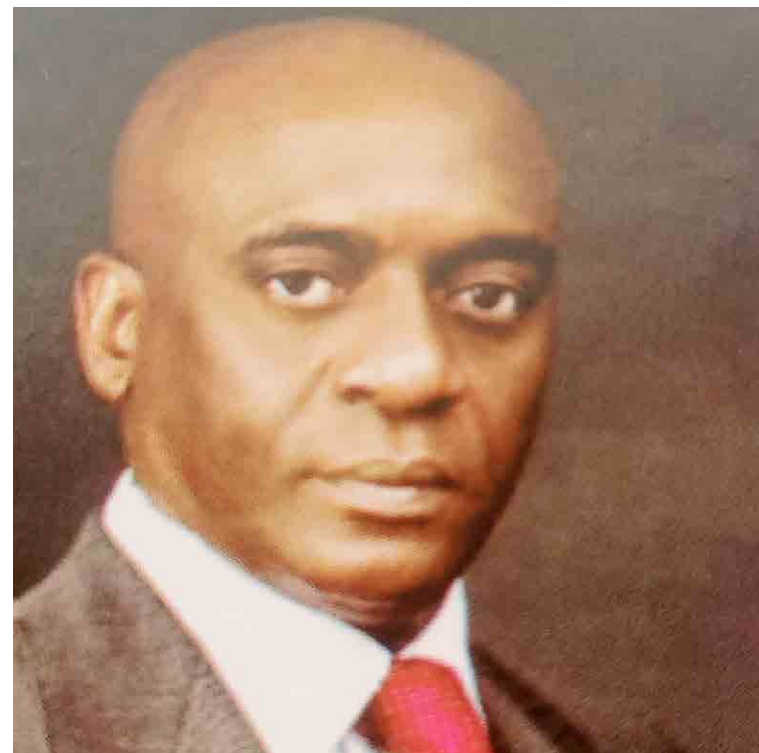
stakeholder engagement, and implementing strategic reforms aimed at enhancing efficiency and accountability.

Through renewed policies and people-oriented initiatives, the Commission is opening its processes to greater public participation, an approach widely seen as critical to ensuring sustainability and community ownership of projects.

At 25, the NDDC may not have fully realised its founding vision. However, given the complex challenges it has faced, it is evident that the Commission has made meaningful contributions to the development of the Niger Delta. With sustained reforms, improved governance, and stronger collaboration with stakeholders, the NDDC is well positioned to redefine its legacy.

Ultimately, the path forward lies in deepening partnerships with the people of the Niger Delta—ensuring that development is not only delivered, but also protected and sustained by the communities it is meant to serve.

• *Matthew Okagha is a Benin-based journalist and media consultant.*



Chinedu Ebie, Chairman, NDDC Governing Board

## FEATURE

# The Victor Ekun debacle and the throne of the Olososo of Ososo

BUORO OCHEDU, OKOGBE  
YAMAH, SAMUEL OJO BUORO

The recent publications by Ofiare and Nicholas, circulated by Victor Ekun, have created confusion regarding the leadership succession in Ososo. These publications appear to have been intended to shift attention from unresolved matters concerning historical records and family lineages. However, in their presentation, they reveal inconsistencies and misunderstandings of the history and traditions of the Igbedu and Itokura families.

Victor Ekun's pursuit of the throne highlights the complexities surrounding succession in Ososo. Those advising him may have motives that are not fully aligned with his interests, and some may be seeking to influence outcomes for their own purposes. It is important to note that Victor Ekun has been navigating between the counsel of his late father and pressures from external influences. His absence from home during key periods and his limited engagement in local family matters have complicated his position within the Itokura and Igbedu families.

Membership in Ososo's traditional societies, such as Iminafe, does not automatically confer membership in the blood lineage, Iminitha. Victor Ekun's lineage traces back to his great-grandfather, who was adopted into the Itogbelekhia family without direct blood connection. This distinction is important in understanding his role and claims within the family structure.

Adamagbo, the husband of Oghomese Itokura, was integrated into the family in recognition of his loyalty and service. Their union produced several descendants, including Peter Ogudamiyan, Summonu, Ajiboye, Abureh, and Adeoju. Adeoju's lineage includes Odjiwo, who fathered Nicholas. Among these branches, Victor Ekun is the only one maintaining a claim of descent from Itokura.

Historical conflicts have shaped the current dynamics. During the reign of Okuodu II, disputes arose between the King and Peter Ogudamiyan Adamagbo, highlighting the distinctions between adopted members and those with direct ancestral ties. These events have been recorded in local folklore and remain part of the collective memory of Ososo.

Victor Ekun's grandfather, John Ekarabo Aduroja Adamagbo, later adopted the surname Ekun to formalise his identity within the community. He was entrusted with hosting elders' meetings, reflecting the integration and acceptance of his family, despite the absence of direct Igbedu lineage. His son, Ochiette, and later Victor Ekun, have continued to navigate the challenges of family heritage and succession.

In the 1980s, Ochiette's attempt to participate in the selection process for the throne was met with opposition from the Itokura family, which emphasised the importance of bloodline in leadership eligibility. This principle remains central to the traditional process of selecting a monarch.

Presently, Victor Ekun and his sup-

porters continue to engage in efforts to assert claims to the throne, including involvement in legal matters concerning family land. These actions illustrate the ongoing negotiation between historical precedent, family lineage, and contemporary interpretation of tradition.

The legacy of previous monarchs, such as King Omodu, demonstrates the significance of understanding ancestral history and the responsibilities associated with leadership. Any claims to the throne must be considered in the context of this broader historical framework and the traditions that have guided succession in Ososo for generations.

The historical records of Ososo show that the integration of families like the Adamagbos into the Itokura and Igbedu communities was based on service, loyalty, and contributions to the kingdom rather than direct bloodline. Over generations, these families became established members of the community, acquiring land, participating in communal activities, and taking on responsibilities within the traditional system.

The union of Adamagbo Evaro and Oghomese Itokura produced several children who continued to build their own families within Ososo. Among these descendants, Victor Ekun has maintained a prominent role, though his claims of succession have been complicated by questions regarding lineage. Other branches of the family, including Peter Ogudamiyan's descendants, have long-standing ties to the Igbedu family and the palace, forming a complex network of relationships that have influenced leadership decisions over time.

During the era of Okuodu II, conflicts arose regarding privileges and responsibilities of non-direct descendants. These disputes reflected the challenges of integrating adopted or allied families into the traditional system while maintaining respect for established lineage rules. Folklore and local songs recount these events, preserving the memory of past disagreements and reinforcing the importance of heritage in governance.

John Ekarabo Aduroja Adamagbo, Victor Ekun's grandfather, played a significant role as a liaison between his family and the Igbedu leadership. While he held responsibilities in the community, his family's position was carefully distinguished from direct heirs of the throne. His son Ochiette later faced challenges when attempting to participate in succession decisions, highlighting the ongoing tension between historical integration and lineage-based eligibility.

In the late twentieth century, the Itokura and Igbedu families emphasised adherence to established succession protocols. The experiences of Ochiette illustrate that positions within the family structure and the palace require recognition of ancestry and respect for traditional authority. These historical precedents continue to inform contemporary discussions on eligibility and participation in succession processes.

Legal disputes over family land, such as Suit No. CDCC/12/2022, demonstrate how historical claims



VICTOR EKUN

intersect with modern governance and property rights. Victor Ekun's involvement in such cases reflects the complexity of reconciling ancestral rights, family heritage, and contemporary interpretations of tradition. While different family members may hold varying perspectives, the princi-

ples of lineage, recognition by elders, and respect for customs remain central to resolving these matters.

The late King Omodu Ede exemplified the integration of historical knowledge, leadership experience, and awareness of family legacies in guiding the throne. Understanding the actions and decisions of predecessors is essential for anyone aspiring to leadership, as it provides context for responsibilities, expectations, and the consequences of choices made within the community.

Victor Ekun's current position highlights the ongoing dialogue between history, family structure, and succession. While the community has recognised multiple branches of the Adamagbo family as part of Ososo's social fabric, the rules governing leadership succession remain clear: ancestral lineage and adherence to tradition are fundamental. Attempts to reinterpret or challenge these principles must be examined within the broader historical and cultural framework of Ososo.

The events surrounding the selection of the Olososo of Ososo have always been guided by ancestral precedent, the consensus of elders, and adherence to established family lineages. Historical consultations with oracles and diviners reinforced this process. For instance, prior to the selection of Ichama as Olososo, Augustine Odjiwo, Nicholas's father, consulted an oracle for guidance. The diviner, who was Ofiare's own father, confirmed that the ancestors had already chosen the rightful heir—Anselm Obaitan, son of the late

Okuodu II—demonstrating the enduring influence of spiritual counsel in succession matters.

In recent times, Victor Ekun has pursued the throne while engaging external advisors and supporters, raising questions about the alignment of these efforts with traditional expectations. His claim to the throne is intertwined with legal and historical disputes, including land cases that involve the Igbedu family. These issues underscore the interplay between heritage, legal recognition, and community consensus in determining succession.

Victor Ekun's lineage, as a descendant of the Adamagbo family, reflects both integration into the Ososo community and the historical distinctions between adopted families and direct bloodlines. While his family has long been accepted and respected within the community, the rules governing succession emphasise ancestral ties to the Igbedu lineage. Historical events, including past disputes over palace privileges and leadership eligibility, continue to shape contemporary perceptions and decisions regarding succession.

The actions of previous generations, such as the contributions of John Ekarabo Aduroja Adamagbo and the stewardship of Ochiette, Victor Ekun's father, illustrate the importance of service, loyalty, and adherence to tradition. Leadership claims are not solely based on presence or ambition; they require recognition by family elders, adherence to established customs, and respect for historical precedent.

Efforts to assert claims outside these protocols, including the use of legal mechanisms and advocacy by supporters, highlight tensions between modern strategies and traditional expectations. The community continues to uphold the principle that succession is guided by ancestry, legitimacy, and the collective wisdom of the elders. Misinterpretations or challenges to this process can create disputes that the community seeks to resolve with reference to history, family records, and spiritual guidance.

The preservation of family heritage, historical records, and sacred artifacts is central to maintaining the integrity of succession. Generations of Ososo residents have ensured that knowledge of lineage, ancestral contributions, and the legacy of past monarchs remain accessible for guidance and verification. The recognition of these records informs decisions regarding eligibility and the responsibilities associated with the throne.

In conclusion, the ongoing discussions surrounding Victor Ekun's claim to the Olososo throne illustrate the complex interplay of family lineage, historical precedent, legal processes, and community consensus. The traditions of Ososo continue to serve as the framework for leadership selection, emphasizing ancestry, service, and adherence to established customs. Future resolutions will depend on the community's commitment to these principles, ensuring that succession reflects both historical legitimacy and the enduring values of Ososo society.

**BURSTING THE MYTHS ON SNAKE BITES AND ENVENOMATION****What experts, others say**

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

A whole lot has happened in only a few days, the sad and untimely death of Ifunanya Nwangene, popularly known as "Nanya" a classical songbird, from cobra bite in her private residence in Abuja on January 31.

Following this sad development, the world seemed to stand still with grief as practically everyone mourned her demise, with her associates in the classical music industry reeling out memorable videos of her classical songs and the bright future that was about to unfold for her in her trade, even outside the shores of the country.

While the onrush of emotions intensified, the focus was centred on the dangers of snakebite and the lack of antivenom in Nigeria's Healthcare sector.

As arguments over this systemic failure heightened, the internet was flooded by sudden onset of conversations on how to manage snake bites, using unorthodox methods where a palpable failure had been recorded in the healthcare system.

While many believed in traditional methods of treating snake bites, using herbs and other plant and crude materials like the black stone, activated charcoal, neem leaf, aloe vera, bitter kola, and even urine, the medical scientists however maintain their stance that all the mentioned items are merely beliefs that are not scientifically proven to be accurate.

However, those who believe in traditional means also hold tenaciously to their claims, that snake bites were common in villages and no one died from it due to the efficacy of herbs and other plant materials.

Let's look at some of the conversations around myths:

On ANIMALS OR PETS THAT REPEL Snakes, Ada Ujaligwa, a Parienting Expert says,

"No animal can reliably repel snakes from a house.

Anyone saying otherwise is selling folklore not safety."

She sold what she stated was Truth she knows for certain about animals thus:

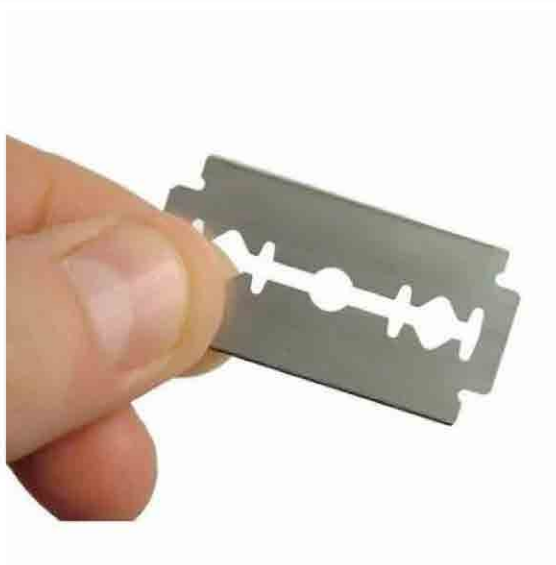
- Cats and dogs
- They do not repel snakes. They get bitten often and die or need antivenom. Many snake bites in pets happen because people believed this myth.
- Mongooses
- They kill snakes sometimes but they do not repel them. They are wild animals not house pets and they still get envenomed and die.
- Guinea fowl, turkeys, peacocks
- They are noisy and may alert you when a snake is around. They do not repel snakes. Snakes still enter compounds with these birds.
- Pigs
- They kill snakes occasionally. Completely impractical and unsafe for homes.

**BOTTOM LINE**

No animal emits a smell sound or aura that drives snakes away. Keeping animals gives false confidence and increases bite risk.

Herbs with anti snake venom properties

This is where people die. So read carefully.



There is NO herb that can neutralise snake venom in the human body. None. Zero.

Laboratory studies sometimes show herbs can inhibit venom enzymes in test tubes.

That does not translate to real life survival.

Why herbs fail.

- Snake venom spreads fast through lymph and tissue
- Venom doses are massive relative to body size
- Oral herbs are slow poorly absorbed and unpredictable
- By the time anything is absorbed the damage is done

No herb has ever been proven in humans to prevent death from snake envenomation.

Common herbs people mention that do NOT work.

- Neem
- Bitter leaf
- Garlic
- Snakeroot
- Black stone
- Charcoal
- Alcohol mixtures
- Herbal pastes applied to the wound

These delay hospital care and increase death and amputations.

What actually prevents death before antivenom

Only three things to do to buy time:

1. Stillness and immobilization  
This slows lymphatic spread.
2. Pressure immobilization bandage  
Only if trained and mainly for neurotoxic bites.

rotoxic bites.

3. Rapid transport to hospital  
Antivenom is the only true antidote.

Everything else is noise superstition or profit driven lies.

Real snake prevention that works  
If you want fewer snakes around your home.

- Clear bushes wood piles rubble
- Control rodents
- Seal cracks holes and drains
- Keep grass short
- Use proper lighting at night
- Wear boots outdoors
- Educate household members

**WISDOM**

Snakes are repelled by clean environments not animals or herbs.

Venom is neutralised by antivenom not plants.

Believing otherwise costs lives.

I hope this helps you to know the facts

**KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**

Myths are misleading and therefore costs lives

On his part, Francis Onwusu-Bana, a green environment advocate says, "Our Fathers Used Cassava Leaves for Snake Bites"

Hear him:

Our fathers trusted cassava leaves as a remedy for snake bites.

• First, the victim chewed a moderate amount of fresh cassava leaves and swallow the juice immediately after the bite.

• This was believed to counter the venom from within the body.

• Small, shallow cuts were made around the bite area.

• These cuts were meant to release contaminated or poisoned blood.

• The bite area was wiped with a sharp object to remove what was believed to be the snake's teeth.

• Fresh cassava leaves were then crushed into a paste.

• The paste was applied directly to the bite and left for some time to draw out remaining venom.

For Confidence Aribibia, a social commentator, she opines, "If you are not learning anything from Ifunanya's death, I am" and her reasons are not farfetched, going by popular expressions of angst over Nanya's death and the systemic failure of everything and everyone involved, particularly neighbours.

"How does a young woman get bitten by a snake and face that emergency alone?"

That question has refused to leave my mind.

I learnt she tied the spot where she was bitten, booked a ride by herself, and went to the first hospital. They had no anti-venom. She didn't collapse. She didn't shout. She didn't have people around her to argue or insist. She quietly booked another ride and went to a second hospital. Still alone.

There, questions were asked. Probably what happened? When? Where? What did you do first? The thing she tied on her hand was removed. A drip was set and somewhere between protocols, delays, and assumptions, life slipped away.

I keep asking myself where were the neighbours?

Was this a "mind your business" compound?

Was there no one to follow her, to speak for her, to insist on urgency?

Because emergencies are not the time for politeness or silence.

If people had gone with her, someone would have raised their voice. Someone would have demanded anti-venom immediately. Someone would have pushed past hesitation and said, "This is an emergency." Sometimes, it is not the patient that saves themselves it is the people around them.

This is not about blaming hospitals alone. It is also about how we live with one another. Communities that don't show up leave people to face danger by themselves, and sometimes, that loneliness costs lives.

Ifunanya's death is painful. Her voice had promise. Her future was still unfolding but her story is also a warning.

Check the kind of environment you live in.

Check the kind of neighbour you are.

Because one day, you may need help faster than words can come out and on that day, you will need people not silence.

**©Confidence Aribibia**

I remain your favorite Lawyer

Ada Ujaligwe also shocked everyone when she stated, "MOST SNAKES ARE NOT VENOMOUS..."

MOST PEOPLE DIDN'T SURVIVE SNAKE BITES BECAUSE HERBS WORKED.

Ada Ujaligwe said...she emphasized,

THEY SURVIVED BECAUSE THE SNAKE HAD LITTLE OR NO VENOM AND LUCK DID THE REST.

LET'S TAKE A DEEPER DIVE TO GAIN MORE KNOWLEDGE

This debate has a clear scientific answer. Herbs did not cure venom. Biology explains the survivors.

**FIRST THE HARD TRUTH**

People did not survive true venomous snake envenomation because of herbs.

They survived because venom was absent minimal or poorly delivered.

Antivenom did not replace herbs. It replaced guesswork and luck.

Which snakes are venomous and which are not

Major venomous snake families

-Elapidae  
Highly venomous neurotoxic snakes.

**EXAMPLES**

- Cobras
- Mambas
- Kraits
- Taipans
- Coral snakes

**Mechanism**

Respiratory paralysis. Victim suffocates without antivenom or ventilation.

-Viperidae

Venomous hemotoxic and cytotoxic snakes.

Examples

- Vipers
- Adders
- Rattlesnakes
- Puff adder

# Historic Oba Market rises as modern masterpiece under Gov Okpebholo

RICHARD EWEKA

The Oba Market (Èki-Óba), situated in the heart of Benin City (Ring Road), Edo State, is one of the oldest and most significant markets in the Benin Kingdom, with roots tracing back to the 15th century. Deeply connected to the palace of the Oba of Benin, the market has long served as a central trading hub for local commodities.

Over the years, Oba Market has evolved from a traditional trading post into a modern commercial centre, where millions of naira in business are transacted daily. The market contributes significantly to the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of Edo State and has become a key driver of economic growth, providing employment opportunities for countless residents and non-residents alike. Traders and business owners rely on it to support their families, improve their standards of living, and contribute to the State's broader economy.

Historically, Oba Market has survived empires, wars, invasions, and other challenges—including devastating fires in 2020 and 2025 that threatened its very existence. On Monday, June 22, 2020, traders awoke to the tragic news that a midnight fire had razed their shops, destroying goods worth millions of naira. Firefighters struggled to contain the blaze, which raged until 10 a.m., leaving half the market in ruins.

The inferno was eventually extinguished through combined efforts from the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, Nigerian Petroleum Development Company (NPDC), University of Benin, and Federal Fire Service Zone K. Despite a visit from then-Governor Godwin Obaseki promising to rebuild the market, traders remained stranded for over five years as the market lay in ruins, with no temporary arrangements made for them to continue trading. A similar fire in December 2019 had also destroyed the Ekiosa Market and EDPA building, again without relief for victims.

During his campaign for the September 21, 2024, Edo State gubernatorial elections, Governor Monday Okpebholo visited the devastated market and pledged to rebuild it if elected. "This devastating news is most unfortunate for the economy of Edo State, especially coming after the major Eki Osa market fire, for which the state government is yet to fulfil its promises to the victims," he said. "When elected, we will manage the situation, identify causes, and put preventive measures in place to avoid future occurrences."

True to his word, Gov Okpebholo commenced the reconstruction of Oba Market. Less than a year into his administration, another fire on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, threatened the market—but thanks to swift action by firefighters, only one shop was affected. This demonstrated that the Okpebholo administration had put preventive logistics and safety measures in place.

Under Gov Okpebholo's watch, the historic Oba Market has been rede-



The Newly built Oba Market (Èki-Óba), Benin City, Edo State



*We promised the traders that we would rebuild this market, and today, that promise is being fulfilled. What you see here is a demonstration of that commitment*



tomers alike.

The governor has repeatedly emphasised that reconstructing Oba Market is about more than just rebuilding; it is about restoring hope, creating opportunities, and fostering sustainable development.

During an inspection on December 21, 2025, the project contractor, Engr. Shahid Mahmud, assured Gov Okpebholo that the market would be completed within six months, targeting June 2026. On April 1, 2026, the governor conducted an unscheduled

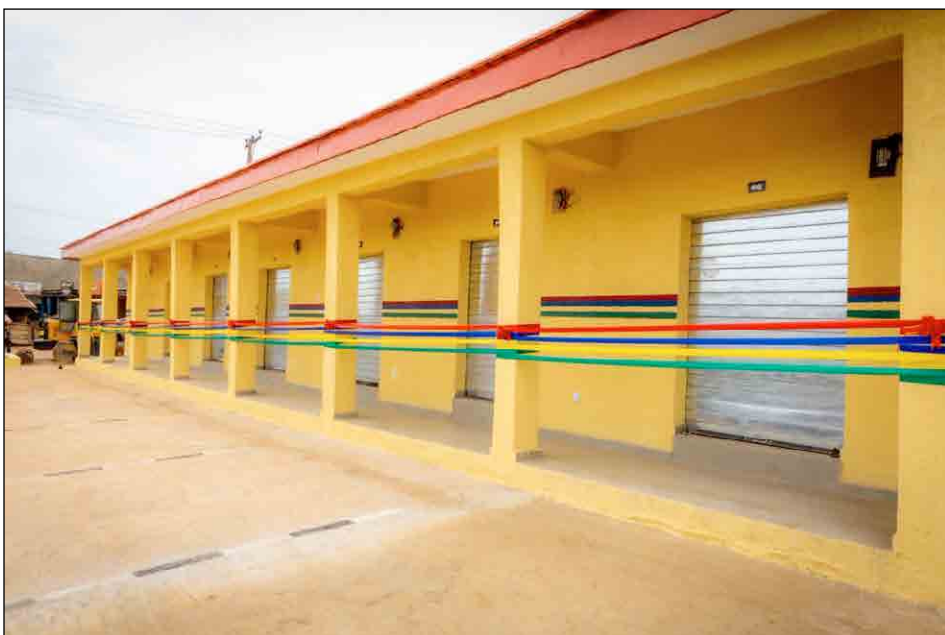
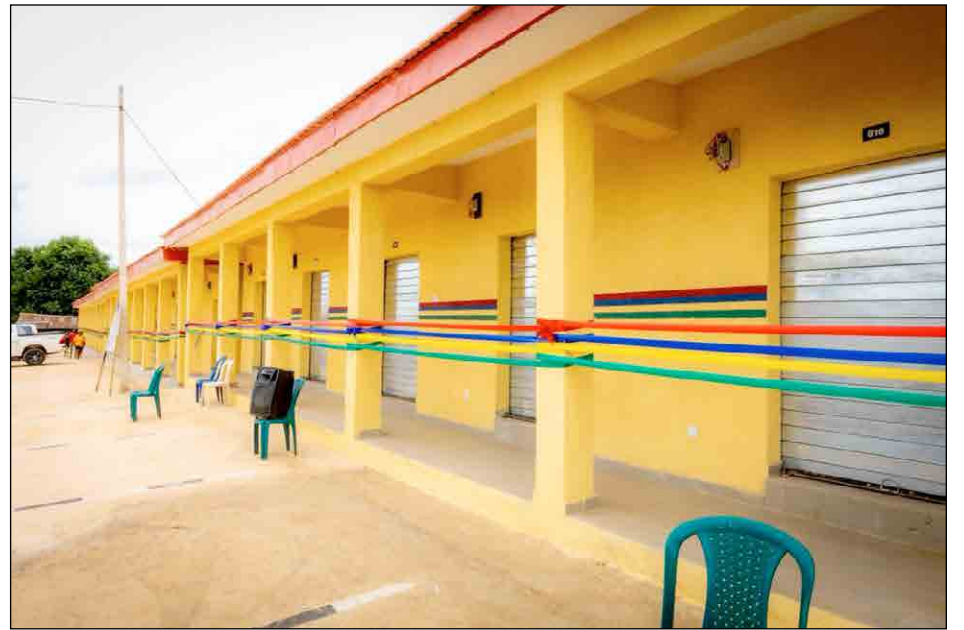
visit, touring the market with the contractor and inspecting various sections. Engr. Mahmud confirmed that construction was 97 percent complete and announced that the market would now be ready for handover in April instead of June, thanks to additional manpower and extended work hours.

Governor Okpebholo expressed satisfaction with the progress, noting, "We promised the traders that we would rebuild this market, and today, that promise is being fulfilled. What

you see here is a demonstration of that commitment."

Oba Market is rising again as a modern commercial masterpiece, blending tradition with mall-level safety, style, and convenience. In the coming weeks, traders and business owners are expected to celebrate the official handover of the reconstructed market to the Edo State government, which will ensure proper allocation of shops to genuine traders, marking a new era of secure and productive trading in this historic marketplace.

# Police Officers' Wives Association (POWA) Complex In Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area, which was rebuilt by Governor Monday Okpebholo and commissioned last week after it was razed by fire about four months ago



# Sports

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

## Edo State Sports Commission Chairman receives **SPORTSVILLE** Leadership Award

● **Enabulele dedicates award to Gov Okpebholo, Edo athletes, coaches**

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission Hon Am-

adin Desmond Enabulele on Friday, April 3, 2026 received the Sportsville Leadership Award. The award is in recognition of his pragmatic lead-

ership style and achievements within a short period of time he has been at the helms.

Receiving the Visionary Leadership award at the prestigious Lagos Country Club on Friday evening during the 6th SV Award Ceremony, the Edo State Sports Commission boss expressed gratitude to the organizers of the prestigious sports awards, Sportsville Communications Ltd for the recognition.

Enabulele dedicated the award to the Governor of Edo State Distinguished Senator Monday Okpebholo who gave him the opportunity to contribute his quota to sports development in Edo State. He also dedicated the award to his board members, Edo athletes and coaches whose sacrifices and dedication earned the state top position at the recently concluded second Niger Delta Games in Edo State.

"I appreciate Sportsville Communications for the honour done me and I see it as part of encouragement for us to do more. I dedicate this award to my state governor who gave me the opportunity to serve Edo State and contribute to the development of sports. This award is also for the wonderful Edo athletes, coaches and my board members who have been so supportive." He said.

The 6th edition of the annual Sportsville Special Recognition Award ceremony, Chaired by one of the most respected sports personalities in Africa, and founder of Brila Media, Dr Larry Izamoje, brought together sports stakeholders in celebration of sports excellence.

A total of twenty awardees were honoured in seven categories during the colourful ceremony



The Executive Chairman Edo State Sports Commission Hon Amadin Desmond Enabulele with the Executive Chairman, National Sports Commission Alhaji Shehu Dikko after receiving their Sportsville Award in Lagos on Friday evening.



IBRAHIM GUSAU AND GBENGA ELEGBELEYE

## Elegbeleye backs Gusau, hails NFF Congress Expansion as Progressive move

Chairman of the Nigeria Premier Football League and Second Vice President of the Nigeria Football Federation, Gbenga Elegbeleye, has praised NFF President Ibrahim Gusau for the decision to expand the Federation's Congress, describing it as a bold and progressive step for Nigerian football.

Speaking in Abuja, Elegbeleye said the decision gives clubs a direct voice in football administration, a development he noted has been long overdue. Under the new structure, the NPFL will be represented by 10 delegates, with five drawn from the top five clubs at the end of the 2025/2026 season. The Ni-

geria National League and Nigeria Nationwide League One will also have two delegates each.

He explained that the top five NPFL clubs will earn voting rights at the NFF elections later this year, a system designed to deepen competitiveness and to reward performance within the domestic league.

He acknowledged that while Nigeria narrowly missed out on World Cup qualification, the national teams have recorded notable progress under Gusau's leadership. He cited the Super Eagles' run to the Africa Cup of Nations final in Gusau's first year in office, as well as a subsequent semi-final finish and bronze medal, as signs of steady improvement.

## Yusuf Alli hails Governor Diri support for road race

● **Says Bayelsa 10km Road Race has come to stay**

Former Nigerian athlete and respected road race expert, Yusuf Alli, has commended the Executive Governor of Bayelsa State for the bold initiative of sponsoring a new 10km Road Race, describing it as a timely intervention that will not only boost sports development but also place the state firmly on Nigeria's athletics map.

Alli, a seasoned figure in Nigerian athletics with years of experience both on and off the track, noted that the introduction of the Road Race is a clear demonstration of the government's commitment to youth empowerment and grassroots sports development. According to him, road races have become one of the most effective platforms globally for discovering talents, promoting healthy living, and stimulating economic activities within host communities.

He emphasized that Bayelsa State, known for its passion for sports, has taken a strategic step in aligning with global best practices by investing in a 10km race, which is widely regarded as an entry-level but

highly competitive distance that attracts both elite and amateur runners.

"This is not just another sporting event," Alli remarked. "It is a vision that has the potential to grow into a major annual fixture on Nigeria's athletics calendar. With proper planning and consistency, this race will attract top runners from across the country and even beyond, while also giving young athletes a platform to showcase their talents."



GOVERNOR DOUYE DIRI

## NPFL relocates Plateau United home matches over security concerns

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The Nigeria Premier Football League has approved the relocation of all remaining home fixtures of Plateau United to an alternative venue for the rest of the season, citing security concerns.

Chairman of the NPFL management, Gbenga Elegbeleye, said the decision was taken to safeguard players, officials, and traveling teams amid

ongoing security challenges in Plateau State.

According to him, the move became necessary as the league enters a crucial stage where results carry significant weight. He emphasized that beyond competition, the welfare and safety of all participants remain a top priority.

"The board had to act as we approach the final stretch of the season. While every match is important, we are equally

concerned about the safety of teams. We want matches played in a conducive environment that allows players perform at their best, while we hope for a return to normalcy in Plateau State," Elegbeleye stated.

Plateau United currently sit ninth on the league table but remain within reach of the relegation zone, with any slip in form likely to complicate their survival hopes as the season winds down.

## Heartland FC silent after NFF orders ₦6.4m payment to Charles Uzor

Heartland FC has failed to respond to former head coach Charles Uzor after the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) Players' Status and Arbitration Committee ordered the club to pay him ₦6.4 million for unlawful ter-

mination of contract.

Uzor said "the club has not contacted him since the ruling, despite the Committee's directive that Heartland FC must pay the compensation within 45 days."

The Committee found that the club terminated the coach's con-

tract on June 11, 2025, without just cause and without following proper disciplinary procedure.

Uzor had signed a contract with Heartland FC on August 1, 2024, with a monthly salary of ₦700,000.

The NFF also warned that

failure to comply with the ruling could lead to sanctions, including a transfer and registration ban on the club.

The Nigeria National League (NNL) has barred Heartland FC, Akwa United and other indebted clubs.

## World Cup: Canada woos Italy's crestfallen supporters after World Cup

Canada Soccer cheekily courted Italy's crestfallen supporters on Saturday, urging them to swap their Azzurri blue strips for maple leaf red after the four-time champions suffered another World Cup failure.

"Dear Italian soccer fans, don't wait four more years. Swap your jersey for Canada," the sports governing body posted on X on Friday, directing fans to gather outside Cafe Diplomatico, a popular restaurant in Toronto's Little Italy neighbourhood.

The light-hearted appeal followed Italy's third consecutive failure to qualify for the World Cup after a playoff defeat by Bos-

nia on Tuesday, a setback that led to the resignations of coach Gennaro Gattuso and federation president Gabriele Gravina.

Canada, who will co-host the World Cup alongside Mexico and the United States, seized the moment to call for fans to support their country instead.

Local media reported hundreds of supporters queued for the Italy-for-Canada jersey exchange, though the offer proved more symbolic than transactional. Canada Soccer handed out 2026 shirts and posters to fans — and did so without collecting a single Italian jersey in return.



CANADA NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM

## Sports

# Enugu emerges overall winner of 3rd National Para Games

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

Curtains were drawn on the 3rd National Para Games on Friday in Abuja with

Enugu State emerging as the overall winner as Bayelsa and

## ● Bayelsa, Edo take 2nd, 3rd positions

Edo State coming 2nd and 3rd best teams in the special athletes games in the country.

Enugu state contingent secured 40 Gold, eight Silver and seven Bronze medals to have a

total of 55 medals.

Bayelsa finished in the second position with 25 gold, 30 Silver and 34 Bronze medals, amassing the highest number of total medal count of 89.

Edo state who went to the tournament with just 47 athletes claimed third place with 25 Gold, 14 Silver and 12 Bronze medals, to record a total of 51 Medals in the just concluded 3rd National Para Games

Rivers came out fourth with 21 Gold, 21 Silver and 17 Bronze medals to have aggregate of 59 medals while Lagos State finished fifth with 20 Gold, 23 Silver and 20 Bronze medals, bringing their total to 63.

Abia state settled for the sixth

position after recording nine Gold, 16 Silver and 18 Bronze medals, totalling 43 medals, followed by Plateau in seventh place with eight Gold, six Silver and 14 Bronze medals, totaling 28.

Osun came eighth with three Gold, six Silver and seven Bronze medals (16 total), while Adamawa State secured ninth place with three gold, three silver and two bronze medals, totaling eight.

Kwara completed the top 10 with two Gold, seven Silver and 11 Bronze medals, totalling 20.

Other states that featured in the medal table include Cross River (2 gold, 5 silver, 11 bronze – 18 total), Ondo (2 gold, 4 silver, 7 bronze – 13 total).



Wife of the Vice President, Nana Kashim Shettima, addressing the crowd

## Greenbull RFC crowned South East Champions after dominant final display

Greenbull RFC delivered a commanding performance to defeat Isukwuato RFC 12-0, emerging champions of the South East Rugby Tournament.

The competition, organised by the Southeast Rugby Football Association in partnership with Martina Martins Seed Foundation and Msportslink, featured five teams from across the region, including Greenbull RFC, Isukwuato RFC, Oteji RFC, AJ-Green RFC and Coal City RFC.

In the final, Greenbull RFC combined disciplined defence with aggressive line speed and quick ruck play, forcing Isukwuato into wide, low-percentage attacks. Their dominance translated into two well-executed tries and a successful conversion to seal a deserved 12-0 victory.

Isukwuato RFC finished as runners-up, while Oteji RFC secured the bronze medal. AJ-Green RFC and Coal City RFC placed fourth and fifth respectively.

Beyond competition, the tournament also featured seminars and workshops centred on youth development, safe play, and the fundamentals of rugby—underscoring its grassroots focus.

Speaking after the event, Southeast Zonal Representative on the board of the Nigeria Rugby Football Federation, Onyekachi Stephen Ibebulam, commended the strong turnout and commitment of teams and supporters, noting the sacrifices made by clubs to grow the sport.

He also expressed appreciation

to key stakeholders, including Anderson Akaliro, a distinguished member of the Abia State House of Assembly representing Umuhia North State Constituency, for his support toward grassroots rugby development.

Special recognition was equally given to Ugochukwu Anunobi for his unwavering encouragement, as well as partners, officials, volunteers, coaches, and medical personnel whose contributions ensured the success of the tournament.



GREENBULL RFC TEAM

## Ogun State Rugby Association collaborates with NRFF for coaching, medical courses

The Ogun State Rugby Association, in partnership with the Nigeria Rugby Football Federation (NRFF), is set to host a three-day Rugby Coaching and Medical Course in Abeokuta as part of efforts to boost grassroots development.

Scheduled to hold between

April 23 to 25, 2026, at the MKO Abiola Sports Arena, the programme is aimed at building local capacity and expanding participation in the sport across Ogun State and beyond.

The course will serve as a preparatory pathway for Level 1 and Level 2 Coaching and Medical certifications, while

also supporting educator development and quality assurance ahead of anticipated World Rugby engagements later in the year.

Participants are required to have completed key World Rugby introductory modules, including Rugby Ready, Safeguarding, and basic coaching and medical courses. The training will focus on practical knowledge in player safety, coaching techniques, and athlete management.

The initiative underscores a broader strategy to develop competent local educators and practitioners, critical to the sustainable growth of rugby in Nigeria.

The programme will also align with the 3rd edition of the Tunde Delu Abeokuta Rugby 7s Tournament, providing a unique blend of learning and competition.



NIGERIA RUBY PLAYERS

## 10-man Wikki tourists held to thrilling 2-2 draw in Lafia, NPFL26 MD 33

Wikki Tourists FC were forced to settle for a dramatic 2-2 draw against Enyimba at the Lafia City Stadium, the new home ground, in a pulsating Matchday 33 encounter of the NPFL26 season.

The hosts started brightly and took an early lead in the 15th minute through Imamu

Bala, who finished calmly with a header from a cross by Klingshak Longbak to give Wikki a deserved advantage. Wikki maintained control for large spells, showing composure and attacking intent against the visitors.

However, Enyimba responded with an equaliser in the 54th minutes by Samuel Okechukwu

to bring the game back on level terms few minutes on resumption from the break.

In the second half, Wikki regained the lead in the 70th minute when Jonathan Mairiga found the back of the net, sparking celebrations among the home supporters and putting the hosts in a strong position to secure maximum

points.

The game took a dramatic turn in the first half when Wikki were reduced to 10 men following a red card to goalkeeper Utum. The early dismissal shifted momentum in favour of Enyimba, forcing Wikki to reorganize and battle through the remainder of the game with a numerical disadvantage.



DEONTAY WILDER

## Boxing: Wilder edges retiring Chisora in chaotic heavyweight boxing fight

Former world champion Deontay Wilder sent Derek Chisora into retirement by edging their engaging yet chaotic heavyweight fight in London, United Kingdom.

The boxers, aged 40 and 42 respectively, threw hopeful knock-out punches and barely jabbed. Both slipped and fell to the canvas frequently during the bout at the O2 Arena on Saturday.

Wilder got the only knock-down in the eighth round, sending Chisora through the ropes, but the American was deducted a point in the same round for pushing. Chisora was rattled, but Wilder did not press his advantage.

Wilder dominated the early rounds, and Chisora rallied late. The judges were split in their scoring: Wilder received scores of 115-111 and 115-113, and the

third picked Chisora by 115-112. Wilder said the fight was fun and suggested he didn't want to knock out Chisora.

"Tonight, I looked out for him. I want him to live for his kids," he told broadcaster DAZN. "It's time for us to take care of each other."

Chisora said in the build-up that the fight was to be his last, but the Londoner was reluctant to confirm it afterwards.

"I'm going to go home with the boss lady and see," he told DAZN. "I'm going to go home and drop the kids, do the school run."

It was the 50th fight for both in the professional ranks.

Wilder improved his record to 45-4-1. The WBC titleholder from 2015 to 2020 came to London having lost four of his last six fights.

## NSC reaffirms commitment to para-athletes

Shehu Dikko, Chairman of the National Sports Commission (NSC) has reaffirmed the commission's commitment to ensuring that para-athletes in Nigeria receive the necessary support to thrive.

Dikko made this known at the closing of the 3rd National Para Games in Abuja, on Friday, describing the event as a celebration of resilience, inclusion and national unity.

"Our para-athletes have consistently brought honour to Nigeria on the global stage. They deserve a system that matches their dedication with the right level of support, investment and recognition," he said.

He expressed satisfaction

with the successful hosting of the Games and congratulated participating athletes for their outstanding performances, noting that their courage, discipline and resilience have inspired the nation.

The NSC chairman emphasised that the Games were not only about winning medals, but also about promoting dignity, inclusion, visibility and the transformative power of sports.

"To those who have won medals, your success is well deserved. To those who may not be leaving with medals, your efforts, courage and participation are equally valued. You have all represented Nigeria with honour," he added.



PARA-ATHLETES



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13 X 4	369,500	397,213	295,600	317,770	206,938	222,458	443,500	476,763	369,550	397,266
10 X 4	340,000	365,500	273,500	294,013	177,400	190,705	370,000	397,750	295,600	317,770
HALF PAGE	295,600	317,770	236,500	254,238	147,800	158,885	340,000	365,500	273,450	293,959
10 X 3	221,700	238,328	147,800	158,885	118,300	127,173	266,000	285,950	251,300	270,148
13 X2	206,900	222,418	133,000	142,925	103,500	111,263	221,800	238,435	147,810	158,896
QUARTER PAGE	192,150	206,561	118,250	127,119	88,690	95,342	236,500	254,238	133,000	142,975
CENTER SPREAD	1,356,968	1,466,992						B/W	1,148,181	1,241,276
HALF CENTER	991,590	1,071,989						B/W	887,272	959,212

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FP 5X2	81,100	87,183	97,300	104,598
FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475
FP 2X2	59,000	63,425	64,900	69,768

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3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
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2 X 1	12,400	13,330	7,415	7,971
CAC	38,000	40,850		

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EFFECTIVE FROM FEBRUARY 1, 2023

# FEATURE

## Security Stands Tall as the Heartbeat of Governor Okpebholo's Vision for Edo

PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE, PH.D

Security is no longer a slogan in Edo State of today; it has become the backbone of governance since Governor Monday Okpebholo assumed office.

At a time when public anxiety is high and emotions are understandably raw following recent security incidents, it is important to pause, look beyond the noise, and examine the facts, the actions, and the direction Edo State is heading under his leadership. An insider assessment shows that security remains the central pillar of Governor Okpebholo's SHINE agenda, not just in words, but in clear policy choices, massive investments, and sustained operations across the state.

From the very start of his administration, Governor Okpebholo made it clear that no meaningful development can happen in an unsafe environment. Roads, schools, hospitals, businesses and even community life collapse when fear takes over. That understanding shaped the government's priorities, especially as reflected in the state's budgets. For example, in the 2025 budget and even more boldly in the 2026 estimates, security received one of the strongest levels of attention, with billions committed to patrol vehicles, motorcycles, modern equipment, recruitment of trained personnel, intelligence gathering and inter-agency collaboration. To the discerning these are not cosmetic gestures; they are deliberate investments aimed at reclaiming forests, highways and communities from criminal elements.

The strengthening of the Edo State Security Corps, the reactivation and regulation of vigilante structures, and the expansion of Operation Rescue are part of a wider deliberate, concerted strategy to take security closer to the people. Before the last yuletide season, coordinated bush-combing operations were carried out across Auchi, Agenebode, Okpella, Fugar and parts of Owan. These operations led to the discovery and destruction of kidnapers' hideouts, multiple arrests, prosecutions, and in some cases, armed confrontations that neutralised dangerous criminals. The result was a remarkably peaceful festive period, one of the calmest Edo State has witnessed in years. That outcome did not happen by chance.

The tragic abduction and killing of Dr. Abu Momoh Tahir in Auchi was a painful setback, and the government did not shy away from acknowledging the gravity of that loss. The incident is unfortunate and deeply regrettable, not only because a precious life was lost, but because it came at a time when sustained efforts had significantly reduced kidnapping incidents across the state. The fact remains however, that isolated criminal acts, no matter how heartbreaking, do not erase the pro-



GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

*These measures aim to make Edo State increasingly hostile terrain for criminal networks, reducing their ability to regroup, recruit or operate freely*

gress being made nor do they define the overall security architecture of our state. Criminality thrives on opportunism, and the fight against it is rarely linear. The real measure of leadership lies in response, resolve and consistency, and on that score, the Okpebholo administration has remained firm on this score.

Governor Okpebholo has repeatedly assured Edo people that his government will not allow criminals or their sponsors to take the state hostage. His message has been clear and consistent: there will be no hiding place for kidnapers, cultists or anyone threatening public peace and safety.

Security operations are ongoing, intelligence-led and strategic, even if not every detail can be discussed publicly. Security, by its nature, demands discretion, coordination and patience. Loud debates and premature disclosures may satisfy public curiosity, but they can also compromise operations and endanger lives.

This is why the government's appeal for calm and restraint is both timely and necessary. Recent protests, including the one at the university town of Ekpoma, may have been driven by genuine concerns, but blocking roads and creating disorder do not strengthen security. On the contrary, such actions can distract security agencies, expose residents to danger and create openings for criminal elements to exploit chaos.

Governor Okpebholo is clear that while the right to peaceful protest is respected, security matters require structured engagement, not uncoordinated actions that undermine public order.

Interestingly, one of the most im-

portant points often overlooked in public discourse is that security is a shared responsibility. Government can deploy vehicles, recruit personnel and fund operations, but without citizen and community cooperation, intelligence sharing and vigilance, even the best strategies will struggle.

The Okpebholo administration has consistently called on traditional rulers, community leaders, youth groups and residents to work with security agencies, report suspicious movements and refuse to shield criminals. This people-centred approach recognises that those who live in the communities often see what security operatives may not immediately notice.

It is also worth noting that the Okpebholo government has not limited its response to enforcement alone. Stronger anti-cultism laws, engagement with neighbouring states, and continuous review of security strategies form part of a broader effort to address the roots of crime. These measures aim to make Edo State increasingly hostile terrain for criminal networks, reducing their ability to regroup, recruit or operate freely.

Criticism is part of democracy, and public concern over security is valid. However, it is important that such

criticism be informed, balanced and constructive. Painting Edo State as lawless or portraying the government as indifferent does not reflect the reality on ground. The facts show sustained investment, continuous operations and a leadership that has placed security at the very centre of its agenda. Progress may not be instant, but it is visible and measurable.

As Edo continues this difficult journey but necessary journey toward lasting peace, what is required from citizens is not panic or division, but unity, patience and cooperation. The government has reaffirmed its commitment to building a safe, peaceful and prosperous Edo State, and that commitment has been backed with resources, action and political will. Security remains the heartbeat of Governor Monday Okpebholo's vision for Edo, and with collective resolve, the state can and will overcome the challenges it faces.

In times like these, calm is not weakness, and restraint is not silence. They are powerful tools that allow security efforts to work, justice to take its course, and progress to continue. Edo State's future depends on it.

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