

All 33 banks hit CBN capital targets, raise N4.65trn

ABUJA

The Federal Government has unveiled a \$552-billion banking sector has emerged stronger following the successful completion of the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) two-year recapitalisation programme, with all 33 banks meeting the revised minimum capital requirements, the apex bank announced on Wednesday.

According to a statement jointly signed by Dr Olubukola Akinwunmi, Director of Banking Supervision, and Mrs Hakama Sidi-Ali, Acting Director of Corporate Communications, banks collectively raised N4.65 trillion in new capital, reinforcing the resilience of the financial system and enhancing its capacity to support the nation's economy.

Under the programme, the CBN set minimum capital requirements based on the scope of each bank's operations: ₦250 billion for banks with international authorisation, ₦125 billion for national banks, and ₦25 billion for regional banks.

All 33 banks successfully met these thresholds.

The recapitalization, launched in March 2024, attracted strong participation

from both domestic and international investors, with 72.55 percent of funds sourced locally and 27.45 percent from abroad, signalling continued confidence in Nigeria's banking sector.

While a few institutions remain subject to regulatory and judicial processes, the CBN confirmed that all banks continue to operate fully, ensuring uninterrupted access to financial services for individuals and businesses.

The apex bank noted that the initiative strengthened Capital Adequacy Ratios (CAR) above international Basel benchmarks, improved asset quality, and reinforced balance sheet transparency. The programme also positions the sector to mobilise savings, support lending, and withstand domestic and global economic shocks.

CBN Governor Mr Olayemi Cardoso described the achievement as a milestone for the Nigerian banking system, noting that the strengthened capital base enhances financial system resilience and supports sustainable economic growth.

"The successful completion of the programme demonstrates our commitment to a stable, transparent, and robust banking sector," he added.

The Nigerian Observer



...that the people may know

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Edo LG elections: We can't disqualify candidates, power lies with political parties —EDSIEC

BENIN CITY

The Chairman of the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), Hon. Jonathan Aifuobokhan, has clarified that the commission does not have the authority to disqualify candidates in the upcoming local government elections.

Speaking at a stakeholders' meeting yesterday in Benin City ahead of the July 11 polls,

Aifuobokhan said such decisions are the exclusive prerogative of political parties. The commission's role, he explained, is limited to advising parties on areas where their candidates fail to comply with relevant laws.

He assured participants that the elections timetable released by EDSIEC aligns fully with both the commission's guidelines for the 2026 Local Government Council elections and

the provisions of the amended Electoral Act.

On calls to amend the schedule, Aifuobokhan said that delaying the elections beyond July 11 would amount to instituting a caretaker committee—an arrangement not recognised under local government election laws.

"As a commission, we are fully committed to our constitutional mandate and are putting in place necessary meas-

ures to ensure a level playing field for all political parties and candidates," he said.

"However, the success of any electoral process does not rest solely on the electoral body. It requires active participation, cooperation, and trust from all stakeholders, political actors, security agencies, community leaders, civil society organisations, the media, and indeed the electorates."

The meeting drew key stake-

holders, including the Chairman of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, Comrade Festus Alenke; Edo State Commissioner of Police, Mr Monday Agbonika; traditional rulers from all three senatorial dis-

tricts; representative of the Commander, 4 Brigade Nigeria Army and the Chief Imam of Benin Central Mosque, Al-haji Abdul-Fatai Enabulele, all of whom unanimously called for credible elections and fair competition for all candidates.

We're voice of Edo people through projects, Okepbholo declares

● Gets accolade from Benin residents over road reconstruction

RICHARD EWEKA

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okepbholo, has emphasised that his administration speaks for the people of Edo through the implementation of life-changing projects across the state, particularly in road construction and flood control.

During an inspection of ongoing road projects at Ohoghobi and Evbhukhu boundary, Governor Okepbholo said that the residents of the area had long been voiceless, with no one to advocate for their needs. "Constructing this road for them is a thing of joy. If we don't do it, who will? I am here to work for the people of Edo State, just as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu works for Nigerians, bringing hope to the

people," he stated.

The governor highlighted that the road works would open the area for economic development.

"Different buildings are already springing up at Ohoghobi and Evbhukhu boundary. By the time we complete the road, economic activities will flourish, benefiting the community," he added.

Site engineer, Engr. Frank Nwogu, provided technical details of the project, noting that it spans 14 kilometres across Oghehe, Sapele Old Road, and adjoining roads, with a 2.5 km section at Ohoghobi and Evbhukhu boundary.

The project includes reinforced concrete drainage measuring 1.2 by 1 metre and pavement thickness of 250mm.

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STAKEHOLDERS MEETING:

Chairman, Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), Hon. Jonathan Aifuobokhan (middle), flanked by members of the Commission, Hon. Anthony Aikpoghome (left), and Hon. Frank Habib Umoru, during a stakeholders meeting ahead of the July 11, 2026 Local Government Council Elections.

Okonjo-Iweala urges Nigeria to lead Africa's single aviation market push
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Okonjo-Iweala urges Nigeria to lead Africa's single aviation market push

ABUJA

Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has called on Nigeria to take the lead in championing the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) as part of efforts to transform the continent's aviation and trade landscape.

Okonjo-Iweala made the call virtually on Wednesday at the maiden Nigeria Aircraft Acquisition and Investment Summit (NAAIS) 2026 held in Lagos.

The summit, themed "Unlocking Capital, Confidence and Capacity in Nigeria Aviation Industry," brought together stakeholders to explore strategies for repositioning the sector.

She explained that SAATM, unveiled in 2018 as a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063, is designed to create a single, unified and liberalised aviation market across Africa.

According to her, the initia-

tive seeks to dismantle restrictive bilateral arrangements and fragmented national policies, while positioning aviation as a transformative driver of development across the continent.

"Boosting intra-Africa trade, deepening tourism, and providing the connectivity infrastructure required to meet Africa's growth trajectory demands that Nigeria leads this agenda from the front," she said.

Okonjo-Iweala stressed that the aviation sector holds vast opportunities, noting that the country must shift from treating it as a source of revenue to recognising it as a strategic economic enabler.

She urged the Federal Government to reposition aviation as critical infrastructure underpinning the African Continental Free Trade Area, especially as Nigeria seeks to transition into a high-value, export-oriented economy.

Highlighting structural challenges, she noted that air connectivity within Africa remains costly and inefficient,

with passengers often forced to transit through Europe to travel between African countries.

"This raises the cost of doing business and constrains trade. It is a structural barrier to growth," she said, adding that intra-Af-

rican trade currently stands at about 16 per cent, while Africa accounts for only about three percent of global trade.

She pointed out that despite representing less than one per cent of global goods by volume, air cargo accounted for nearly 30 percent of global trade by value in 2025, underscoring its

importance to high-value and time-sensitive goods such as pharmaceuticals, electronics and e-commerce parcels.

"When air cargo functions efficiently, it does not merely complement trade, it enables it," she added.

Okonjo-Iweala acknowledged improvements in Nigeria's avia-

tion sector, including increased private airline participation, expansion of airport infrastructure and enhanced safety records over the past 19 years, but said more progress is required.

She noted that existing airlines must upgrade their fleets and scale up operations to improve competitiveness.

We 're voice of Edo people through...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

"This is an erosion control and water retention project. Over the years, this area was unpassable, especially during the rainy season," he said.

The drainage is about 80 percent complete, with full project delivery scheduled for May 2026.

Residents expressed gratitude to the governor for intervening in a long-neglected area.

Peter Onu described the initiative as a welcome relief, while Kate Obayuwana said the road had been prone to flooding for years before the current administration stepped in.

Mathew Ehikhuemen recalled that the community had suffered flooding since 2000, but praised Governor Okepbhoholo for restoring hope.

Accompanying the governor on the inspection were the State Deputy Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Sylvester Aigboboh, and other top government officials.

They also assessed the second flyover bridge at Adesuwa Road, Agbonze and Iyore Street at Ohoghobi, Camplink Road along Obagie N'Evbuos, Ihriri Road, Evbhukhu-Amagba Road, Okpagha-Amufi Road, and the water retention point at Amufi, including the Boundary road between Iyanomo and Amufi Community.

Also, residents of Charismat-

ic Church Road, off Ekenhuan Road in Benin City, have expressed overwhelming relief and gratitude following the ongoing reconstruction of the once-derelect stretch, as Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, inspected the project.

The 1.4-kilometre road, currently under construction is transforming a corridor long associated with hardship, inaccessibility, and insecurity into a functional route, raising hopes among residents and business owners.

During the governor's visit, large crowds gathered to welcome him, applauding what they described as a long-overdue intervention that has restored life to the area.

A resident, Blessing Patrick, recounted years of difficulty navigating the road, noting that it had remained impassable for a long time. Speaking in an emotional tone, she expressed appreciation for the ongoing work, attributing the intervention to divine favour and commending the governor for addressing their plight.

Similarly, trader Osarunwense Igbinovia described the road's previous condition as dangerous, citing incidents of erosion that damaged buildings and created opportunities for criminal activities.

She noted that the transformation underway has already improved safety and renewed confidence among residents.



INSPECTING ONGOING ROAD PROJECTS:

Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo (left), with other government officials inspecting ongoing road projects in Edo South Senatorial Districts yesterday in Benin City.

APC picks Osarobo as Ovia South West flag bearer amid calls for unity

BERNADETTE IDALU

IGUOBABUWA

The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Ovia South West Local Government formally unveiled Mr. Osarobo Osaro Anthony as its flag bearer for the upcoming April 3, 2026, Local Government primary election on Wednesday, with party leaders, urging peace and harmony among mem-

bers.

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, speaking at the Iguobazuwa Town Hall, lauded the party for zoning the chairmanship position to Udo Ward, a first in the area's political history and described the move as a demonstration of fairness, equity, and unity within APC.

"Udo Ward has never produced a Council Chairman since politics began in Ovia

South West. After careful deliberations, we have today presented our preferred candidate," Idahosa said.

Highlighting the credentials of the party's flag bearer, Idahosa said, "Osarobo Anthony is a son of Ovia South West, born and raised in Udo Community.

"He understands the struggles of rural residents, enjoys strong support from youths, and embodies competence,

loyalty, and commitment to the values of our great party."

He also praised the smooth selection of APC councillorship nominees across the ten wards, noting that the consensus approach reflects the party's commitment to grassroots democracy.

"This shows that APC is united and focused on development. I urge all members, especially those who stepped aside voluntarily, to continue working for the party's success," he added.

AIG warns against ballot snatching ahead of 2027 Elections

LAGOS

The Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG) in charge of Zone 2 Command, Mr. Olohundare Jimoh, has warned Nigerians against ballot snatching and other forms of electoral violence ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Jimoh issued the warning on Wednesday during a sensitisation lecture for stakeholders on the dangers of electoral vi-

olence, held at the command headquarters in Onikan, Lagos, as part of activities marking National Police Day 2026.

Describing ballot snatching as a "serious criminal offence," the AIG urged citizens to shun actions that could undermine the credibility of elections.

"Ballot snatching disenfranchises voters and can incite violence. It will not be tolerated, and perpetrators will face the full weight of the law," he said.

He stressed the need for col-

lective responsibility in ensuring peaceful elections, noting that the police cannot guarantee security alone without public cooperation.

"Part of our policing mantra is that the public are our bosses. We are here to serve you and to work with you to ensure safety and security," Jimoh added.

The AIG also highlighted ongoing security measures, including threat assessments, intelligence-led policing, and strategic deployment of per-

sonnel around polling units.

He commended Lagos and Ogun residents for their peaceful conduct in previous elections, urging them to sustain this compliance.

Jimoh called on political actors to focus on issue-based campaigns, avoid incitement, and seek legal redress when aggrieved. "Democracy thrives in a peaceful environment. We must all play our part to ensure free, fair, and credible elections," he said.

Islamic banking gains ground, boosting financial inclusion —SEC

LAGOS

The Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Alhaji Aliyu Katuka, says Islamic banking, also known as non-interest or Sharia-compliant finance, is gaining wider acceptance in Nigeria, sup-

porting economic growth and financial inclusion.

Katuka spoke to newsmen on the sidelines of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group Day in Lagos, noting that growing awareness and investor confidence were strengthening market integrity and advancing Nigeria's

goal of a one trillion dollar economy.

"Initially, many non-Muslims had limited knowledge of non-interest banking, which slowed adoption. But ongoing sensitisation is improving understanding and acceptance," he said, adding that users of Islamic banking products

were satisfied with benefits in areas such as job creation, infrastructure, education, and healthcare financing.

Although still smaller than conventional banking, Katuka said the sector was growing steadily and showed strong potential.

"Non-interest banking is

evolving, so direct comparison with conventional banking may not reflect its true potential, but the growth trajectory is encouraging," he noted.

He stressed that the model aligned with Nigeria's financial inclusion strategy, offering alternative financing options to

underserved populations.

"The focus should be on the benefits to society, not religious differences. It is about economic development and shared prosperity for all Nigerians," he said, expressing optimism that expanded participation would further drive national economic growth.

Edo govt lauds women's political role, seeks greater inclusion

FRIDAY OBANOR

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has commended women for their growing contributions to political and legislative development, while calling for greater inclusion of women in governance at all levels.

Speaking at the maiden edition of the Convergence of Women in Leadership and Impact Awards (COWLIA 0.1)

held in Benin City, the Coordinator, Office of the State First Lady, Mrs Edesili Okpebholo-Anani, noted that women's active participation continues to shape governance, influence policy direction, and strengthen democratic institutions across the state.

The event, organised by the League of Women Journalists (NILOWN), Edo State chapter, focused on advancing women's leadership and participation.

Mrs Okpebholo-Anani, who was represented by the wife of the Secretary to the State Government, Barrister Nimata

Umar Ikhilior, stressed the need to boost women's representation and ensure sustainable development through inclusive participation.

The one-day programme, themed "From Purpose to Platform: How Women Learn, Rise, Lead and Create Impact," celebrated the achievements and contributions of women in leadership across various sectors.

In her goodwill message, the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development, Mrs Eugenia Abdallah, underscored the critical role

of women's empowerment in nation-building, noting that women have consistently demonstrated courage and leadership in shaping families, communities, and nations.

She emphasised that empowerment must go beyond rhetoric and translate into concrete policies, inclusive governance frameworks, and equal access to education, economic resources, and leadership opportunities.

"True progress can only be achieved when women are fully empowered, given equal opportunities, and included in

decision-making processes at all levels," she said, adding that political participation remains a vital pathway for women to influence policies, advocate justice, and drive sustainable development.

Mrs Abdallah called on government institutions, civil society organisations, and community leaders to support initiatives that promote gender equality and leadership development.

"As we mark this occasion, let us reaffirm our commitment to breaking barriers, challenging stereotypes, and building an inclusive society where women's voices are heard and respected. Empowering women is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic necessity for growth, peace, and prosperity," she added.

She further urged women to take bold steps in pursuing leadership roles, stressing that their perspectives are essential for effective governance.

In her remarks, the Founder of NILOWV, Hon. Dame Esther Uduehi, represented by former Edo State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Prof. Yinka Omorogbe (SAN), described the gathering as purposeful and reflective of strong vision and commitment to advancing women's leadership.

In a Keynote address, former Deputy Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly and member representing Esan North East II, Hon. Maria Edeko, shared insights on pathways to impactful leadership and effective participation in governance.

**INDUCTION:**

Outgoing Director-General, Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development (MBNCWD), Dr Asabe Vilita-Bashir (R) unveiling her portrait, during her induction into the Hall of Fame in Abuja on Wednesday.

Obe N'Evbuebo hails Oba Ewuare II for restoring peace to community

OBE N'EVBUENO

The elders and people of Obe N'Evbuebo community in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State have expressed gratitude to the Benin Monarch, Oba Ewuare II, for restoring peace and harmony following a protracted leadership crisis.

In a statement signed by the Ozukpogieva (second most senior elder), Pa Nosakhare Iyoha, the Ozukpogieha (third in command), Pa Charles Ise, and other elders, the community said the monarch's intervention culminated in the suspension of the priest (Ohen), Ogiobe N'Iyomo, Ogbiede Isaac Edobor, on March 5, 2026.

The elders noted that the crisis began after the death of the late Odionwere, Pa Joseph Orhue Iyoha, and the subsequent installation of Pa Oyeobagie Ekhatior as his successor.

They alleged that the new Odionwere conspired with the Ohen to illegally ostracise some indigenes to pave way to forcefully sell community lands previously allocated to elders.

According to the statement, although the Benin Palace intervened in 2017, nullified the ostracisation, and ordered the return of the lands, the directives were ignored by the priest.

The elders further alleged that the Ohen continued to enforce the ostracisation and engaged in sacrilegious acts and land grabbing, while also usurping the authority of the Elders-in-Council.

EIRS extends 2026 tax returns deadline to April 30

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS) has extended the deadline for filing Individual Annual Tax Returns (Form A) and Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) Returns (Form H3) by one month.

The closing date has been shifted from March 31 to April 30, 2026.

The extension applies to a

broad category of taxpayers, including individuals, business owners, professionals, freelancers, content creators, entertainers, artisans, consultants, tradesmen and women, employees, as well as all employers of labour across the state.

Announcing the development, the Executive Chairman of EIRS, Mr John Osirenimhe Odior (FCA, ACTI), said the decision was part of efforts to support taxpayers and enhance

administrative efficiency.

He explained that the extension would allow taxpayers sufficient time to gather necessary documentation, improve compliance among individuals and businesses, ensure accurate financial reporting, and enable intensified taxpayer education and sensitisation across the state.

Odior urged all eligible taxpayers to take advantage of the extended window and avoid last-minute rush by utilising

the agency's digital platforms.

He stated that individual taxpayers are required to file their returns via the official EIRS website at www.eirs.gov.ng, while employers can submit PAYE returns through paye.eirs.gov.ng or at the nearest EIRS office.

The Service reiterated its commitment to strengthening tax administration and promoting a culture of voluntary compliance among residents.

EDHA orders training certificates for ESSC salaries

● Moves to regulate hospitality sector

KEN ABU

ABUJA

The Edo State House of Assembly (EDHA) has directed members of the Edo State Security Corps (ESSC) to present evidence of training as a prerequisite for the payment of their monthly salaries.

Speaker of the House, Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, gave the directive on Wednesday during plenary while responding to complaints and appeals from ESSC personnel over sal-

ary payments.

He instructed local government council chairmen to ensure that only duly trained corps members are considered for salary disbursement.

Meanwhile, the House has advanced legislative action on a bill seeking to regulate tourism and hospitality establishments in the state, with a view to strengthening security.

Leading the debate, Majority Leader, Hon. Jonathan Ibhama, said that the proposed law would mandate proper documentation of

guests in hotels, guest houses, and apartments, noting that the absence of such records poses significant security risks.

"It is unacceptable that identities of many guests are not properly recorded, thereby creating security vulnerabilities," he said.

According to him, the bill would require hospitality operators to obtain valid identification from guests and maintain accurate records, while also submitting periodic reports on guest data and activities to relevant authorities.

Contributing, Hon. Isibor

Addeh stressed that effective security depends on proper identification systems, adding that documents such as the National Identification Number (NIN) and voter's card would aid in tracking individuals and curbing crime.

He also recommended the installation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) systems in hotels and apartments to monitor movements within such facilities.

Similarly, Hon. Maria Edekor noted that the legislation would boost investor and tourist confidence by enhancing security across the state.

Edo, UNDP partner on smart, human-centred devt agenda

ODIGIE ETINOSA

The Edo State Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have initiated discussions aimed at advancing a human-centred, technology-driven development strategy for the state.

The engagement took place at the UNDP office in Abuja, where the Commissioner for Communication and Digital Economy, Hon. Ohimai Ehijimotor, outlined the ministry's vision for innovation and sustainable growth.

He revealed that the state has commenced an Integrated Smart State Programme designed to transition from traditional paper-based systems to a fully digitalised document management framework powered by e-government platforms.

Discussions between both parties centred on leveraging

technology, digitisation, and clean energy to improve service delivery and quality of life.

A key highlight of the meeting was ongoing justice reform efforts, particularly initiatives involving young lawyers providing legal aid to prevent unlawful pretrial detention, thereby enhancing access to justice for vulnerable citizens.

The dialogue also explored future collaboration opportunities, including solar-powered healthcare facilities, youth innovation hubs to drive job creation, and gradual migration to a paperless government system to boost transparency and efficiency.

While UNDP emphasised its role as a technical partner, rather than a funding agency, both sides expressed commitment to building a structured partnership anchored on accountability, trust, and long-term impact.

NEWS

Police nab suspected kidnapper, recover AK-47 rifles in Rivers

PORT HARCOURT

The Rivers State Police Command has arrested a suspected kidnapper and recovered two AK-47 rifles following a foiled abduction attempt in Port Harcourt.

The Command's Spokesperson, CSP Grace Iringe-Koko, disclosed this while briefing

journalists on Wednesday.

She said the arrest followed a failed attempt to kidnap one Mr Fadi Nasser at his residence along Woji Road in the Government Reserved Area (GRA) in the early hours of March 20.

According to her, the assailants invaded the residence and opened fire in a bid to abduct the victim, who, however,

managed to escape.

"The victim's escape enabled a swift police response, which led to the recovery of a mobile phone at the scene.

"The mobile phone provided a significant lead in our investigations. Our operatives used technical intelligence to track

the device and arrested one Joseph Abibo, a suspected gang member," she said.

Iringe-Koko added that the suspect subsequently provided information that led operatives to the gang's hideout.

"On arrival at the hideout, operatives came under heavy

gunfire from other gang members.

"Police operatives engaged the suspects in a gun duel and overpowered them, resulting in six suspects fleeing into a nearby river with gunshot wounds," she said.

She said a search of the hide-

out led to the recovery of two AK-47 rifles, four magazines and 108 rounds of ammunition.

The police spokesperson said a manhunt had been launched to apprehend the fleeing suspects and recover additional weapons.

COEASU strike grounds Ebonyi College over unpaid benefits

ABAKALIKI

Academic activities at the Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo, have been paralysed following a one-week warning strike by the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) over unpaid benefits.

The industrial action, which began on Monday, has halted lectures, examinations and other academic programmes.

In a statement issued in Abakaliki, the COEASU Chairman, Dr Ama Nnachi, said the strike followed the expiration of 14-day and seven-day ultimatums earlier issued to the state government and the institution's management.

He described the situation as "years of neglect and poor conditions of service".

"We are on strike because the 2024 salary structure has not been implemented. This is 2026 and nothing has been done," Nnachi said.

He disclosed that the union is also demanding a living wage, as well as payment of pensions and gratuities owed to retired staff.

According to him, lecturers are still being paid under an outdated structure tied to the ₦18,000 minimum wage introduced over a decade ago.

"As we speak, some staff who have worked for 20 to 22 years

earn less than ₦30,000.

"With fuel selling above ₦1,500 per litre, how do they survive?" he queried.

Nnachi described the situation as life-threatening, alleging that some staff members had died due to hardship.

"This is no longer just about salaries; it is about survival," he said.

The union also decried the non-payment of pensions and gratuities, describing the plight of retirees as heartbreaking.

A retiree, Mr Celestine Oke, said he retired in 2022 but had yet to receive his entitlements.

"I survive from hand to mouth," he lamented.

Another retiree, Mr Samuel Uwalaka, described the situation as unbearable and appealed to the government for intervention.

A lecturer, who spoke anonymously, also criticised the government for failing to meet its basic responsibility of paying salaries.

"All infrastructure here is funded by external interventions. The government's primary duty is to pay salaries, and that is not being done," the lecturer said.

Reacting, the Provost of the college, Prof. Benedict Mbam, confirmed that the union is demanding implementation of the 2024 salary structure approved by the Salaries and Wages Commission.

Oborevwoori felicitates Delta Speaker Guwor at 47

ASABA

Governor Sheriff Oborevwoori of Delta State has congratulated the Speaker of the State House of Assembly, Hon. Emomotimi Guwor, on his 47th birthday.

The felicitations were conveyed in a statement issued by the governor's Chief Press Secretary, Mr Festus Ahon, on Wednesday in Asaba.

Oborevwoori commended Guwor, who also serves as Chairman of the Conference of Speakers of State Legislatures in Nigeria, for his contributions to legislative excellence and governance.

He described the speaker as "a leader with a strong sense of

purpose."

According to the governor, Guwor's leadership has ensured stability in the House and fostered cooperation among the arms of government.

He praised the Assembly under Guwor for sustaining a seamless lawmaking process and passing impactful bills and resolutions aimed at improving the welfare of the people.

Oborevwoori also highlighted the alignment between the legislature and his administration's M.O.R.E Agenda, noting that the synergy has accelerated development across sectors.

He prayed for the speaker's continued good health, long life and greater accomplishments in service to Delta State and humanity.



MEETING WITH NAN:

L-R: Head of Lagos Operations, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Mrs Ifeyinwa Omowole; Chairman, Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers Union (RATTAWU), Comrade Ayodeji Fadipe, and Secretary, RATTAWU, Comrade Olujimi Joseph, during their meeting with the head of NAN, Lagos Operation on Wednesday.

Advocates, journalists partner to tackle HIV stigma, GBV in Edo

BENIN CITY

Health advocates in Edo State have secured fresh commitments from journalists and human rights officials to intensify efforts against HIV-related stigma and gender-based violence (GBV).

The commitments followed advocacy visits by the Access to Health and Rights Development Initiative (AHRDI) and the Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (NEPWHAN) to the Nigeria

Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Benin City.

The groups are implementing the Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) project, supported by the Global Fund through NEPWHAN, to identify gaps in healthcare delivery and strengthen institutional response to the needs of people living with HIV.

Speaking at the NUJ Press Centre, NEPWHAN Edo Coordinator, Mr Friday Osayande, urged journalists to

shape public discourse on HIV and amplify documented cases of discrimination.

"The media can decide what society pays attention to. We are placing evidence before you—real stories, real gaps and asking you to act," he said.

Osayande noted that the CLM project had uncovered cases of stigma within families and health facilities, which were often absent from official reports.

In his response, Chairman of NUJ, Edo State Council, Mr Festus Alenkhe, announced the formation of a three-member media team to drive sustained coverage of HIV-related

rights issues and GBV.

He said both print and broadcast platforms would prioritise the campaign, adding that a local radio programme would be deployed to broaden public engagement.

The collaboration signals a shift from data gathering to enforcement, with advocates leveraging media reach and institutional authority to promote accountability.

At a separate meeting with the NHRC, AHRDI Programme Officer, Mr Kackah Alex, presented field reports highlighting cases of extortion, harassment and discrimination linked to HIV status.

Flood deaths drop sharply in 2025 — NEMA

ABUJA

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has reported a significant decline in flood-related fatalities in 2025, attributing the improvement to proactive mitigation strategies and enhanced early warning systems.

The agency disclosed that 241 lives were lost in 2025, compared to over 1,000 deaths recorded in 2024.

NEMA Assistant Director of Planning, Mr Dapo Akingboade, made this known in Abuja during an After-Action Review (AAR) of the 2025 climate-related disasters.

He said that while more than five million people were affected by flooding in 2024, the figure dropped to less than 500,000 in 2025.

Similarly, the number of displaced persons reduced from over one million to about 58,000 within the same period.

According to him, 27 states and 128 local government areas were affected in 2025, compared to 35 states in the previous year.

Akingboade attributed the gains to early dissemination of forecasts by the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) and the translation of early warning messages into major Nigerian languages for grassroots reach.

"We achieved this feat through collective responsibility and improved data coordination.

"The early release of the Seasonal Climate Prediction (SCP) by NiMet enabled simulation exercises and increased public awareness campaigns," he said.

He, however, identified persistent challenges, including poor drainage maintenance, refusal of residents in high-risk areas to evacuate, and limited access to some communities during peak flooding.

NEMA urged state governments to activate contingency plans and prioritise urban drainage management ahead of the 2026 rainy season.

On the 2026 weather out-

look, NiMet Assistant Chief Meteorologist, Mr Abubakar Sadiq, said the agency recorded 74 per cent accuracy in rainfall predictions for 2025.

He explained that NiMet is transitioning to automated forecasting systems to improve reliability amid climate change challenges.

"For 2026, we are moving from a weak La Niña into neutral conditions, suggesting near-normal rainfall across the country," he said.

Sadiq attributed recent unusual weather patterns in the Federal Capital Territory to extra-tropical systems caused by a mid-latitude trough moving across West Africa.

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Preventive healthcare key to tackling rising disease burden —Expert

LAGOS

A health advocate, Mr Lorenz Mba, has called for a nationwide shift from reactive to preventive healthcare through simple lifestyle changes and early screening, as part of efforts to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases.

Mba made the call on Wednesday in Lagos during an interview with journalists at a road walk held to commemorate the sixth edition of the "Let's Waka with Q-Life and HEI".

The road walk, organised by

the Waka Community International Foundation in collaboration with Q-Life Family Clinic and Health Emergency Initiative (HEI), was held in honour of Dr Ade Alakija, a renowned medical expert.

He noted that many life-threatening conditions such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer and glaucoma often present no early symptoms, making regular medical checks critical for early detection.

According to him, late diagnosis continues to increase mortality rates and treatment costs, pushing many families into financial hardship.

Mba stressed that preventive health practices, including daily walking, proper nutrition, hydration and adequate sleep, remain the most cost-effective ways to maintain good health.

He also highlighted gaps in men's health awareness, noting that many men ignore early warning signs due to stigma or lack of information.

"Men's health issues are not getting the attention they deserve, yet they have wider implications for families and society.

"When men suffer health challenges, especially those affecting their reproductive

health, it often leads to psychological and emotional strain," he said.

He added that there is growing evidence of a relationship between prostate cancer in men and increased breast cancer risk among their female relatives, underscoring the need for family-wide health awareness.

The "Waka" founder identified unhealthy lifestyles, physical inactivity and excess weight as major contributors to chronic diseases.

He explained that walking remains one of the safest and most accessible forms of exer-

cise, particularly for individuals with limited mobility or underlying health conditions.

"Walking is low-impact, inclusive and effective. It helps in weight management and reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes," he said.

Mba cautioned against high-impact exercises such as running for overweight individuals and those with a family history of arthritis, noting that excess weight significantly increases pressure on the knees.

He disclosed that the event also featured free health screenings to encourage early diagnosis and promote a cul-

ture of regular medical check-ups.

The advocate added that the initiative, which has more than 58,000 members across 48 countries, continues to promote community-based health interventions aimed at improving public health outcomes.

According to him, Waka-thon 2026 reflects a growing movement to reposition health as both a personal and collective responsibility.

"A healthy population is essential for national productivity and economic growth. Nigerians must prioritise their health before illness forces them to," he added.



2026 NATIONAL POLICE DAY:

L-R: Commissioner of Police, Oyo State Police Command, Abimbola Olugbenga; Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Abiodun Onohu, and DCP Usen Ekanem, during the 2026 National Police Day Sensitization lecture in Ibadan on Wednesday.

Easter: Bishop decries impunity, urges decisive action on insecurity

IBADAN

As Christians mark Easter, the Catholic Bishop of Oyo Diocese, Most Rev. Emmanuel Badejo, has called for an end to impunity amid Nigeria's worsening security crisis.

Badejo made the call on Wednesday in an interview with journalists in Ibadan.

Referencing Jesus' promise in John 10:10 to give life in abundance, the bishop emphasised that Easter symbolises life, not death.

He criticised leaders who fail to protect citizens, stating that those who make unfulfilled promises do not deserve respect or recognition.

"Why are our leaders holding rousing rallies and conventions while our compatriots are being slaughtered?"

"How has the most populous country in Africa become so helpless while criminality escalates?" he queried.

Citing remarks attributed to Pope Leo on Palm Sunday that

God does not listen to the prayers of warmongers, Badejo noted that innocent Nigerians were reportedly killed in Jos, Kaduna and Zamfara on the same day.

"Let us understand that God will not listen to leaders who watch their citizens die needlessly," he said.

He described the current situation as evil, insisting that only those indifferent to suffering would fail to be outraged.

The bishop urged leaders at all levels to act decisively to crush terrorists and restore order, stressing that safeguarding lives should be the foremost Easter message.

"Jesus has not risen in the lives of leaders who look on while avoidable deaths are inflicted on innocent citizens," he said.

He further criticised what he described as a disparity in law enforcement, alleging that security agencies act swiftly against protesters, drug offenders and internet fraudsters, but appear ineffective against terrorists and kidnappers.

Mixed reactions trail 37th Enugu Int'l Trade Fair

ENUGU

Participants at the 37th Enugu International Trade Fair have expressed mixed reactions over the level of patronage and turnout recorded at the event.

While some exhibitors lamented low attendance by visitors and reduced business activity, others commended the performance of the Enugu Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (ECCIMA) for successfully hosting the fair despite prevailing economic challenges.

Some participants attributed the low turnout to the dwindling economy, worsened by the recent hike in fuel prices.

Others, however, noted that the fair demonstrated the resilience of Nigerian businesses in the face of economic downturns.

Mr Caleb Ezenwa, who works with the cosmetics arm of the Ekulu Group of Companies, said he was pleased to participate but observed that patronage remained lower than in previous editions.

Similarly, a textile dealer, Mr Friday Olabisi, described the fair as well organised but called for improvements in publicity.

Olabisi urged organisers to invest more in advertising through radio, television and newspapers to attract a larger audience in future editions.

A shopper, Mrs Uchekuk-

wu Ikegwonwu, said purchasing goods at the fair was less stressful than in open markets.

She commended ECCIMA for providing a conducive shopping environment, particularly with the introduction of a newly built, fully air-conditioned 3,000 square metre tent.

Mr Solomon Ani said he attended the fair to explore innovations and interact with manufacturers, noting that his expectations were met.

Also speaking, Mr John Udekwe, a dealer in body sprays and perfumes, said although turnout was initially low, his company was able to record modest sales.

Responding, the Director-General of ECCIMA, Mr

Uche Mba, attributed the moderate attendance to the prevailing socio-economic situation.

He disclosed that some companies that had earlier indicated interest in participating withdrew due to the high cost of petroleum products nationwide.

Despite the challenges, Mba said the 2026 edition showed improvement compared to the previous year.

He highlighted new features introduced at the fair, including free business classes for youths and start-ups, daily lotteries and free transportation, all aimed at boosting participation.

He, however, identified power outages and the high cost of diesel for generators as major operational challenges.

C'River Assembly suspends 4 Councillors over gross misconduct

CALABAR

The Cross River House of Assembly (CRHA) has suspended four councillors of the Akpabuyo Legislative Council for 90 days over alleged gross misconduct.

The affected councillors are Mr Innocent Mbukpa, Mr Patrick Etim, Mr Bassey Edet and Mr Tete Ubene.

The decision was reached during plenary on Wednesday following consideration of a petition submitted by two councillors, Mr Emmanuel Archibong and Mr Bassey Ekpo.

The petition, read by the Deputy Leader of the House, Dr Davies Etta, alleged harassment, intimidation and aggressive conduct by the suspended councillors.

It further claimed that the councillors used cult groups to intimidate colleagues, including Mr Ekpo, who is the leader of

the Association of Councillors.

They were also accused of attacking council staff on March 23, 2026, resulting in injuries and damage to council property.

Contributing to the debate, Mr Francis Asuquo, representing Odukpani State Constituency, condemned the actions, noting that the councillors failed to follow due process in expressing their grievances.

Other lawmakers emphasised the need for dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution, describing the alleged conduct as unacceptable.

They cited Section 14(3) of the Local Government Law, which empowers the Assembly to suspend officials facing misconduct allegations.

The House resolved that the suspension would remain in effect pending investigation by its Committee on Judiciary, Public Service, Petitions and Conflict Resolution.

INEC launches voter enlightenment campaign in Kano

KANO

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has launched a voter enlightenment campaign at the Sani Abacha Stadium in Kano, urging residents to revalidate their Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) ahead of up-

coming elections.

INEC Enlightenment Officer in Kano, Garba Ashiru, disclosed this while briefing journalists on Wednesday.

He said the initiative targets eight metropolitan Local Government Areas and is aimed at increasing voter awareness and participation, as well as updat-

ing registration details.

According to Ashiru, the campaign seeks to mobilise voters by educating citizens on electoral processes and encouraging active participation.

He added that the programme would run for seven days, featuring public sessions and community engagements.

"The exercise, in collaboration with the Kano State Government, aims to strengthen democratic participation," Ashiru said.

He appealed to residents to take advantage of the exercise by revalidating their PVCs and obtaining accurate information necessary for full participation in the electoral process.

NEWS

FRSC elevates 7 senior officers, reaffirms road safety commitment

... Raises alarm over worn tyres, reckless driving

KADUNA

The Federal Road Safety Corps has decorated seven senior officers, urging them to embrace their promotions as a call to greater responsibility and dedication to road safety.

The ceremony, held on Wednesday in Kaduna, saw the elevation of four Corps Commanders and three Deputy Corps Commanders.

The Zonal Commanding Officer, ACM Abdullahi Sunusi, described promotion as "a privilege from God," emphasizing that it comes with higher expectations for leadership and service.

"Promotion is an elevation to a higher rank and always comes with greater responsibility," Sunusi said.

"My advice to the newly promoted officers is first to thank Almighty God and to appreciate the FRSC leadership for deeming them worthy of this advancement."

He urged the officers to demonstrate dedication, commitment, and exemplary leadership, stressing that they must uphold the corps' mandate to ensure safety on Nigerian roads.

"Wherever they are post-

ed, they should strive to work diligently and improve upon the standards they meet on the ground," he added.

Speaking at the event, Corps Commander Tijjani Iliyasu, Sector Commander of the Kaduna State Command, reminded the officers that promotion comes from God and must be matched by discipline and dedication.

Responding on behalf of the promoted officers, Corps Commander Philip Malgwi expressed gratitude for the recognition and leadership support, recalling that officers had pledged to enhance the command's performance during the zonal commander's recent visit.

"The positive developments we are witnessing today are a testimony to that commitment. It is my prayer that we will sustain and build upon this progress," Malgwi said.

He described the occasion as a great honour, urging officers to remain hopeful and committed to career growth within the FRSC. "At a time, it seemed almost impossible to rise to the highest ranks, but today we have realised that the sky is not our limit; heaven is our limit in the FRSC," he said, thanking the Corps Marshal and man-

agement for the promotion.

The ceremony underscores the FRSC's ongoing commitment to road safety and leadership development within the corps.

Meanwhile, the FRSC has intensified its warning to motorists, particularly commer-

cial drivers, to strictly adhere to safety standards and avoid the use of worn-out and sub-standard tyres.

The FRSC Deputy Corps Public Education Officer, Mr Ohaeri Osondu, issued the warning on Wednesday during a Special Easter Mega Rally held across

major motor parks in Abuja.

He explained that the rally formed part of efforts to reduce road crashes during the Easter period and beyond, adding that it was also aimed at sensitising motorists to safe driving practices and responsible road use.

Osondu decried the increasing cases of reckless driving on highways, attributing the trend

to poor driving attitudes, disregard for traffic regulations and inadequate vehicle maintenance.

He noted that avoidable factors such as negligence and non-compliance with established safety measures continued to contribute significantly to road traffic crashes, leading to loss of lives and property.



NEWS CONFERENCE:

Chairman/CEO of Nigerians in Diaspora Commission, Dr Abike Dabiri-Erewa (L), addressing newsmen, at the commission in Abuja, during a news conference on the forthcoming Nigeria Diaspora Economic Conference (NIDEC) which will take place from August 12 - 16, 2026 in Canada.

2027: Coalition opposes Desmond Elliot's 4th-term Lagos Assembly bid

LAGOS

A coalition of stakeholders in Surulere, under the aegis of Surulere Accountability Forum, has rejected the bid by Mr Desmond Elliot to seek a fourth term in the Lagos State House of Assembly.

The group, in a statement issued on Wednesday by its spokesman, Mr Olanrewaju Badmus, said Elliot's three previous terms were characterised by substandard performance, weak policy innovation and failure to address local needs effectively.

Badmus stated that community leaders, youth groups, small business representatives and civil society organisations had collectively reviewed the lawmaker's legislative record and found it unsatisfactory.

He accused Elliot of delivering minimal constituency projects and demonstrating limited legislative impact, alleging that the lawmaker lacked the capacity to tackle infrastructure decay, youth unemployment and inadequate primary healthcare.

"We are not opposed to any individual on principle, but we refuse to endorse continued leadership that has not produced tangible improvements for our wards.

"Three terms should have

delivered clear and measurable progress. Instead, we have witnessed stagnation, recycled ideas and little evidence of responsive policy leadership," he said.

Badmus emphasised that the group's position was not driven by malice or personal bias but by a commitment to accountability and good governance.

"Leadership must remain accountable, renewable and reflective of the evolving aspirations of the people," he added.

He also dismissed suggestions that the group's stance was reactionary or influenced by recent developments, insisting that it was based on a long-standing assessment of performance.

The coalition called for the emergence of candidates with fresh ideas and renewed energy to drive development in Surulere Constituency I.

It further urged residents and supporters of democracy to prioritise people-centred representation and uphold democratic values.

"As stakeholders, we remain committed to promoting inclusive participation and ensuring that the voice of the people remains paramount.

"We call on residents to support candidates with the vision and ambition to take Surulere to greater heights," the statement added.

GEOSON targets 5m trees in Oyo, plans nationwide rollout

IBADAN

The Geo-Information Society of Nigeria (GEOSON), Oyo State Chapter, has set a target of planting five million trees within the next three to four years as part of efforts to promote environmental sustainability.

The initiative, under its geomonitorship project, will commence in Oyo State as a pilot scheme before expanding nationwide to support biodiversity restoration.

The GEOSON Chairman in Oyo State, Mr David Afolayan, disclosed this in an interview with journalists in Ibadan on

Wednesday.

Afolayan explained that the project would combine tree planting with geospatial technology, enabling schools and communities to map planted trees, monitor their growth and strengthen long-term conservation efforts.

He noted that the initiative is designed to move beyond theoretical discussions by applying Geographic Information System (GIS) tools to practical environmental restoration and biodiversity monitoring.

"We are going to schools to plant trees, using our technology to map where the trees have been planted, and using the

same technology to monitor them as they grow," he said.

Afolayan, who is also the Chief Executive Officer of GIS Konsult, Ibadan, said the society is encouraging its members nationwide to adopt schools, mentor teachers and students, and deploy professional geospatial skills for conservation purposes.

He described geomonitorship as an initiative aimed at helping younger generations better understand the earth, appreciate biodiversity and utilise technology to tackle environmental challenges.

The chairman revealed that the project had progressed beyond the conceptual stage,

with pilot efforts in both public and private schools already producing hundreds of trees now growing.

According to him, some institutions have also planted and digitally tagged trees, creating a database that supports long-term monitoring and helps schools develop green belts around their campuses.

"We have implemented prototypes across Oyo State, adopting both private and public schools to teach GIS and encourage tree planting.

"In their database, they have hundreds of trees that are already planted and growing," he said.

Navy hands over 3 Ghanaian stowaways to Immigration in Lagos

LAGOS

The Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS) BEECROFT on Wednesday handed over three suspected Ghanaian stowaways rescued from a merchant vessel, MT ANATOLIA, to the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS).

The Commander of NNS BEECROFT, Commodore Aiwuyor Adams-Aliu, said the handover was part of ongoing collaboration among security agencies to curb illegal migration and strengthen maritime safety.

Adams-Aliu spoke during the handover ceremony held at the NNS BEECROFT parade

ground in Apapa, Lagos.

He explained that a stowaway is a person who conceals himself aboard a vessel with the intention of travelling illegally to another country without authorisation.

According to him, the NIS will handle further procedures, including transferring the suspects to the Ghanaian Embassy after due judicial processes.

"The suspects were discovered on Saturday, concealed within the rudder compartment of the vessel while it was berthed at Dangote Terminal, Lagos.

"They were safely evacuated and brought to NNS BEECROFT for preliminary investigation and

profiling," he said.

He identified the suspects as Armah Peter, 26; Amisah Daniel, 22; and Amoh Michael, 25, all Ghanaian nationals.

Investigations revealed that the trio had travelled from Ghana to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where they reportedly lived and engaged in fishing activities for about a year.

"Further inquiry revealed that, with the aid of a canoe, they gained access to the rudder compartment of MT ANATOLIA with the intention of illegally travelling to Europe.

"After several hours at sea, believing they had reached their destination, they alerted

the vessel's crew, which led to their detection and rescue," Adams-Aliu added.

He urged parents, guardians and community leaders to caution youths against attempting to board sea-going vessels illegally.

"This advice extends beyond Nigeria to neighbouring countries along the West African coast," he said.

The commander reaffirmed that NNS BEECROFT would continue to pursue the mission of the Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Adm. Idi Abbas, to maintain a highly professional naval force capable of safeguarding Nigeria's maritime interests and supporting national security operations.

JUDICIARY

NEWS

El-Rufai bail: Court fixes April 14 for ruling amid tight security

KADUNA

A Federal High Court in Kaduna has fixed April 14 for ruling on the bail application filed by former Kaduna State governor, Malam Nasir El-Rufai, in his ongoing trial over alleged corruption.

Lead defence counsel, Mr Oluwole Iyamu (SAN), disclosed this while speaking

with journalists shortly after Wednesday's court proceedings.

At the commencement of the trial, journalists were barred from entering the courtroom to cover the proceedings.

Iyamu said both the defence and prosecution had argued the bail application, after which the court adjourned for ruling.

"The bail application was argued and responded to, and the

ruling on that bail has been fixed for the 14th of April," he said.

The senior advocate expressed optimism that the court would deliver a fair judgment.

"Any lawyer will be hopeful. We are hopeful. We have put our arguments before the court, and this is a court of justice. We look forward to the decision of the court," he added.

On a separate case sched-

uled for April 10 at the Federal High Court in Abuja involving the Department of State Services (DSS), Iyamu said the defence team was fully prepared.

"That's a separate one. As lawyers, we are ready. We have filed the necessary papers and we will be there," he said.

The court had earlier adjourned hearing of the bail application from Tuesday to Wednes-

day following proceedings conducted under tight security, reflecting heightened public interest in the high-profile case.

El-Rufai is standing trial be-

fore Justice Rilwan M. Aikawa on a 10-count charge bordering on alleged conversion and possession of public property, as well as money laundering.

Court orders final forfeiture of ₦3.4bn, properties linked to alleged NNPC fraud

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja has ordered the final forfeiture of ₦3.4 billion and three properties linked to alleged fraud in the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC).

Justice Joyce Abdulmalik granted the order while ruling on a motion on notice filed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The forfeited assets include an uncompleted six-bedroom semi-detached duplex with boys' quarters at Plot 3168, Asokoro District, Abuja; a two-bedroom flat at Block 2, Apartment A1, Block EFG, Osborne Foreshore II, Ikoyi, Lagos; and a restaurant building at Plot 102, Cadastral Zone C09, Lokogoma District, Abuja.

All the properties are linked to Mr Salihu Nuhu, while the sum of ₦3.44 billion is held in the EFCC Recovery Account.

The EFCC said the assets were proceeds of unlawful activities connected to three major projects awarded by the NNPC—Maiduguri Emergency Power Project, Abuja Independent Power Project and Benin Gas Plant Project—over which Mr Salihu Nuhu allegedly exercised significant control while serving as Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Gas and Power Investment Company Limited (NGPIC).

At the hearing, counsel for the interested party, Maryam Abba, informed the court that her client had filed an affidavit of non-contestation in compliance with earlier directives.



A NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: UN Resident Representative, Ms Elsie Attafuah; Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Office of the Vice President, Sen. Ibrahim Hadejia and Senior Special Assistant to the President on Media and Communications, Office of the Vice President, Mr Stanley Nkwocha, during a news conference on the forthcoming meeting on Artificial Intelligence (AI), University Innovation Pod (UNIPOD) at the Presidential Villa in Abuja on Wednesday.

Cyclist arraigned for stealing groundnut oil to host naming party

BADAGRY (LAGOS)

A 28-year-old commercial cyclist, Muhammed Garuba, was on Wednesday arraigned before a Badagry Chief Magistrate's Court for allegedly stealing a five-litre container of groundnut oil valued at N18,000.

Garuba is facing charges of

theft and breach of peace.

He pleaded guilty to the theft charge but denied the allegation of breach of peace.

Prosecuting counsel, Insp. Friday Maneh, told the court that the defendant committed the offences on Tuesday at about 11:30 a.m. at Badagry Market.

The prosecutor alleged that Garuba stole the container of

groundnut oil belonging to the complainant, Mrs Dorcas Mobee.

He further stated that the defendant conducted himself in a manner likely to cause a breach of peace by creating pandemonium during the incident.

According to the police, the defendant intended to use the stolen oil to cook for a naming ceremony for his newborn baby scheduled for Friday.

"He went to the market,

stole the oil and ran away. He was caught by the people and handed over to the police for prosecution," Maneh said.

The offences, he added, contravene Sections 287 and 168 of the Criminal Laws of Lagos State, 2015.

Chief Magistrate A. J. Aina granted the defendant bail in the sum of N150,000 with two sureties in like sum on the breach of peace charge.

Buhari ordered local production of redesigned naira notes —Witness

ABUJA

A prosecution witness, Mr Chinedu Eneanya, on Wednesday told an Abuja High Court that the redesigned naira notes were produced locally on the directive of former President Muhammadu Buhari.

Eneanya testified in the ongoing trial of former Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Governor, Godwin Emefiele, who is

facing charges filed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) bordering on disobedience to lawful directives and acts allegedly causing injury to the public.

During cross-examination by defence counsel, Mr Olalekan Ojo (SAN), the witness confirmed that Exhibit N1 was the extra-judicial statement of Mr Ahmed Halilu, Managing Director of the Nigerian Security Printing and Minting

Company (NSPMC).

He said Halilu was invited during the investigation to shed light on the matter and had stated that NSPMC commenced and completed the local production of the redesigned notes.

Eneanya told the court that he did not encounter any contradicting evidence during the investigation and confirmed that the CBN paid NSPMC for the production.

On whether Emefiele diso-

beyed presidential directives, the witness said investigations showed the defendant violated Section 19 of the CBN Act, 2007, which requires the CBN Board to recommend currency redesign to the President.

He further stated that the defendant's 11-page memo to the President contained three design samples, which were approved with a directive that the notes be produced locally.

Man docked over alleged ₦1.8m housing fraud in Ibadan

IBADAN

A 53-year-old man, Abiodun Adepoju, on Wednesday appeared before an Iyaganku Magistrate's Court in Ibadan over an alleged ₦1.8 million accommodation fraud.

Adepoju was charged with

obtaining money under false pretence and stealing, to which he pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutor, ASP Femi Omilana, told the court that the offences were committed between December 27, 2025 and February 9 at Orita, Ibadan.

He alleged that the defendant obtained ₦1.8 million from

Mrs Amina Gbadamosi under the false pretence of securing a two-bedroom apartment for her.

According to the prosecution, the defendant failed to provide the apartment and instead converted the money to personal use.

The offences, he said, contravene Sections 390(9) and 419 of the Criminal Laws of

Oyo State, 2000.

Magistrate Adebola Adeola granted the defendant bail in the sum of ₦2 million with two sureties in like sum.

She ruled that two of the sureties must present evidence of three years' tax clearance, while one must be a blood relative of the defendant.

Bauchi CJ swears in 31 Sharia judges, warns against misconduct

BAUCHI

The Chief Judge of Bauchi State, Justice Rabi Umar, on Wednesday swore in 31 newly appointed Sharia Court Judges, charging them to uphold integrity, impartiality and professionalism in the discharge of their duties.

The oath-taking ceremony was held at High Court No. 1 premises in Bauchi.

Justice Umar described the judiciary as the last hope of the common man and urged the

judges to dispense justice without fear or favour.

She emphasised fairness, diligence and strict adherence to the rule of law, noting that public confidence in the judiciary depends on the conduct of judicial officers.

The Chief Judge cautioned the judges against issuing orders outside their jurisdiction, particularly restraining security agencies from performing lawful duties, warning that misconduct would not be tolerated.

Man jailed 7yrs for human trafficking in C'River

CALABAR

The Federal High Court in Calabar has sentenced a 29-year-old man, Bassey Bassey, to seven years imprisonment for human trafficking and facilitating illegal foreign travel.

Delivering judgment on Wednesday, Justice Ijeoma Ojukwu found the defendant guilty on seven counts bordering on human trafficking and illegal migration.

The offences contravene Sections 13(2)(b), 18, 27 and 29 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act.

The court also imposed a fine of ₦1 million on the convict.

Bassey had pleaded not guilty when he was first arraigned on February 24, 2025.

The court heard that the convict conspired with his sister-in-law, identified as Ms Esther, who is currently at large, to deceive and recruit victims for exploitation abroad.

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **EMWINGHADEVA LAWRENCE**, now wish to be known and address as **EMWINGHADEVA LAWRENCE IREDDIA**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **IDEMUDIA ENORENSE**, now wish to be known and address as **IDEMUDIA ENORENSE FAITH**; also my correct date of birth is **22/11/1990** not **22/11/1989** that was wrongly written on my BVN. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

NEWS

Foreign

Russian military plane crash kills 29 in occupied Crimea

A Russian military plane has crashed in the occupied Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, killing 29 people on board, the Russian defence ministry has said.

Wreckage of the An-26 aircraft was found on Tuesday after the plane lost contact with authorities during a "routine flight", according to the ministry.

It blamed a "technical failure" and reported no external damage to the aircraft, implying that missiles, drones or birds are not suspected of causing the crash.

Seven crew members and 23 passengers had been on board

as it flew over the Ukraine's Crimean peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014.

Russia's Investigative Committee confirmed the crash and said it had opened an inquiry into a flight safety violation.

News agency Tass reported that communication with the plane was lost at about 18:00 local time (15:00 GMT) on Tuesday, and the wreckage was found following a search and rescue effort.

Ukraine has not commented on the crash.

The An-26 is a Soviet-era aircraft mainly used in a mili-

tary capacity to transport heavy cargo and smaller numbers of passengers over a short-to-medium distance. It is manufactured by the Ukrainian aerospace company Antonov.

The planes have been used since the late 1960s, and have been involved in several deadly crashes.

Twenty-six people, mostly cadets, were killed when a Ukrainian An-26 came down in Kharkiv in 2020. The following year, 28 people were killed in a crash in the Russian Far East and in 2022, one person was killed in a crash in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region.

Fighting between Ukrainian and Russian forces has been ongoing in Crimea since Moscow launched its full-scale invasion four years ago.

Ukrainian strikes have largely targeted Russian military bases in the peninsula, which borders the partly Russian-occupied Kherson region in southern Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly demanded Russia withdraw from Crimea as part of a ceasefire. In November, a US-backed peace plan proposed by Kyiv would cede control of Crimea.



SOVIET-ERA AIRCRAFT:

The An-26 is a Soviet-era aircraft designed primarily for military use (file photo)

Peter Magyar, the former Orban ally vying for power in Hungary

Now or never," Peter Magyar has been telling Hungarians, in a breathless campaign across the country in the run-up to 12 April elections that opinion polls suggest he can win.

This 45-year-old former Fidesz party insider represents the biggest threat to Viktor Orban's rule in Hungary since he won the first of four consecutive victories in 2010.

Magyar's slogan dates back to a revolutionary poet's 19th Century rallying cry to rise up for the homeland.

After more than 100 campaign stops his message has been shortened to "Now": the words "or never" have been crossed out, adding to the urgency.

He is on course to visit all of Hungary's 106 constituencies, and he has given four, five, even six speeches a day. Magyar has built a powerful support base in more than two years of touring the country, even in the small towns and villages where Fidesz traditionally dominates.

Last year he walked 300km (185 miles) from Budapest to the Romanian border in a campaign to "reunite" the nation, in a bid to bring natural voters to his side.

Magyar promises to tackle corruption, improve the economy and he has sought to woo Hungary's disadvantaged Roma community. He has also promised to unlock billions of euros in EU funds, frozen largely because of concerns over Hungary's rule of law.

But Orban has depicted him as a "puppet" of the EU and Ukraine, and he has been wary of getting too close to Brussels and has promised voters "we are the real party of peace".

His self-confidence stems from a deep understanding of the rival he faces.

Until February 2024, Magyar was very much part of the Fidesz family.

He joined the party at university and married one of its rising stars in Judit Varga, with whom he had three children.

Then Magyar stunned Hun-

garians with a live appearance on a pro-opposition YouTube Channel called Partizán.

In a country of 9.6 million people, a million watched as a solemn Peter Magyar explained why he had had enough of his own party.

"Everyone warned me against it, friends, family people I know," he told presenter Márton Gulyás. "Obviously I've been in this system, in this circle, for a very long time."

Large numbers of Hungarians watched Magyar's interview on 14 February 2024 when he tore into Orban's party.

Hungary was in the midst of a scandal in which President Katalin Novak had granted a pardon to a man who had helped cover up sexual abuse in a Hungarian state-run children's home.

She resigned, and so did Magyar's ex-wife. Varga had been justice minister and had co-signed the pardon. Two leading Fidesz women were left to carry the can. Varga had been destined for big things in Fidesz, having left her job as

minister to spearhead Fidesz European election campaign. That career was over.

Now she was no longer part of the Fidesz machine, Peter Magyar sensed this was his moment.

"I do not want to be part of a system in which the real people in charge hide behind women's skirts," he wrote on Facebook.

Towards the end of his Partizán interview Magyar spoke of his hope for political change, while realising it would be very difficult while Orban was still in power.

The current opposition was totally inept, he complained, so change would have to come from within. But one day there would be change and when it did happen it could be fast, he predicted.

His YouTube appearance went viral.

"It was not a planned move," he later told the BBC. "My mother called me not to go, but I did the opposite. Everybody knew the situation in Hungary - it's not very safe to go against this government."

Israel intensifies Lebanon attacks and hits areas not in Hezbollah's control

Israel has intensified its attacks on Lebanon this week, hitting areas outside of Hezbollah's control on Tuesday.

Strikes without warning hit a vehicle north of Beirut and the Jnah neighbourhood in the heart of the capital.

Attacks also continued in the city's southern suburbs and the country's south, both where Hezbollah has a strong presence.

A building was destroyed on the road to Beirut's airport after an evacuation order, and in the south, a strike hit a health facility, killing a paramedic, according to Lebanon's health ministry.

Israel's military said it had hit Hezbollah infrastructure in Beirut and killed a senior commander and another senior figure from the Iran-backed armed group.

Hezbollah joined the ongoing regional war on 2 March, sending missiles towards Israel, after the US and Israel attacked the armed group's ally Iran on 28 February.

Israeli attacks have kept bombarding Lebanon as its troops have moved into the country's south.

On Tuesday, a vehicle was targeted in the Mansourieh area, a predominantly Christian residential neighbourhood north of Beirut.

Meanwhile, the Jnah neighbourhood in the heart of the capital was attacked after midnight. The Lebanese health ministry said the Al-Zahraa Hospital had received and treated "a number of those injured in the air strike".

Hassan Jalwan, who lives near Jnah, told AFP he heard several "big explosions" overnight.

"Nobody knows what's happening," he said, adding that "displaced people have been sleeping in the open" in the area.

The Dahieh neighbourhood to the south of Beirut, where Hezbollah has a strong presence, continues to be a target. A building was destroyed on Tuesday in Ghobeiry on the road to the airport following an evacuation order.

Also on Tuesday, Lebanon's health ministry said at least seven people had been killed by Israeli strikes in the country's south, including the paramedic.

The number of health workers who have been killed since the start of the war has now reached 53.

Earlier, the Lebanese army cleared its last positions in the south, pulling out from Ain Ibel and Rmeish villages a day after an army checkpoint was hit and a soldier was killed by an Israeli air strike, according to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Israeli military has not appeared to have commented yet on the reported death.

However, some residents of the villages refuse to leave.

In the predominantly Christian village of Rmeish, Father Najib Al Amil appeared in a video on social media, where he said: "There is grass and soil. We rely on God and will stay in our village. We either all die together and lose our land or live and our villages will live with us."

Trump gives primetime address on Iran war as questions swirl over his next move

Across the world on Wednesday night, millions of people were expected to tune in to watch Donald Trump deliver a primetime update on the war in Iran. Many will hope for some insight on how the war ends and what might come after.

The Trump administration has, so far, given little clue as to what prompted the hastily-arranged remarks, or whether they will mark the beginning of the end of the conflict or a potentially bloody escalation.

This ambiguity is, at least partly, by design. Trump often changes course or leaves his thinking a mystery to all but a small inner circle of supporters, which he has acknowledged leaves friend and foe alike wondering about his next move.

The president also knows that the address comes at a critical time in his presidency and amid mounting domestic pressure to find a way out of the conflict.

Poll after poll has shown that Americans have little appetite for a protracted conflict in Iran, particularly if it involves the prospect of US soldiers on Iranian soil.

A Reuters poll released this week, for example, found that two-third of Americans believe the US should work to swiftly

wrap up its involvement in the war, even if the administration's stated military objections are not fully accomplished.

Closer to home, many Americans are increasingly wary of higher prices at the petrol pump, which this week crossed the average of \$4 a gallon for the first time in years.

For a president who, pre-war, often pointed to lower petrol prices as a mark of success, this trend represents a challenge.

Imran Bayoumi, a geostrategy expert with the Atlantic Council in Washington DC and former policy adviser to the defence department, told the BBC that the "deep domestic unpopularity" of the war, along with the economic fall-out, "both pose a problem ahead of midterm elections" if the war were to drag on.

The US president will also likely present his view on how the conflict - or at least US involvement in it - will come to a close.

This has shifted repeatedly, from initial calls for an "unconditional" Iranian surrender to a potential negotiated agreement. Just yesterday, he abruptly shifted course, saying that the war could end in "two to three" weeks even without any deal.

Foreign

NEWS

Explosions at Burundi ammunition depot kill civilians, witnesses say

At least four people have been killed by a series of powerful explosions at an ammunition depot in Burundi's largest city, Bujumbura, local residents have told the BBC.

The blasts erupted late on Tuesday at the facility, located in the suburb of Musaga, due to an electrical fault, an army spokesperson said.

Shrapnel and debris were propelled more than 5km (three miles) and several houses in nearby districts were destroyed by the force of the explosions.

The authorities have not yet provided any casualty figures but family members and eyewitnesses told the BBC of four separate deaths in the city. The AFP news agency quotes security sources as saying that dozens of people had died.

One woman told BBC Gahuzza that a relative, who had been detained at Mpimba Central Prison, had died after a bomb hit the facility.

Numerous inmates at the

prison, which is located near the ammunition store, are reported to have been injured.

In the north-eastern neighbourhood of Gisandema, witnesses told BBC Gahuzza that a bomb had destroyed a house and killed a domestic worker.

The authorities have said they cannot yet comment on the number of casualties as they are still assessing the extent of the damage.

The explosions sent plumes of smoke rising above the city, sparking panic in the city of more than a million people.

President Evariste Ndayishimiye, in a message on X, expressed his condolences to all Burundians, adding that the authorities are "here to help".

One man told the BBC the blasts lasted from around 18:15 local time (16:15 GMT) until midnight and that he had left his home with his family to seek refuge.

"Glass fell on us and I even got wounded under my foot," he said.

Iran war economic shocks will last 'months', says Australia's PM

Australia's Prime Minister has warned the economic shock from the war involving Iran will "be with us for months", as he delivered a rare televised address to the nation.

Speaking on Wednesday, Anthony Albanese said the conflict had driven the biggest spike in petrol and diesel prices in history, and households were already feeling the strain.

"Australia is not an active participant in this war. But all Australians are paying higher prices because of it," he added.

Addresses of this kind have been used at moments of international importance, last seen in the country during the Covid pandemic and before that the 2008 financial crisis.

Australia is among a host of nations that have seen fuel prices increase sharply since the start of the US-Israel war with Iran and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The near-total blockade of international shipping in the vital waterway - through which around 20% of the world's oil and natural gas flows - has led governments around the world

to begin implementing measures to conserve fuel.

Albanese has previously sought to reassure motorists following reports of panic-buying and petrol stations running dry.

During the address, he acknowledged that the "months ahead may not be easy", and said that no government could fully shield Australians from the global pressures.

The Australian government has announced a series of temporary measures aimed at easing immediate cost pressures, including halving fuel excise - a sales tax - and scrapping road user charges for heavy vehicles for three months.

Officials are also seeking to shore up domestic supply and increase fuel imports through regional partners as part of a newly agreed National Fuel Security Plan.

Alongside government action, Albanese urged Australians to limit unnecessary usage of fuel, including switching to public transport where possible to preserve supplies for essential industries.

You should go about your business and your life, as normal", he said.



DEPLOYED SOLDIERS:

Soldiers will be deployed to several crime-ridden areas of South Africa for a year

Mass robotaxi malfunction halts traffic in Chinese city

A mass robotaxi outage in the Chinese city of Wuhan caused at least a hundred self-driving cars to stop mid-traffic, sparking renewed debate around the safety of driverless vehicles.

Local police said initial findings suggested a "system malfunction" caused multiple vehicles to stop in the middle of the road.

Videos on social media have documented the outage, with one appearing to show it resulting in a highway collision, although police said no injuries had been reported and passen-

gers exited their vehicles safely.

Baidu did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

According to the police statement, posted on social media site Weibo, the cause of the incident is still under further investigation.

Baidu operates its Apollo Go driverless taxi service in dozens of cities across the world, mostly in China.

In December 2025, ride-sharing apps Uber and Lyft announced partnerships with the Chinese technology giant to test its Apollo Go cars

on UK roads, aiming to start trials in 2026.

However, both still need approval from regulators before they can begin the pilot programmes.

Social media users posted photos and videos of Apollo Go cars stranded in the middle of the roads due to the outage.

While driverless tech may be safer on average than human drivers, this incident showed it could "still go wrong in completely new ways," said Jack Stilgoe, professor of science and technology policy at Uni-

versity College London.

"If we're going to make good choices about this technology, we need to understand entirely new types of risk," he told BBC News.

The outage is not the first time self-driving cars have faced technical difficulties.

In December 2025, a large power outage in San Francisco led Waymo taxis to stop working around the city, causing huge traffic jams.

Meanwhile in August 2025, an Apollo Go robotaxi carrying a passenger in Chongqing fell into a construction pit.

South African army arrive in crime hotspots to help tackle gangs

South Africa's army has officially been deployed to several parts of the country to help overwhelmed police clamp down on violent crimes, including illicit mining and gangs.

President Cyril Ramaphosa earlier this year announced the deployment of 2,200 soldiers to five of the country's nine provinces hardest hit by criminal activities.

Authorities say the deployment, set to run for a year, is aimed at restoring order to crime-ridden areas, but critics warn that using the military in

civilian policing rarely delivers lasting results.

Illicit mining and gang violence are major problems in South Africa, which has one of the world's highest murder rates.

According to the latest crime statistics, covering the period between October and December 2025, around 71 people were killed each day.

An initial group of soldiers was deployed to several parts of Gauteng province, which includes Johannesburg, in March.

The second, and main cohort, will help with operations in the

Eastern Cape, Free State, North West and Western Cape provinces from 1 April for a year.

The BBC spoke to several residents in a Johannesburg suburb, Eldorado Park, a few weeks after soldiers arrived in the area. It is one of the three Johannesburg suburbs targeted in the initial military deployment due to the high levels of gang violence there.

Some of those interviewed expressed scepticism about the soldiers' presence in their neighbourhood.

Leola Davies, a 74-year-old pensioner, described Eldorado Park as a "hell-hole to live in".

"Sodom and Gomorra have nothing on this place. I stay indoors all day because I just don't want to be the next victim. Things are getting worse," she said.

Elviena le Roux, a mother of three, told the BBC she doesn't believe having the military in the area will help, saying it will only "make the violence worse".

Ronald Rabie, 56, said that while seeing the army patrolling the streets makes some difference, as it creates a safer environment for families, this peace is short-lived.

"Once they leave, things return to chaos - they need to be

here permanently," the father of three said.

There have been mixed reactions to the army's deployment to crime-riddled areas of South Africa.

This is not the first time Ramaphosa has deployed troops to help bring down the country's high crime levels.

In 2023, over 3,000 soldiers were roped in to help tackle illicit mining across the country for six months.

In July 2021, the army was also deployed to help quell the deadly riots that had hit the country after the arrest of former South African President Jacob Zuma.

Under South Africa law, soldiers can only arrest civilians under rare circumstances and must then hand the suspect over to the police as soon as possible.

Security experts have repeatedly warned that the military is trained for combat - not for the kind of community-based policing needed to build trust.

And there is also history to contend with. The racist apartheid regime used the military to enforce their rule - a legacy that still shapes how some South Africans view soldiers on their streets today.

Starmmer holds off from emergency measures but warns storm is coming

Even if the US and Israel had not struck Iran just over a month ago, Sir Keir Starmer probably would have been giving a press conference today - and it would have contained much of the same content.

April has long been earmarked in government as a crucial moment for the prime minister to advertise various decisions made previously which take effect either today or next week, for example increases in minimum wage rates and the abolition of the two-child benefit cap.

As the prime minister acknowledged, these are not new announcements. And some of them will continue to be criticised by his political opponents as the wrong priority for limited government resources.

Still, it was striking to see the prime minister today redeploy these announcements as part of an argument for why the UK was well-placed to handle whatever the economic impacts of this conflict turn out to be.

Otherwise, though, this was a prime ministerial address peppered with gloomy language. Sir

Keir spoke of a coming "storm", which may well be "fierce".

If the prime minister's message could be summarised in just one sentence, it was his admission that "this will not be easy".

Sir Keir was using that phrase to describe both the general economic impact of the Iran conflict and the particular difficulties in getting the Strait of Hormuz open again.


Indeed, at one point he warned that even if the conflict ends that does not necessarily mean the strait will reopen.

"This will not be easy" would

also serve perfectly well as a description of the political impact of this conflict for the prime minister.

It is a simple statement of political fact that no government welcomes an economic shock. Historically - both in the 1970s and over the past few years - incumbent governments across the world have been punished by voters in such moments.

In that political context, the prime minister has made three big calls, all of them on display at today's press conference.

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2026 World Cup: Super Eagles absent as Africa secures historic 10-team representation

EDWARD OSEGHE

Nigeria's Super Eagles will not be part of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, as Africa prepares to make history with a record 10 teams at the tournament to be hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The expanded global showpiece will see the continent enjoy its largest-ever presence, with nine countries sealing automatic qualification after finishing top of their respective CAF qualifying groups in October 2025, while one additional slot was decided via the playoffs.

The African representatives are Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Ghana, Cape Verde, South Africa, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and DR Congo.

When the competition kicks off in June 2026, the qualified nations will shoulder the expectations of more than 1.4 billion

people across the continent, underlining Africa's growing influence in world football.

However, Nigeria—one of Africa's most decorated sides and a five-time continental champion—will be a notable absentee for the second consecutive World Cup.

The Super Eagles' hopes were dashed in November 2025 after a dramatic 4-3 penalty shootout defeat to DR Congo in the CAF playoff final, following their failure to secure an automatic qualification spot from the group stage.

Despite parading a squad filled with top talents plying their trade in Europe, including star striker Victor Osimhen, Nigeria fell short at the final hurdle against the Leopards.

The absence of the Super Eagles, under the guidance of head coach Eric Chelle, represents a significant setback for a nation with a rich football pedigree and high expectations on the global stage.



SUPER EAGLES OF NIGERIA

Italy crash out of 2026 World Cup after playoff defeat to Bosnia, extend qualification drought

EDWARD OSEGHE

Four-time world champions Italy will miss out on the FIFA World Cup for a third straight edition after suffering a heartbreaking playoff defeat to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Azzurri join Nigeria's Super Eagles among notable absentees from the 2026 tournament, following a 4-1 penalty shootout loss after a 1-1 draw in regulation time.

Italy had looked in control early on, with Moise Kean putting them ahead after capitalising on a defensive lapse. The forward's strike extended his impressive run, making him only the fourth Italian player to score in six consecutive international matches.

Bosnia, however, responded with attacking intent, as Ermedin Demirović and veteran striker Edin Džeko repeatedly tested goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

The match took a decisive turn when Alessandro Bastoni was sent off for a foul on Amar Memić, leaving Italy to battle with ten men for much of the encounter.

Despite mounting pressure from Bosnia, Donnarumma delivered a series of crucial saves to preserve Italy's lead.

The resistance eventually broke when Haris Tabaković pounced from close range to level the score after Donnarumma had initially denied Džeko.

Both sides searched for a

winner in extra time, with opportunities falling to Francesco Pio Esposito for Italy and Kerim Alajbegović for Bosnia, but neither side could find the decisive goal.

The contest was ultimately settled from the penalty spot, where Italy faltered. Misses by Esposito and Bryan Cristante proved costly, as Bosnia converted all their kicks to seal qualification and complete a remarkable comeback after falling behind early.



ITALY PLAYERS AFTER DISQUALIFY FROM THE WORLD CUP

Team Nigeria unveils Ambassadors for Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The National Sports Commission (NSC) has officially unveiled a list of distinguished Team Nigeria Ambassadors ahead of the 2026 Commonwealth Games, reflecting the country's commitment to a strong and impactful outing at the global multi-sport event in Glasgow.

The list, as approved by the Com-

mission, features prominent figures across sports administration, athlete representation, and corporate partnership. Amongst the delegation of ambassadors is Mallam Saleh Ahmadu, alongside respected stakeholders including Dr. Amos Adamu, Chief Patrick Ekeji, Alhassan Yakmut and Gbenga Elegbeleye.

These experienced administrators previously served as Director General of the NSC, and

thus, carry tremendous wealth of experience that will benefit Nigeria at the Games and beyond.

Also named are ex elite athletes and stakeholders such as Olympic medalist Daniel Igali, Blessing Oborodudu, Tajudeen Ogunbade, Khadijat Sulaiman, Victor Iroele, as well as a representative from Premium Trust Bank and the Comptroller General of Nigeria Customs, Wale Adeniyi.

The appointment of these ambassadors underscores Nigeria's strategic approach to blending experience, technical expertise, and athlete representation in preparation for the Games.

The 2026 Commonwealth Games is scheduled to hold in Glasgow, Scotland from July 23 to August 2, 2026, bringing together over thousands of athletes from approximately 74 Commonwealth nations and territories.



BUKOLA OLOPADE AND MALLAM DIKKO



SAFA EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Crisis rocks SAFA: Four Executive Members suspended

Just months ahead of the 2026 World Cup in North America, turmoil has struck the South African Football Association (SAFA).

Despite South Africa securing qualification for the Mundial, the governing body under President Danny Jordan is facing internal turbulence.

In a recent statement, SAFA announced the suspension of four executive members from all football-related activities in the country.

The association did not provide detailed reasons for the

suspensions, but sources suggest internal disagreements and governance issues have escalated tensions within the leadership.

SAFA has pledged to conduct thorough investigations and maintain the integrity of South African football ahead of the global tournament.

Fans and stakeholders are watching closely as the nation prepares for its World Cup campaign, hoping that administrative crises do not overshadow the team's on-field preparations.

Bosnia shock Italy, seal 2026 World Cup spot on penalties

Bosnia and Herzegovina stunned four-time champions Italy, winning 4-1 on penalties to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup after a 1-1 draw.

Italy will miss a third consecutive World Cup finals after crumbling in the playoff, in spite of forcing extra time before losing composure in the decisive shootout.

The Italians, reduced to 10 men in the first half, struggled under pressure as Bosnia converted all four penalties to seal qualification.

Esmir Bajraktarevic struck the decisive kick in Zenica, sending Bosnia into Group B alongside Canada, Switzerland and Qatar.

Italy had taken an early lead in the 15th minute through Moise Kean, who curled a precise first-time finish from the edge of the box.

Their advantage faded after Alessandro Bastoni's red card for denying a clear scoring chance, fouling Amar Memić just before half-time.

Bosnia equalised after sustained pressure, with Haris Tabakovic reacting quickest to a loose ball following a corner.

Italy faltered in the shootout, missing their first and third kicks, while Bosnia converted flawlessly to the delight of their home supporters.

The defeat makes Italy the first former champions to miss three consecutive World Cups, their last triumph coming in 2006.

Bosnia secured their second World Cup appearance and first since 2014, sparking wild celebrations after Bajraktarevic's winning penalty.



ITALY PLAYERS

Fernandez sparks excitement after dream Super Eagles debut

EDWARD OSEGHE

Emmanuel Fernandez has wasted little time endearing himself to Nigerian fans after announcing his arrival with a goal on his first start for the Super Eagles.

The Rangers centre-back found the net in Nigeria's 2-2 draw against Jordan on Tuesday at the Mardan Sports Complex in Antalya, delivering a composed performance that has already sparked widespread praise and comparisons to established stars like Calvin Bassey.

Fernandez admitted he was initially surprised by his invitation to the national team.

"When I first got the call to come and play for Nigeria, I was a bit shocked that the national team wanted me," he

told the Nigeria Football Federation's media team.

That disbelief quickly gave way to impact. Making his first full start, the defender scored in the 41st minute after connecting with a cross from Bright Osayi-Samuel.

Positioned at the back post, Fernandez controlled the ball calmly, shifted onto his left foot, and slotted past Jordan goalkeeper Yazeed Abulaila with the poise of a seasoned forward.

Beyond the goal, his overall display stood out. Fernandez played the entire 90 minutes, maintaining discipline and composure even as the match grew increasingly physical in the second half.

When Jordan equalised in the 77th minute and the tempo became frantic, the young de-

fender remained steady at the heart of Nigeria's defence.

His growing reputation is backed by valuable European experience.

Since joining Rangers from Peterborough United in the summer of 2025, Fernandez has tested himself against top opposition in both the UEFA Champions League and Europa League. He has scored six goals for the Scottish side this season, underlining his threat in attacking situations.

Rangers supporters were quick to celebrate his Super Eagles breakthrough, with fan platform Heart and Hand posting a simple but telling reaction: "There he is."

Nigerian fans, however, had much more to say.

Many praised his leadership and confidence, noting how

he was seen organising teammates despite being new to the squad. Others pointed to his potential, suggesting he could develop into a key figure with further refinement, much like Bassey did.

Some supporters even expressed excitement about a possible partnership between both defenders at the heart of Nigeria's backline, while others went further, hailing his presence and influence as that of a future team leader.

Fernandez's composure on the ball may stem from his past, having previously played as a midfielder before transitioning into a central defensive role. That background was evident in his comfort in possession and his instinct to read attacking situations.

It also explained his goal.



EMMANUEL FERNANDEZ

Rather than waiting for the play to come to him, he anticipated the moment, found space, and executed with precision.

With two appearances, one

goal, and a commanding full debut, Fernandez has already made a strong impression. For many Nigerian fans, the verdict is forming quickly — this is a player ready to stay.

NSC announces Main Organising Committee for maiden National Intermediate Games in Lagos

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

The National Sports Commission, NSC, has announced a formidable list of membership to serve in the Main Organising Committee, MOC, for the maiden edition of National Intermediate Games scheduled to be held later this year in Lagos state.

The National Intermediate Games is one of the many forward thinking initiatives birthed by the current leadership of the NSC led by Chairman Malam Shehu Dikko and Director General Hon Bukola Olopade to further earn the sports production mandate of the new NSC under the Renewed Hope Initiative for Nigeria Sports Economy (RHINSE).

The Intermediate Games was also established to create a scientific and organic pathway for athletes who are above 15 years of age after attending the National Youth Games.

The Director General of the NSC, Hon Bukola Olopade will serve as the Chairman of the Main Organising Committee while the Local Organising Committee Chairman will serve as the Vice Chairman and Olalekan Alabi is the MOC Secretary.

Other members of the committee include; Amaka Ashiofu, Niyi Beyioku, Thecla Para, Mrs Kehinde Ajayi, Dr Rabiuh Mohammed, Mbora Ikana, Dr Ibrahim Abdullahi, Yusuf Ali, Dr Emmanuel Igbosina and Micheal Obasi.

The membership of the main Organising committee also includes; Salisu Abubakar, Seyi Johnson, Rekiya Amedu, Kawu, Ahmad Muazu, olufisayo Odiaka, Mariam Akande and a representative of the state Director of Sports.

The Director General of the NSC Hon. Bukola Olopade urged members of the committee to bring their expertise and experience to bear to ensure the maiden edition of the Intermediate games creates a legacy and historic footprints for future games.



NSC, CHAIRMAN MALLAM SHEHU DIKKO

International Friendly: Al-Nashama hold Super Eagles to 2-2 draw in Antalya

FIFA World Cup-bound Jordan had to dig into the deepest part of their pouch to avoid defeat against the Super Eagles in an international friendly match played in Antalya, Turkey on Tuesday night.

Three-time African champions Nigeria wrapped up

their March international window with a pulsating 2-2 draw against the Jordan senior men team at the Mardan Sports Complex. Al-Nashama, currently ranked 64th in the world and boasting a formidable recent record, showed their quality early. In the 17th minute, a well-rehearsed free-

kick routine caught the Nigerian defense off-guard, allowing star man Mousa Tamari to fire Jordan into the lead.

Nigeria thought they had restored parity just six minutes later when Raphael Onyedika hammered home a clever cut-back from Moses Simon, but the strike was controversially ruled out by the officials. Undeterred, the Super Eagles equalized in the 30th minute. Captain for the night, Moses Simon, celebrating a landmark 97th appearance showcased his predatory instincts yet again. After Ademola Lookman's initial effort was blocked, the Paris FC forward reacted quickest to slot home with a delightful left-footed finish, marking his second goal in as many games this month.



JORDAN VS NIGERIA MATCH

Iraq end 30-year World Cup drought after edging Bolivia 2-1 in qualifiers playoff



IRAQ PLAYERS CELEBRATING

Iraq defeated Bolivia 2-1 to qualify for the FIFA World Cup 2026, ending a 30-year absence from football's biggest stage.

Goals from Ali Al-Hamadi and Aymen Hussein secured Iraq's historic return, their first appearance since 1986, after victory in the intercontinental playoff final in Mexico.

Al-Hamadi struck in the 10th minute, but Moises Paniagua equalised 28 minutes later in a tightly contested encounter at Monterrey Stadium on Wednesday.

Hussein netted the decisive goal in the 53rd minute, finishing from close range off Marko Farji's cross to seal qualification for the Lions of Mesopotamia

Turkiye, Sweden seal 2026 World Cup spots, as Kosovo, Poland crash out

Turkiye and Sweden secured FIFA World Cup 2026 qualification after playoff victories over Kosovo and Poland.

Turkiye defeated Kosovo 1-0 in Pristina to end a 24-year wait, qualifying for their first World Cup since 2002.

Kerem Akturkoglu scored the decisive goal in the 53rd minute, sealing victory in a tense contest before a packed home crowd.

Turkiye, ranked 25th globally, overcame years of qualifying disappointment under coach Vincenzo Montella with a balanced squad.

Kosovo, ranked 79th, saw their impressive run end just short of a historic first major

tournament appearance.

Elsewhere, Sweden defeated Poland 3-2 to book their place, with Viktor Gyokeres scoring a late winner in a dramatic playoff final.

Anthony Elanga gave Sweden an early lead before Nicola Zalewski equalised, while Gustaf Lagerbielke restored the hosts' advantage before halftime.

Karol Swiderski levelled again after the break, but Gyokeres struck late to seal victory for Sweden.

The result sends Sweden into Group F alongside the Netherlands, Japan and Tunisia at the 2026 World Cup, their first appearance since 2018.



TURKIYE CELEBRATE

SPORTS

Bayelsa, Lagos, others shine at Duoye Diri Wrestling Classics

Wrestlers from Bayelsa, Lagos and other states emerged winners in various categories on Day 7 of the ongoing 4th Governor Douye Diri Wrestling Classics in Yenagoa.

The championship is organised by the Bayelsa Govern-

ment through the Ministry of Sports Development in collaboration with the Nigeria Wrestling Federation.

In the women's 53kg category, Mausi Zannli of Lagos won gold, while Ayo Esewi of Edo State claimed silver.

Andrew Woyinkobikiye of

Bayelsa and Bidemi Enukezie of Delta won bronze medals.

In the women's 57kg category, Jumoke Adekoya of Ondo secured gold, while Faith Eso-uakpo of Edo took silver.

Tanlayefa Bekefale of Bayelsa and Brenda Godfrey of Delta won bronze medals.

In the women's 65kg category, Mercy Adekuoroye of Rivers clinched gold, while Mughentola Ebipatai of Bayelsa won silver.

Tokere Appah of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and Jennifer Okhylie of Edo claimed bronze medals.

In the men's 57kg category, Welson Ebikewenimo of Bayelsa won gold, while Simone Enosunimi of Edo took silver.

In the men's 86kg category, Godday Eseimokumo of Bayelsa secured gold, while Femi Jackson of Rivers won silver.

The championship will serve as a selection platform for Nigeria's representatives to the African Wrestling Championships in Alexandria, Egypt, scheduled for late April to early May.

The fourth edition of the Governor Douye Diri National Wrestling Classics, which began on March 25, will end on April 1.



AFRICAN CHAMPION MERCY ADEKUOROYE

Adekuoroye, Ebikewenimo, others retain titles at 4th Diri wrestling classic

African Champion Mercy Adekuoroye yesterday retained her title at the ongoing Gov. Douye Diri Wrestling Classics in Yenagoa, Bayelsa.

Adekuoroye, representing Rivers, defeated Mughentola Ebipatai of Bayelsa by technical superiority in the Women's 65kg final at the multipurpose sports hall of the Samson Siasia Complex.

Tokere Appah of Ministry of Defence and Jennifer Okhylie of Edo won bronze medals in the 65kg category.

In the 57kg category, Jumoke Adekoya of Ondo State delivered a brilliant performance, defeating Faith Eso-uakpo of Edo in the final.

Tanlayefa Bekefale of Bayelsa and Brenda Godfrey of Delta claimed bronze medals.

In the women's 53kg final, Mausi Zannli of Lagos State laboured to beat Ayo Esewi of Edo, while Andrew Woyinkobikiye of Bayelsa and Bidemi Enukezie of Delta settled for

bronze. Meanwhile, Welson Ebikewenimo of Bayelsa fought hard to retain his title, securing a decisive point at the final whistle against Simone Enosunimi of Edo in the men's 57kg. Enosunimi had taken the lead in the first round, but the Commonwealth Games silver medalist fought back to clinch victory.

Joseph Joshua of Lagos State and Samuel Chaima of Plateau State won bronze medals.

In the star match of the night, Godday Eseimokumo of Bayelsa dethroned Femi Jackson of Rivers in the 86kg category.

Eseimokumo surged ahead with six points before Jackson responded with five. The Rivers wrestler nearly completed a comeback, but Eseimokumo held on until the final whistle.

Mathias Okuma of Edo and Andy Alagba of the Nigeria Customs Service settled for bronze medals each



ACTIONS FROM THE 2026 DOUYE DIRI WRESTLING CLASSICS

Czechia beat Denmark to secure first World Cup spot since 2006

Czechia defeated Denmark on penalties in Prague after a 2-2 draw, with Michal Sadilek scoring the decisive kick to seal qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

The victory sends Czech to their first FIFA World Cup since 2006.

They will face Mexico, South Africa and South Korea in Group A.

Tomas Chory and Tomas Soucek converted their penalties, while Ladislav Krejci missed.

Denmark's only scorer was Christian Eriksen during the shootout.

Rasmus Hojlund struck the crossbar, Anders Dreyer missed, and Mathias Jensen fired over, sealing Denmark's exit from the playoff.

Pavel Sulc opened scoring early with a volley after a cleared corner.

Denmark equalised through Joachim Andersen's 72nd-minute header from Mikkell Damsgaard's free kick.

Krejci restored Czechia's lead in the 100th minute after a scramble, with his effort deflected into the net by defender Alexander Bah.

Denmark equalised again in the 111th minute as substitute Kasper Høgh headed in Eriksen's corner shortly after coming on.

Czechia had earlier beaten Ireland on penalties in the semifinals, while Denmark defeated North Macedonia 4-0 to reach the final.

Denmark dominated possession but struggled to break Czechia's defence, which sat deep after scoring early in the encounter.

Goalkeeper Matej Kovar made key saves, denying Hojlund and tipping Gustav Isaksen's free kick over the bar to keep Czechia in the game.

Czechia threatened on the counter, but Denmark continued to miss chances or found Kovar in inspired form throughout the match.

The hosts held firm to force penalties, eventually prevailing to book their place at the 2026 FIFA World Cup.



DENMARK PLAYERS

Congolese celebrating their qualification for the 2026 World Cup

The Democratic Republic of Congo in the early hours of Wednesday defeated Jamaica 1-0 after extra time to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, ending a 52-year wait.

A 100th-minute goal by Axel Tuanzebe, secured the Leopards' passage, earning them the 47th slot at the tournament.

The victory marks DR Congo's first World Cup appearance since 1974, when the country competed as Zaire.

Tuanzebe scored in Guadalajara, Mexico, converting a corner from Brian Cipenga which deflected past Jamaica

goalkeeper Andre Blake.

DR Congo dominated the early stages, with Cedric Bakambu denied an opening goal after being flagged offside.

Jamaica improved after the break, creating chances from set-pieces but failing to breach the Congolese defence.

Bakambu had another effort ruled out for offside as the Leopards continued to press.

Their persistence paid off in extra time when Cipenga delivered the corner that led to Tuanzebe's decisive goal.

A lengthy VAR check confirmed the goal, sparking celebrations among DR Congo

players and officials.

The game was briefly disrupted in the second half of extra time following an injury to the referee.

Jamaica, however, could not find an equaliser as fatigue set in against a disciplined DR Congo side.

The result means DR Congo will make their second World Cup appearance, having first qualified in 1974.

They have been drawn in Group K alongside Portugal, Uzbekistan and Colombia, and will open their campaign against Portugal on June 17 in Houston, Texas



THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO CELEBRATING