

Senate approves \$516.3m loan for Sokoto–Badagry Super Highway project

ABUJA

The Senate has approved 516,333,700 dollar syndicated financing facility for the construction of Sokoto–Badagry Super Highway.

This followed the consideration and adoption of the report of the Senate Committee on Local and Foreign Debts dur-

ing plenary on Wednesday

The approval followed a letter from President Bola Tinubu dated April 20, requesting legislative backing for external borrowing in line with the provisions of the Debt Management Office Establishment Act 2011 and the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007.

The request was referred to

the Senate Committee on Local and Foreign Debt on April 23.

The committee subsequently presented its report recommending approval of the loan.

Sen. Adamu Aliero (APC-Kebbi) presented the report on behalf of the committee's chairman, Sen. Aliyu Wamakko (APC-Sokoto).

He explained that the facility would finance Section One, Phase One (A and B1) of the highway, covering about 120 kilometres, as part of a broader corridor expected to span approximately 1,000 kilometres from Sokoto to Badagry.

The lawmaker noted that the project was strategically designed to enhance national

connectivity by linking Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kwara, Oyo, Ogun and Lagos states.

He described it as a major infrastructure initiative aimed at improving trade, transportation efficiency and national integration.

Aliero further stated that the project would reduce travel time, lower logistics costs,

improve access between agricultural zones and markets and strengthen supply chains across key sectors, including agriculture and manufacturing.

According to him, the financing arrangement is structured as a syndicated facility provided

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That The People May Know

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#200

Court stops INEC from recognising ADC congresses

● *Nulifies Mark-led caretaker decisions*

ABUJA

A Federal High Court in Abuja on Wednesday barred the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from recognising or participating in any congress organised by a disputed caretaker leadership of the African Democratic Congress (ADC).

In a decisive judgment, Jus-

tice Joyce Abdulmalik also restrained the Senator David Mark-led leadership of the ADC from interfering with the functions and tenure of duly elected state executives, reinforcing the authority of existing party structures.

Delivering the ruling, Justice Abdulmalik held that the responsibility for conducting state congresses lies strictly with state executive commit-

tees of the party, not the national executive committee or any interim body.

She affirmed that the four-year tenure of the ADC's State Working Committees and State Executive Committees remains valid and subsisting pending the conduct of properly constituted congresses and the convocation of a national convention.

The court further ruled that

neither the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria nor the ADC's constitution empowers the party's Caretaker/Interim National Working Committee, led by Mark, to appoint any committee for the purpose of conducting state congresses.

The suit was instituted by aggrieved state chairmen of the party, led by Norman Obinna and six others, who challenged the legality of actions taken by the caretaker national leadership.

In their originating summons, filed on behalf of ADC state chairpersons and executive committees, the plaintiffs argued that the caretaker body lacked constitutional authority to organise state congresses or appoint committees for that purpose, and sought judicial affirmation of their tenure while asking the court to halt any parallel processes.

Justice Abdulmalik, in her judgment, described the issues raised as "meritorious," noting that the central question was whether the defendants, including Mark, possessed constitutional or statutory authority to assume the powers of elected state organs of the party whose tenure is guaranteed.

She cited Section 223 of the 1999 Constitution, which mandates political parties to conduct periodic elections on a democratic basis, alongside Article 23 of the ADC constitution, which stipulates that party officers shall hold office for a maximum of two terms spanning eight year

The judge queried whether any infraction occurred when the defendants convened meetings and appointed a "congress committee" to organise state congresses, concluding that such a procedure is not recognised by the party's constitution.

On the argument that the matter concerned internal

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TINUBU MEET WITH PLATEAU STATE STAKEHOLDERS:

: Fidelis Tapgun; former Governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye; APC National Chairman, Prof Nentawe Yilwatda; President Bola Tinubu; Governor Caleb Mutfwang of Plateau State; former Governors of the state, Jonah Jang and Simeon Lalung, and former Military Administrator of the State, retired Real Adm. Samuel Atukum, during a meeting of the President with Plateau State stakeholders at the Presidential Villa in Abuja on Wednesday

Okpebholo tours near-completed Ikpoba Hill Flyover

● *As residents cheer progress*

BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, on Wednesday inspected the Ikpoba Hill Flyover at Ramat Park in Benin City, Edo South Senatorial District, as the project nears completion.

The governor undertook the inspection alongside award-winning broadcast journalist, Seun Okinbaloye of Channels Television, in a move seen as part of efforts to spotlight key infrastructure developments across the state.

The visit featured a walk-

through of the construction site and adjoining areas, drawing considerable public attention. Market women, commuters, and residents around Ramat Park turned out in large numbers, chanting slogans such as "Akpa-komiza," "Akpako Rescue," and "the best governor," in apparent endorsement of the project and the administration's efforts.

The Ikpoba Hill Flyover, now over 90 percent completed, is a major infrastructure project expected to significantly ease traffic congestion and enhance connectivity within Benin City upon completion.

Nigeria records highest global sickle cell burden —VC

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CVR: INEC displays preliminary voters' register in Lagos

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Ugandan authorities arrest dozens of foreigners in possible human trafficking case —Pgs 9

D'Tigress show growth despite defeat to Minnesota Lynx in WNBA tour clash —Pg 13

Nigeria records highest global sickle cell burden —VC

GWAGWALADA (FCT)

The Vice-Chancellor, Yakubu Gowon University, Prof. Hakeem Fawehinmi, has said that Nigeria bears the highest global burden of Sickle Cell Disease, with about 150,000 children born annually with the condition nationwide.

Fawehinmi spoke at the Patient-Centred Sickle Cell Disease Management in

Sub-Saharan Africa (PACTS) Consortium meeting, organised under CESRTA on Wednesday in Abuja, highlighting urgent national health challenges.

He said many affected children endured lifelong pain, disrupted education, reduced livelihood prospects, and poor access to quality healthcare, particularly in rural and peri-urban communities across Nigeria.

According to him, the SCD

situation represents a critical national health emergency requiring urgent, coordinated, and sustained intervention across government, research institutions, and development partners nationwide.

He said that the PACTS programme had, over four years, generated strong community-based and policy-relevant evidence aimed at improving understanding and management of the disease burden.

"We live at a critical moment. As a medical doctor myself, I

am aware of the enormity of the health challenges that the world is facing, part of which brings us together this morning.

"Nigeria is among the countries of the world that bears the highest burden and prevalence of sickle cell disease in the world," he said.

Fawehinmi commended CESRTA researchers for their dedication, describing their work as impactful, evidence-driven, and essential for shaping national and regional responses to SCD.

"What they have done is truly worth of commendation.

"As PACTS enters its final phase, the question before us goes beyond what research have we uncovered, what have we discovered.

"Equally important is what do we do with these findings and who is responsible for ensuring that these gains are implemented and sustained," he said.

He urged stakeholders to develop clear policy frameworks and actionable plans to ensure research findings translated

into improved healthcare delivery for affected communities.

The Director of CESRTA, Prof. Obiageli Nnodu, said Nigeria had established SCD standards of care and guidelines, but their implementation across health facilities remained uneven and required urgent strengthening nationwide.

She said the PACTS project was assessing how effectively those standards were applied in hospitals and communities while also evaluating public awareness and knowledge of SCD.

Court stops INEC from recognising...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

party affairs beyond judicial interference, Justice Abdulmalik held that while courts generally refrain from meddling in party matters, they are duty-bound to intervene where there is a breach of constitutional or statutory provisions.

"Any argument that this court lacks jurisdiction on that basis fails," she ruled, adding that where a party alleges violation of its constitution, the court must adjudicate.

The court subsequently set aside the appointment of the congress committee and restrained INEC from recognising any congress conducted under its authority.

It also barred Mark and other defendants from organising congresses or conventions outside the provisions of the party's constitution, as well as from taking steps capable of undermining the authority of state executive committees.

Earlier, the court dismissed preliminary objections filed by the defendants, ruling that the subject matter falls within the jurisdiction of the Federal

High Court under Section 251 of the Constitution.

On claims that the plaintiffs failed to exhaust internal dispute resolution mechanisms, the judge held that addressing such an issue at that stage would amount to determining substantive matters prematurely.

She also affirmed the plaintiffs' locus standi, stating that their legal standing derived from the alleged violation and that their shared grievance justified the representative action.

Consequently, all objections were resolved in favour of the plaintiffs.

The defendants in the suit include the ADC, David Mark, Patricia Akwashiki, Malam Bolaji Abdullahi, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, Oserheimen Osunbor, and INEC.

While the plaintiffs maintained that the tenure of state executive committees remains valid until properly conducted congresses are held, the defendants had urged the court to dismiss the suit, arguing that it bordered on internal party affairs, was not justiciable, and that the plaintiffs lacked the legal standing to institute the action.

Senate approves \$516.3m loan for...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

by Deutsche Bank, with partial credit enhancement support from the Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit.

He said that the facility has a tenor of nine years, including a grace period of up to three years, with an interest rate benchmarked at CME SOFR plus 5.35 percent per annum.

The senator also noted that although the loan would add to Nigeria's external debt stock, it was tied to long-term capital development projects expected to generate significant economic returns.

Following the presentation of the report, the request was subjected to debate by the senators, with many of them describing the project as a strategic infrastructure link capable of boosting economic growth across geo-political zones.

Sen. Mohammed Monguno (APC-Borno) argued that the project would unlock agricultural and transport value chains, while reducing unemployment and insecurity along the corridor.

Deputy Senate President, Jibrin Barau, emphasised its national integration benefits, noting that it would connect the

northern and southern parts of the country more efficiently.

Sen. Adetokunbo Abiru (APC-Lagos) referenced previous loan approvals that had yet to be fully disbursed due to global financial constraints, arguing that the current arrangement provided an alternative funding structure for ongoing projects.

Ruling on the motion, the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, put the recommendation to a voice vote and it was overwhelmingly adopted.

The senate, thereafter, approved the 516.3 million dollar syndicated loan for the phase one, section one (A and B1) of the project and mandated strict oversight by relevant committees.

The upper chamber also directed quarterly reporting by the Federal Ministry of Finance, Debt Management Office, and Federal Ministry of Works as well as submission of the financing agreement within 30 days.

The lawmakers further stressed the need for transparency, competitive procurement and periodic project evaluation to ensure value for money and timely delivery.

With the approval, the request now awaits transmission to the executive for final processing and implementation.



AFTER PLENARY:

L-R: Senators Ipalibo Banigo; Gbenga Daniels; Adams Oshiomhole and Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, after plenary at the National Assembly Abuja yesterday. Photo by Omoye Aminu

Edo moves to deepen data-driven governance, strengthens digital partnership

BENIN CITY

In a decisive push to accelerate digital transformation and entrench data-driven governance, the Edo State Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy has strengthened institutional collaboration with the Edo State Bureau of Statistics, signalling a renewed commitment to innovation, transparency and inclusive growth.

The high-level strategic meeting, convened by the Commissioner for Communication and Digital Economy, Hon. Ohimai Ehijimotor, held at the conference room of the Bureau of Statistics at Palm

House in Benin City, brought together top officials from both institutions to chart a unified pathway for leveraging data and technology in governance.

Speaking at the session, Ehijimotor described the engagement as productive and forward-looking, stressing the urgency of forging stronger partnerships that will enhance data utilisation, drive technological advancement and expand economic opportunities for residents of the state.

He emphasised that closer collaboration between the ministry and the Bureau would strengthen the foundations of evidence-based policymaking while accelerating Edo's tran-

sition into a digitally enabled economy.

Also speaking, the Edo State Statistician-General, Mr. Abiebhode Bashiru, said the meeting marked a critical step towards identifying areas of synergy between both institutions.

He listed key focus areas to include the development of digital infrastructure, promotion of digital innovation ecosystems, deployment of smart governance solutions, and strengthening of statistical systems for improved planning and policy implementation.

Bashiru noted that aligning the state's statistical framework with emerging digital tools would enhance the quality, accessibility

and reliability of data required for effective governance.

In her remarks, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, Mrs. Jennifer E. N. Aisuan, underscored the pivotal role of data in shaping responsive government policies. She also introduced a prototype web portal developed by the ministry, designed to support seamless access to government data and services.

Further demonstrating the state's digital drive, the Acting Director of Planning, Research and Policy in the ministry, Mr. Wilson Asenogua, presented the Edo Open Portal — an innovative digital platform aimed at improving public access to data, boosting transparency and promoting evidence-based decision-making.

Senate clears Yuguda as CBN Dep Governor, hails competence

ABUJA

The Senate on Wednesday confirmed the appointment of Mr Lamido Abubakar Yuguda as Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), describing him as a "square peg in a square hole."

The confirmation followed the presentation and adoption of a report by the Senate Committee on Banking, Insurance and Other Financial Institutions.

Presenting the report, Chairman of the Committee, Senator Adetokunbo Abiru

(Lagos East), said the nominee was eminently qualified for the position, citing his extensive knowledge, competence and years of professional experience in the financial sector.

Abiru noted that the nomination complied with Section 8(1) of the CBN Act and that Yuguda performed impressively during the screening exercise conducted earlier in the day.

According to him, the nominee demonstrated a deep understanding of financial systems, monetary policy and banking regulations, adding that no petition was received

against him.

He, therefore, urged the Senate to approve the nomination.

The motion for confirmation was seconded by Senator Danjuma Goje (Gombe Central), who said President Bola Ahmed Tinubu made the right choice in nominating Yuguda for the strategic office.

Following the motion, Senate President Godswill Akpabio put the question to a voice vote, with lawmakers overwhelmingly approving the appointment.

Speaking after the confirmation, Akpabio described Yuguda

as "a square peg in a square hole," noting that the Senate was satisfied with the President's choice.

He also commended President Tinubu for appointing a competent hand to a critical position in the nation's apex bank.

Earlier, during the screening, Yuguda was granted the Senate's traditional "take a bow and go" privilege.

Given the importance of the office of Deputy Governor of the CBN, Abiru had initially proposed that the nominee be subjected to detailed questioning on monetary and fiscal policies.

NEWS

2027: Osifo challenges Tinubu's dominance in APC Presidential race

ANDY ASEMOTA

ABUJA

Stakes are getting higher in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) 2027 presidential race as 50-year-old businessman, Stanley Osifo, picks up the N100 million presidential nomination form of the party.

The first aspirant to enter into the presidential race, less than 24 hours after President Bola Tinubu had purchased the party's expression of interest and nomination forms, debunked speculations that the President was sponsoring his lofty ambition.

Mr. Osifo, former presidential hopeful on the platform of

the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) several years back, also dismissed the claims that his ambition is being backed by political sponsors, saying he is funding his campaign independently.

Pushing back against the widespread endorsement of President Tinubu by the various stakeholders and organs of the party nationwide, Mr. Osifo, who spoke at a press conference in Abuja, said: "There is no part of our party's constitution that says that if anyone is endorsed, he automatically becomes the candidate of the party," adding that provisions of the law empowers aspirants to freely seek party tickets.

Unveiling his ambition un-

der the campaign theme: "Metamorphosis 2027," he described himself as a patriotic Nigerian with a vision to position the country among the leading economies of the world.

He promised to tackle Nigeria's challenges through a focus on security and fiscal discipline, adding that his ambition is anchored on integrity and solid understanding of global economic recovery models and that economic stability and security are central to national development.

According to Osifo, his policy priorities would however focus on key sectors, including the economy, security, health-care, water resources and regional integration.

Ex-convict, 25, in court over alleged house breaking, theft in Ekiti

ADO-EKITI

An ex-convict Olamide Oladiran, 25, who allegedly broke into four houses and stole valuables worth N1,025,000, on Wednesday appeared before an Ado-Ekiti Magistrates' Court.

The defendant, a resident of Grace Avenue, Oshodi Area, Ado-Ekiti, is standing trial on a two-count charge of house breaking and stealing.

The police prosecutor, ASP Yomi Osulale, told the court that the defendant committed the offence on April 25 at 3:00 a.m. at Oshodi community in Ado-Ekiti.

He alleged that the defend-

ant, who was just released from prison, entered into the dwelling houses of Mrs Funke Ikuomola, Mr Kehinde Gbadamosi, Mr Yinka Kolapo and Mrs Margaret Adedapo, all residents of Oshodi community.

Osulale said that the defendant stole foodstuffs and provisions valued at N750,000, belonging to Mrs Ikuomola, trouser and shirt valued at N45,000, property of Mr Gbadamosi

Others are: iron rod cutter valued at N150,000 belonging to Mr Kolapo and a fabricated seat valued at N80,000, belonging to Mrs Adedapo.

According to him, the offences contravened Section 323

and 302(1)(A) of the Criminal Law of Ekiti State, 2021.

The prosecutor asked the court for an adjournment to enable him to study the case file and assemble his witnesses.

However, the defendant pleaded not guilty to the charges preferred against him.

Counsel to the defendant, Mrs Blessing Falaye, urged the court to grant the defendant bail, with a promise that he would not jump bail.

The Magistrate, Mrs Olubunmi Bamidele, granted bail to the defendant in the sum of N200,000 with one surety in like sum.

She adjourned the case till May 20 for hearing.

Egbin halts operations after fatal underwater maintenance incident

LAGOS

Egbin Power Plc has shut down operations following a fatal industrial accident involving a contractor during an underwater maintenance exercise.

The incident, which occurred

on Tuesday, reportedly led to the shutdown of the plant, a major contributor to electricity supply on the national grid.

Confirming the development on Wednesday, the company's Head of Corporate Affairs, Mr Felix Ofulue, expressed condolences to the

family of the deceased.

"Immediately following the incident, established emergency response, safety, and reporting protocols were activated, and the relevant authorities were promptly notified," he said.

Ofulue said the company was cooperating with relevant authorities to determine the circumstances surrounding the incident, adding that a review was ongoing.

"Egbin Power remains firmly committed to the health, safety, and well-being of all personnel and contractors, and to maintaining the highest standards across its operations," he added.

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **EHIIOGHAE EGHOSA SUNDAY** and **EHIIOGHAE EGHOSA** are one and the same person as appeared in some of my documents. Henceforth, I wish to be known and called **EHIIOGHAE EGHOSA SUNDAY**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS FELICITA OGBEBOR**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS. FELICITA AIMIENDE AKPORIE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

ADDITION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **OWIE IKPONMWOSA MAKABO** and **OWIE IKPONMWOSA** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and called **OWIE IKPONMWOSA MAKABO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS OKOSUN ODION JOY**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS. AKPODUADO JOY**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **OSUNDE BLESSING OMOYEMWENSE**, now wish to be known and addressed as **KALU OMOYEMWENSE BLESSING**. All former documents remain valid concerned authorities and the general public please take note.



EDO STATE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION BOARD

Education Hub, Iyaro, Benin City,
Edo State

INVITATION TO TENDER FOR CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Edo State Universal Basic Education Board on behalf of Edo State Government is desirous of Carrying out procurement of construction and renovation of school buildings for basic school delivery. Consequently, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders.

2.0 SCOPE OF WORK

Scope of Work for the Construction and Renovation of School Buildings at OHE Primary School, Irrua, Esan central, in Edo State includes the following;
Renovation of a block of 3 classrooms, Completion of a block of 3 classrooms with an office, Construction of a block of 6-unit chamber toilet, Construction of water harvester, Construction of perimeter fence and security post, Construction of galvanized steel fence.

3.0 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

You are required to submit a detailed profile which should contain the following:

- Certificate of incorporation/registration with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC)
- Evidence of registration with Edo State Public Procurement Agency.
- Evidence of payment of tax by the company for the immediate past 3 years (i.e. 2023, 2024, 2025)
- Company's audited financial account (indicating turnover) and funding information over the past 3 years endorsed by a firm of chartered accountants.
- Evidence of Industrial Training Fund (ITF) Compliance Certificate valid till 31st December 2025
- Evidence of current Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund Compliance (NSITF) Certificate valid till 31st December 2025
- PENCOM Compliance Certificate valid till 31st December 2025
- Evidence of registration on National Database of Federal Contractor, Consultants and Service Providers by submission of Contractor, Consultants and Service providers by submission of Interim Registration Report (IRR) expiring on 31st December 2025
- Company Profile including organization structure, key professional staff with their names and registration with appropriate regulatory bodies (COREN, QRBN, ARCON, CORBON etc.) with their current practicing license.
- A sworn affidavit indicating that:
 - None of the Directors of the Company has been convicted in any court for any criminal offence including fraud and financial impropriety.
 - The Company is not in receivership, insolvent or bankrupt.
 - No officer of SUBEB is a former or present Director, shareholder or has any pecuniary interest in the company.
- Bank Reference.
- All documents for submission must be transmitted with a covering letter on the company's letter head paper bearing all necessary details.
- Equipment and technology capacity, with evidence of ownership or lease.
- Letter of consent to allow verification of documents submitted.
- Evidence of payment of appropriate non-refundable tender fee of ₦100,000.00 only.

4.0 COLLECTION/SUBMISSION OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS

Set of bidding documents can be picked up at the procurement office at the address below or received by email upon submission of an evidence of payment of a non-refundable fee of **₦100,000.00 (One Hundred Thousand Naira Only)** into the following Edo State Government Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) bank account domiciled with the following banks:

Bank Name: Premium Trust Bank

Account Number: 0080050728

Account: EDSG Internally Generated Revenue A/C

Payers are requested to indicate the payment reference "**2026 – SUBEB EMERGENCY– Bidding and Tenders – Fees**" at the bank before making this payment.

All bids shall be submitted in a sealed envelope, addressed to the Executive Chairman, State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and marked boldly at the right-hand corner "**BIDDING DOCUMENT**" and to be submitted at the address below. All bids are to be submitted on or before **12:00 noon, 14TH May, 2026**.

5.0 OPENING OF BIDDING DOCUMENTS

Bidding documents shall be opened immediately in the presence of the Bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend at the address below after the close of bid submission deadline by **12:00 noon, 14TH May 2026**.

6.0 NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

- Electronic Bids will not be permitted.
- Late submissions will not be accepted.
- This invitation shall not be construed to be commitment on the part of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) for contract award nor shall it entitle the bidder to make any claims whatever and seek indemnity from the Board by virtue of having responded to this advertisement.

7.0 THE ADDRESS REFERRED TO ABOVE IS:

Edo State Universal Basic Education Board, Education Hub, Iyaro, Benin City.

Signed:
HON. SONIA EBANEHITA OMANZANE
Executive Chairman
Edo State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB)

NEWS**2027: Eschew personal loyalty in electing representatives, Timi tells Bomadi/Patani stakeholders****ABUJA**

Dr Tonye Timi, Executive Director, Corporate Services, South/South Development Commission (SSDC), has advised stakeholders in Bomadi/Patani Federal Constituency to eschew personal loyalty in electing representatives for 2027.

Timi gave the advice in an interview with newsmen on Wednesday in Abuja.

He noted that in every thriving democracy, representation was not merely a privilege be-

stowed on elected officials but a solemn responsibility anchored on performance, accountability and responsiveness to the people.

"As Nigeria's democratic journey continues to mature since the return to civil rule in 1999, citizens across constituencies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to periodically assess the quality and effectiveness of those representing them at the National Assembly.

"The Bomadi/Patani Federal Constituency stands at such a defining moment.

"With the 2027 general elections on the horizon, it is both

timely and necessary for stakeholders, traditional institutions, political actors, civil society and the electorate to reflect deeply on the future of representation.

"This reflection must be guided, not by sentiment or familiarity, but by objective standards of legislative performance and the broader interest of the constituency," he said.

According to him, membership of the House of Representatives is multi-dimensional, as it goes beyond occupying a seat in Abuja.

"It encompasses lawmaking through the sponsorship of bills, influencing national discourse through motions and debates, exercising oversight over government agencies and

attracting development opportunities to the constituency.

"These functions are not optional; they are the very essence of legislative relevance and effectiveness.

"In advanced democracies and emerging ones alike, legislators are evaluated based on measurable contributions.

"These include how many bills have they sponsored? What motions have they moved to address pressing

issues affecting their constituents? How visible and vocal are they in debates that shape national policy?

"Also, to what extent have they facilitated federal presence in their constituencies through infrastructure, social programs, or institutional interventions?

"These are not abstract questions. They are practical benchmarks that determine whether representation is truly serving its purpose," he said.

Expert hails WHO approval of newborn malaria drug**LAGOS**

Ikotun Olayemi, President of the Nigeria Biochemistry Practitioners Association, has said that recent approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) of a newborn specific malaria drug offers major biochemical and public health benefits for Nigeria.

Olayemi made the remarks in an interview with newsmen on Wednesday in Lagos, highlighting the importance of the breakthrough ahead of 2026 World Malaria Day.

The World Health Organization recently announced the prequalification of the first malaria treatment developed specifically for newborns and young infants weighing between two and five kilograms marking a significant milestone globally.

He described the development as more than a new medicine noting it represented a shift toward precision medicine in infectious disease management tailored specifically for neonates who required spe-

cialised dosing considerations.

Olayemi said effective adoption in countries like Nigeria could significantly reduce early life malaria deaths among newborns but warned poor implementation might limit access and impact across vulnerable populations nationwide.

He explained that previously newborns faced risks of overdose toxicity and poor pharmacokinetic outcomes because malaria treatments were designed for older children affecting immature organs such as the liver significantly.

The new therapy he said offered safer treatment options for newborns representing a major advancement while also opening opportunities for Nigerian biochemists to engage in drug monitoring and metabolism research activities.

He added that the development created pathways for further exploration of natural medicinal supplements and plant based adjuncts that could complement conventional malaria treatment especially within African neonatal populations.

Rainy season: FRSC warns Anambra motorists against use of worn-out tyres, faulty wipers**AWKA**

As the rainy season intensifies, the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) in Anambra, has urged motorists to put their vehicles in good condition before plying the roads.

The State's Sector Commander of FRSC, Bridget Asekhauno, gave the advice on Wednesday in Awka.

Asekhauno warned that roads become increasingly slippery during rainfalls, making careful driving essential.

She expressed concern over continued use of worn-out tyres by some drivers, noting that such tyres lose proper grip on road surfaces.

According to her, worn-out

tyres reduce effective contact with the road, increasing the risk of skidding or loss of control when brakes are applied.

She consequently, harped on the need for motorists to slow down significantly when roads are wet.

"Drivers must carry out routine vehicle checks before driving; They should regularly check their tyres, oil and water levels.

"Motorists must obey traffic rules, avoid driving under the influence of alcohol, and pull over safely when rainfall becomes too heavy and visibility is poor," she said.

Asekhauno reaffirmed the corps' commitment to ensuring safety on Nigerian roads, especially during challenging rainy season.

**ITEMS DONATED:**

Some of the items donated by the Bayelsa Education Development Trust Fund (BEDTF), on Wednesday to the Bayelsa College of Nursing Sciences, Tombia-Ekpetiama.

Bayelsa Education Fund supports College of Nursing with beds, mattresses, laptops**YENAGOA**

The Bayelsa Education Development Trust Fund (BEDTF), on Wednesday donated 100 double bunk beds, 200 mattresses and 10 laptops to the Bayelsa College of Nursing Sciences, Tombia-Ekpetiama.

Speaking at the event, the Executive Secretary, BEDTF, Prof Ebimiewei Etebu said the donation aligned with the organisation's mandate to support critical education infrastructure across the state.

He reiterated the fund's commitment to enhancing learning

environments across educational institutions in Bayelsa.

He added that the provision of the items would help create a more conducive atmosphere for students, particularly those in professional field like nursing where adequate rest and comfort were essential for effective learning outcomes.

"This intervention from the state government, is borne out of our belief that the quality of a learning environment directly impacts the quality of learning itself.

"This was the foresight of Benjamin Franklin when he

noted that an investment in knowledge pays the best interest," Etebu said.

Similarly, Dr Charles Daniel, Chairman, Bayelsa House of Assembly Committee on Education, while handing over the items to the school, commended the BEDTF for its interventions.

He said that the gesture would enhance teaching and learning in the school.

In the same vein, Chairman, Bayelsa Traditional Rulers Council and Ibenanaoewei of Ekpetiama Kingdom, King Bubaraye Dakolo represented by the Amananaoewei of

Gbarantoru, Chief Igonia Dakolo, lauded the state government for the gesture.

He called on other organisations and well to do individuals domiciled and from the state to emulate the gesture and invest more in the institution.

Also, Chairman of the BEDTF Board, Chief Fidelis Agbiki urged the management of the institution to ensure proper management of the items donated.

He warned the leadership of the institution to refrain from converting the laptops to personal use as the BEDTF had monitoring mechanisms to check abuse of provided items.

NACA begins HIV epidemic control survey in Anambra**AWKA**

The National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) has charged the Anambra State Technical Team for the 2026 Integrated Biological and Behavioural Surveillance Study (IBBSS) to identify persons living with HIV/AIDS in the state.

The agency also urged the team to ensure access to antiretroviral therapy and achieve significant viral suppression as part of efforts to control the spread of HIV/AIDS in Anambra.

Director-General of NACA, Dr Tope Ilori, gave the charge during the inauguration of the

technical team at the 2026 IBBSS state entry meeting held at the Anambra State AIDS Control Agency (ANSACA) in Awka.

Ilori, represented by Mrs Joy Egwuonwu, Principal Programme Officer of NACA, said the survey was aimed at achieving HIV epidemic control in Anambra.

She explained that the IBBSS was a nationally coordinated survey designed to improve the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in the country.

According to her, the survey will provide reliable data needed to strengthen HIV intervention programmes in the state.

Ilori commended Gov. Chukwuma Soludo for appointing Dr Hilary Okeke as Executive Director and Programme Manager of ANSACA, describing him as a vibrant and competent public health expert.

She noted that Anambra was among the 12 states selected for the survey due to recent improvements in the state's HIV response system.

"Anambra State data on HIV has been very poor, but with the appointment of Dr Okeke, the future is very bright," she said.

Speaking, Okeke said the survey would focus on key populations, including female sex work-

ers, men who have sex with men and people who inject drugs.

He said the Soludo administration had provided an enabling environment to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the state.

Okeke assured that the technical team would begin implementation strategies and policies necessary for the successful conduct of the survey.

Also speaking, Mr Chukwuebuka Ejekam, Acting Chief Executive Officer of the West Africa Centre for Public Health and Development, said the IBBSS was targeted at key populations as part of efforts to achieve HIV epidemic control in Nigeria by 2030.

CVR: INEC displays preliminary voters' register in Lagos

LAGOS

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in Lagos State on has displayed register of voters from the ongoing Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) for

claims and objections.

The INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner in Lagos State, Prof. Ayobami Salami, disclosed this on Wednesday according to a statement by Alhaji Taiwo Gbadegesin, the Head, Voter Education and

Publicity of the commission.

Salami said that the register had been displayed in all the 20 Local Government Areas of the state.

He said that the exercise was pursuant to Section 19 of the Electoral Act 2022.

"The exercise (verification) that kickedstarted today, Wednesday, April 29 will span through May 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. everyday of the week excluding weekends.

"This is a critical window for every eligible citizen to verify

their details on the register and file a claim if their names are omitted or wrongly captured.

"It is also a window for registered voters to file an objection against ineligible persons — deceased, underage, non-Nigerians, or multiple registrants.

"The credibility of the 2027 elections will be determined largely by the integrity of the voter register.

"We cannot afford a bloated register filled with deceased persons' names and irregular

entries, the INEC boss said.

Salami urged all residents and political stakeholders to mobilise to their designated centres and take lawful action where necessary as spelt out by the enabling instruments.

INEC has fixed January 16, 2027, as the new date for the presidential and national assembly elections.

The commission also fixed February 6, 2027, as the date for governorship and state houses of assembly elections.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

Women participants at a community outreach in Karonmajigi District, Abuja yesterday where they pledged to reject voter inducement, elect credible candidates and uphold electoral integrity.

Elections: Women pledge to reject voter inducement, champion integrity

ABUJA

Women in FCT have pledged to reject voter inducement, elect credible candidates and uphold electoral integrity as the country prepares for the 2027 general elections.

They made the commitment at a community outreach in Karonmajigi District, Abuja Municipal Area Council, on Wednesday.

The outreach was organised by Open Mind Young Voices Network (OMYV), with support from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), to train youths on social democracy, leadership, and active citizenship in preparation for future electoral participation nationwide.

The community Women Leader, Mrs Zainab Musa, not-

ed the growing determination among women to resist vote selling, vote buying and other practices that undermine democratic processes.

She said the initiative had further revealed to them the effects of collecting gift items from candidates vying for various positions, not knowing out whether they are credible or not.

"Enough is enough, we will reject any gift items they might want to used to lure us to vote for candidates that are not credible.

"We have representatives from various groups, religion, tribes and organisations present and I believe that they will cascade lessons learnt to those that are not here," she said.

According to her, she will use her position to mobile women to ensure that they register, get their Permanent Voter Cards

(PVC) and vote during elections.

"Some people feel their vote doesn't count due to past election results outcomes, but we are trying to rebuild their confidence and trust in the system and encourage them vote during elections," she said.

Hajiya Hassana Usman, a resident and business woman, said, "usually wrappers, Maggie, salt, detergents and even money are shared to encourage us vote for a particular candidate.

"But with this training, we now know that the money used in buying these gift items will mostly be recovered by the candidates when they win the elections, thereby neglecting projects that could benefit the people.

"So this time around, no more vote buying" she said.

On her part, Mrs Caroline

Katsina, a public servant in the community, said the exercise had reversed her mindset about voter apathy, her civic responsibilities and her rights as a citizen to participate in electoral processes.

"It will no longer be the usual vote buying, divide, rule and other tactics used by politicians to ensure they are voted into office.

"We are ready and will vote only credible candidates of our choice that will not only focus on their enrichment, but will execute projects that would develop our country and benefits our children," she said.

Shadrack Danladi, a development practitioner in democratic governance and youth participation, emphasised that accepting financial or material incentives in exchange for votes weakened governance and deprived communities of credible leadership.

Collaborative funding essential to sustain Nigeria's poultry sector — Don

LAPAI (NIGER)

Don, Prof. Olufemi Olubunmi-Egbewande, has called for a collaborative funding model by government, industries and wealthy individuals to ensure sustained innovation in Nigeria's poultry sector.

Olubunmi-Egbewande, a Professor of Monogastric Animal Production in the Department of Agriculture, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, made the call on Wednesday while delivering the institution's 28th inaugural lecture.

Delivering the lecture with the title: "Platonic Love for Chicken", Prof Olubunmi-Egbewande captured the essence of the consumption of chicken and its products as the richest source of nutrients for human health.

He said that reforming the poultry sector would not only improve productivity of farmers but guarantee opportunities for young professionals in Agriculture, par-

ticularly poultry production.

He called for reforms in government policy to support and improve research funding, create an enabling research environment, ensure adequate security and institutional support for agricultural innovation.

Olubunmi-Egbewande further urged policymakers to introduce farmer friendly policies that would stimulate poultry production across the country.

He said that with the reforms in place, many trained animal scientists would become productive and contribute their quota to the food security and protein needs of the nation instead of drifting into unproductive social vices.

According to him, reducing the cost of feeds and providing accessible, low-interest loans will boost productivity and encourage more Nigerians to invest in poultry farming.

He noted that private sector funding for research had declined over the years, adding that with adequate government policy, the sector could be revived.

NDLEA raids 3 illicit drug warehouses, recovers N16.9bn worth of opioids

LAGOS

Operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) have raided three illicit drug warehouses hidden in a residential estate in Okota area of Lagos.

The operatives recovered 2,360,000 pills of high-potency tramadol 225mg and 1,909,400 bottles of codeine syrup with a combined street value N16.9 billion only.

This is contained in a statement Wednesday by Mr Femi Babafemi, Director, Media and Advocacy, NDLEA.

Babafemi said that the high stakes intelligence-led coordinated operations were conducted on April 17, at 98 Olukeyode Awofisayo Street, Park View Estate, Ago Palace, Okota Lagos.

He said that at the address, a large warehouse was uncovered, while two others were uncovered at 5 Charles Ndumetu Street within the same estate.

According to him, recovered from the three warehouses were 19,094 cartons containing

1,909,400 bottles of codeine syrup and 2,360,000 pills of high-potency tramadol 225mg in another 34 cartons.

Reacting to the development, the NDLEA Chairman, retired, Brig.-Gen. Buba Marwa said the successful operations had dealt a staggering blow to the heart of the pharmaceutical drug black market.

Marwa commended the operatives involved, describing the seizure as a monumental victory in the ongoing fight against substance abuse and illicit drug trafficking in the country.

According to him, the scale of this recovery, nearly 4.3 million units of lethal substances, is a testament to the fact that our officers are staying several steps ahead of these merchants of death.

"To find such volumes hidden within residential estates like Park View and busy hubs like Okota shows the desperation of these cartels, but it also highlights the peerless intelligence capabilities of our team."

Virologist, Tomori warns proposed infectious disease institute may duplicate NCDC roles

ABUJA

Renowned virologist, Prof. Oyewale Tomori, has expressed reservations over the proposed National Institute for Public Health and Infectious Diseases Zaria (Establishment) Bill 2025, warning it could lead to duplication of functions of NCDC.

Tomori raised the concern in an interview with newsmen on Wednesday in Abuja while reacting to the proposed legislation.

The bill seeks to upgrade the former National Tuberculosis

and Leprosy Training Centre in Zaria into a full-fledged specialist institution for infectious disease research, training and clinical care.

It is expected to operate in collaboration with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC), which is responsible for disease surveillance and national outbreak response.

Proponents of the bill have maintained that the institute is designed to complement and not duplicate the NCDC's statutory functions, focusing on specialist training, advanced research and tertiary-level clinical services.

However, the Virologist cautioned that, in practice, overlapping mandates could still emerge if roles are not clearly defined and existing institutions are not optimally utilised.

According to him, the establishment of such an institute raises questions about duplication of roles, especially when the NCDC is already mandated to handle disease surveillance, outbreak response and public health coordination in the country.

He said that while the idea of strengthening capacity in infectious disease research and training was commendable, Nigeria must first assess whether existing structures

were functioning effectively.

"If the NCDC is doing what it is set up to do, we should not be seeing this kind of duplication," he said.

He emphasised that creating new national-level institutions without addressing gaps in existing ones could lead to fragmentation, inefficiencies and competition for limited resources.

He noted that globally and increasingly across Africa, countries are moving toward integrated National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs), which consolidate surveillance, laboratory systems, research and emergency response under one coordinated framework.

NEWS

NMA rejects court ruling granting FCCPC role in medical negligence cases

LAGOS

The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) has objected to a Federal High Court judgment affirming the authority of the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) to investigate alleged cases of medical negligence.

Its Lagos State Branch Chairman, Dr Babajide Saheed, in a statement on Wednesday, warned that the ruling could trigger regulatory conflicts and deepen uncertainty within Nigeria's healthcare sector.

Saheed described the ruling as "surprising and troubling," arguing that existing Nigerian law already granted exclusive oversight of medical practice and professional misconduct to the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN).

According to him, the MDCN's authority over medical ethics, disciplinary procedures and negligence investigations is clearly defined under Nigerian law and is central to maintaining professional standards within the healthcare system.

He emphasised that the statutory mandate of the MDCN was "deliberate and exclusive," adding that medical negligence cases often involve highly technical issues requiring specialised professional expertise.

The NMA chairman warned

that allowing external agencies such as the FCCPC to investigate medical negligence could create overlapping jurisdictions, institutional clashes and inconsistent standards in the handling of sensitive healthcare matters.

He expressed concern that the ruling may open the door for other regulatory and law enforcement agencies to intervene in areas traditionally managed by professional medical regulators.

Saheed insisted that medical negligence cannot be treated in the same way as ordinary consumer disputes because of the specialised scientific and ethical considerations involved.

He argued that extending investigative powers to agencies outside the established professional framework could expose healthcare practitioners to arbitrary or poorly informed scrutiny.

The chairman also linked the ruling to wider concerns over the worsening migration of Nigerian healthcare professionals abroad, commonly referred to as the "japa" phenomenon.

According to him, additional regulatory uncertainty could further discourage practitioners from remaining in the country.

"At a time when Nigeria is already facing severe shortages of healthcare professionals, developments like this risk eroding confidence within the medical community," he said.

He warned that continued brain drain poses serious risks to healthcare delivery, including longer waiting times, increased workloads for remaining staff and declining access to

specialised care.

He disclosed that NMA Lagos branch would challenge the ruling through legal means, including an appeal aimed at securing judicial clarification on the limits of the FCCPC's authority in medical matters.

Saheed emphasised that the association supported account-

ability and high ethical standards within the profession but insisted that disciplinary oversight must remain under the purview of recognised medical regulatory institutions.

"We remain committed to upholding the highest standards of medical ethics and professional accountability while safeguard-

ing the autonomy and integrity of the profession for the benefit of all Nigerians," he said.

A Federal High Court in Abuja, presided over by Justice Emeka Nwite, had on April 15, reaffirmed the powers of the FCCPC to investigate complaints related to medical negligence and healthcare services.



LEADERSHIP TRAINING:

L-R: Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research Innovation, University of Ibadan, Prof. Simisola Akintola, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ibadan, Prof. Kayode Adebowale, Chairperson of Academic Staff Union of University of Ibadan, (ASUU), Dr Adefemi Afolabi, Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic, University of Ibadan, Prof. Jumon Artiba, during a leadership training of the new Members of University Ibadan in Oyo on Tuesday.

Kwara intensifies polio campaign, targets missed cases, resistance

ILORIN

The Kwara State Government has expressed renewed resolve to tackle resistance and missed cases in poliomyelitis immunisation across the 16 local government areas through strengthened strategies and stakeholder engagement efforts statewide.

Dr Dupe Shittu of the Kwara Primary Healthcare Development Agency stated this on Wednesday in Ilorin during a stakeholder engagement and review of the March polio immunisation campaign.

She explained that the meeting aimed to assess the March campaign outcomes and outline strategies to address lin-

gering resistance and missed cases affecting immunisation coverage in various communities across the state.

According to her, in spite of growing awareness efforts and improved turnout, more work remains necessary to ensure that no eligible child is left unvaccinated in the ongoing fight against polio.

Shittu reaffirmed the agency's commitment to reaching every eligible child emphasising that inclusive coverage remained essential to eliminating polio and safeguarding public health across both urban and rural communities.

She described the media as a critical partner in healthcare delivery particularly in rural areas where access to information was limited and awareness

played a key role in influencing public acceptance.

Shittu called for the support and cooperation of media practitioners and stakeholders noting that the success of immunisation campaigns depended largely on public understanding and community participation across the state.

She said that sustained media engagement would help address resistance, encourage caregivers, and support collaboration with partners, including international donors, to strengthen healthcare delivery systems across the state.

Also speaking Mr Olayioye Ajide Director of Finance and Supply at the agency warned that misinformation remained a major obstacle particularly at the grassroots where some

caregivers still doubted the existence of polio.

He urged the media to help bridge the gap by sensitising the public to the importance of immunisation and the dangers posed by polio especially to children in vulnerable communities.

A representative of UNICEF Mr Adisa Salmon also called on journalists to provide accurate information, counter rumours and strengthen communication between health workers and communities to improve immunisation outcomes.

Findings from the March campaign showed mixed progress with variations across local government areas.

Some areas recorded higher vaccination uptake while others revealed gaps requiring intensified follow up and engagement.

Ebonyi farmers lament rising cost of farm inputs, labour

ABAKALIKI

Farmers across communities in Ebonyi have raised concerns over the rising cost of farm inputs and labour as the 2026 planting season begins.

A cross-section of farmers who spoke with our correspondent in Abakaliki on Wednesday said that the trend could negatively affect food production and prices.

The farmers said that the sharp increase in the prices of fertilisers, improved seeds, agrochemicals, and the cost of hiring farm assistance had made it difficult for them to prepare adequately for the season.

Mr Joseph Ugwuoke, a yam and rice farmer decried the development and called for government intervention to boost efforts toward achieving food security.

Ugwuoke said that the price of fertilisers had doubled compared to what it was the previous year, adding that it was difficult for him to cope as the current planting season approached.

Similarly, a cassava and yam farmer, Mr Chukwuma Nkwuda, complained about the high cost of labour, noting that most farmers could no longer afford to hire workers for land clearing and planting.

"Labour costs have increased significantly. What we paid workers in 2025 has almost doubled. Some of us now rely on family members, but that is not always enough," he said.

Nkwuda attributed the situation to rising transportation costs, inflation, and the removal of fuel subsidy, which they said had affected the prices of goods and services nationwide.

Mr Joshua Oke, a labourer in Ugwuachara, said the cost of making heaps for yam cultivation ranged from N200 to N500, depending on the size.

"We earn more from labour now. We are paid between N10,000 and N15,000 to clear grass on farmland," Oke said.

At Kpirikpiri Market, a seller of farm inputs, Ms Blessing Nworie, said that the price of agrochemicals, including herbicides, had increased significantly.

"Herbicides that sold for N3,000 in 2025 now sell for N5,000, while fertiliser, which was N30,000, now sells for between N45,000 and N50,000," she said.

In her reaction, Mrs Nkechinyere Iyioku, the Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources said Ebonyi had recorded tremendous improvement in Agri-business since the inception of the present governor, Mr Francis Nwifuru.

Army adopts new framework to track, improve troop performance

ABUJA

The Nigerian Army has intensified efforts to enhance operational efficiency and institutional performance through the introduction of a Standardised Evaluation Framework aimed at strengthening accountability and combat readiness across formations.

The initiative was highlighted on Tuesday at a sensitisation seminar organised by the Army Headquarters Department of Standards and Evaluation at the Nigerian Army Conference Centre as contained in a statement by the Acting Director, Army Public

Relations, Col. Appolonia Anele, on Wednesday in Abuja.

The Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Waidi Shaibu, represented by the Military Secretary (Army), Maj.-Gen. Everest Okoro, described the framework as a major step in deepening institutional effectiveness and sustaining operational excellence.

Waidi said the Department of Standards and Evaluation served as the Army's quality assurance arm, responsible for enforcing compliance with operational benchmarks, conducting readiness assessments, and evaluating performance across units.

According to him, the sys-

tem is designed to identify strengths and weaknesses within formations, close operational gaps, and improve overall mission effectiveness through structured evaluation.

Shaibu noted that the seminar marked the first major engagement of the department since its establishment, underscoring the army's commitment to continuous improvement and professionalism.

He said the development reflected the Nigerian Army's broader push to entrench a culture of accountability, precision and continuous improvement within its operational structure.

Earlier, the Chief of Army Standards and Evaluation, Maj.-Gen. Bobby Ugiagbe, said the framework would institutionalise uniform standards across the army and strengthen discipline, professionalism and operational efficiency.

He added that the initiative would ensure systematic application of evaluation tools to improve performance outcomes and align Army operations with global best practices.

The seminar brought together senior officers and stakeholders to deepen understanding of performance assessment mechanisms and strengthen compliance across formations.

JUDICIARY**NEWS**

Alleged coup: Court grants FG's plea for witness' protection as 3 bankers testify

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Wednesday granted an application by the Federal Government to shield the name and identity of its witness from the Nigerian Army in the ongoing trial of the six suspected coup plotters.

Justice Joyce Abdulmalik granted the application after

taking arguments from counsel for the prosecution, Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, and the defence lawyers.

The Federal Government had filed a 13-count charge, marked: FHC/ABJ/CR/206/2026, against the defendants.

The suspects are retired Maj-Gen. Mohammed Ibrahim Gana, retired Capt. (NN) Erasmus Ochegobia Victor, Insp

Ahmed Ibrahim, Zekeri Umoru, Bukar Kashim Goni and Abdulkadir Sani, listed as 1st to 6th defendants respectively.

Although the former Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Timipre Sylva, is not named as a defendant in the charge, he is listed as being at large.

The defendants were accused of alleged treason and terrorism, including failure to disclose security intelligence and money laundering linked to terrorism financing, among other charges.

The defendants, who were arraigned on April 22, pleaded not guilty to all the counts.

When the case was called for the commencement of trial on Wednesday, Oyedepo told the court that four witnesses were present and the prosecution was ready to proceed.

Three witnesses from Jaiz Bank, SunTrust Bank and Providus Bank gave evidence.

They tendered letters obtained from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission

(EFCC), through the prosecution lawyer.

Justice Abdulmalik admitted the letters in evidence, marked them as exhibits and the witnesses responded to questions under cross-examination by defence lawyers.

However, when the fourth witness was called, Oyedepo applied that the identity of the witness be protected.

He said the witness should be shielded to prevent "unnecessary attack" and protect the officer's identity, citing Section 232 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015.

He said the provision allows courts to adopt protective measures in appropriate cases, especially in matters involving security and terrorism allegations.

Lawyers to the defendants did not oppose the application.

However, they insisted that the defence must still know the identity of the witness to ensure fair hearing.

They argued that shielding

the witness from the public might be justified, but full anonymity from the defence would be prejudicial and would prevent proper testing of credibility.

They added that Section 232 of the ACJA allows protective measures but does not remove the need for basic identification within proceedings.

They urged the court to strike a balance between security concerns and fair trial rights.

They, however, said that sensitive parts of the proceedings could be restricted from public access if necessary.

In response, Oyedepo insisted that full protection was necessary.

He said the witness is a serving officer who faces security risks if exposed.

He also said the law allows the use of initials or other non-identifying methods.

Ruling on the application, the judge held that the request was justified, particularly as one of the counts relates to terrorism.

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

L-R: Chief Relations Officer, NNPC, Morenike Adewunmi; Chief Financial Officer, Tajudeen Karim, and former Chief Financial Officer, Umar Ajiya Isa, during the Public Account Committee's public Hearing on matters arising from Legislative enquiry into the operations of NNPC at the National Assembly Abuja yesterday.

PHOTO OMOYE AMINU

Court frees 5 labourers accused of kidnaping

IKEJA

An Ikeja High Court has discharged and acquitted five labourers after spending seven years in custody over alleged kidnaping.

The defendants are: Damilare Ashimi, 42; Rasheed Yekini, 40; Yusuf Rilwan, 39; Taoreek Ashimi, 29; and Alli Jinadu, 28, who are bricklayers and welders.

The sixth defendant, Olaolu-

wa Ojo, died in custody during the trial in 2024 at the age of 28.

Delivering judgment, Justice Oyindamola Ogala discharged and acquitted the defendants, ruling that the prosecution failed to prove the essential ingredients of conspiracy to commit kidnaping and kidnaping.

Ogala held that the manner in which the victim was kidnaped was not established and that there was no eyewitness.

She added that there was

insufficient evidence and that no proof of an identification parade was tendered.

The court also noted contradictions in the testimony of the first prosecution witness.

The judge further held that there was no evidence before the court to show that the victim was abducted.

"There is no case to answer," the judge held.

The court consequently discharged and acquitted the de-

fendants of the two-count charge.

The defendants and others still at large were accused of conspiring to commit kidnaping.

They were also accused of abducting one Chief Rasaq Adamson to an unknown destination on April 23, 2019, in Akpere Community, Ikota, Ajah, Lagos.

The trial witnessed multiple adjournments and arguments before the defence filed a no-case submission dated February 5.

Property developer, lawyer charged with illegal eviction seek settlement

ABUJA

A property developer, Cecil Osakwe, and an Abuja-based lawyer, Victor Giwa have urged an FCT High Court to allow parties conclude settlement talks in the alleged illegal eviction and property damage case.

Also charged with Osakwe and Giwa is Edith Erhunmuuse.

They are charged with criminal conduct involving the forceful eviction of occupants and damage to property worth N300 million.

At the resumed hearing on Wednesday, Ahmed Raji, counsel representing Osakwe, informed the court that he was intervening

in the matter to see that the matter is settled out of court.

He told the court that parties had been engaging in talks aimed at easing the grievances of the nominal complainant and bringing the matter to a close.

"We have been trying to resolve the matter in a way to assuage our pains and to make sure this matter is brought to a closure.

"I have also spoken to the prosecution counsel, who is a very good colleague, we have done several matters together.

"I want to appeal that the question of arraignment is deferred to allow us to see the outcome of this effort" Raji said.

Responding, the prosecution counsel, Aderonke Ima-

na confirmed what the senior counsel told the court.

Imana however, told the court that the behaviour of the 2nd defendant, Victor Giwa does not show that he wanted Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

"Yesterday, I was served with three different processes by the 2nd defendant (Giwa).

She further urged the court to allow the bench warrant issued on both Giwa and the 3rd defendant last sitting still continue on the 3rd defendant because she is still not in court.

Responding, Raji warned Giwa that, not with standing that he is speaking on both of first (Osakwe) and Giwa (2nd defendant), that he can never trade

his integrity because of one case.

"I will not soil my hands and integrity on one case.

"If they, I repeat, if they try to defraud me, I will be the first to go against them, I will not compromise my conscience or reputation.

"I am making the promise here in the open court" Raji said.

Giwa, who represented himself in court, then told the court that he aligned with the senior advocate (Raji).

He promised to be of good behaviour and apologised for his absence at the last meeting which brought issuance of a bench warrant on him.

"I am in court and ready to abide by the settlement initiative.

Man, 29, in court for allegedly stealing wires worth N250,000

LAGOS

The police in Lagos on Wednesday charged a 29-year-old man, Joshua Adebayo, before an Ejigbo Magistrates' Court in Lagos, for allegedly stealing electrical wires from street lights.

The defendant, whose residential address was not provided, is standing trial on a two-count charge of stealing and causing a breach of peace.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The prosecutor, ASP Benedict Aigbokhan, told the court that the defendant committed the offences on April 24 at about 4.00 p.m. at Glory Estate, Isheri Oshun, Lagos.

He alleged that the defendant conducted himself in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace by cutting electri-

cal wires from street lights belonging to Mr Adeniyi Lawal.

Aigbokhan alleged that the defendant cut and stole 3x2.5mm electrical wires from the streetlights, worth N250,000.

The offences contravene the provisions of sections 168(d) and 287 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

Section 168(d) prescribes payment of a fine or three months imprisonment for breach of the peace, while Section 287 prescribes three years imprisonment for stealing.

The Magistrate, Mrs K.A. Dosumu, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N200,000 with two sureties in like sum.

She ordered that the sureties must show evidence of tax payment to the Lagos State Government.

The court adjourned the case until May 19, for mention.

Farm manager jailed 8 months for stealing 30 crates of eggs

KADUNA

A Kaduna Magistrates' Court on Wednesday sentenced a 27-year-old farm manager, Israel Tony, to eight months in prison for stealing 30 crates of eggs.

Tony, a resident of Barnawa Kaduna, was charged with stealing.

In his ruling, the Magistrate, Ibrahim Emmanuel, sentenced Tony to eight months imprisonment without an option of fine.

Emmanuel also ordered him to pay N243, 000 to the complainant as compensation.

Earlier, The Prosecutor, Insp. Chidi Leo, told the court that the convict committed the offence sometime between

February and April at Maraba Rido Kaduna.

Leo said Williams Dogo, of Sabon Tasha Kaduna, reported the matter at Sabon Tasha Police Station on April 22.

He said that the convict who was hired as a manager at the complainant's farm stole 30 crates of eggs.

He said the convict was arrested when the complainant noticed some irregularities in the account book.

Leo further said the convict confessed to the crime when arrested, adding that he sold the stolen eggs to one Bello Aminu at large.

The prosecutor said that the offence contravened the Penal Code of Kaduna State, 2017.

Russia scales back Moscow Victory Day parade, blaming threat from Ukraine

Russia's Victory Day parade in Moscow on 9 May will be scaled back this year because of a "terrorist threat" from Ukraine, the Kremlin has said.

"All measures are being taken to minimise the danger," said President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

Russia's military explained that the annual commemorations of Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two would not feature military vehicles or cadets due to the "current operational situation".

Ukraine has recently intensified its strikes deep inside Russia, more than four years into Russia's full-scale invasion. Kyiv says it is hitting legitimate military targets, and in turn accuses Moscow of at-

tacking civilians in Ukraine.

Peskov told reporters on Wednesday that "the Kyiv regime, which is losing ground on the battlefield every day, has now launched into full-scale terrorist activity".

"Therefore, given this terrorist threat, all measures are, of course, being taken to minimise the danger," he said, stressing that the parade would still be held on the Red Square.

Putin revived the old Soviet practice of parading heavy military hardware in Red Square in 2008 to demonstrate Russia's "growing defence capability".

Last year, more than 20 world leaders were in Moscow for lavish commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the Nazi defeat in 1945 which included an array of modern

armoury, including tanks and drones.

In its statement late on Tuesday, the Russian defence ministry said this year's parade would include representatives of all branches of Russia's armed forces and a colourful fly-past. However, it made clear that "cadets from Suvorov military schools, Nakhimov [naval] schools, and cadet corps, as well as a column of military equipment will not participate in the military parade this year".

Footage would also be shown on national TV, it said, of Russian military personnel "carrying out tasks in the special military operation zone" - a reference to how Moscow officially terms its invasion.

Steve Rosenberg: Kremlin's tightening grip on internet fu-

els Russian discontent

Russia has been changing traditional parade formats in recent years - but it is the first time since the invasion of Ukraine that armoured columns will not be rolling on the Red Square.

First reports that this year's event would be scaled down emerged on social media earlier this month, with several pro-Kremlin military bloggers writing about a growing threat of Ukrainian long-range aerial attacks.

"Imagine, 'Parade, stand at attention', and then a missile threat is announced. It would be a significant blow in terms of media coverage, even if nothing hits," blogger Ilya Tumanov was quoted as saying by Russian media.



80TH ANNIVERSARY:

Lavish commemorations were held in Moscow last year to mark the 80th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany.

Former US officials criticise Pentagon silence on deadly Iran school attack

Five former US officials, including a former top military lawyer, have criticised the Pentagon for not acknowledging potential American involvement in a deadly strike on an Iranian school earlier this year.

Some of those officials said it was highly unusual not to release even basic details of the strike after such a length of time.

A missile hit a primary school in Minab during the opening salvos of the US-Israeli war on February 28, killing 168 people including around 110 children according to Iranian officials.

In the two months since then the Pentagon has said only that the incident is under investigation.

US media reported in early March that US military investigators believed American forces were likely responsible for hitting the school unintentionally but had not

reached a final conclusion.

Asked a series of questions by the BBC about the strike and the accusations of a lack of transparency, a Pentagon official said "this incident is currently under investigation," adding that more details would be provided when they became available.

The BBC has reviewed three historical cases in which civilians were killed during US military operations and in each case significantly more information had been released by the Pentagon within less than a month.

The current US position "strikingly departs from the standard response," said Lt Col Rachel E VanLandingham, a retired Judge Advocate General in the US Air Force and former senior legal adviser at US Central Command during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Administrations in the past

at least demonstrated fidelity, a commitment to the law of war," said VanLandingham, who argued what was "missing" from the administration's statements was a commitment to accountability and "importantly to ensure this doesn't happen again".

President Trump said on 7 March that in his "opinion" Iran was to blame for the Minab strike, without providing evidence. Days later, when asked about video showing a US Tomahawk hitting the military base next to the school, he said: "I haven't seen it" and claimed without evidence that Iran had Tomahawk missiles.

On 11 March, when asked about reports that an initial military probe had found that the US hit the school, Trump said: "I don't know about it".

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth was asked by the BBC on

4 March about the strike and said: "All I can say is that we're investigating that. We of course never target civilian targets".

The US Department of Defense has declined to answer multiple questions about the strike. It has repeatedly declined to answer whether the Iranian military base next to the school was one of its pre-planned targets on 28 February, despite speaking publicly about pre-planned targets or operations in dozens of other instances in the war.

Last month, the BBC independently confirmed video showing a US Tomahawk missile striking the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) base next to the school. US media reports quoted unnamed military officials saying a preliminary inquiry had determined a US missile struck the school. The reports said this was due to outdated target coordinates supplied by a US intelligence agency.

Will King Charles's US visit lead to lasting reset in relations with UK?

The jokes landed, the warm words resonated, the pageantry looked good on the evening news.

But as the applause fades and the plates are cleared from the White House banquet, what from the King's historic visit to the United States will sustain? How much of the pomp will translate into politics?

Before King Charles arrived in the US, British diplomats were pragmatic about how much the state visit could achieve. They knew it could not reset the UK-US relationship entirely. The differences over Iran, Nato, Ukraine, trade and President Donald Trump's rhetorical barbs against Sir Keir Starmer were too deep to be overcome by one royal tour.

Diplomats hoped instead the visit could at the very least change the tone and lower the temperature between London and Washington.

Sir David Manning, a former UK ambassador to the US, told the BBC before the trip the King was "a stabiliser, a shock absorber" who could "provide a better climate for re-engaging with the Trump administration over some of the very difficult bilateral issues".

To that end, the King may have achieved his task.

With a charm and humour that many British politicians would envy, he used his two speeches to praise the US, its people and its leaders in a way that perhaps only an outsider could venture.

His gift for the president of an "HMS Trump" ship's bell was a masterstroke of deft diplomacy.

And before an audience that is so polarised, the King gently reminded Americans

of where they came from and what united them as a nation. He spoke of "the living mosaic of the United States", praising it and the UK both as "vibrant, diverse and free societies".

The Republican senator and Trump supporter, Lindsey Graham, said the King had given a "much needed morale boost" for US politicians.

"Most members of Congress feel better after the speech than they did before," he said on social media. "I will admit it was a bit odd that the unifying feeling had to come from the King of England... but so be it!"

Trump was presented with a bell from the HMS Trump during the state dinner.

The King's second task was to try to pour some oil on turbulent political waters across the Atlantic.

He went about this by making a virtue of past differences, saying the strength of the relationship was demonstrated by its ability to overcome disagreements.

"Ours is a partnership born out of dispute, but no less strong for it," he told Congress. "We can perhaps agree that we do not always agree."

With such words, the King was attempting to frame the current diplomatic rows in a broader, historical context. The hope among British diplomats is that idea will sink in.

Then His Majesty cut to the chase.

Amid the self-deprecating humour and romp through history, the King landed some hard arguments.

Nato, he said, had not only supported the US "shoulder to shoulder" after the 9/11 attacks, it also helps us "meet the challenges of an increasingly complex and contested world".

Last Kenyan officers leave Haiti as new international security initiative begins

The last contingent of Kenyan police officers has left Haiti, bringing an end to the UN-backed Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS), that's been in place since 2024.

Haitian authorities expressed their gratitude to the Kenyan officers at a departure ceremony on in the capital Port-au-Prince on Monday.

Kenya's mission objective was to help the Haitian government drive out violent gangs that had taken control of Port-au-Prince and vital infrastructure.

But the MSS faced enormous obstacles, including a lack of personnel and funding. Projected to have a budget of \$600 million, only about two-thirds of that came through. As a result, the operation struggled with limited equipment

and intelligence capabilities.

Kenya had also promised 1,000 officers but only 800 were ever deployed.

The mission also generated controversy, with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving its officers. While some cases were substantiated and victims received assistance, Kenyan authorities denied any wrongdoing.

The MSS is being replaced by a new international security initiative, the Gang Suppression Force, approved by the UN last year.

"When Haiti needed support most, Kenya stepped up," the GSF said in a statement. "T_his commitment to peace and service beyond borders leaves a lasting legacy."

Unlike the Kenyan mission, the GSF will work with Haitian police and its armed forces.

Foreign

NEWS

**GUNFIRE IN BAMAKO:**

Explosions and gunfire were reported in the capital, Bamako (pictured above) last weekend

France urges citizens to leave Mali after rebel attacks

France has urged its citizens to leave Mali "as soon as possible", after a weekend of co-ordinated attacks by separatist fighters and Islamist militants.

In an update on Wednesday, the advice also warned French citizens not to travel to the West African nation, describing the situation as "extremely volatile".

Explosions and sustained gunfire were reported across the country, including the capital, Bamako on Saturday. In Kati, the defence leader Sadio Camara was killed in an apparent suicide bombing by militants, while in the north, separatist forces have taken control of the city of Kidal.

Mali's military leader Gen Assimi Goïta said the security situation in the country was under control.

Speaking in public for the first time on Tuesday evening, he said the army had dealt a "violent blow" to the attackers, and signalled operations were still ongoing.

The spokesperson for one of

the rebel groups, the ethnic Tuareg separatist Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), on Wednesday vowed "the regime will fall, sooner or later".

Speaking to AFP news agency during a visit to Paris, Mohamed Elmaouloud Ramadane said the rebels intended to take control of several other northern towns - Gao, Timbuktu and Menaka - following their success in Kidal.

The foreign ministry of France, Mali's former colonial power, said: "French nationals are advised to make arrangements to leave Mali temporarily as soon as possible on the commercial flights that are still available."

Pending their departure, they should stay at home, limit their movements and follow instructions from local authorities, it said, adding that they should also keep their relatives informed.

"Travel to Mali is still strongly discouraged, regardless of the reason."

The UK has also advised "against all travel to Mali due

to the unpredictable security conditions", and asked its citizens to leave.

The travel guidelines - which have been in place since the weekend - told British citizens in Mali to "leave immediately by commercial flight if you judge it safe to do so".

It also warned them not to travel by land to neighbouring countries, deeming it "too dangerous" due to what it called "terrorist attacks along national highways".

"If you choose to remain in Mali, you do so at your own risk. You should have a personal emergency plan that does not rely on the UK government," the foreign office added.

Bamako International Airport is currently open, but travellers have been warned to check the latest information in case of delays or cancellations.

The US embassy in Mali said it was continuing to "closely monitor" the situation, and told citizens to "shelter in place, remain alert... and avoid areas where security operations may

be under way".

On Saturday, fighting was reported in Bamako, Kati, home to a major military base outside the capital, as well as in Gao and Kidal in the north, and the central cities of Sèvre and Mopti. Clashes reportedly continued into Sunday in Kidal and Kati.

Reports suggest the assault by the FLA was primarily focused on northern areas claimed as parts of a Tuareg homeland, while the jihadist group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) staged simultaneous attacks on multiple locations across the country.

Mali is currently ruled by a military junta led by Goïta, who first seized power in a coup in 2020, promising to restore security and push back armed groups.

The junta had popular support when it took power, promising to deal with the long-running security crisis prompted by the Tuareg rebellion in the north, which was then hijacked by Islamist militants.

Russian paramilitary carried out air strikes in Mali as rebels advanced, footage shows

A Russian paramilitary launched air strikes against rebel forces near Mali's capital Bamako, video footage shows, following a shock offensive against the ruling military government.

Jihadist and Tuareg separatist forces on Saturday carried out attacks across Mali and killed the country's Defence Minister Sadio Camara. Russian forces claimed up to 12,000 fighters took part in the offensive.

The Kremlin-controlled Africa Corps, which supports Malian military operations, has posted several videos since Saturday showing air strikes and attack helicopters engaging with rebel troops. BBC Verify located the clips to the town of Kati, around 20km (12 miles) from Bamako.

Despite the show of force, the mercenaries confirmed that they have pulled out of Kidal in northern Mali, which housed significant numbers of troops and was at the core of the military's operations in the region. Verified footage now shows rebels roaming the base.

Mali has fought a long-running conflict against a broad array of rebel groups for more than a decade. Military leaders seized power in 2020 after accusing the civilian administration of failing to properly manage the security situation.

Since then the military has had limited success targeting the al-Qaeda linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) group and the separatist Azawad Liberation Front (FLA), with Bamako coming under a blockade late last year.

But the latest attacks mark a "major escalation in the conflict" between the military government and the rebels, said Jean-

Hervé Jezequel, Sahel director with the International Crisis Group. Fighting has been recorded across the country, with BBC Verify confirming 22 videos showing rebel movements in seven locations since Saturday.

"Whereas JNIM's strategy initially relied primarily on conquering rural or peripheral areas, it now also targets major cities," Jezequel said.

In Saturday's attack, rebels targeted the defence minister's residence in Kati. A government spokesperson said Camara was killed in a firefight after a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden vehicle into his home.

Satellite images showed that the area was heavily damaged in the attack, with Camara's property completely leveled in the explosion and extensive damage to the rest of the block.

The Africa Corps responded to the attacks on Kati with a series of airstrikes. Drone footage showed a dramatic missile attack on a convoy of rebel pickup trucks as they sped along a highway on the outskirts of the town, with a fireball erupting as they were hit by the attack.

Another clip filmed from the cockpit of an attack helicopter showed missiles being launched at targets on the ground, while another from the outskirts of the town showed smoke rising after an attack by a Russian helicopter.

Russia's Wagner Group mercenaries arrived in Mali in 2021 in the lead-up to the withdrawal of French troops amid a breakdown in relations between the ruling junta and the West. They were replaced by the Africa Corps, which is directly controlled by Moscow, amid Kremlin moves to curb the independence of Russian mercenary groups.

Ugandan authorities arrest dozens of foreigners in possible human trafficking case

As Uganda presses ahead with its crackdown on illegal migration, authorities have arrested dozens of foreigners since Monday.

The latest operation, in which at least 231 were detained, targeted a group of people living in the north of the country, and another group living in a closed compound in the capital, Kampala.

Simon Peter Mundeysi, Uganda's Immigration Department spokesperson, said, "these people were found without anything at all. No passports, no ID, nothing. They were only with their computers and that apartment place was self-contained. It had a restaurant in there, it had a pool table in there, it had all sorts of things and these people were restricted, they wouldn't move out."

"They wouldn't be allowed entry. No access and no exit was allowed," he added.

The foreign ministry has

suggested that human traffickers and cyber scam operations may have been involved with their entry to the country.

Mundeysi said, "first of all, coming in they do not come as a group, they come in as individuals. Somebody comes in as an individual and enters the country. So upon entry here now they group themselves into that illegal big group we found yesterday."

The official said the foreigners were most likely lured into Uganda with job promises and had their passports taken away from them.

"We are looking for the boss who has their passports and also the boss who knows their terms of their stay here," Mundeysi explained.

Authorities say there are now several categories of foreigners held for questioning, including suspected trafficking victims, perpetrators, and those who simply overstayed their visas.

Israeli 'double-tap' strike kills three rescue workers in Lebanon, officials say

The Israeli military says it struck Hezbollah infrastructure sites in southern Lebanon on Tuesday

Two successive Israeli air strikes on a building in southern Lebanon killed nine people on Tuesday, including three emergency workers, Lebanese officials say, in what the country's prime minister described as a "war crime".

The Lebanese health ministry said the three members of the Lebanese Civil Defense, a state-run emergency service, had been sent to rescue those wounded in the first strike in the town of Majdal Zoun. They were trapped under rubble caused by the second strike and later confirmed dead.

The ministry did not identify

the six other fatalities. Two Lebanese army soldiers were also wounded in the attack.

The Israeli military has been approached for comment.

It has previously failed to explain attacks on health professionals while they were on rescue missions. The tactic, known as "double tap", sees an initial attack followed by a second or more, often hitting civilians and rescuers. It has been used by Israel in Lebanon and Gaza.

Human rights groups say deliberate attacks on health workers could constitute a war crime.

The latest conflict between Israel and Hezbollah - the Lebanese militia and political party that is funded and armed by Iran - started on 2 March after the group fired rockets into Isra-

el, which responded with widespread air strikes and a ground invasion of southern Lebanon.

Since then, more than 2,500 people have been killed in Lebanon, including 103 health professionals, according to the Lebanese health ministry. It does not distinguish between combatants and civilians but says the number includes at least 270 women and more than 170 children.

Two civilians have been killed by Hezbollah attacks in Israel, while 16 Israeli soldiers and one civilian have been killed in Lebanon, Israeli authorities say.

The three rescue workers killed on Tuesday were Hussein Ghadbouni, Hussein Sati and Hadi Daher. Last month, the BBC spent several days with their team, which is based on Tyre, to

report on the risks emergency teams in Lebanon face amid constant Israeli attacks.

The strike happened amid a US-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon that has led to a reduction in the hostilities but failed to completely stop the war.

Israel says its actions in Lebanon are in response to what it describes as violations of the deal by Hezbollah, which was not involved in the agreement but had indicated it would abide by its terms if the ceasefire was respected by Israel.

The text of the deal gives the Israeli military the "right to take all necessary measures in self-defence, at any time, against planned, imminent, or ongoing attacks" - phrasing that is broad enough to justify any action it takes.

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EFFECTIVE FROM APRIL 14, 2026

Sports

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NFRA moves to appreciate excellent referees with awards in honour of late Presidents



SIR. KELECHI MEJEObI

An Innovation to encourage excellent performance in the referees family in Nigeria has been instituted if the latest development in the Nigeria Football Referees' Association, NFRA is anything to go by.

A statement by the Nigeria Football Referees' Association, NFRA, discloses that in order to encourage good officiating

among its members, awards for performing in various categories, meant to honour former presidents of the association who have died have come into place, courtesy of the acting President, Sir Kelechi Mejeobi.

The statement reads;
HONOURING NFRA DEPARTED FORMER PRESIDENTS WITH AWARDS FOR

REFEREES

Since the story of the Nigeria Football Referees' Association, NFRA, can't be told without mentioning the names of former leaders, especially Presidents, whose policies have brought positive developments and progress in the association.

And considering that nature has seen some of them pass on peacefully to eternal glory, the need to not only continue to remember but also honour them within the referees' family as our past heroes has become inevitable.

In view of the above, the Acting President, Sir Kelechi Mejeobi who represented the association during the recent First Year Remembrance Event of one of the late Presidents, Otunba Tade Azeze in Lagos, in fulfilment of the earlier promise to honour late Presidents of the NFRA, has

raised an ad-hoc committee with the task of coming up with procedures for; *Nomination and eventual winners of the maiden edition of Referees Awards in honour of departed presidents of the Association with the maiden edition proposed to hold at the end of the 2025/2026 football season. The Awards shall be in honour of the following*;

(a) Otunba Tade Azeze Best Referee of the Year Award (Male Category for NPFL)

(b) Col JD Yabilsu Best Assistant Referee of the Year Award (Male Category for NPFL)

(c) Prof Babatunde Esan Best Female Referee of the Year Award

(d) Chief Reuben Man-nock Best Referee of the Year Award for NNL, Northern Conference

(e) Chief Festus Okubule Best Referee of the Year Award for NNL, Southern Conference.



Ecobank partners federation to host schools chess championship

Ecobank says it is continuing to invest in young Nigerians by partnering with the Nigeria Chess Federation to host the 2026 Ecobank National Schools Team Chess Championship.

The championship is scheduled to hold from May 7 to May 8 in Lagos.

Speaking at the news conference yesterday in Lagos, Mr Adekunle Adewuyi,

Head of Education, Faith-Based and Social Services, Ecobank, said the initiative reflects the bank's commitment to education and youth development.

He described chess as more than just a game, noting that it helps young people develop critical thinking, discipline and

problem-solving skills.

According to him, the competition is designed to prepare students not only for tournaments but also for future leadership roles.

"Through this initiative, Ecobank is helping to prepare young Nigerians not just for competition, but for future leadership and workplace responsibilities," he said.

Adewuyi said participation in the championship has grown steadily, from 1,210 students in 2024 to 1,830 students from 360 schools in 2025, with even more expected this year.

He attributed the increase to growing interest among schools and acknowledged the support of partners, including Schoolmate Nigeria.

Nigeria, Egypt, Madagascar open with wins at ITTF championships

Nigeria, Egypt and Madagascar opened their 2026 ITTF World Team Championships campaigns with hard-fought victories at Copper Box Arena in London.

Egypt started strongly but had to dig deep to beat Thailand 3-1.

Madagascar's Fabio Rakotoarimanana proved decisive in a thrilling 3-2 win over Mongolia, while Nigeria edged Saudi Arabia 3-2 early Wednesday.

Nigeria's victory hinged on talisman Quadri Aruna, who inspired the comeback after youngster Matthew Kuti lost both his matches.

Aruna and Olajide Omotayo stepped up to secure the opening group win, placing Nigeria in a strong position to reach the knockout stage.

Nigeria next face top seeds Hong Kong on Thursday, before concluding group matches against South Africa on Friday.

The top two teams in each group will progress to the knockout rounds.

Madagascar's Group 3 clash with Mongolia was a rollercoaster encounter, swinging dramatically between both sides.

Rakotoarimanana and Antoine Razafinarivo gave Madagascar a 2-0 lead, but Mongolia rallied to level through Ankhbayar Bilguun and Temuulen Myandal.

"With everything at stake, Fabio held his nerve," officials said, as he beat Manlaijargal Munkh-Ochir in three tense deuce games.

In Group 6, Greece overcame a scare against Algeria to

secure a 3-1 victory.

Ioannis Sgouropoulos opened with a 3-0 win over Stephane Ouaihe, before Mehdi Bouloussa levelled after edging Panagiotis Gionis 3-2.

Milhane Jellouli threatened an upset, but Georgios Stam-atouros responded strongly to win 3-1 and restore Greece's advantage.

Gionis redeemed himself in the fourth match, defeating Ouaihe in straight games to seal victory for Greece.



QUADRI ARUNA

Wrestling: Adeniyi urges national wrestlers to make Nigeria proud in continental championship

The President, Nigeria Wrestling Federation (NWF), Adewale Adeniyi, on Wednesday in Abuja urged Nigeria's wrestlers to make the country proud in their continental competition in Egypt.

Adeniyi, who is also the Comptroller-General of Customs (CGC), expressed optimism that the wrestlers will definitely return with medals

as they prepare for the African Wrestling Championships in Alexandria, Egypt.

The president hosted athletes, coaches and officials of the federation on Tuesday before their departure to Egypt.

He said representing the national flag at a continental championship is a great responsibility and obligation placed on your shoulders.

"You are no longer representing Bayelsa, Ondo, Lagos or any other state. You are now ambassadors of the green-white-green. That is something we treasure deeply," he said.

The President urged the team to be driven by the pride of hearing the Nigerian national anthem during medal presentations.

"I want that thought to motivate you from the moment you step on Egyptian soil. Make a personal commitment that you are returning on that aircraft with medals," he said.

He said success at such tournaments would require discipline, strategy, commitment and determination, adding that the technical crew had worked hard to prepare the athletes during camp.

"There is a journey between stepping onto the mat and leaving with a medal. It takes effort, energy, discipline and commitment.



ADEKUROYE

WAFU B boosts women's football through capacity building

The West African Football Union (WAFU) B says it is undergoing a major transformation with a renewed focus on capacity building and inclusive development for women's football.

Philippe Tchere, Executive Director of WAFU B, stated this at the end of a three-day Confederation of African Football (CAF) WAFU B Women's Football Administrators' Workshop in Abuja.

Tchere lauded the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) for hosting the event, noting that the 14 participants had benefitted significantly from the training.

"Since 2024, WAFU B has been undergoing a transformation, with a strong focus on capacity building.

"Football has become increasingly modern, and if we want to reach the top, we must also look inward—at all the actors working behind the scenes.

"It is essential to equip them with the right knowledge, the latest tools, and current trends. That is the essence of the meeting.

"This is also a defining moment for women's football. We are committed to giving women's football the same level of attention and structure as the men's game," Tchere added.

On her part, Aisha Falode, an Executive Committee Member of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) and one of the participants, called for more capacity-building workshops to further enlighten women's football administrators.



WAFU B WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Sports

Go fly Nigeria flag in victory,' Adeniyi gives charge as Team Nigeria departs for African Wrestling Championships

The President Nigeria Wrestling Federation, Bashir Adewale Adeniyi MFR, PhD, has thrown his weight behind Team Nigeria as they departed Nigeria ahead of 2026 African Wrestling Championships in Alexandria, Egypt.

The contingent departed the Nnamdi Azikiwe International

Airport, Abuja, on Tuesday ahead of the event, slated for April 27 to May 2, 2026, featuring U17, U20, and Senior categories.

The contingent, which comprises ten female wrestlers and 8 male wrestlers, will compete for honours in eighteen explosive categories.

Bidding farewell to the athletes

before departure, Bashir Adewale Adeniyi, who doubles as the Comptroller General of the Nigeria Customs Service, charged the team to build on their existing dominance at the African scene.

Maintaining that the aim is to retain the Women's category of the championship, which the country has won 14 times, a re-

cord for any sporting event Nigeria has ever participated in.

"I want to appreciate all of you for the report of discipline and dedication you exhibited during your stay in camp. That is the spirit you have to showcase in Egypt."

"Heading into this championships, we are the current women champions, and we have to try our best to bring the title home for the 15th time," Adeniyi stated.

The NWF President expressed high expectations for the team to make the entire country proud, reminding the athletes that they are ambassadors of the nation.

"Continue to believe in yourselves and do your best and maintain a high level of discipline to make the country proud."

"We implore you to do your best and ensure that Nigeria's flag is hoisted in Alexandria victoriously," He said.

Meanwhile, below are the names of athletes, coaches, and officials heading for the African Wrestling Championships in Egypt

FEMALE

1. Genesis Mercy Miesinnei 50kg
2. Ogunsanya Christianah Tolulope 53kg
3. Idris Adijat Avorshai 55kg
4. Adekoye Jumoke Bukola 57kg
5. Asaolu Esther Olamide 59kg
6. Kolawole Esther 62kg
7. Adekuoroye Mercy 65kg
8. Reuben Hannah 68kg
9. Biogos Ebi 72kg
10. Ojo Damola Hannah 76kg

MALE

11. Egoli Saviour 61kg
12. Akintewe Stephen Tope 65kg
13. Erefagha Didekemei 70kg
14. Andrew Ebierelayefa Allison 74kg
15. Ulabo Solomon 79kg
16. Esemokumoh Gooddy Oyeme 86kg

17. Newlife Ebikeme oyobi 92kg
18. Onovwiomoghbw Harri-son 97kg

COACHES

19. Akuh Purity
20. Blessing Oborududu
21. Agberkeme Areh

REFEREES

22. Yusuf Usman
23. Adebisi Anthony

OFFICIALS

24. Bashir Adeniyi Adewale (President)
25. Amkpila Christopher (Vice President)
26. Daniel Baraladei Igali (UWW Member)
27. Ademisoro Oluwasegun Bode (Secretary General)



GO FLY NIGERIA FLAG TEAM

World Cup: FIFA increases financial distribution to World Cup participants by 15%

FIFA will increase payments to teams taking part in the 2026 World Cup to almost \$900 million, world soccer's governing body said on Tuesday, citing the commercial success of its expanded flagship men's tournament.

The FIFA Council, meeting in Vancouver ahead of the 76th FIFA Congress, approved a 15% increase in the resources to be distributed to all 48 participating member associations at next year's tournament in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

The total pot will rise to \$871 million, FIFA said, with each participating team receiving increased preparation money of \$2.5 million, up from \$1.5 million.

Qualification money will also increase from \$9 million to \$10 million, while FIFA said additional team contributions would include subsidies for team delegation costs and increased team ticketing allocations totalling more than \$16 million.

"FIFA is proud to be in its most solid financial position ever, enabling us to help all our Member Associations in an unprecedented way," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said.

"This is one more example of how FIFA's resources are re-invested back into the game."

The sheer scale of staging a tournament across North America, with long-haul travel, differing tax regimes and significant operational demands, had prompted unease among some participating nations.

UEFA had passed on con-

cerns from several European associations that teams could find it difficult to break even unless they progress deep into the competition.

The 2026 World Cup will be the first edition of the men's tournament to feature 48 teams, up from 32, and will be staged across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The increased distribution comes as FIFA prepares for the biggest and most commercially lucrative World Cup in history, with more teams, more matches and expanded revenue opportunities across ticketing, sponsorship and broadcast rights



Table tennis: Aruna Quadri leads Nigeria to victory at ITTF World Team Championships

Nigeria's men's table tennis team kicked off their campaign at the

ITTF World Team Championships in London with a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Saudi

Arabia,

Leading from the front, Quadri Aruna delivered an outstanding performance, winning two crucial matches to inspire Team Nigeria to a winning start in their opening group fixture.

Aruna's dominance at key moments proved decisive, as the tie remained evenly balanced throughout the encounter.

His composure under pressure ensured Nigeria stayed in contention against a determined Saudi Arabian side.

Olajide Omotayo also played a vital role, securing the third and decisive point to seal the victory for Nigeria.

The win provides a strong platform for the Nigerian team as they look to build momentum and progress further in the competition



Barau FC beat Bichi First FC to emerge Kano 2026 FA Cup winners

Barau Football Club, for the first time in their history, won the 2026 Kano State Federation Cup following an outstanding 3-2 victory over NNL side Bichi First FC.

The match was played on Monday, 27 April 2026, at the iconic Sani Abacha Stadium, witnessed by fans across the state, including Kano State FA Chairman, Sharif Rabiu Inuwa Ahlan, among others.

The Maliya Boys opened the scoring in the 7th minute through Sa'ad Tijjani, after capitalizing on a well-created chance to put Barau FC ahead.

Bichi First FC responded quickly after the break, equalizing in the 51st minute through Usman Ahmed. However, Barau FC regained the lead in the 56th minute when Sugau Aliyu converted from the penalty spot.

Bichi FC once again levelled the score in the 58th minute through Abubakar Shua'abu, but Henry Ezoenye sealed the victory with a decisive goal in the 71st minute, securing a historic triumph for Barau FC.

The Maliya Boys began their campaign at the semi-final stage, where they defeated Chanji FC 4-0 to book a place in the final, eventually going on to lift the trophy.

Under the leadership of General Manager Dominic Iorfa, Barau FC demonstrated quality, dedication, and experience to secure their first-ever Federation Cup title.

Barau FC striker Abdulmajid Aminu emerged as the top scorer of the tournament, netting two goals against Chanji FC, while the technical crew praised the team's resilience and character.

The trophy presentation was conducted by the Kano State FA Chairman, Sharif Rabiu Inuwa, and received by Barau FC captain, Usman Maidubji.

"We are very happy to win this trophy for the first time. We stayed patient and brave, and when the moment came, we took it," said captain Usman Maidubji.

Barau FC Lineup vs Bichi First FC: 24. Emeka Nwabulu (GK), 22. Sugau Aliyu, 3. Bismark Duah Dapma, 33. Jimmy Ambrose, 5. Moses Tsehuan, 8. Usman Maidubji (C), 9. Sa'ad Tijjani, 4. Ebuka Nwokorie, 7. Joseph Atule, 39. Adamu Hussein, 9. Abdulmajid Aminu.

Substitutes: 31. Oscar Destiny, 33. Nura Ibrahim, 13. Sunday Dapma, 27. Chisom Flavian, 26. Stanley Oganbor, 19. Henry Ezoenye, 34. Ibrahim Yunusa, 12. Muhammad Umar.



FC BARAU CELEBRATE KANO FA CUP TRIUMPH

FIFA considers new academy player rule for clubs, including NPFL sides

The FIFA is reportedly exploring a new regulation that could significantly reshape team selection policies across domestic leagues, including Nigeria's top-flight clubs.

The proposed rule would re-

quire clubs to give greater opportunities to young academy graduates by mandating the inclusion of at least one youth player in the starting lineup of competitive matches.

Key elements under consid-

eration include:

- Each team must start at least one player aged under 20 or 21
- The selected player must be developed within the club's own academy system

• Clubs would be discouraged from relying solely on high-cost external signings, with a stronger emphasis placed on internal player development

If approved, the policy would directly impact leagues such as the Nigeria Premier Football League, where many clubs currently depend heavily on experienced professionals and imported talent.

The move is seen as part of FIFA's broader push to strengthen youth development structures globally and ensure more pathways for academy players to transition into first-team football.

Discussions are still at an early stage, and no final decision has been announced.



CAF PRESIDENT PATRICE MOTSEPE

D'Tigress show growth despite defeat to Minnesota Lynx in WNBA tour clash

Nigeria's senior women's basketball team, D'Tigress, delivered an improved and impressive performance in their ongoing U.S. tour despite falling 88-79 to the Minnesota Lynx in a spirited exhibition encounter.

The fixture, part of a high-level preparatory series against top WNBA opposition, provided another valuable test for the African champions as they continue to fine-tune their squad ahead of major international competitions, including the FIBA Women's World Cup.

From the opening tip, D'Tigress showed greater cohesion and intent compared to their previous outing, matching the Lynx possession for possession in a fiercely contested first half. Nigeria surged into a 42-38 lead in the second quarter, an evidence of their offensive sharpness and improved defensive organization.

However, the experience and depth of the Minnesota-based franchise eventually proved decisive, as the Lynx regrouped after halftime, tightened their rotations, and executed efficiently down the stretch to secure the nine-point victory.

Leading the charge for Nigeria was captain Ezinne Kalu, who delivered a standout performance with a game-high 25 points, combining composure, perimeter shooting, and leadership. Emerging guard Gabby Williams (often referred to in reports as Gabby White) added 16 points and contributed strongly on the boards, while additional support came from key contributors across the roster, reflecting a more balanced team display.

For the Lynx, Courtney Williams impressed with 17 points on an efficient shooting night, while rookie guard Olivia Miles displayed her all-around ability with 11 points, five rebounds, and five assists.

Despite now holding a 0-2

record on the tour, the Nigerian side will take significant positives from the encounter. Their improved ball movement, defensive intensity, and ability to compete deep into games against elite opposition signal steady progress under challenging conditions.

D'Tigress will look to build on this momentum when they face the Indiana Fever on May 2, in what promises to be another crucial test of their readiness for the global stage.

Overall, while the result did not go in their favour, the performance reaffirmed D'Tigress' growing competitiveness and potential as they continue their preparations against some of the best teams in world basketball.



D'TIGRESS

Tennis: Nigeria to host four weeks of Junior ITF tournaments in Abuja, Lagos

Nigeria is set to host four weeks of Junior International

Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments in the coming months, in a significant

boost for youth tennis development in the country.

The series of tournaments will take place across Abuja and Lagos, with the events expected to attract promising young players from different parts of the world.

The first phase of the competition will be held in Abuja from June 1 to June 13, where the nation's capital will stage two legs of the J30 event.

The tournaments are expected to provide a valuable platform for emerging talents to compete for international ranking points while gaining exposure against top junior players from across the globe.

The hosting of the events further underlines Nigeria's growing status as a destination for international sporting competitions and is expected to contribute positively to the development of tennis at the grassroots level



JUNIOR ITF TOURNAMENTS



RT. HON. VICTOR OCHEI

Youth-focused reforms will grow tennis in Nigeria —Ochei

Rt. Hon. Victor Ochei, President of the Nigeria Tennis Federation (NTF), Rt. Hon. Victor Ochei, has unveiled plans by the federation's new board to boost interest in tennis among young Nigerians and drive nationwide participation in the sport.

Ochei made this known on Saturday during the Arise TV Global Sports programme, where he outlined the federation's vision for transforming tennis in Nigeria through innovative reforms and long-term development strategies.

According to him, one of the key initiatives is the creation of a central registration platform for tennis players across the country. Under the system,

every registered player will be assigned a unique identification number to help build a comprehensive national database and improve access to clubs and competitions.

"We want every registered tennis player to have a player's number. This will help us build a comprehensive compendium and also make it easier for players to access tennis clubs and competitions nationwide," he said.

Ochei also spoke on his longstanding commitment to sports development, recalling that while serving as a lawmaker in Delta State, he invested heavily in youth empowerment through sporting programmes, including sponsorship for wheelchair basketball athletes.

NBF invites 40 boxers for Commonwealth Games camping in Lagos

The technical committee of the Nigeria Boxing Federation (NBF) has invited Forty-(40) pugilists for the final phase of its 2026 Commonwealth Games open camping in Lagos.

The boxers, which are mostly finalists at the last National Boxing Open Trials held in February, consist of Twenty-(20) male and Twenty-(20) females across all the weight categories.

An official letter of invitation has been sent to the selected boxers, coaches, and other technical members. The camp will open on Friday, May 1st, the same day the pugilists are expected to arrive at the Lieutenant General Kenneth Minimah (Rtd) boxing hotel at the National Stadium in Surulere Lagos. The training ses-

sions will commence this Saturday, the 2nd of May.

The Chairman NBF technical committee Babatunde Laguda said the Federation is leaving no stone unturned to ensure the boxing contingent to the Glasgow Games gets the best of preparation.

"The NBF board under the leadership of Hon. Wale Edun has prioritized an early camping for every international event. Hence, the Nigeria Boxing Federation has taken the lead in calling athletes to camp ahead of the Commonwealth Games."

"This phase of the trials is very crucial because from the Forty boxers we have invited the Ten that will fly Nigeria's flag in Glasgow Scotland will emerge." Laguda added.



FORTY BOXERS FOR COMMONWEALTH GAMES

FEATURE



Tinubu's love for Niger Delta will engineer his massive votes in 2027 —Otuaro

SEBASTINE EBHUOMHAN

Abuja. His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, will receive massive votes from the people of the Niger Delta and be re-elected without shedding sweat, contrary to the negative expectations of the opposition.

High Chief Dennis Brutu Otuaro PhD., Administrator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) stated this in appreciation of the devotion of Mr. President to both infrastructural and human capital development of the Niger Delta, which the PAP is spearheading through a dedicated reformation of the lives of ex-agitators and impacted communities.

Reflecting on the huge progress the Programme has made in just two years under his leadership, Otuaro hailed Tinubu as a lover of the Niger Delta and people of the region, and added that the people are patiently waiting to seal his re-election bid with massive votes in 2027.

While it is on record that President Tinubu increased the funding of the Programme in order for it to meet the yearnings of the people and communities in a recessive global economy, which allowed the Otuaro administration to pursue the an all-inclusive human capital development of the region, thereby enabling thousands and more of youths to benefit from the Programme's foreign and local scholarship education policy, the president also ensured the sound management of the Programme through the excellent supervision from the National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu.

Dr. Otuaro said, "It is on record that since His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic, came into power in 2023, his love for Niger Delta and the people of the region has been massive, uncommon and incomparable. He has extended his love by way of support to the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Without the huge support of Mr. President and the excellent supervision of the National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, we would not have achieved all that we have achieved today."

Established by the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to engage ex-agitators of the Niger Delta Region who laid down their arms in a strategic move aimed at stabilising and boosting the national economy and now, in the 17th year, under the leadership of Dr. Otuaro, the Programme has engendered sustainable peace, security, and development in the Niger Delta by serving as a key catalyst for the socio-economic transformation of the oil-rich region through the



His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR



High Chief Dennis Brutu Otuaro PhD

human capital development of ex-agitators and youths of crude oil and gas-impacted communities.

Since he assumed office in March 2024 as the Administrator of the PAP, Dr. Otuaro has embarked on a conscious, deliberate and planned redirection of the Programme to its original vision: the reformation and empowerment of ex-agitators and people of impacted communities through dialogue, consultation, transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and rule of law in the relentless pursuit of education, vocational skills training, after-training empowerment, peace building, conflict resolution, job placement and beneficial partnerships, which are the key necessities for sustainable security, peace, and development in the Niger Delta.

The redirection of the Programme and its sound management have gladdened the hearts of leaders and followers in the region as well as the beneficiaries, who are patiently counting down the timetable to the next presidential election in February 2027 to re-elect Tinubu and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) with massive votes.

Otuaro added, "Niger Delta people are people who appreciates love. They are aware of and thankful for all the ongoing infrastructural and human capital development projects and

programmes going on in the region under Mr. President's Renewed Hope Agenda. They are waiting to repay him with massive votes next year.

"President Tinubu's love for Niger Delta and Niger Delta people will engineer massive votes for him that will translate into a sweatless re-election."

Going forward, we have repositioned the Programme for better service delivery that would capture more beneficiaries through expansion especially with renewed attention to the youth and women

Under the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Tinubu, Dr. Otuaro's administration has deployed about 8, 205 education scholarship beneficiaries to local and foreign schools with over 223 in the United Kingdom alone, undergoing various undergraduate and post-graduate studies in critical disciplines, thereby producing a community of intellectuals and experts that would unleash development on the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole.

Last year, 2025, the Programme trained batches of hundreds of participants in its Leadership, Alternative Dispute Resolution and Mediation Training aimed at repositioning Niger Delta youths for leadership with the capacity for alternative resolution of issues at community level. More are expected to be trained this year.

The Otuaro administration has recorded more success in the strategic placement of a total of 27 qualified indigenes of the Niger Delta in good jobs since assumption of office. He has promised not to relent this year.

Furthermore, the PAP Rehabilitation Department is presently pursuing the rehabilitation of Niger Delta youths overwhelmed by drugs. In Warri and Lagos particularly, 100 youths are undergoing rehabilitation from hard drugs and other psychosocial substances such as cocaine, heroin, cannabis, tramadol etc.

It is documented by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and other authorities that the high rate of hard and psychosocial drugs consumption amongst Nigerian youths is responsible for the high-level of criminality and anti-social vices at the various communities.

"I must emphasise again that the huge success we have achieved in the past two years was because of the massive support Mr. President, who graciously increased the funding that enabled our administration's strategic, broad-based, inclusive, result-oriented policies and reforms anchored on consultation, conflict-resolution, counselling, and collaboration

"Going forward, we have repositioned the Programme for better service delivery that would capture more beneficiaries through expansion especially with renewed attention to the youth and women," Otuaro concluded.

Going by the revised timetable of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the 2027 general elections to elect the president, vice president, lawmakers of both chambers of the National Assembly as well as lawmakers of the various State Houses of Assembly will come up in January. Particularly, the presidential election that would elect the president and vice president will be held in Nigeria on 16th January.