

Rotary targets 2029 for global polio eradication —General Secretary

BENIN CITY

The General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of Rotary International and the Rotary Foundation, John Hewko, has disclosed that the global body is targeting 2029 to completely eradicate polio worldwide, even as it intensifies vaccination campaigns and awareness drives across Nigeria and other

high-risk countries.

Hewko, who spoke during a press conference in Benin City ahead of the forthcoming Rotary International Conference hosted by District 9141 said Rotary and its partners would remain committed to the anti-polio fight until the disease is eliminated globally.

According to him, despite major successes recorded across the world, polio remains

endemic in only two countries — Afghanistan and Pakistan largely due to insecurity, misinformation, and cultural resistance to vaccination.

“We’re currently projecting that we hope to eradicate polio in 2029. But until we eradicate it everywhere, children everywhere must continue to be vaccinated because the virus does not recognise borders,” Hewko said.

He revealed that Rotary Inter-

national and its partners, including the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have spent over \$3 billion since 1985 to combat the disease globally.

Hewko noted that the challenge in countries where polio cases persist is largely tied to insecurity and difficulty accessing children in remote areas.

“You cannot vaccinate a child by Zoom. You have to

physically get to the child and administer two drops of the vaccine,” he stated.

He explained that vaccinators now adopt several innovative methods to reach children, including immunising them at border crossings, bus terminals, toll gates, markets, and rural settlements.

Addressing concerns over vaccine hesitancy and misconceptions in some northern

Nigerian communities, Rotary leaders said aggressive grassroots sensitisation campaigns had become critical to the success of immunisation efforts.

District 9141 Governor of Rotary and convener of the conference, Anthony Woyingren who also addressed journalists, said many parents reject vaccines due to ignorance and misinfor-

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#200

Nigeria losing devt funds to illicit financial flows —FG, CSOs

ABUJA

The Federal Government, anti-corruption agencies and civil society organisations have raised fresh concerns over the growing threat of illicit financial flows to Nigeria’s economy, warning that the country risks losing critical resources needed for

development unless stronger collaboration and enforcement measures are adopted.

The warning came on Thursday in Abuja during the public presentation and validation of a research report assessing Nigeria’s legal and institutional framework for combating illicit financial flows (IFFs).

Stakeholders at the event

stressed that corruption, tax evasion, money laundering, cybercrime and terrorism financing continue to drain public resources, weaken institutions and undermine economic growth across the country.

Executive Director of the Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), David Ugolor, said tackling il-

licit financial flows required collective action involving government institutions, civil society groups, investigative journalists, academia, development partners and citizens.

According to him, government agencies alone cannot effectively address the challenge without stronger institutional collaboration and public ac-

countability.

He described the event as an important platform for validating research findings, promoting dialogue among stakeholders and identifying reform priorities aimed at strengthening Nigeria’s anti-corruption framework.

Also speaking, Abdullahi Shehu urged stakeholders to focus on practical reforms capable of curbing illicit fi-

nancial flows, noting that the participation of anti-corruption agencies, the media and civil society groups reflected a shared commitment to protecting Nigeria’s resources.

The Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit, Hafsat Bakari, described illicit financial

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BNC VISITS EDSIEC:

General Manager, Bendel Newspapers Corporation (BNC), publisher of *The Observer* titles, Hon. Peter Odiboh (right) presenting a copy of *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper to the Chairman of Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), Hon. Jonathan Aifuobokhan when the management team of BNC visited the commission recently.

BNC seeks strategic partnerships, reassures on improved service delivery

BENIN CITY

The management team of Bendel Newspapers Corporation (BNC), publishers of *The Observer* titles, has paid courtesy visits to the Edo State Specialist Hospital and the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC), with both institutions expressing readiness to partner the organisation.

During the visits, the General Manager of BNC, Hon. Peter Odiboh, who led the delegation, said the engagements were aimed at fostering a mutually beneficial partnership with the two state establishments.

He informed the management teams that the visit also served to announce BNC’s return to full production, with improved service delivery and

enhanced operational capacity.

Odiboh also used the occasion to solicit patronage for the corporation’s printing services.

At the Edo State Specialist Hospital, the Managing Director, Dr. Antonia Enibokun Njoku, commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for reviving the state-owned newspaper publishing company.

She expressed optimism that with the current leadership direction, *The Observer* titles would reclaim their position as a leading brand in the newspaper industry.

Similarly, the Chairman of EDSIEC, Hon. Jonathan Aifuobokhan, acknowledged the important role of BNC in information dissemination and public communication, noting its relevance to governance and civic engagement.

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Fubara denies defection, reaffirms loyalty to APC

ELIZABETH AGBOEGBULEM

PORT HARCOURT

Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, has dismissed speculations that he defected from the All Progressives Congress (APC) to the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Governor Fubara clarified his political stance during an inspection tour of the newly

constructed General Hospital and the remodelled Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Rumuigbo, Obiakpor Local Government Area of the state.

The governor said reports circulating in sections of the media suggesting that he had dumped the APC were false, insisting that he remained committed to the ruling party.

"I know there have been a lot of drama in the media; one story or another. I am a

member of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and nothing has changed. People should stop using whatever situation they pick up from social media or their own interpretation of events to present me wrongly.

"I have not gone anywhere; I am still a member of the APC and I remain a member. Whatever happens, what is important is supporting the overall interest of the party," he said.

Fubara was conducted around the health facilities by the Director of Medical Services in the Rivers State Ministry of Health, Dr Vincent Wachuk-

wu, who took him through the hospital wards, conference hall, ICT centre, students' hostel, staff quarters and other sections of the facilities.

The governor expressed satisfaction with the completion of the projects, noting that they were initiated to address pressing healthcare challenges in the area.

According to him, the decision to rehabilitate the Neuropsychiatric Hospital followed concerns over mental healthcare, while the absence of a General Hospital in the area also necessitated urgent intervention.

"This very project, if you could remember, when we came in, we had an issue that required our sudden visit and it had to do with mental health. When we came here for inspection of the rehabilitation centre the board was trying to put together, we discovered that there were more issues beyond mental health.

"We did not have a General Hospital to serve the people within this area. The closest medical facility was the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), which is far from here.

"We felt that with the space available within this compound, it would be proper to also establish a General Hospital here to cater for neighbouring communities up to Rumuola, Rumuolumeni and surrounding areas.

"Today, to the glory of God, the project is fully completed. It is not 95 per cent completed; it is 100 per cent completed.

"We are happy because it is a promise made and a promise fulfilled. What is important is doing what will positively impact the lives of our people," he said.

Nigeria losing devt funds to illicit...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

flows as a major threat to governance, sustainable development and economic stability.

She said such financial crimes weaken institutions, reduce government revenue and limit the ability of authorities to provide essential public services.

Bakari noted that while Nigeria had made progress in strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks against corruption, financial crimes and money laundering, the major challenge remained effective implementation, stronger inter-agency coordination and improved accountability.

Represented by Dr Kehinde Oginni, Head of Asset Recovery and Enforcement at the NFIU, Bakari reaffirmed the agency's commitment to working with government institutions, civil society organisations, the private sector and the media to protect Nigeria's economic future.

The Inspector-General of Police, Olatunji Disu, also warned that illicit financial flows pose serious threats to economic stability, governance and national security.

Represented by Commissioner of Police Arimu Bamidele, the police chief said financial crimes linked to corruption, cyber-

crime, tax evasion and terrorism financing continued to deprive developing nations of resources needed for infrastructure and economic growth.

He stressed the need for stronger laws, intelligence sharing, deployment of technology, improved inter-agency cooperation and citizen participation to combat evolving financial crimes.

Disu commended ANEEJ and the European Union for supporting the research initiative, adding that the findings would strengthen policy reforms and institutional responses to economic crimes.

Similarly, Chairman of the Code of Conduct Bureau, Abdullahi Bello, said illicit financial flows continued to deprive developing countries of resources needed for infrastructure, healthcare, education and security.

Represented by Mrs Munirah Elabor, Bello warned that corruption, tax evasion and abuse of office undermine the rule of law and weaken public institutions.

Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, Musa Aliyu, described illicit financial flows as a major challenge affecting economic growth and worsening hardship among citizens.

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mation, stressing that awareness remained the most potent weapon against resistance.

"If you have ever seen a polio victim, you will understand why this fight is personal to many of us. Two drops of vaccine can save a child from lifelong deformity," he said.

He recalled leading a three-day World Polio Day campaign in Bayelsa State, where Rotary members moved through markets, health centres, and riverine communities educating women and immunising children.

According to him, Rotary also deploys incentives under its "Polio Plus" initiative to encourage compliance, including the distribution of mosquito nets, Vitamin A supplements, and other welfare items alongside vaccines.

Rotary leaders further used the occasion to highlight the organisation's humanitarian interventions across Nigeria, particularly in youth empowerment, healthcare, water supply, sanitation, and education.

The district governor disclosed that Rotary clubs across Rivers

State and other parts of the country had embarked on extensive vocational training programmes aimed at reducing youth unemployment and criminality.

He said youths are being trained in hairdressing, barbing, information technology, and other practical skills to enable them become self-reliant.

"Everybody cannot get white-collar jobs. But when people acquire skills, there is no way they will go hungry," he said.

The governor also listed several community projects executed by Rotary clubs, including the provision of solar-powered boreholes in Edo and Rivers states, rehabilitation of school sanitation facilities, and construction of classroom blocks with solar-powered learning equipment.

He revealed that Rotary International had also secured a \$2 million intervention fund to combat maternal and child mortality in Nigeria.

"We do not want a situation where women die while giving birth. Rotary will continue to intervene in areas that directly affect communities," he added.



NATIONAL HEALTH FELLOWS GRADUATION:

L-R: Dr Ehannire Theodore Osas, Edo State Coordinator, National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA); Dr Cyril Adams-Oshiomhole, Edo State Commissioner for Health and Coordinator, Office of the First Lady, Edo State, Mrs Edesili Okpebholo-Anani, during the National Health Fellows graduation and onboarding ceremony in Benin City.

Oborewori charges new Per Secretaries on accountability

AJUWA VICTOR

ASABA

Delta State Governor, Hon. Sheriff Oborewori, has charged newly sworn-in Permanent Secretaries in the state civil service to uphold professionalism, integrity and accountability in the discharge of their duties.

Speaking during the swearing-in ceremony at the Unity Hall, Government House, Asaba, the governor said the appointments were made to fill existing vacancies and were

based strictly on merit, seniority, professionalism and service records.

Oborewori stated that the appointees emerged from a pool of competent officers and noted that every local government area in the state now has representation at the level of Permanent Secretary.

According to him, the development reflects his administration's commitment to fairness, inclusiveness and equity in public service appointments.

He explained that the appointments were in line with

Section 208(4) of the 1999 Constitution, which provides that such appointments should reflect the diversity of the people within the state and promote a sense of belonging.

The governor assured that as more vacancies emerge, qualified officers would continue to be appointed based on competence, ethical conduct and professionalism.

Oborewori also disclosed that his administration recently approved the promotion of several deserving officers as part of efforts to strengthen the welfare and career progression of civil servants in the state.

Addressing the newly

sworn-in officials, the governor described their elevation as a reward for years of dedication, sacrifice and hard work.

He, however, cautioned them against seeing the appointments as a final destination, stressing that their new responsibilities demand greater commitment and accountability.

"The reward for hard work is more work," he said, urging them to continue to demonstrate discipline, integrity, dynamism and dedication in service.

The governor warned that Permanent Secretaries, as accounting officers of their ministries, would be held accountable for lapses in service delivery.

CSO raises alarm over surveillance of Journalists ahead of 2027 polls

ABUJA

Civil Society Organisation, Spaces for Change (S4C), has raised concerns over increasing digital surveillance targeting journalists and civic actors ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The concerns were highlighted in a report titled "Victims Speak: Techniques, Patterns and Impacts of Targeted Surveillance in Nigeria," unveiled by the Executive Director of S4C, Mrs Victoria Ibezim-Ohaeri.

According to her, fear of surveillance is creating anxiety among journalists, activists and ordinary citizens ahead of the elections.

Ibezim-Ohaeri said many Nigerians were increasingly afraid to openly express political views or publicly support candidates because of fears of monitoring, intimidation and reprisals.

She warned that shrinking civic space and rising digital surveillance could undermine democratic participation and electoral outcomes in 2027.

"This report was deliberately released ahead of the elections to encourage journalists and civic actors to continue speaking against abuses and injustice.

"We want civic actors and journalists not to be afraid to report issues affecting society because silence only emboldens perpetrators.

"Technology should be deployed responsibly, with full respect for privacy rights, civic freedoms and democratic participation," she said.

Technology Officer at S4C, Mr Michael Itegbé, disclosed

that the report documented 18 cases involving journalists, activists and protest organisers allegedly subjected to unlawful surveillance.

He said findings revealed that surveillance technologies acquired for national security purposes were increasingly being diverted to monitor journalists and suppress dissent.

According to him, spyware, GSM interception systems and social media monitoring tools were among the technologies commonly used against media practitioners and civic actors.

Editorial



Flood threat looms: Nigeria must act before disaster strikes

On April 15, 2026, the Minister of Water Resources, Prof. Joseph Utsev warned Nigerians to the imminent flooding expected this year, with no fewer than 14,118 communities across 266 Local Government Areas already classified as high risk.

The figures are troubling. A further 15,597 communities fall within the moderate risk category, while 923 are considered low risk. Edo State, notably, appears across all three categories, a clear indication that vulnerability varies widely within the state.

The warning, presented during the unveiling of the 2026 Annual Flood Outlook by the Hydrological Services Agency, is not alarmist; it is rooted in scientific forecasts and careful hydrological analysis.

What makes the situation more

worrisome is that the causes of flooding are no longer unfamiliar. Intense rainfall, poor drainage systems, unchecked urbanisation, and weak land use practices continue to combine in dangerous ways.

In many urban centres, flash floods are now almost expected during heavy rains, while coastal and riverine states face the added threat of rising sea levels and tidal surges.

The Federal Government deserves credit for issuing an early and detailed warning as this, as well as for ongoing efforts, such as flood control projects and the Anticipatory Action initiative.

However, the reality on ground tells a different story. In many states, including Edo, the impact of these measures has not been as strong or as visible as it should be.

This is where the real challenge lies. Flooding is no longer a dis-

tant or occasional problem, it is a recurring national emergency. What is required now is not just planning, but action that is practical, sustainable and measurable.

State governments must treat the 2026 Flood Outlook as more than just a report. It should serve as a working document for immediate and long-term planning. With improved tools, such as real-time flood monitoring dashboards and more accurate forecasting powered by advanced technology, there is little excuse for being caught unprepared.

At the same time, residents in vulnerable communities must play their part by paying attention to early warnings and taking simple preventive steps where possible.

Equally important is the role of key agencies and partners, including the World Meteorological Or-

ganisation, the Nigerian Meteorological Agency, and the National Emergency Management Agency. Their responsibility goes beyond data collection; they must ensure that vital information reaches the people who need it most, in a form they can understand and act upon.

For states like Edo, this warning should serve as a timely reminder to act decisively. Clearing drainages, enforcing building regulations, and strengthening public awareness are no longer optional; they are necessary steps to reduce the risk.

Ultimately, the Annual Flood Outlook should be seen more than a technical document. It is a clear call to action. Early warning, when taken seriously, saves lives and reduces losses. As the old saying goes, "To be forewarned is to be forearmed."



NEWS

2026 Hajj: Okpebholo to bid Edo pilgrims farewell May 16

BENIN CITY

Governor Monday Okpebholo will on Saturday officially bid farewell to Edo State intending pilgrims ahead of their departure to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

The farewell ceremony, organised by the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board (EMPWB), is scheduled to hold by 10:00 a.m. at

the Board's premises located at 2/3 Ugomosun Street, off Dumez Road, Sapele Road, Benin City.

In a statement issued by the Executive Secretary of the Board, Alhaji Eranga Muhammadkabar Abdulkabir, members of the Muslim community were invited to attend the event, which is expected to draw government officials, Islamic clerics, family members and other well-wishers.

According to the statement,

all intending pilgrims are expected to be seated by 9:00 a.m. and must appear in their official Hajj uniforms for the ceremony.

The event will feature prayers, spiritual guidance and goodwill messages for the pilgrims before their journey to the holy land.

The Board appreciated members of the Muslim community for their support and urged invited guests to attend promptly.

EDOGIS partners Business Ministry to drive investment, ease-of-doing business

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Geographic Information Service (EDOGIS) has pledged support for the Ministry of Business, Trade and Investment in advancing the investment and ease-of-doing-business goals of Governor Monday Okpebholo's SHINE Agenda.

Managing Director of EDOGIS, Dr. Innocent Bello, made the commitment during a courtesy visit by the Commissioner for Business, Trade and Investment, Hon. Omoh

Anabor, and members of his management team.

Bello thanked the delegation for the visit and assured them of the agency's readiness to support initiatives aimed at improving the state's business environment.

He described ease of doing business as a major pillar of the current administration's development agenda and urged the ministry to provide detailed documentation of its requests to enable EDOGIS facilitate and fast-track the process.

Earlier, Anabor said the visit was to congratulate Bello on his

appointment and seek EDOGIS support in identifying and facilitating the allocation of parcels of land across the three senatorial districts of the state.

According to the commissioner, the request is tied to a proposed partnership between the ministry and the National Commodity Exchange, which requires the construction of facilities across Edo State.

He noted that the project would help stimulate economic growth, boost food security and strengthen trade and investment opportunities within the state.

NHIA, Edo govt graduate health fellows, deploy new cohort

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government and the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) have intensified efforts to strengthen primary healthcare delivery following the graduation of Cohort One and onboarding of Cohort Two of the National Health Fellows Programme in Benin City.

The programme, organised by the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in collaboration with the Edo State Ministry of Health, attracted government officials, healthcare stakeholders, development partners, traditional and religious leaders.

Speakers at the event highlighted the importance of the initiative in strengthening primary healthcare services, promoting data-driven governance and expanding access to quality healthcare at the grassroots.

The Edo State Coordinator of the NHIA, Amb. Dr. Ehannire Theodore Osas, commended the Federal Government and the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) Office for implementing impactful healthcare interventions in Edo State.

He highlighted NHIA-backed programmes currently

running in the state, including the Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care initiative, the Free Fistula Programme and the Basic Health Care Provision Fund.

Ehannire also appreciated Governor Monday Okpebholo for creating an enabling environment for healthcare programmes to thrive.

Representing the governor, the Coordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Mrs. Edesili Okpebholo Anani, said the programme aligns with the administration's SHINE Agenda, which prioritises stronger primary healthcare, improved maternal and child health and expanded access to healthcare services.

She commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Muhammad Ali Pate, for championing the initiative.

The Edo State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cyril Adams Oshiomhole, described the fellowship programme as part of broader reforms aimed at promoting transparency, accountability and evidence-based healthcare governance.

According to him, the fellows will support healthcare monitoring, improve service delivery and provide real-time

feedback to aid decision-making across local government areas.

Representing the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Omoruyi Iyahan of the SWAp Coordination Office, Abuja, praised the Edo State Government for supporting health sector reforms.

He said the fellowship programme was designed to equip young Nigerians with the skills needed to strengthen healthcare systems and improve grassroots service delivery.

Edo State SWAp Coordinator, Dr. Godswill Omijie, described the initiative as a major step toward bridging the gap between policy and implementation through collaboration and innovation.

Speaking on behalf of graduating fellows, Pharm. Dr. James Abhulimen said Cohort One members contributed to healthcare system strengthening through advocacy, partnerships, community outreach and data-driven interventions.

On behalf of the incoming fellows, Dr. Airen-Ogieva Efosa pledged commitment to improved healthcare outcomes and quality service delivery.

Highlights of the event included the presentation of certificates to graduating fellows and awards to outstanding participants.

Edo launches public service knowledge series to deepen reforms

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has unveiled the maiden edition of the Edo State Public Service Knowledge Series, a new initiative aimed at promoting continuous learning, strengthening policy conversations and deepening ongoing reforms within the state civil and public service.

The initiative was announced by the Edo State Head of Service, Dr. Anthony Okungbowa, during a press briefing in Benin City.

Okungbowa said the programme, conceptualised by the Office of the Head of Service in line with the vision of Governor Monday Okpebholo, is designed to build a self-sufficient, innovation-driven and result-oriented public service under the Edo State Public Service Retooling and Enhancement Programme (Edo-PREP).

He explained that the monthly virtual knowledge-sharing platform was introduced to ensure reforms within the service are driven internally by civil servants and public administrators.

According to him, one of the key objectives of Edo-PREP is to strengthen institutional capacity by equipping workers with the knowledge, competencies and emotional intelligence required to navigate the complexities of modern governance.

"In a rapidly changing world, effective public service demands more than dedication. It requires knowledge, emotional intelligence, adaptability and the ability to navigate complex situations with excellence," he said.

Okungbowa noted that the initiative aligns with Governor Okpebholo's SHINE Agenda, particularly in the areas of education, institutional strengthening and human capital development.

He said the platform would bring together policymakers, administrators, analysts, development actors, technocrats, researchers and public servants to exchange ideas, bridge knowledge gaps and discuss practical solutions for improving governance and service delivery in the state.

"The Governor's directive is very clear. The service must

become self-sufficient and reforms must be facilitated from within the system. That vision necessitates continuous learning and the creation of platforms where ideas are shared, lessons are learned and institutional knowledge is strengthened," he stated.

The Head of Service disclosed that the maiden edition of the series would hold virtually on May 26, 2026, with the theme, "Emotional Intelligence: A Vital Strand for Effective Service Delivery."

He said the topic was selected because emotional intelligence remains one of the most critical but often overlooked competencies required for leadership, teamwork, crisis management and public engagement.

The session will feature Mr. Osahon Omole, a former Edo State Chairman of the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CIPM) and member of the institute's governing council, as guest speaker.

Okungbowa expressed confidence that participants would gain practical insights into workplace relationships, conflict management, communication and productivity enhancement.

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

With heavy heart but total submission to the will of Almighty God, the families of Pa Ekhibise Omonfonmwan & Madam Owie Ekhibise Omonfonmwan of Utoke Village in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State announce the glorious exit of our son, beloved husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather, brother, uncle and father-in-law, **late Mr Jonathan Osarhiemen Ekhibise aka (Daddy Joe)**. He was aged 87 years. Until his death he was a community leader and a devout Christian.

He is survived by a wife, children, grand and great grandchildren.

BURIAL ARRANGEMENTS

THURSDAY 21ST MAY 2026.

10.00AM - Service of Songs at Central Baptist Church, Ring Road, Benin City
Interment follows at the family compound in Benin (Family members only)

SATURDAY 23RD MAY, 2026.

1.00PM - Reception/Social Dance at Canvey Event Centre, College Road off Ekenwan Road by the Anglican Church, Benin City.

SUNDAY 24TH MAY, 2026.

10.00AM - Outing/Thanksgiving Service at Central Baptist Church, Ring Road, Benin City.
May His Gentle Soul Rest In Perfect Peace. Amen.

Signed:
Engr Osagie Ekhibise
For the family

LATE MR JONATHAN OSARHIEMEN EKHIBISE aka (Daddy Joe)

N'Delta leaders urge Tinubu to decentralise pipeline surveillance contracts

AKURE

Leaders and stakeholders from the Niger Delta region have called on President Bola Tinubu to ensure the immediate decentralisation

of pipeline and oil and gas infrastructure surveillance contracts across the region.

The leaders made the call in an open letter to the President made available to journalists on Thursday in Akure.

The letter was signed by the President of the Ijaw Youth Council Worldwide, Dr Alaye Tari Theophilus, and nine other regional leaders.

They also called for an investigation by anti-graft agencies

into the utilisation of funds under the Presidential Amnesia Programme managed by its current coordinator.

The stakeholders warned against allowing any single non-state actor to exercise unchecked control over Nigeria's critical oil infrastructure, saying such an arrangement could pose security risks to the country.

"No single non-state actor should hold unchecked operational authority over Nigeria's most critical economic infrastructure.

"A joint supervisory framework bringing together security agencies, state coordinators, and recognised community leadership must be put in place now," the letter stated.

The stakeholders said the current pipeline surveillance structure had sidelined individuals and groups that supported the Federal Govern-

ment during the 2015/2016 Niger Delta Avengers crisis.

They recalled that several leaders in the region aligned with government efforts at the time to prevent attacks on oil installations and maintain national stability.

The leaders expressed concern that those who defended the Nigerian state during the crisis were now being excluded from the present surveillance arrangement, while those who once threatened national assets were allegedly being empowered.



STAKEHOLDERS MEETING:

A cross-section of the participants, during a Stakeholders meeting with the Commissioners and Heads of the Agency on National Education Data Infrastructure Organised Federal Ministry of Education in Abuja on Thursday, 14th May, 2026.

PHOTO BY: BADA DEBORAH/NAN

PDP disowns alleged alliance with APM in Ibadan

ABUJA

The Abdulrahman Mohammed-led faction of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), has distanced itself from an alleged political alliance between the party and the Allied Peoples Movement in Ibadan.

The party's National Publicity Secretary, Jungudo Mohammed, stated this during a news conference on Thursday in Abuja.

Mohammed maintained that the PDP remained united and fully prepared for the 2027 general elections without any legal or political obstacles.

"Let us state clearly and unequivocally that the PDP is not part of any alliance, coalition, agreement, or political arrangement with the APM or any other political party regarding this gathering or any related political activity," he said.

According to him, anybody claiming to represent the PDP in connection with the Ibadan gathering was acting without the knowledge or approval of the party.

"What is being presented to Nigerians as a political alliance is nothing more than another desperate attempt by Governor Seyi Makinde and his associates to mislead the public and manufacture a false impression of political relevance and support," he added.

Mohammed urged Nigerians to disregard what he described as propaganda and misleading narratives surrounding the Ibadan event.

He said the PDP was currently conducting screening exercises for governorship and presidential aspirants at Legacy House in Maitama, Abuja, following the successful completion of state and National Assembly screenings nationwide.

The spokesman further advised Governors Seyi Makinde and Bala Mohammed to accept reality, alleging that their association with the APM had exposed attempts to destabilise the PDP.

He also accused the governors of sponsoring propaganda aimed at misrepresenting the Supreme Court judgment on the PDP leadership crisis.

NSUK commends Sule, Police over rescue of abducted students

KEFFI

The management of Nasarawa State University, Keffi has commended the Nasarawa State Government and the police for securing the release of six abducted students of the institution.

The commendation was contained in a statement signed by the Acting Information and Protocol Officer of the university, Malam Ja'afar Abdullahi, and made available to journalists in Keffi on Thursday.

The state Nigeria Police Force had confirmed the abduction of six students from the institu-

tion's Faculty of Engineering, Gudi Campus, in Akwanga Local Government Area on May 6 by unidentified gunmen.

The students, however, regained their freedom on May 12 through intelligence-led operations conducted by the Nasarawa State Police Command.

According to Abdullahi, the university management expressed profound gratitude to the administration of Governor Abdullahi Sule and the police for their swift intervention.

"The university community received the news of the students' release with immense relief and gratitude after days

of anxiety and concern following the unfortunate incident.

"The unwavering support and decisive actions of the state government, working closely with security agencies, demonstrated a strong commitment to the safety and wellbeing of students and residents of the state," he said.

He added that the university particularly commended the efforts of the police and other security operatives for their professionalism, courage and dedication throughout the rescue operation.

"Their sacrifice and vigilance remain invaluable in safeguarding lives and restoring confidence within the university community," he added.

Abdullahi also appreciated parents, guardians, members of the university community and other Nigerians for their prayers, support and solidarity during the challenging period.

"While celebrating the safe return of the students, the university reaffirms its commitment to working collaboratively with government and security stakeholders to strengthen safety measures within and around the institution.

"The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sa'adatu Liman, on behalf of the Governing Council, Senate, staff and students of the university, once again extends heartfelt appreciation to the governor of Nasarawa State," he said.

Lagos residents cut food consumption, ration meals amid rising costs

LAGOS

Rising food prices and unstable electricity supply are forcing many residents of Lagos to adopt survival strategies, including rationing meals and cutting down on household food purchases.

Traders and consumers who spoke with journalists on Thursday said inflation and poor power supply had significantly altered spending habits and daily living conditions.

Mrs Kemi Balogun, a frozen foods and household items trader at Agege Market, said many customers who previously

bought food items in bulk now purchase in smaller quantities.

"People who used to buy full bags of rice now buy in paint buckets or cups. Everybody is just trying to survive," she said.

Balogun noted that rising transportation costs and poor electricity supply had continued to erode profit margins.

"Every week, prices increase. Customers complain, but we also buy at higher prices.

"Sometimes we spend a lot on fuel because there is no electricity to preserve perishable goods," she added.

Mrs Ifeoma Nwoye, a mother of five residing in Agege, said her

family had abandoned structured meal plans and now focused only on essential food items.

"Before, we could cook different meals comfortably, but now we buy only what we can afford.

"We no longer eat to maintain a balanced diet; we eat simply to fill our stomachs," she said.

Nwoye described the situation as exhausting, lamenting the combined burden of power outages and rising living costs.

"Sometimes we stay in darkness for hours. Yet, we still buy fuel and pay electricity bills," she said.

A visit to several markets showed that roadside food ven-

dors and small eateries had reduced portion sizes without increasing prices in a bid to cope with rising operational costs.

Some residents said they had resorted to bulk purchases with neighbours, community buying arrangements and strict food rationing to stretch limited incomes.

Mr Anthony Amodu, a resident of Oshodi, said many households were struggling to meet basic needs.

"People are frustrated because salaries have remained the same while the prices of food, transportation and utilities keep increasing," he said.

Nigerians decry rising cost of hypertension treatment

LAGOS

Some Nigerians living with hypertension have lamented the rising cost of treatment as the world prepares to mark World Hypertension Day on May 17.

The patients, who spoke with journalists in Lagos on Thursday, highlighted the financial and emotional challenges of managing the condition amid the country's economic difficulties.

Mr Benjamin Iwu, a 41-year-old teacher, said he had battled hypertension for six years and struggled to afford medication.

"The stress from my teaching work increases my blood pressure, and I struggle to buy my drugs because I do not have enough money," he said.

He added that despite his demanding work schedule, he still made time to rest to help manage his condition.

Mrs Stella Machukwu, an accountant, said her hypertension was intermittent and usu-

ally triggered by stress.

She disclosed that she relied mainly on rest and was not currently taking antihypertensive medication.

A fashion designer, Mrs Belynda Emerulam, attributed her high blood pressure to the demands of her work.

"My doctor asked me to cut down on the number of clothes I sew in a day and rest whenever I feel dizzy or overwhelmed," she said.

Emerulam advised Nigerians to embrace regular medical check-ups and avoid self-denial about their health conditions.

Some herbal medicine sellers also claimed that herbal remedies could help manage hypertension.

A trader at Ikotun Market identified as Iya Aro said patients often got better results when they prepared herbal mixtures themselves, while another seller, Iya Mustapha, said treatment costs varied depending on the severity of the condition.

NEWS

Lawmakers' long stay threatens democracy —Don

LAGOS
Prof. Adepaju Tejumaiye of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, has described the prolonged stay of lawmakers in office as a threat to Nigeria's democracy.

ing to the growing trend of lawmakers seeking to remain in office after serving multiple terms. According to him, although experience is important in lawmaking, prolonged stay in office has not translated into effective legislative performance in Nigeria. "If you look at democracy and governance generally, people spend long years because experience matters in lawmaking.

"The number of years spent in the legislative assembly provides an avenue to make meaningful contributions to policies. "In Nigeria, the reverse is the case; the longer lawmakers remain in office, the more docile they become. They contribute less to debates and lawmaking processes," he said.

The university don noted that while long legislative experience had proved beneficial in developed democracies, it had failed to produce similar outcomes in Nigeria.

"The people should not encourage lawmakers to remain in office beyond two terms. We can amend the constitution to achieve this," he added. Tejumaiye argued that after eight years, many lawmakers become less vibrant and no longer contribute effectively to legislative activities.

He called for constitutional reforms to formally limit lawmakers' tenure, saying such measures would strengthen democratic governance and encourage fresh ideas in lawmaking.

Foundation offers free eye care to 600 indigent Niger residents

BIDA (NIGER STATE)
No fewer than 600 indigent persons in Bida and surrounding communities in Niger State benefited from a free medical outreach organised on Thursday by the Etsu Yahaya Abubakar Foundation.

development and reiterated the foundation's commitment to improving the wellbeing of vulnerable persons, particularly those unable to afford medical treatment. The royal father said the foundation would continue to strengthen partnerships with relevant organisations and stakeholders to expand access to quality healthcare services and alleviate the suffering of the people.



SAFETY AND DIGITAL PROTECTION TRAINING: A cross-section of participants, during a safety and digital protection training for civil state actors in Edo State, organized by the Women's Rights and Health Project (WRAHP) on Wednesday, 13th May, 2026. PHOTO BY: FRANCIS ODUPUTE

The outreach featured free cataract surgeries and medical consultations for patients suffering from various eye-related ailments.

According to him, the gesture reflects his commitment to humanitarian service, community development and the promotion of healthy living among the populace.

NULGE begins strike in Benue over unpaid salaries

The exercise was organised by the foundation established by the Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Yahaya Abubakar, Chairman of the Niger State Council of Traditional Rulers, in collaboration with the Near Foundation Abuja and the Federal Medical Centre Bida.

He added that restoring the sight of affected persons would not only improve their health conditions, but also restore hope, dignity and economic productivity among beneficiaries and their families.

MAKURDI
The Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) in Benue State on Thursday commenced a two-week warning strike over unpaid salaries and unresolved welfare issues.

The union, in a statement jointly signed by its President, Joshua Adinya, and Secretary, Musa Yusuf, said the action followed the expiration of a series of ultimatums earlier issued to the state government.

union, at a meeting held on April 21, demanded the unconditional payment of March and April salaries owed to local government workers across the state.

seven-working-day reminder notice to the government.

Expert urges regular water intake amid Heheatwave

POTISKUM (YOBE)
Dr Hauwa Kwanda, a resident doctor at Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, has advised residents to maintain regular water intake to reduce the health risks associated with the ongoing heatwave.

to wear lightweight, bright and loose-fitting clothing, and to use umbrellas, caps and sunglasses when going outdoors.

"Even though awareness is improving nowadays, there is still a need for more public health education through radio programmes, television, social media, schools, mosques, churches and community gatherings.

fusion, persistent vomiting or collapses due to heat," she said.

The union also demanded the release and implementation of all pending promotions of local government staff, as well as the resolution of issues affecting the smooth implementation of the Benue Public Service Contributory Pension Scheme (BEP-PCON) remittances.

According to the union, the state government failed to respond to its demands or take steps to avert the industrial action.

Kwanda told journalists on Thursday in Potiskum that residents should cultivate the habit of drinking sufficient water even when they do not feel thirsty.

The medical expert urged the public to adopt preventive measures against excessive heat exposure, warning that prolonged exposure to scorching sunlight could result in dehydration, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and sunburn.

"People need to understand that extreme heat can be dangerous and even life-threatening if proper precautions are not taken.

Kwanda further advised residents to drink room-temperature water instead of excessively cold water, warning that extremely cold water could trigger other health complications.

It further called for the reinstatement of disengaged 2011/2012 local government workers and the payment of all outstanding salary arrears owed to workers.

It expressed disappointment that the government allegedly ignored all opportunities provided to resolve the dispute.

She also advised residents

She called on stakeholders to intensify public enlightenment on the dangers of excessive exposure to heat, which she said could be life-threatening.

"Eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and seek medical attention immediately if someone develops severe weakness, con-

Advert Space for Sale

The statement noted that the SEC reconvened on May 7 after the expiration of the initial 14-day ultimatum and subsequently issued an additional

The union said it had been pushed to the wall and was left with no option but to direct all local government workers to embark on a two-week stay-at-home warning strike effective Thursday, May 14.

NULGE directed all branches across the 23 local government areas of the state to ensure full compliance, warning that the action would result in a total shutdown of activities at the third tier of government until the issues are addressed.

MISSING LAND DOCUMENT

The general public is hereby notified that I, **Mr Ikponmwosa Ighore Teslyne**, is the lawful owner of a piece/parcel of land, measuring **100ft by 50ft**, lying and situate at **Ogheghe Community, Off Sapele Road, Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area, Edo State**, from one **Mr Idemudia Aiwekwoe**, vide through a deed of transfer dated **April 14, 2026**. The land is part of **100ft by 100ft** transferred to **Idemudia Aiwekwoe** by **Enogie Aghatise Iyiriaro** and **100ft by 50ft** was transferred to me by **Mr Idemudia Aiwekwoe**.

The original documents of the **Deed of Transfer** was discovered missing sometimes in **April 2026**, and efforts to trace it has proved abortive, hence this publication for record purposes. The property is not for sale. Buyers Beware!

The general public and concerned authorities take note.

Signed: IKPONMWOSA IGHORE TESLYNE

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **LAWRENCE ISAIAH**, now wish to be known as **MR LAWRENCE OGORCHUKWU ISAIAH**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS ADEJOH IGBE JOYCE**, now wish to be known as **MRS. IKHIFA JOYCE PRINCE HENRY**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS ULLAM RITA MWUESE**, now wish to be known as **MRS. IMAHYEREBO RITA MWUESE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

REMOVAL OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **ERIE OSIREGBEMHE APEGHOHA** and **ERIC APIEGIOKHAI**, are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known as **ERIC APIEGIOKHAI**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS AKHIGBE JENNIFER OSIKE**, now wish to be known as **MRS. KADIRI JENNIFER OSIKE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **ONOSEBE LUCKY**, now wish to be known as **OBIRE LUCKY**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **ENIYE MERCY ASAYA**, now wish to be known as **ASAYA MERCY ENIYE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **FRIDAY ENEHIZENA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **ENEHIZENA FRIDAY OZIEGBE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public should please take note.

FG expands adult literacy drive, opens 8,000 learning centres nationwide

ABUJA

The Federal Government says it has established more than 8,000 learning centres across the country to expand access to adult literacy and non-formal education.

Dr John Edeh, Director overseeing the National Com-

mission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), disclosed this in an interview with journalists on Thursday in Abuja.

Edeh, who also serves as Director of Literacy and Development at NMEC, said the centres were spread across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

According to him, the centres are aimed at providing second-chance educational opportunities for youths and adults who missed formal schooling.

He added that additional centres were being opened under the Universal Basic Education intervention support fund to reach underserved communities.

"We have opened close to 136 learning centres in the FCT

alone. We have also opened more than 50 additional learning centres in each of the states.

"For instance, in Ibadan, where we have an office, we have opened an additional 74 learning centres. In Owerri, where we also have an office, we have opened an additional 64 learning centres, likewise in Bauchi, Gombe, Akwa Ibom, Katsina and Niger," he said.

Edeh noted that although the centres currently serve less

than one million learners, the government was scaling up operations to enrol between 50,000 and 100,000 additional learners within the next six months.

"Our target is to make sure that within the next six months, we will be able to bring back an additional 50,000 to 100,000 learners to our learning centres.

"We will also ensure that they graduate and provide some starter packs for them if they choose the path of vocational training," he said.

The NMEC director further disclosed that literacy programmes had now been integrated with vocational skills acquisition to improve the economic empowerment of beneficiaries.



PRESENTATION OF LETTER OF APPOINTMENT:

L-R: Deputy Group Managing Director of BOVAS, Mr Temitope Samson; Chancellor, Osun State University, Mrs Victoria Samson; Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Odunayo Adebooye, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof Adetunji Kehinde, during the presentation of letter of appointment by Vice-Chancellor and management Osun State University to Samson as Chancellor of the University, in Ibadan yesterday. PHOTO: OLAYINKA BODE-ARE/JAU/NAN

FG clarifies reports on 40% peculiar allowance for civil servants

ABUJA

The Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (HCSF) has clarified reports surrounding the approval of a 40 percent peculiar allowance for federal civil servants.

In a statement issued by the Director of Press and Public Relations, Mrs Eno Olotu, the office said it neither approved nor communicated approval of the allowance to the Joint National Public Service Negotiating Council (JNPSNC) or any labour union.

Olotu explained that the statutory responsibility for issuing and communicating such circulars rested with the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC).

She said the circular currently being referenced in media reports was issued by the NSIWC on April 23, 2026.

According to her, the meeting convened on Tuesday by the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation was purely interventionist and conciliatory.

"It was strictly an interventionist and conciliatory engagement aimed at facilitating dialogue be-

tween organised labour under its jurisdiction and the NSIWC.

"The meeting was to promote mutual understanding and avert any breakdown in labour relations within the Federal Civil Service," she said.

Olotu recalled that during a press briefing on April 24, 2026, the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, announced the Federal Government's approval of welfare packages and other entitlements for civil servants.

According to her, the approvals included full Duty Tour Allowance for approved trainings in selected institutions and an upward review of peculiar allowance across grade levels on the Consolidated Public Service Salary Structure (CONPSS) and Consolidated Research and Allied Institutions Salary Structure (CONRAISS).

Other approvals, she said, included increases in estacode, book allowance and other entitlements.

She further disclosed that the Federal Government approved a N10 billion housing loan scheme aimed at improving access to affordable home ownership for public servants.

Abia LIFE-ND trains farmers on packaging, branding for higher profits

UMUAHIA

The Abia Livelihood Improvement and Family Enterprises, Niger Delta (LIFE-ND), has organised a step-down training for selected beneficiary farmers on standards, weights, measures and packaging aimed at improving agribusiness profitability.

Speaking at the event in Umuahia, the Abia Project Coordinator for LIFE-ND, Dr Uchenna Onyeizu, said the programme was designed to

equip participants with practical knowledge to improve product quality, packaging and marketability.

Onyeizu described the training as part of LIFE-ND's efforts to strengthen capacity across agricultural value chains.

"One of our many programmes for beneficiaries is focused on building their capacity on packaging so they can sell their products on time and make the profit they need.

"The sustainability of any agribusiness depends on the

profit it makes," he said.

He lamented that many farmers still sold their produce at farm gates at low prices due to limited knowledge of value addition.

According to him, the training would help participants process, package and rebrand their products to command better market value.

LIFE-ND is a Federal Government project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development with support from the Niger Delta Development Commission.

The State Agribusiness Promotion Officer for LIFE-ND,

Mr Godwin Chukwuekezie, said accurate measurement and branding were critical to building investor confidence and sustaining agribusinesses.

"If you sell 20kg and the buyer receives 15kg, he won't come back.

"Proper measurement, packaging and labelling give your product identity and make you traceable and credible," he said.

One of the resource persons from the State Ministry of Agriculture, Mr John Gabriel, urged farmers to build confidence in branding products with indigenous identities rather than foreign names.

Kano Assembly seeks urgent govt intervention in tomato pest outbreak

KANO

The Kano State House of Assembly Standing Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources has raised alarm over the outbreak of Tuta Absoluta, a destructive tomato pest ravaging farms across the state.

Chairman of the committee, Alhaji Ahmed Ibrahim (APC-Karaye), disclosed this while presenting the committee's report before the House.

Ibrahim said the committee was mandated to assess the infestation following a motion

on a matter of urgent public importance raised by Ali Lawan Kiyawa (APC-Bagwai/Shanono) over the spread of the pest, popularly known as "Sharon," in his constituency.

According to him, the assessment revealed that the infestation had spread across major tomato-producing areas, including Bagwai, Shanono, Rogo, Tofa, Bunkure, Kura, Garun Malam, Rano, Kibiya, and parts of Tudun Wada and Dawakin Kudu local government areas.

Ibrahim explained that Tuta Absoluta attacks tomato crops at all stages of growth, destroy-

ing leaves, stems, flowers and fruits, resulting in severe crop losses if not properly managed.

"The outbreak has severe consequences not only for farmers but for the state and the nation as a whole, causing shortage of tomatoes and driving up prices nationwide," he said.

The committee chairman urged the House to direct the Kano State Government and relevant stakeholders to urgently contain the outbreak.

According to him, the infestation occurs annually, particularly during the summer

season.

To address the situation, the committee recommended the immediate provision of resources to the Kano State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNAR-DA), including approved insecticides, pheromone traps, sprayers, protective equipment and other implements needed to manage the outbreak.

The committee also recommended the deployment of extension workers and technical personnel to farming communities for early detection and management of crop diseases.

Police, Foundation unveil forensic laboratory to tackle gender violence in Rivers

PORT HARCOURT

The Rivers State Police Command, in partnership with the GS Foundation, has unveiled a state-of-the-art gender laboratory to strengthen the fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the state.

The command's spokesperson, ASP Blessing Agabe, disclosed this in a statement issued in Port Harcourt.

According to Agabe, the facility, located within the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department, is designed to enhance the investigation and prosecution of gender-related offences through technology-driven processes.

She said the laboratory is equipped with advanced forensic tools, confidential counselling spaces, digital evidence management systems and coordinated legal support services.

A representative of the GS Foundation, Mr Peter Heepen, described the initiative as a major step towards strengthening institutional response to domestic violence and other gender-related crimes.

"The gender laboratory is not just a facility; it is a beacon of hope, protection and justice for survivors.

"Through this collaboration, we are building a safer society where victims are empowered to speak up and offenders are held accountable through professional, technology-based investigations," he said.

The Commissioner of Police in Rivers State, Olugbenga Adepoju, commended the initiative and reaffirmed the command's commitment to protecting vulnerable persons. Adepoju said the project aligned with ongoing efforts to improve investigative standards through innovation and strategic partnerships.

NEWS

Police launch anti-violent crime unit in Imo, warn officers against rights abuses

OWERRI

The Imo State Police Command has inaugurated a Violent Crime Response Unit (VCRU) to strengthen the fight against armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism and other violent crimes in the state.

Speaking at the inauguration, Governor Hope Uzodimma advocated rights-based

policing and stressed that sustainable development could only thrive in an atmosphere of peace and security.

Uzodimma, represented by his Chief Principal Security Officer, ACP Adamu Shaba, described security as the foundation upon which development stands.

He condemned kidnapping, banditry and terrorism in the state, describing perpetrators

as “enemies of peace,” and vowed that those taking up arms against innocent citizens would be decisively dealt with.

The governor, however, cautioned that security enforcement must not override justice, noting that democracy is measured by its respect for justice and human dignity during law enforcement operations.

He advocated intelligence-driven policing, saying the approach focused on lawful arrest procedures and evidence-based prosecution to ensure that only guilty persons faced the law.

Referencing the 1999 Constitution, Uzodimma reminded officers that every Nigerian has a right to life and insisted that the use of force must always be reasonable.

“Detention without lawful justification is illegal,” he said,

citing Section 35 of the Constitution, while insisting that suspects must be arraigned within a reasonable timeframe.

The governor also condemned torture and degrading treatment during investigations, stressing that professional policing requires respect for human dignity to maintain public trust.

He warned that any officer found engaging in extortion, corruption or abuse of authority would face strict disciplinary

measures under the Nigeria Police Act and other relevant laws.

Uzodimma further pledged continued support for the Army, Police and Department of State Services (DSS), while urging communities to support security agencies by reporting suspicious movements.

“Security is a shared responsibility,” he said, calling for stronger collaboration among vigilance groups, traditional rulers and formal security agencies.

NSCDC arrests 12 over railway, pipeline vandalism in Kaduna

BIRNIN YERO (KADUNA)

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has arrested 12 suspects over alleged vandalism, theft and recycling of critical national infrastructure, including railway tracks, NNPC pipelines and water board installations.

The National Public Relations Officer of the corps, ACC Babawale Afolabi, disclosed this during a briefing in Kaduna.

Afolabi, represented by the Deputy Public Relations Officer, SC Terzungwe Orndiir, said the operation followed a viral video showing massive vandalisation of newly laid Kaduna-Kano rail tracks and other railway infrastructure in the North.

He said the Commandant-General of the corps, Ahmed Abubakar Audi, directed the CG’s Special Intelligence Squad (SIS) and the Kaduna State Command to identify and apprehend those responsible.

According to him, the break-

through came through intelligence-led operations supervised by the Commander of the CG’s SIS, Commandant Apollon Dandaura, in collaboration with the Kaduna State Command.

Afolabi said operatives on May 12 dismantled what he described as an international and local syndicate operating under sophisticated criminal cover.

He alleged that the suspects used the premises of Inner Galaxy Steel Company at Birnin Yero in Igabi Local Government Area as a front for their activities.

According to him, the company allegedly compressed vandalised railway materials into scrap at its Kaduna facility before transporting them to Aba, Abia State, where they were melted and recycled into nails and iron rods.

“This criminal cycle has caused the Federal Government monumental economic losses,” he said.

Afolabi said seven suspects were arrested in connection with the operation.



MINISTERIAL NEWS CONFERENCE:

L-R: Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Wealth Creation and Employment, Mrs Lolade Aina; Commissioner for Wealth Creation and Employment, Mr Akinyemi Ajigbotafe and Permanent Secretary, Lagos State Ministry of Information and Strategy, Mr Olanrewaju Bajulaye, during the 2026 Lagos State Ministerial News Conference by the Ministry of Wealth Creation and Employment, in Commemoration of the Seventh Year in Office of Gov. Sanwo-Olu in Lagos on Thursday, 14th May, 2026.

PHOTO BY: OLADAPO KAYODE/JAU/NAN

Stakeholders urge FG to mobilise private capital for infrastructure

ABUJA

Stakeholders in Nigeria’s infrastructure and financial sectors have urged the Federal Government to shift from traditional procurement models to private capital mobilisation to bridge the country’s estimated 2.3 trillion dollars infrastructure deficit.

The call was made at the opening of the 2026 Infrastructure Dialogue in Abuja.

President of the Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Emeka Obegolu, said modern and resilient infrastructure had become a national necessity.

According to him, the major challenge is no longer identifying infrastructure gaps but mobilising long-term and sustainable funding.

“Infrastructure remains the foundation of every thriving economy. Whether in transportation, energy or digital connectivity, it directly influences productivity and quality of life,” he said.

Obegolu stressed that infra-

structure financing required collaboration between the public and private sectors.

In a goodwill message, Director-General of the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission, Dr Jobson Ewalefoh, said Nigeria required annual investments of 100 billion dollars to address infrastructure needs across transport, ICT and aviation.

Represented by Mr Amanze Okere, Ewalefoh said public spending currently covered less than 30 percent of the requirement, making private capital mobilisation an “absolute necessity.”

He disclosed that the commission would unveil a model Public-Private Partnership (PPP) agreement by June 2026 to accelerate project financing and execution.

“To bridge this substantial financing gap, Nigeria has strategically embraced PPPs. They are not merely financing tools; they are powerful catalysts for infrastructure renewal and poverty alleviation,” he said.

ABUJA

Environmental non-governmental organisations have urged media organisations to invest in climate literacy and move beyond routine weather reporting to more in-depth, solution-driven environmental journalism.

The call was made during a two-day Media Training Conference on “Climate Governance and Gender Mainstreaming in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Minamata Conventions.”

The training was organised by EnviroNews Advocacy & Campaigns for Sustainability in collaboration with Women Environmental Programme.

Former House of Representatives member, Rep. Sam Onuigbo, described the media as a critical bridge between scientific knowledge and public action, stressing the need for specialised environmental reporting to combat misinformation and drive accountability.

Onuigbo, sponsor of Nigeria’s Climate Change Act 2021, urged media organisations to establish specialised environ-

mental desks and invest in investigative reporting.

“Journalism is the bridge between scientific knowledge and public consciousness,” he said.

According to him, climate journalism extends beyond reporting temperature increases or international climate summits and should include holding governments accountable for climate commitments, investigating climate financing and environmental corruption, and amplifying the voices of vulnerable communities.

Onuigbo also highlighted the importance of the Minamata Convention on Mercury, adopted in 2013 after the devastating mercury poisoning incident in

Minamata Bay, Japan.

He warned that mercury pollution remained a major concern, particularly in artisanal and small-scale mining communities where unsafe mercury use continues to contaminate water bodies and endanger lives.

“The consequences include neurological disorders, developmental impairments, respiratory illnesses and long-term ecological degradation,” he said.

He added that climate change had become a lived reality across Nigeria, citing floods, desertification, food insecurity, displacement and rising temperatures as growing threats to livelihoods and national stability.

2027: APC aspirant Opah promises industrialization, jobs in Abia

UMUAHIA

An All Progressives Congress (APC) governorship aspirant in Abia State, Chief Eric Opah, has declared his intention to contest the 2027 governorship election, promising to industrialise the state and create jobs if elected.

Opah, accompanied by a large crowd of supporters to the APC secretariat on Azikiwe Road, Umuahia, was presented to the party leadership by party chief-

tain, Chief Charles Ogbonna.

Presenting the aspirant, Ogbonna described Opah as a successful businessman with extensive international experience.

“We have come to present our aspirant, who will soon become the candidate of this great party, APC. Opah is a man of honour who has established himself in business in Africa and beyond,” he said.

Addressing party members, Opah said his ambition was driven by the desire to pro-

mote accountable governance, job creation and infrastructure development in Abia.

“My aspiration is not borne out of personal ambition. It is focused on clear agendas,” he said.

The entrepreneur, who reportedly has over 20 years’ experience in international transportation, shipping, aviation and oil and gas logistics, said his administration would prioritise industrialisation and unity in the state.

“Abia needs job creation,

quality infrastructure and someone who can unify the state. We don’t have two Abias,” he said.

Opah outlined plans to revive moribund industries, position Abia as a trade hub and establish the state as a centre for vocational education and manufacturing.

He cited the Canton Fair in Guangzhou as a model that could be replicated in Abia to attract investments and generate employment opportunities.

Opinion

How Gov Okpebholo is constructing modern Edo

PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo is a very confident man. He speaks about the future of Edo State with a level of confidence that confounds his critics. It is not the confidence built around political theatre. Rather, it comes from visible projects and active construction sites, he has activated; and the belief that Edo state is entering a new phase of development under his leadership driven largely by infrastructure renewal.

And it dates back November 12, 2024, when he took office; he has repeatedly promised that Edo would rise again. During his inauguration, Governor Okpebholo assured residents that his administration would focus on rebuilding roads, improving infrastructure, strengthening security, upgrading healthcare, supporting agriculture, and restoring confidence in governance. Nearly two years later, many of those promises are now becoming visible realities across different parts of the state.

Infrastructure is the centrepiece of the administration's development agenda. Across Benin City and other communities, ongoing projects now dominate public discussion. Roads that were previously abandoned are under reconstruction, drainage systems are being expanded, erosion sites are receiving intervention, and major traffic corridors are undergoing transformation. Governor Okpebholo believes infrastructure is the foundation upon which every other aspect of development depends. Roads connect communities to schools, hospitals, farms, and markets. Drainage systems reduce flooding and protect lives and property. Bridges and flyovers improve movement and support economic activity. For Governor Okpebholo, rebuilding Edo begins with rebuilding its physical structure.

That vision has become increasingly visible during the governor's recent inspection tours across the state. Governor Okpebholo has consistently chosen to personally inspect projects rather than supervise from a distance. In recent days, he has visited several ongoing projects, in Edo State, including the Adesuwa Flyover on Sapele Road, the Ikpoba Hill Flyover and erosion control project, the Ekiuwa-University of Benin Road, Oba Erediauwa Road off Upper Mission Road, Temboga Road, Uteh Palace Road, Ramat Park. He had earlier

inspected the extensive stormwater drainage project stretching into the Ikpoba River, the Agbonze and Iyore Street corridor at Ohoghobi, Campink Road along Obagie Ihriri, the Evbhukhu-Amagba Road, and the increasingly significant Okpaga-Amufi Road and flood control project.

Standing at the Adesuwa Flyover where sections of the road had already been asphalted, the governor expressed satisfaction with the pace of work and pointed to the project as evidence of the administration's commitment to modernising Edo. "As you can see, we are making progress. A lot has been done in Edo State," he said while addressing journalists during



GOV OKPEBHOLO ACKNOWLEDGING CHEERS FROM SUPPORTERS

We have achieved so much and I believe that by the grace of God, if we continue like this, Edo will become a modern city before the end of our first four years

the inspection. He added that more visible progress would emerge within weeks as construction continued.

The governor then made a statement that has since shaped public conversation around the administration's development agenda: "We have achieved so much and I believe that by the grace of God, if we continue like this, Edo will become a modern city before the end of our first four years." For supporters of the administration, the statement reflected growing confidence rooted in visible infrastructure renewal rather than mere political optimism.

Among the many projects, the Okpaga-Amufi Road and surrounding erosion and flood control works have become particularly symbolic of the administration's governing philosophy. For decades, residents of Amufi, Okpaga, Iyanomo, and Egiekpe communities battled severe flooding, erosion, and deteriorating road conditions with little government intervention. During heavy rains, movement became difficult, homes were threatened, and residents repeatedly complained about neglect. According to many members of the affected communities, previous administrations focused attention on more politically visible areas while communities like theirs continued to suffer environmental and infrastructural decay.

During his inspection of the Ok-

paga-Amufi Road and adjoining water retention and drainage infrastructure, Governor Okpebholo openly acknowledged the neglect experienced by residents. "The people that live on this road are voiceless," he said, describing communities that had gone years without meaningful government attention. The statement resonated strongly because it reflected a rare public admission that some parts of the state had been overlooked for far too long. The governor further explained that constructing the road and addressing the flooding challenge represented part of his responsibility to the people. "Constructing this road for them is a thing of joy. If we don't do it, who will?" he asked while speaking at the project site.

The Okpaga-Amufi intervention extends beyond ordinary road construction. The project includes drainage expansion, water retention infrastructure, and erosion control measures designed to provide lasting environmental protection for surrounding communities. Engineers supervising the project have explained that the broader road and erosion control network spans several kilometres and covers multiple adjoining communities. For residents who endured repeated flooding for decades, the project represents far more than asphalt and concrete. It represents visibility, inclusion, and government

presence in places that once felt forgotten.

The administration's broader infrastructure efforts follow the same pattern across the state. In flood-prone parts of Benin City, drainage expansion projects are being executed to reduce the destructive effects of heavy rainfall. Areas that previously became impassable during the rainy season are gradually receiving long-overdue intervention. The stormwater drainage project leading into the Ikpoba River remains one of the administration's largest environmental infrastructure projects, aimed at redirecting floodwater away from densely populated communities. Across several road corridors, reconstruction work is simultaneously improving mobility and reducing years of infrastructural deterioration.

Governor Okpebholo has repeatedly acknowledged that he inherited serious infrastructural challenges upon assumption of office. According to him, bad roads, insecurity, flooding, and weak public infrastructure were among the realities confronting the administration from the beginning. "Bad roads across Edo State are one of the things I inherited," the governor stated during one of his project inspections. Rather than focusing on blame, however, the administration says it has concentrated on rebuilding damaged infrastructure and restoring confidence in governance through visible projects. That approach has become central to the administration's public messaging.

Beyond Benin City, road rehabilitation and construction efforts are also ongoing across other parts of Edo State. The administration insists infrastructure development must not be limited to urban centres alone. Rural communities require functional roads to support agriculture, trade, education, and healthcare delivery. In many farming communities, poor road

conditions have historically made it difficult for farmers to transport produce to urban markets. Government officials argue that improving rural road networks is critical to economic growth, food production, and job creation.

The governor has also linked the pace of development in Edo State to support from the Federal Government under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda. Governor Okpebholo has repeatedly acknowledged federal support for ongoing infrastructure projects and expressed appreciation to the President for assisting the state's development efforts. "I am grateful to the President for providing the funds to carry out these projects," the governor said during another inspection exercise. According to the administration, collaboration between the state and federal governments has helped accelerate ongoing construction activities across Edo State.

While infrastructure remains the most visible aspect of the administration's agenda, the government insists development efforts also extend to education, healthcare, and security. Governor Okpebholo earlier declared a state of emergency in the education sector after personally inspecting several public schools in poor condition. According to him, many of the facilities visited reflected years of neglect and required immediate intervention. Renovation and rehabilitation projects have since commenced in parts of the education sector, while healthcare facilities are also receiving upgrades.

Still, infrastructure projects continue to dominate public attention because of their visibility and direct impact on daily life. Across Edo State, bulldozers, construction workers, drainage channels, road rehabilitation teams, and flyover projects now form part of the physical landscape. In several communities visited during inspection tours, residents gathered along roadsides to welcome the governor and observe the ongoing projects. Supporters of the administration believe the visible nature of the projects explains the increasing public confidence surrounding the government's activities.

For Governor Okpebholo, infrastructure renewal is not simply about roads and concrete. It is about restoring public trust, reconnecting neglected communities, improving economic activity, and rebuilding confidence in governance. From the flyovers rising above major corridors in Benin City to the drainage systems reclaiming flood-prone neighbourhoods and the Okpaga-Amufi communities finally receiving long-awaited intervention, the administration believes the foundation for a modern Edo is already being laid. The governor insists the transformation is no longer a future promise but an ongoing process visible across the state. A Modern Edo is already under construction!

Dr. Ebojele is the Chief Press Secretary to Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State

Friday Sermon



Good conduct and its benefits to society

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

All praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help and forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our bad deeds. Whomsoever Allah guides, none can misguide, and whomsoever He leaves astray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, without partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His servant and messenger.

Dear brothers and sisters in Islam, fear Allah as He should be feared and know that among the greatest treasures a believer can possess after faith is good conduct.

Good conduct beautifies a person, strengthens communities, and earns the pleasure of Allah.

Allah Almighty says in the Noble Qur'an: "Indeed, Allah commands justice, good conduct, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality, bad conduct, and oppression." (Qur'an 16:90)

Good conduct is not only about smiling or speaking softly. It is a complete way of life. It includes honesty, kindness, patience, humility, respect, mercy, truthfulness, forgiveness, and fulfilling people's rights.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent to perfect noble character. He said: "I was only sent to perfect good moral character."

This shows that morality and man-

ners are central to Islam. A person may pray and fast, but if his conduct is bad, he harms himself and society.

Dear Muslims, every society rises through good conduct and collapses through corruption of character.

When honesty disappears, trust disappears. When kindness disappears, hatred grows. When people abandon mercy, oppression spreads.

Good conduct builds peace in homes. A husband who treats his wife kindly creates a peaceful family. Children who respect their parents strengthen family ties. Neighbours who care for one another build safe communities.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "The best among you are those with the best character."

Good conduct also strengthens friendship and unity. People naturally love those who are respectful, truthful, and humble. A person with good manners can solve conflicts and calm tensions. Harsh words may destroy relationships in minutes, but gentle speech can heal hearts.

Allah says: "And speak to people kindly." (Qur'an 2:83)

Today, many societies suffer because of dishonesty, greed, insults, betrayal, and lack of compassion. Some people cheat others in business. Some spread lies and gossip. Some disrespect elders and leaders. Others oppress the weak because they have power or wealth.

These behaviours destroy trust and weaken society. Islam teaches us to

avoid all forms of harmful conduct.

Dear brothers and sisters, good conduct is especially important in public life. Traders should be honest in business. Leaders should be just and sincere. Teachers should guide with patience. Students should show discipline and respect. Workers should carry out their duties faithfully.

When people perform their responsibilities with sincerity and good manners, society progresses.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against harming others. He said: "A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand other Muslims are

safe."

This includes avoiding insults, mockery, slander, online abuse, and every form of injustice. Words can heal or destroy. Therefore, believers should guard their tongues carefully.

Another important part of good conduct is patience. We live among people with different attitudes and behaviours. Sometimes we face provocation or hardship. Islam teaches us to respond with wisdom and self-control.

Allah says: "Repel evil with that which is better." (Qur'an 41:34)

Responding to wrong with goodness often changes enemies into friends and softens hardened hearts.

Dear servants of Allah, good conduct is not limited to fellow Muslims alone. Islam commands kindness to neighbours, respect for elders, mercy to children, and fairness to all people regardless of tribe, race, or status.

A society filled with good conduct becomes peaceful and united. Crime reduces. Trust increases. Families become stronger. Young people grow with discipline and respect. The poor and vulnerable feel protected.

But when morals decay, society suffers from violence, hatred, corruption, and division.

Therefore, let each of us begin with ourselves. Let us examine our character. How do we speak to our parents? How do we treat our spouses, neighbours, coworkers, and even strangers? Are we truthful in our dealings? Do we forgive others? Do we show mercy?

The Prophet (peace be upon him)

said: "The heaviest thing on the scale of a believer on the Day of Judgment is good character."

SubhanAllah, good conduct is not only beneficial in this world; it is also a means of attaining Paradise and closeness to the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the Hereafter.

He (peace be upon him) said: "The closest of you to me on the Day of Resurrection will be those with the best character."

May Allah beautify our character, purify our hearts, and make us among those who spread goodness wherever they go.

O Allah, guide us to the best manners, for none guides to the best of them except You. O Allah, remove hatred, dishonesty, and cheating from our society. Unite our hearts upon truth and righteousness. Bless our homes, our communities, and our nation with peace and good conduct.

Indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe, send blessings and peace upon him abundantly.

Servants of Allah, Allah commands justice, good conduct, and generosity to relatives, and He forbids immorality, evil conduct, and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.

May Allah grant us the best in this world and in the Hereafter.

Abdul-Kadir Abdullah is the President of Muslim Media Practitioners of Nigeria (MMPN), Edo State Chapter

Lack of father figure made me turned to drugs —Bucci Franklin

Award-winning Nollywood actor, Bucci Franklin has said that his 'messy' childhood experience was due to lack of father figure at the early stage of his life.

Speaking in a candid interview with media personality Chude Jidenowo, Franklin said the absent of his father impacted his life negatively, revealing that at some point he turned to drugs to fill the void of absent father.

He disclosed that he was able to overcome the addiction due to his mother's efforts and support, stressing that he credited his success in life and career to his mother.

The movie star emphasized that it is not easy to be a single parent, adding that children especially males need a father in their lives.



BUCCI FRANKLIN

I do not have powers to get you into Big Brother show —Whitemoney to applicants

Former Big Brother Naija 'shine your eye winner', Whitemoney has appealed to intending housemates of the reality show to stop asking him for assistance on how to participate in the show.

Whitemoney said many have reached out to him asking him to influence their admission ahead of the eleventh edition of the show.

Speaking in a video broadcast recently, Whitemoney urged the intending housemates to follow due process rather than seeking to cut corners.

According to him "I lack the power to influence anyone's entry into the reality show. My DM is filled up with messages from people asking me to influence their entries into BBNaija, please I do not have the power to put you into Big Brother house, stop sending messages. Every year when the programme is approaching, I keep getting messages, this year's own is too much"

"Understand that the economy is

hard and everyone want to be famous by going to the Big Brother show, but please go and do audition, follow the due process"

"I auditioned four times before I

was picked, keep auditioning even if they reject you, don't fall victim of scam by giving anyone money to give you a BBNaija slot, be wise about it" he said



WHITEMONEY

'Ego, competition destroying collaborations among Nigerian artistes —Joeboy

Afrobeats singer, Joeboy said at the weekend that ego and unnecessary competition is affecting how Nigerian artistes collaborate.

Joeboy who spoke in Cool FM, Lagos alongside his colleague Wizard

Chan claimed some artistes approach collaboration with competitive mindset seeking to outshine their collaborators.

The artiste said he prefers to collaborate with artistes with whom he has cordial relationships to prevent poten-

tial conflict of interest.

"It is easier for me to collaborate with artistes that I am cool with, because there will be no ego and inner competition personally, if I feature you, I expect you to outshine me in the song. That is why I featured you, so I don't care about the competition" he said

"The reason I would feature anybody is because I cannot do what they are doing, and cannot even tell them to sound like me or do my style"

"The aim of collaboration is to bring a different aspect to the song, and not to compete. But some artistes would go as far changing their verses songs when they hear that their collaborator's own sounds better than theirs" he explained



JOEBOY

Don Jazzy debunks prioritizing artistes

Music Executive, Michael Collins Ajereh, popularly known as Don Jazzy has denied allegations that his Record label 'Mavin Records', prioritizes some artistes over others in terms of promotion and other opportunities.

Speaking in a recent episode of the creastorium podcast, the music producer said it made no sense that a Record label would invest in an artiste and ignore the artiste in bid to promote another.

He claimed that artistes who are not making waves and releasing fewer songs in Mavin are responsible for their decisions and not the Record label.

According to him "imposter syndrome and overthinking are respon-

sible for the allegations of neglect by artistes who assume their colleagues are treated better"

"We do see lots of comments that we do not prioritise some artistes, it is like I would just carry my money and just throw it away, just lock it inside somewhere, we obviously, invest in people to make us and ourselves money"

"So, the idea that we would have artistes and not want to priorities them is not real, if you see an artiste in Mavin and the artiste only releases one or two songs in a year, just know that its the artiste's decision"

"If the artiste has one million songs and they want to release them, we can release them, most of them actually have imposter syndrome. It is normal,



DON JAZZY

Nollywood actor, Alex Etubo is dead

● **I saw him smiling even in dead —AY**

Famous Nollywood actor, Alex Etubo is dead.

Source closed to the Nollywood industry told showbiz on Tuesday that the actor died on Monday afternoon after spending hours on life support.

This paper also has it in good authority that the Nollywood actor had been battling kidney cancer related ailment since May last year.

Alex who was diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer in 2024, has undergone a kidney transplant before the liver failed again in 2026 and died of complications hours later on Monday this week after being placed on life support.

Meanwhile, popular Nigerian comedian, Ayo Makun, professionally known as AY has spoken about the late Nollywood actor, Alex Ekubo's final moments.

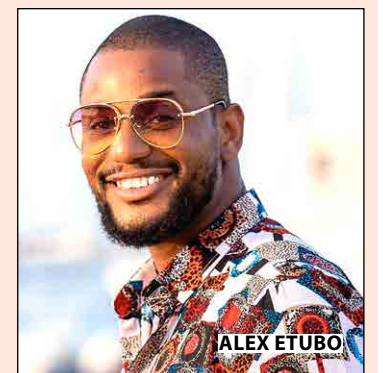
Speaking about Alex's final moment in an Instagram post, comedian AY who was present at the hospital revealed that Alex was smiling when he breathed his last breath.

"Some losses do not feel real no matter how many times you try to

process them, still struggling with the reality that Alex is gone"

"From the laughter to the conversations, the random moments, the brotherhood and all the memories we shared in the Nollywood industry, this one hurts deeply"

"I was there, I saw you smiling even in death, I saw the tears from friends and family, honestly, a part of me is still in shock. Rest well brother, you will be remembered beyond the lights, the cameras and the fame" AY penned.



ALEX ETUBO

ArtsWorld with Francis Odupte 08023680030

Culture: An advantage or a limitation?

EJEMOGO REBECCA ANWURI

Have you ever wondered why it is quite difficult for people to detach themselves from conforming to the demands of their culture despite being geographically distant from their cultural societies? Or have you imagined why culture-like constitutions are difficult to amend? These questions reveal how culture is an integral part of an individual just like an umbilical cord that connects a mother to her child while still in the womb. Hence, culture is a consciousness that one carries whether far or near.

Culture can simply be defined as the way of life of a particular section of people in a society. In other words, culture can be referred to as the customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. Culture can therefore be identified through mode of dressing, language, food, beliefs, traditions, customs, music, value and other forms that captures its expression from one generation to another.

Culture as a concept is important because it helps to promote unity across touch points, instills moral value and uprightness, gives people an identity, and even goes as far as having economic value. Therefore, it is important as members of a society to understand the existence of both its benefits and challenges that contribute to the entirety of a cultural society in contemporary times.

Culture as an integral aspect of a society helps to promote identity and unity. It is such a beautiful thing to look at people and without batting an eyelid can identify where such individuals came from. Culture in that sense has helped to place a certain amount of importance on such a person in the midst of thousands of people occupying a geographical location. For example, mode of dressing, language, beliefs and traditions of a culture can help to pinpoint the culture that engage in such practices i.e The 'Adire' clothing, local dishes like Amala and Ewedu are predominant among the Yorubas. It also helps to create unity through ceremonies, festivals, marriages etc. which promotes peace, oneness and understanding, not just within the culture, but reflects in the larger society.

Culture has assisted in inculcating moral values. An adage once said 'Charity begins at home', this assertion can identify with the discourse on culture in itself as a way of molding and shaping the attitude and behaviour of individuals. It can be likened to a furnace that purifies raw gold until it gets to its finished form. For instance, the 'greeting' aspect of culture has helped those who have embraced it to have a sense of reverence and respect for others, particularly their elders. Taking the Yoruba society for example, we will realize that the men prostrate by laying down flat on their chest, while women kneel on their two legs. It has also created a medium for controlling their actions and refraining them from indulging in certain practices. For example, the reason most persons deviate from engaging in wrongdoing is because their culture must have



BENIN CULTURAL TROUPE DRUMMERS IN ACTION.

PHOTO BY FRANCIS ODUPUTE

clearly stipulated the consequences of such actions, which in most cases are life threatening.

Furthermore, social bonding is also a product of culture. This implies that culture creates emotional, and physical connection among those who are in the radar of a particular culture irrespective of who they are. A typical example can be seen in the 'New Yam' festival among the Igbo people, which can also be called 'Iri Ji Ohuru.' In that festival, there is no such thing as segregation, or oppression. People from all walks of life come to celebrate a safe start of the harvest season and to give thanks to God and their ancestors for a bountiful harvest. This festival comprises dance, feasts masquerades etc. which serves as a medium to strengthen community bonds and foster unity.

Aside from creating social bonds, culture also attracts tourists and boosts the society's economy. This factor comes into play especially when foreigners find something that attracts or draws their attention to a culture or an aspect of it, their quest for knowledge in some of these cultural practices can spark their interest in visiting such places. For example, the artifacts of the Benin Kingdom especially in brass, bronze, and ivory have over the years attracted tourists to visit and explore the Kingdom. By so doing, it has contributed immensely to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to the mode of transportation used which is mostly by Air, hence, it has generated funds to the country's purse, also, it will generate money for the tourist centre that will coordinate their visit all through the duration of their stay within the environment.

In addition, culture serves as a veritable means of preserving tradition

In a nutshell, culture is an integral aspect of a society that contributes to how it is viewed and valued by people. While the positive benefits should be encouraged and imbibed, the negative counterparts should be discouraged and at all cost prevented from taking place, because the society where the culture is located is at the verge of losing her peace and unity

and heritage. People can successfully be aware, taught, and oriented about the beliefs, traditions, customs and dictates of their culture because it was passed down from previous generations before they were born, hence, they are also given the baton to pass it down to their children in that order. Some of these cultures were preserved through mouth-to-mouth (oral tradition), storytelling, folklore, literature etc. For instance Late Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart' typifies certain knowledge about the Igbo cultural norms and practices.

Despite the benefits culture portrays, it has certain limitations that undermines its total acceptance among people in contemporary times. Culture has been criticized for promoting tribalism, in the sense that people tend to indulge in favouritism to satisfy only those who belong to their culture, and neglect others who are not from where they came from. This is mostly seen in workplace settings where most qualified candidates

are disappointed and replaced by unqualified ones due to terms like "he or she is from my side." It has blinded people from developing, learning and sustaining relationships with people from other cultures, which might give them a myopic view of what they are supposed to benefit from.

Also, culture has heightened gender inequality in society. In an African society like Nigeria, we will realize how gender inequality has eaten deep into what people now see and accept as the norm which is socially constructive. For example, the female gender is believed in some cultures to belong to the kitchen and be prevented from acquiring formal education, while the male gender are encouraged to pursue acquiring a formal education. In some culture, women are forbidden from doing jobs to earn a living because they believe she will become arrogant and less submissive to her husband, or is it about the testament that we have less women than men in politics and political positions as a whole, or

the agony of widows who are forced to engage in traditional rites and libation, drinking concoctions just to prove their innocence of not killing their husbands, these and many more might have contributed to the statement made in 2016 by Late. General Muhammadu Buhari who said during a state visit to Germany that "my wife belongs to my kitchen, living room and the other room," which further portrays a society dominated by patriarchy.

Culture can also lead to outrageous traditional practices, and these practices have the tendency of harming individuals, especially those that are naive about it, and it can also lead to the violation of human rights. For example, in Nigeria, there are some culture that whenever a woman's husband dies which ought to create a sense of sympathy and compassion on her, would instead lead to the rise of gluttonous individuals from the deceased man's family who will at all cost want to claim the properties of their supposed 'brother' and in such process leads to the widow and the poor children being kicked out of their abode and sidelined from becoming partakers of her husband's property. It has therefore violated section 43 of the Nigerian Constitution which states that every citizen of Nigeria shall have the right to acquire and own immovable property in any part of the country.

In addition, culture can also lead to religious intolerance. Most cultures believe that theirs is better and superior to others, while they use such to oppress those they feel are incomparable with theirs. For instance, during the era of colonialism, the Western countries that colonized some parts of Africa condemned its customs, traditions and values, violated the norms, invaded communities and even referred to their cultural practices as "primitive, retrogressive and barbaric." This has caused people to begin to shy away from their own culture and embrace a foreign one. We can evidently witness some of its effect in the adoption of English language, which has become one of the most recognized and spoken language in the world, it has also affected our mode of dressing i.e the wearing of suit and tie especially for those engaged in white collar jobs, even western education was introduced by the western culture. It has therefore affected the value people have for informal education especially the ones gotten from home.

While there are benefits and shortcomings in culture, there are practical solutions that can help mitigate its negative impact in the society which can be achieved through the promotion of unity, gender equality, cultural tolerance, discouraging harmful cultural practices, and other positive contributions to culture.

In a nutshell, culture is an integral aspect of a society that contributes to how it is viewed and valued by people. While the positive benefits should be encouraged and imbibed, the negative counterparts should be discouraged and at all cost prevented from taking place, because the society where the culture is located is at the verge of losing her peace and unity.

Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

'Every divinely called creative artiste should be able to reinvent themselves at least once in a decade'

You have witnessed different eras of the Nigerian music scene. What major changes have you observed?

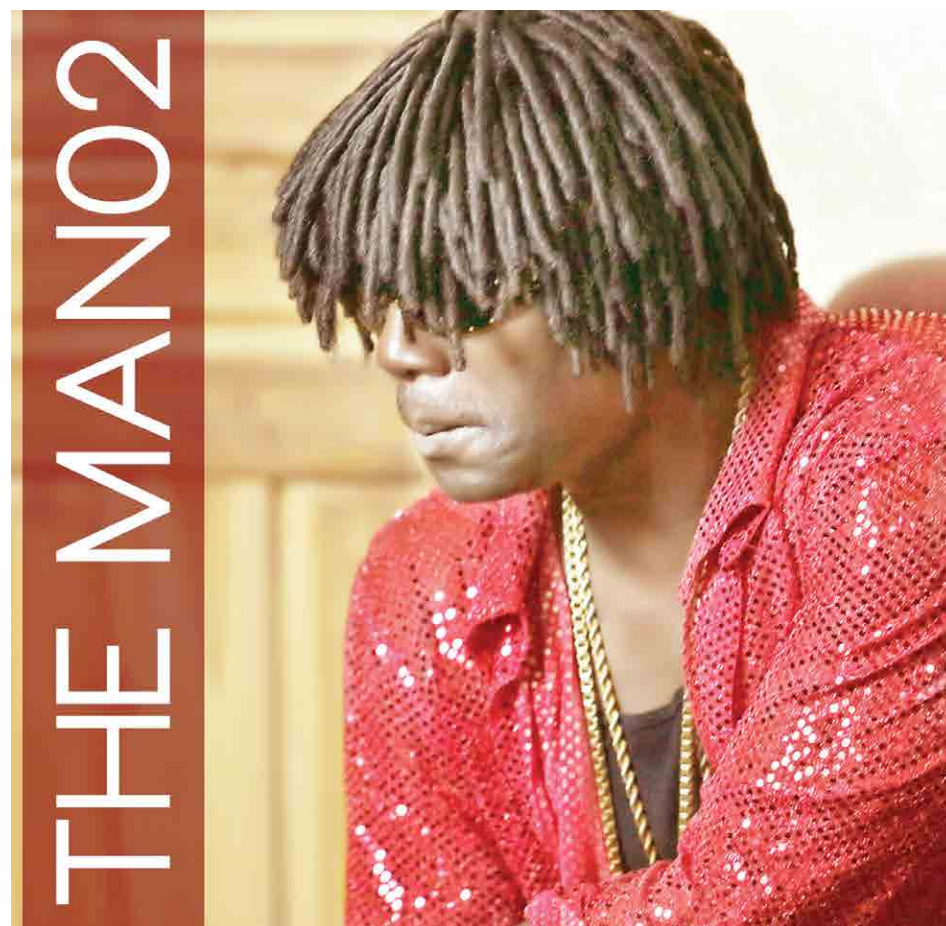
Hmmm. This question is tricky. But from my wealth of knowledge and ability to interpolate and extrapolate on this topic, we can start from the very tainted, undefined specific time and period that we can term the very beginning or formation of the country called Nigeria, the era that I would like to refer to as the blur era because we barely have solid frame of reference in correlation with the topic being discussed, which hinges on the formation of the time and space (the landmarks) that could be agreed upon that Nigeria took its present form. I guess it would be safe to say, as a young person, we are taking it way back to 1960 when Nigeria got independence. Prior to that time, there were nations that existed inside the country Nigeria. These nations can be defined through and within the tribal lines and locations.

Prior to when this country took shape, from time immemorial to it being today called Nigeria, through the 20s to the 50s and somewhere around the 60s, music was mainly created, exploited, and enjoyed within individual tribal lines (boundaries). That also bled and overflowed into areas and territories of people who shared close-knit national identity. That's how many Nigerian songs, folklores and motifs ideation came about, and music whose composers are largely unknown (till date) that make up a substantial wealth of our national musical inherent, intellectual property wealth and identity that are yet to be tapped or exploited to the benefit of the entertainment sectors within Nigerian communities globally. To put it mildly, I can guarantee you that these songs are all together worth billions of dollars, which is part of the material archive, musical libraries that accumulated into the generous musical echoes and ecosystem with derivatives of hip hop, Afrobeat, funk, pop, soul, and Gidila-Gidilo (aka Big Vibes Big Vokes, Vibes On Vibes, Gidivibe Gidivoke), which is THEBB02's formulated term for his original genre.

THEBB02's legacy is still on course and unfolding, catering towards impacting the economic difference and structure that is beneficial and much-lacked and needed in our shared values and commonwealth.

Starting from the 60s through the 70s, that musical ecosystem began to expand beyond its original territories. Then local and foreign interests (executive greed) started brewing and teaming together in the interest of benefiting, tapping, and mining our inherent musical wealth and cultural identity as best as our ancestors have been able to pass it down and preserve it to the first generation who started putting it in solid, tangible (territorial ownership) forms, e.g., records, betamax, VHS, cassette tapes, etc. This was around the era of EMI, Decca Records, Premier Records, Supreme Records, Sony, Island Records and Tabansi Records, etc. In America, which is a far younger country compared to the pre-colonial nations that existed within the territory now called Nigeria, they were forward-thinking and business savvy to have established the Library of Congress in the 18th century wherein creative talents/intellectual property original curators/owners can reap from where they have put in hard work and creative input. But in Nigeria, these aforementioned record labels were lacklustre in their business practices towards breaking dividends, sometimes to the detriment of the creatives, even as the creatives were also delinquent most times in their business practices and approach. And no one knows this better than THEBB02 who has experienced both sides of the aisle all the way to the early 2000s where, arguably, the current music scene started to take its form to the point where we are today, which is largely marked by artistes now pushing towards independence due to the advent of social media marketing and availability of easy tools.

With a sound academic training in Music & Business Management/Intellectual Properties Laws at Northeastern University in Boston, USA, and years of experience as the Founder/CEO of Bigmanity Music Records and the label "Collectives" Imprint THE BB02 & THE LEMLINES (aka BIGMANITY ALL STARS), THEBB02, born Jesse Adesotu Woghiren, is one artiste and music executive whose in-depth knowledge of the entertainment sectors on both sides of the Atlantic is unquestionable. He shares some of that knowledge in this interview, touching on steps he is currently embarking on to promote a thriving industry that serves the best interest of all stakeholders.



Now, going back to the beginning of the 20th century where there is no historical reference, which, as I said before, I like to call the blur era, an era that THEBB02 is well vested in beginning to throw a lot of wood to the fire to build a formidable library of reference for the benefits and positive exploitation of the current and future generations. This era, any soulful musical motif, tune and melody that was in the air as spiritually (mystically) given, socially encountered, intelligently created, or accidentally happened upon by individuals or a group of persons from their lifetime experiences and the social norms pop culture of the times will serve as a launch pad for lucrative exploitation globally as aforementioned.

Now going back, depending on a lot of factors at play at the time these original tunes, motifs and melodies were put out, some of the eventual songs/music or folklore derived as at that time usually spread fast within the community by a group of social juggernauts through all walks of life, family and friends, to the top of the societal hierarchy.

Moreover, these melodies, motifs and music ideations are usually spiritually poised and socio-consciously based. Till today, there are a lot of these folkloric melodies and motifs that no one person or individual is registered or can be registered as the owner, unlike the other side of the Atlantic, in America, before and at the same timeline where the likes of Benjamin Franklin started documenting their similar intellectual inherent wealth and delegating the ownership of the intellectual properties to individual estates and their generations.

Now, even before this set time, we can take a bilateral look or reference from the songs and sounds of King David and King Solomon which are all free library to the benefit of humanity today. I sometimes wish the associated chants and musical melodies with these Songs of Solomon and Psalms of King David were documented just as much as the lyrics and the wordings were superbly documented. Now, if we were to draw a contrast with the time when Kings David and Solomon reigned on earth and the era THEBB02 refers to as the blur era, it is sad to realise that a lot of these beautiful old-money-rich Nigerian sound ecosystem (library) could have been documented for the benefit of their individual creators. The critical question to ask: who are the folks known as the originators of these original melodies today? Their descendants would have been benefiting from the wealth of their ancestors' intellectual estates. You can cut it from anywhere along the tribal lines as earlier said, from the genius nation of the Binis to the Yorubas, the Igbos, the Hausas, and a whole lot of other tribes. Like I said before, this is an area of interest that can be interpolated and extrapolated upon.

What would you say has been the biggest turning point in your career so far?

It's me being able to straddle the fence from both sides of the Atlantic, as an artiste and an executive interchangeably, and see that the music business is more than meets the eye and that most of the folks you think are on the top are still very much in the dark regarding the seasoned and seasonal ebb and flow of the music industry and, importantly, me now

being able to understand, buy into and navigate the musical infrastructure and structure (landmarks) that make the musical industry tick and tock. This is what is now responsible for the magnitude of the status and steps that we are currently embarking on to make it a more formidable industry opportunity towards the best interest of all stakeholders.

What challenges have you faced as a long-standing artiste, and how did you overcome them?

It's me being able to see things from many industry perspectives most times. It's me playing by my own rules and the average industry or non-industry head thinking that popularity contest is the order of the day when, in actuality, it all boils down to the genuine superb status of your catalogue and the fact that THEBB02 is riding his own special wave/lane as only true top dogs can: big and independently. But the good news now is that we are clapping back harder and faster and the right folks with the right intellectual makeup are joining the movement to make the world a better place for our industry.

Besides, much as it's not what I will like to often do, I can't help but recommend THEBB02's masterclass as an opportunity and privilege to get soundly equipped with all these information and many more. So stay tuned and continue reading series of our oncoming articles, especially if you are a true music lover who really also cares about your favourite artistes' wellbeing and, more importantly, the survival and true full fleshing-out (potent/bounds) of the entertainment industry to its full capacity, wherein the industry has attained a mutually beneficial and justly lucrative status (dividends) for both the creative artistes and label executives (investors) based on the best case scenario, meaning everything being everything in regards to creativity, profitability, sustainability, etc. In conclusion, I will use this opportunity to beg and invite you to put on your emotional intelligence and do not fall for the crowd mentality but rather, always remember that you are yet to meet your best potential creative self and peers and that will allow the space and opportunity to get yourself intellectually informed, poised, prepared to make the right and most viable decisions that will excellently support the music industry in such a way that no real talented artiste gets left behind.

How do you stay original and maintain your signature sound in a constantly changing industry?

To me, it's natural. It's like asking humanity: how do you take your breath and get your oxygen? Or asking a butterfly, how do you go from egg to larva, to pupa, and then to adult? A true divinely called creative artiste should be able to reinvent themselves as often as possible. If an artiste is not able to reinvent themselves at least within a decade in a worst case scenario, then that artiste does not belong in the field. It may not be readily obvious as it can be subtle but it should be obvious within 10 years.

As an artiste you should be able to create and expand your horizon in all areas of the entertainment industry you are well versed in. With every material or creative spur you cover, or experiences you expand upon, those can serve as opportunities for reintroducing your brand platform and trajectories.

NEWS**Foreign****Latvian PM resigns after row over stray Ukrainian drones**

Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina has resigned following a political crisis over Russia-bound Ukrainian drones straying into Latvian territory.

She had fired her Defence Minister Andris Spruds last week after two drones crashed down in eastern Latvia, criticising his response and appointing a replacement.

In protest, Spruds's Progressives party pulled their support for Silina's governing coalition, causing it to collapse months before a planned general election in October.

"Seeing a strong candidate for the post of defence minister... political windbags have chosen a crisis," Silina said on Thursday. "I am resigning but I am not giving up."

The political fallout was triggered by the incursion of three drones into Latvian airspace on 7 May - the second such incident since the start of 2026.

Both Latvia and Ukraine acknowledged that the drones may have been Ukrainian UAVs intended to target Russia whose signals had been jammed, leading them to stray into Latvia.

One drone crashed on the ground while another struck an empty oil product storage facility near the town of Rezekne. The third flew in and out of Latvian airspace.

There were no casualties or injuries - but local residents

told media that the official response to the incident had been delayed and insufficient. They said the cell broadcast alert system had not been activated for an hour after one of the drones crashed near Rezekne.

Silina had said after the incident: "Something went wrong. We cannot afford for this situation to continue."

She said she had also asked Spruds to resign because of the situation in the Latvian defence sector as a whole.

The Baltic country spends 5% of its GDP on national defence, Silina noted, which she said entailed a "much higher level of responsibility toward society... that requires clear results".

President Edgars Rinkevics said he would take a decision on the "quickest possible formation" of a new government on 15 May.

Evika Silina was appointed Latvia's prime minister in September 2023, heading a three-party coalition government.

Her government has been steadfast in its support of Ukraine against Russia.

Latvia, like the other two Baltic countries Lithuania and Estonia, feels increasingly nervous about potential Russian aggression.

It has significantly accelerated its defence capabilities and officially reintroduced compulsory military service a year after Moscow launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

'Floating armoury' ship reportedly seized by Iran

A vessel reportedly operating as a "floating armoury" in the Gulf of Oman has been seized by Iranian military personnel, according to the maritime risk management company Vanguard.

The ship is now "bound for Iranian territorial waters", the UK's Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) organisation said.

BBC Verify has checked ship-tracking data from MarineTraffic which shows the vessel - identified by Vanguard as the Honduras-flagged Hui Chuan - last broadcast its location 70km (40 miles) north-east of Fujairah in the UAE on Wednesday.

Hui Chuan's operators told Vanguard it was operating as a floating armoury which stores weapons for security firms who protect ships at sea from attack by pirates.

BBC Verify cannot confirm what was on the ship or who it was used by.

The BBC has previously reported how these vessels are based in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman so security guards can easily collect and drop off weapons and ammunition.

The apparent seizure of Hui Chuan comes after an Indian-flagged vessel was attacked

off the coast of Oman on Wednesday, according to Indian officials.

The Haji Ali "reportedly sank" off the coast of Oman, following a suspected explosion believed to have been caused by a "drone or missile", according to Vanguard.

"All Indian crew on board are safe and we thank the Omani authorities for rescuing them," Indian authorities said on Thursday.

Ship-tracking data from MarineTraffic shows the 57m (187ft) vessel left Berbera Port in Somalia on 6 May. Its intended destination was Sharjah in the UAE, the Indian shipping ministry said.

The ship was carrying livestock "when a fire reportedly broke out onboard, forcing the crew to abandon ship before the vessel sank," Vanguard said.

Fourteen crew members were transferred by Oman Coast Guard units to the country's Diba Port, according to Indian officials.

India's Ministry of External Affairs called the attack "unacceptable".

The situation in the Strait of Hormuz was discussed during talks on Thursday between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

**MASSIVE RUSSIAN STRIKE:**

The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko (right), visited the site of the attack as rescue teams worked on Thursday.

Flattery and fanfare as Trump welcomed to China - but thorny issues remain

Donald Trump last visited China nine years ago, during his first term in office

Xi Jinping threw a grand welcome for Donald Trump on the first day of a visit that could reset ties between the rival superpowers.

The military honour guard lined up outside the Great Hall of the People to welcome Trump, complete with a gun salute and a band playing the US national anthem. The president paused twice to say hello to schoolchildren cheering with Chinese and American flags.

As he shook hands with Xi, he leaned in to pat him on the arm in what appeared to be a gesture of warmth. And he lavished praise on his host.

"You're a great leader. I say it to everybody," he declared in what appeared to be un-

scripted remarks. Later, on his tour of the 15th Century Temple of Heaven, he remarked to reporters that China was beautiful. At the banquet this evening, he called the talks a "cherished" opportunity.

It was a remarkable day given Trump built up his political brand by talking tough on China. "We can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they're doing," he told a campaign rally in 2016.

In 2020, he claimed China has "ripped off the United States like no one has ever done before", and described the Covid-19 pandemic as the "Chinese virus". Before returning to power, he vowed to "make China pay".

At the height of the trade war last year, the two sides had levied tariffs that crossed 100% on each other. A fragile truce followed but one of the main

questions hanging over this visit is whether that will last, and what deal would take its place?

The others are around Iran - can Beijing help broker a deal? - and Taiwan, the US ally and self-governed island that China claims as its territory.

Trump appears to have been delighted by the welcome he received in Beijing

Beijing put on a spectacle designed to flatter Trump ahead of any deal to prove China's door is open to guests.

However, soon after talks began, state media published comments from Xi making clear that tensions over Taiwan could prove challenging.

But the meticulous choreography was not just for the benefit of Trump and the 30 CEOs who accompanied him. It was also a show of strength, which Beijing knows will be

beamed live across the US and the world.

"We are witnessing a historical change," says John Delury, a senior fellow from the Centre on US-China Relations at the Asia Society.

"I hesitate to put too much on this specific summit, but the inexorable rise of China to a place where it is legitimately rivalling the U.S. - that is now happening before our eyes. Beijing is now the second world capital."

A SHOW FOR EVERYONE

President Xi has been eager to portray himself as a stable global leader in contrast to a mercurial US president. Given the size of China's economy, a number of world leaders, including those from US allies such as Canada, the UK and Germany, have turned up, eager to do a deal with Beijing.

Ukraine rescuers pull dead from rubble of Kyiv flats after massive Russian strikes

At least seven people have been killed, including a 12-year-old girl, in Kyiv after Russia launched a massive wave of drone and missile strikes on the Ukrainian capital and other regions, officials have said.

The victims' bodies were pulled from the rubble of a partially destroyed apartment building in Kyiv, where rescuers are searching for at least 20 people feared missing, Ukraine's emergencies service said.

Dozens more have been wounded in the attack, including two children, the city's mayor said. Twenty-one people are being treated in hospital.

It marks the third day in a row Ukraine has reported deaths, as Moscow ramps up its assault after a three-day ceasefire expired on Monday.

The overnight barrage saw more than 670 drones and 56 missiles targeting the country, President Volodymyr Zelensky said. This is among the largest attacks Russia has mounted since the start of its full-scale invasion in 2022.

The strikes hit more than 180 sites across Ukraine, including more than 50 residential buildings, Zelensky added.

He said a "significant number" of Russian drones and missiles were shot down, with an "overall interception rate" of 93%.

"There must be a just response to all these strikes," Zelensky said, calling for allies to hold Moscow accountable and keep global sanctions in place.

In Kyiv, a search and rescue operation began early Thursday to look for people under the rubble of a nine-storey apart-

ment block in the south-western Darnytskyi district.

Police said two men, aged 21 and 30, and a woman, who has not yet been identified, were found dead in the rubble of the building's destroyed entrance.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said the body of a 12-year-old girl had been recovered from the rubble of a house nearby.

A man also died in hospital, the city's police added, who had been at a petrol station which came under attack.

More than 1,500 rescuers and police officers are working in the aftermath of Russia's overnight attacks, almost 600 of them in Kyiv, said Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko.

Dozens of people have been rescued alive from the damaged building and more than 10 people are thought to be missing.

Teams said they had moved more than 20 cubic metres of debris and evacuated five damaged vehicles.

Near the scene, some residents sat inside tents erected by volunteers and local officials, wrapped in blankets in shock and disbelief.

Iryna Movchan was among those watching the debris being cleared, with tears in her eyes. She had returned to Ukraine after being away for two years for a short visit, and was staying in a nearby apartment when the attack happened.

"The entire building was shaking. It was very scary," she told the BBC at the scene.

"It was so quiet lately that I thought perhaps it was time to move back completely. And yesterday and today, we had such an Armageddon."

Foreign

NEWS

'They shot my neighbour in the head' - the lakeside city traumatised by war

Summary executions and rape were among the atrocities committed by the M23 rebel group and Rwandan soldiers during their weeks-long occupation of the lakeside city of Uvira in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, an investigation by a leading rights group has found.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) says its investigators found evidence of the execution of 53 civilians - 46 men, one woman and six children - during door-to-door raids in the city's neighbourhoods after the rebels, widely believed to be backed by Rwanda, captured it in December.

Rwanda has consistently denied supporting the M23 or that its own soldiers have been deployed to resource-rich eastern DR Congo.

But HRW says many of the interviewees alleged witnessing atrocities committed by

uniformed Rwandan soldiers as well as M23 fighters.

"They [M23 fighters] shot my neighbour first in the head," said one of the 130 residents interviewed by HRW.

Another said he saw four members of his family killed.

"I wasn't hit so I just ran to the lake. I saw my brother, his wife, and two of his children fall," he was quoted as saying.

The M23 and Rwandan government have not yet responded to a BBC request for comment.

Warning: This article contains descriptions of sexual violence

The M23 captured Uvira - which lies on the shores of Lake Tanganyika - days after US President Donald Trump brokered a peace deal between DR Congo's President Felix Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame in a bid to end the devastating conflict in

the resource-rich region.

The US and European powers accuse Rwanda - which borders eastern DR Congo - of supporting the rebel offensive.

UN experts have said Rwanda had "de facto control" of the M23's operations. They said M23 recruits were trained under Rwandan supervision and supported by high-tech Rwandan weaponry.

Government forces have regained control of some territory in eastern DR Congo following the withdrawal of rebel fighters

The M23 withdrew from Uvira - the gateway to Burundi, a key military ally of DR Congo - in January following intense diplomatic pressure.

The HRW report is the first detailed study of what happened in the city when it was under M23 control. Tens of thousands of people fled their homes when the group seized control of it.

HRW says it documented eight cases of rape allegedly committed by the rebels and Rwandan soldiers during the occupation.

"They took my clothes off completely, tied my arms behind my back with my clothes, and raped me," a woman is quoted as saying in the report.

She added that when her husband attempted to intervene, he was shot dead.

HRW says it wrote in April to both the Rwandan government and M23 leaders for a response to the allegations in its report, but, it adds, neither replied.

A rape survivor was quoted in the report as saying that men in uniforms she identified to be from the Rwandan military told her: "If you don't do what I tell you, I will kill you."

Another woman said: "The Rwandan man said they should kill me, but the Congolese said: 'No, rape her'."

Cuba has run out of diesel and oil, energy minister says

Cuba has completely run out of diesel and fuel oil, the country's Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy has said.

In an interview with state-run media, de la O Levy said there were limited amounts of gas available, but that Cuba's energy system was in a "critical" state as a US-led blockade of oil to the country squeezed supply.

Scattered protests against power cuts broke out in the capital Havana on Wednesday, the Reuters news agency reported.

The US this week reiterated its offer of sending \$100m (£74m) in aid to the country in exchange for "meaningful reforms to Cuba's communist system".

"The sum of the different types of fuel: crude oil, fuel oil, of which we have absolutely none; diesel, of which we have absolutely none - I am being repetitive - the only thing we have is gas from our wells, where production has grown," de la O Levy said.

Under the US blockade, parts of Havana have been plunged into 20 to 22-hour blackout periods, he continued.

He also acknowledged that the situation in the country had been "extremely tense".

Hospitals have been unable to function normally, while schools and government offices have been forced to close. Tourism, an economic engine for Cuba, has also been impacted.

Cuba normally relies on Venezuela and Mexico to supply oil to its refinery system. However, the two countries have largely cut off supplies since US President Donald Trump threatened tariffs on countries that send fuel to Cuba.

As the island continues to grapple with these energy shortages, rare protests erupted in Havana on Wednesday

evening.

Hundreds of Cubans took to the streets across the city, blocking roads with burning rubbish and shouting anti-government slogans.

It marked the biggest single night of demonstrations in the city since Cuba's energy crisis began in January, Reuters reported.

Residents of the San Miguel del Padron neighbourhood could be heard shouting "turn on the lights!", the AFP news agency said.

Taking to social media on Wednesday, Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel blamed the US for the energy shortages as he acknowledged the "particularly tense" situation across the island.

"This dramatic worsening has a single cause: the genocidal energy blockade to which the United States subjects our country, threatening irrational tariffs against any nation that supplies us with fuel," he wrote.

Last week, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Havana had rejected a US offer of humanitarian aid worth \$100m (£74m), a claim Cuba denied.

The US State Department repeated its offer on Wednesday, saying the humanitarian assistance would be distributed in coordination with the Catholic Church and "reliable" humanitarian organisations.

It continued: "The decision rests with the Cuban regime to accept our offer of assistance or deny critical living-saving aid and ultimately be accountable to the Cuban people for standing in the way of critical assistance."

Washington's blockade on the country ramped up in early May when the US targeted senior Cuban officials in a wave of sanctions accusing them of committing "human rights abuses".

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez called the sanctions "illegal and abusive".



DR CONGO CRISIS:

Conflict in eastern DR Congo has caused a massive humanitarian crisis.

BRICS foreign ministers meet in India amid differences over Iran war

Foreign ministers from the BRICS group of emerging economies began a two-day meeting in the Indian capital, New Delhi, on Thursday.

The gathering comes as the expanding bloc faces divisions over the war in Iran, rising energy prices, and growing global uncertainty.

It brings together diplomats from founding members Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, along with newer member countries.

They are expected to discuss economic cooperation and coordinate their positions on key global issues.

In his opening remarks, Indian foreign minister, Subrah-

manyam Jaishankar, said peace and security issues remain central to global order.

"We meet at a time of considerable flux in international relations. Ongoing conflicts, economic uncertainties, and challenges in trade, technology, and climate are shaping the global landscape," he said.

"There is a growing expectation, particularly from emerging markets and developing countries, that BRICS will play a constructive and stabilising role."

India is having to walk a diplomatic tightrope between BRICS members who remain divided on key issues.

Jaishankar called for "safe,

unimpeded maritime flows" through international waters, as the Strait of Hormuz remains under blockade, saying they remain vital for global economic wellbeing.

Iran's foreign minister, Abbas Araghchi, meanwhile called on members to condemn the US and Israel's "unlawful aggression" against Tehran.

His remarks come as the Washington and Tehran trade threats amid a ceasefire teetering on the brink of collapse.

The war has had far-reaching global repercussions, including on BRICS countries.

Founded by Brazil, Russia, India and China, BRICS was formed as a grouping of major

emerging economies seen as a counterbalance to Western-led institutions such as the G7.

South Africa joined in 2010 and the bloc expanded further in 2024 with the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Indonesia became a full member in 2025.

The group has sought to expand its influence by pushing for a bigger role in a global order long dominated by the United States and its Western allies.

It has gained support across parts of the Global South, where many countries have criticized Western-led financial institutions.

Mali's army carries out overnight strikes on rebel-held city of Kidal

Mali's army reportedly carried out several strikes overnight Wednesday to Thursday on the town of Kidal in the desert region in the north of the country.

It has been under the control of Tuareg rebels and their allies from the JNIM jihadist group since their large-scale coordinated attacks across the country in late April.

Their rare alliance enabled a rapid campaign that saw several strategic military bases overrun across northern Mali.

Residents have told an AFP journalist they heard at least four explosions in Kidal on Wednesday night which caused material damage.

One strike reportedly hit a house near a former market, destroying it, while another struck the governor's compound.

A Malian army officer says the armed forces are targeting specific objectives and warned the strikes will be intensifying in the coming days.

Witnesses say Kidal was unusually calm on Thursday morning with very little traffic on the roads.

The strategic town served as an unofficial headquarters of the Tuareg Azawad Liberation Front coalition for more than a decade

It was captured by Mali's army in late 2023 with the help of Russian mercenaries.

Feature

2027: The rivers political crisis in focus

RAYMOND OSOGBE

The political crisis in Rivers State remains one of the most contentious episodes in Nigeria's democratic history. What began as a dispute between political allies escalated into a high-stakes battle for power, influence, and control of the oil-rich state. As Nigeria approaches the 2027 general elections, the fallout from the Rivers crisis continues to shape national political discourse.

At the center of the conflict are Governor Siminalayi Fubara and his predecessor, Nyesom Wike. Fubara emerged as governor in 2023 with Wike's backing, but the relationship soured over questions of authority and control within the state's political structure. The rift split the Rivers State House of Assembly into rival factions and fueled instability across the state.

Tensions deepened when lawmakers aligned with Wike initiated impeachment proceedings against Governor Fubara. Political violence, protests, and allegations of abuse of power followed. The demolition of the Rivers State House of Assembly complex further inflamed the situation and raised serious constitutional questions nationwide.

In March 2025, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu declared a state of emergency in Rivers State. He suspended Governor Fubara, his deputy, and members of the State House of Assembly for six months, and ap-



NYESOM WIKE

GOVERNOR SIMINALAYI FUBARA

pointed retired Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ibas as sole administrator. The federal government justified the move as necessary to restore order and protect critical oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta.

The declaration drew sharp criticism from legal experts, civil society groups, and opposition politicians.

Many argued that suspending elected officials undermined democratic norms and federalism. Others contended that the intervention averted a descent into chaos. The episode exposed the fragility of Nigeria's political institutions and the enduring influence of godfatherism in governance.

Public reaction revealed deep national divisions. On social media and in political forums, some blamed Wike for interfering in Rivers State affairs, while others accused Fubara of mismanaging the political structure that brought him to power. The debate also reflected growing anxiety about democratic backsliding and the

potential for increased political manipulation ahead of 2027.

Economically, the crisis dented investor confidence in Rivers State, a cornerstone of Nigeria's oil production. Pipeline vandalism, fears of instability, and governance uncertainty disrupted economic activity and raised concerns among local and international investors. Analysts warned that prolonged instability could depress national oil output and reduce government revenue.

Although President Tinubu later initiated reconciliation efforts, political tensions persisted. Meetings involving Wike, Fubara, and key Rivers political actors aimed to restore peace and unity, but trust remained fragile.

As the 2027 elections draw near, the Rivers crisis stands as a cautionary tale about the dangers of political godfatherism, weak institutions, and the struggle for control. It underscores the urgent need for dialogue, constitutional fidelity, and good governance. For democracy to thrive, leaders must prioritize public interest over personal ambition and factional rivalry.

In conclusion, the Rivers political crisis is more than a feud between two politicians. It reflects broader structural challenges facing Nigerian democracy. The events in Rivers will continue to shape political alignments, governance debates, and electoral strategies as the country prepares for another pivotal democratic transition in 2027.

Nigeria's Health System: Too many out-of-pocket payments, too little coverage

CLARETH SOLOMON

Nigeria's health system is under strain. Life expectancy is 54 years, maternal mortality is 512 per 100,000 live births, and out-of-pocket spending accounts for 70% of total health expenditure. For most

Nigerians, getting sick means choosing between debt and no treatment.

The National Health Insurance Authority Act of 2022 made health insurance mandatory. The goal was universal health coverage by 2030. But coverage remains low. Only 7% of Nigerians are enrolled in any form of health insur-

ance, according to the NHIA. The informal sector, which employs 80% of workers, is largely excluded.

WHY COVERAGE IS LOW

Affordability is the main barrier. The basic health insurance package costs N12,000 annually per person.

For a family of five earning minimum wage, that's unaffordable. Trust is another issue. Many enrollees complain of poor service, drug stockouts, and long wait times at accredited facilities.

Supply is also limited. Nigeria has 0.4 doctors per 1,000 people, below the WHO recommendation of 1 per 1,000. Primary health centers exist in most wards, but 30% have no skilled birth attendant, and 40% lack basic drugs.

through a mix of payroll deductions and tax funding. Both countries invested heavily in primary care.

Nigeria's Basic Health Care Provision Fund allocates 1% of consolidated revenue to primary healthcare. Since 2019, it has disbursed over N120 billion. Impact is visible in some states, but disbursement delays and weak monitoring limit results.

THE PATH TO UNIVERSAL COVERAGE

Three priorities stand out:

1. *Expand coverage for the informal sector*: Mobile money and agency banking can collect micro-premiums of N500-N1,000 monthly.
2. *Strengthen primary healthcare*: No insurance scheme works if facilities lack drugs and staff. The PHC revitalization program must accelerate.
3. *Improve data and accountability*: A unified health information system can track enrollment, claims, and outcomes in real time.

Globally, countries that achieved universal coverage did it over 15-20 years with sustained political commitment. Nigeria's window is open, but the clock is ticking. Without faster progress, out-of-pocket payments will keep driving poverty and preventable deaths.

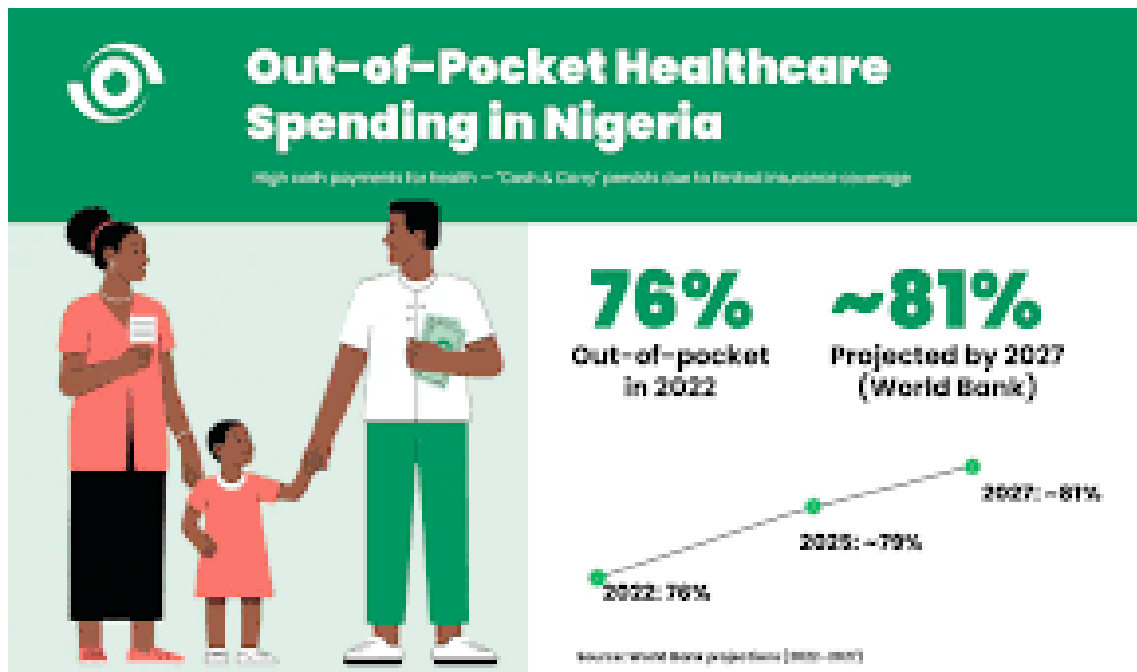
THE BURDEN OF OUT-OF-POCKET SPENDING

When insurance is absent, people pay cash at the point of care. A single hospital admission for malaria or delivery can cost N50,000-N200,000. For households living on N100,000 monthly, one illness can erase savings and push families into poverty.

Catastrophic health spending affects 12% of Nigerians annually. It's a key driver of the 133 million people classified as multidimensionally poor.

LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Rwanda achieved 90% health insurance coverage by subsidizing premiums for the poor and using community-based schemes. Ghana's NHIS covers 60% of the population



FEATURE

Local Government Autonomy: Nigeria's unfinished governance reform

UDO BASSEY

For over two decades, Nigeria has debated local government autonomy. The constitution lists 774 local governments as the third tier of government, but in practice, most operate as extensions of state governments. The result is weak service delivery where it matters most: primary healthcare, primary education, rural roads, and sanitation.

The push for financial and administrative autonomy gained momentum after the Supreme Court's July 2024 ruling. The court declared that state governments could no longer withhold or divert funds meant for local governments. It ordered direct payment of allocations from the Federation Account to LGAs with democratically elected councils.

WHY AUTONOMY MATTERS

Local governments are closest to the people. They are constitutionally mandated to handle primary education, health, roads, and markets. But when state governors control LG funds, pro-

jects become political tools. Audits by BudgIT and CISLAC consistently show that over 60% of LGAs cannot account for monthly allocations.

Without autonomy, rural areas suffer. A clinic may exist on paper, but have no drugs, staff, or electricity. Primary schools lack teachers because LGAs can't pay salaries. Youth unemployment worsens as local economies stagnate.

THE RESISTANCE AND RISKS

State governors argue that full autonomy will fragment development planning and create 774 uncoordinated entities. Some also warn of fiscal indiscipline at the LGA level, citing poor record-keeping and weak oversight.

There are valid concerns. Many LGAs lack qualified staff, internal audit systems, and procurement capacity. Direct funding without accountability could worsen leakage. The risk is that autonomy becomes a transfer of corruption from state to local level.

MAKING IT WORK

Autonomy alone won't fix govern-

ance. It needs three supporting pillars:

1. ***Capacity building***: Train LGA staff in budgeting, procurement, and project management. The Federal Ministry of Finance and the World Bank's SFTAS program have started this, but scale is slow.

2. ***Transparency***: Publish LGA budgets and expenditures monthly on open platforms. Citizens can monitor projects if they have data.

3. ***Electoral integrity***: Ensure LGA elections are free and fair. When council chairmen are appointed rather than elected, accountability to citizens disappears.

Globally, countries like India and Kenya have shown that devolution works when paired with fiscal responsibility laws and public participation. Nigeria's next test is whether the Supreme Court ruling translates into better roads in Bida, cleaner markets in Aba, and functioning clinics in Biu.

If it does, local government autonomy could be the most significant governance reform since 1999. If it doesn't, it will be another paper victory.



Nigeria's Education Crisis: 18 Million out-of-school children and counting

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. UNICEF estimates 18.3 million children aged 6-18 are not in school as of 2024. The figure is not static. Conflict, poverty, and cultural barriers push thousands more out every year.

The crisis is most severe in the north. In states like Kebbi, Zamfara, and Yobe, over 60% of girls are out of school. Insecurity has closed over 1,500 schools since 2019. Even where schools are open, learning outcomes are poor. The 2023 National Assessment found that only 23% of Primary 4 pupils could read a simple sentence in English.

THE ROOT CAUSES

Poverty is the main driver. For many families, the immediate cost of uniforms, books, and transport outweighs the long-term benefit of education. Child labor and early marriage compound the problem, especially for girls.

Supply-side issues matter too. Nigeria needs 277,000 more classrooms and 1.4 million more teachers to meet demand. Many existing schools lack water, toilets, and electricity. Teacher absenteeism averages 25% in rural areas.

The Almajiri system adds another layer. Millions of children attend informal Quranic schools without formal curriculum or basic literacy. Attempts to integrate Almajiri schools into the formal system have faced resistance from communities and funding gaps.

POLICY EFFORTS AND GAPS

The Universal Basic Education Act mandates free and compulsory education for children aged 6-15. The Universal Basic Education Commission disburses funds to states, but uptake is low. Many states fail to provide the 50% counterpart funding required to access federal money.

The National Policy on Education emphasizes mother-tongue instruction in early years and technical ed-

ucation. Implementation is patchy. EdTech initiatives expanded during COVID-19, but less than 15% of rural students had access to devices or data.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Experts agree that incremental fixes won't close the gap. Three shifts are needed:

1. ***Targeted cash transfers***: Conditional cash transfers tied to school attendance have worked in Brazil and

Pakistan. Nigeria's pilot programs show promise but need scale.

2. ***Community ownership***: School-based management committees with real authority improve enrollment and accountability.

3. ***Teacher reform***: Recruit, train, and retain teachers through better pay, housing, and career progression. Without teachers, infrastructure is empty.

Globally, education is the high-

est-return investment a country can make. Every additional year of schooling increases earnings by 8-10%. For Nigeria, the cost of inaction is a generation locked out of the digital economy.

The question is political will. Education spending remains below 7% of the federal budget, far below the UNESCO recommendation of 15-20%. Until that changes, the out-of-school crisis will persist.



OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Gov Okpebholo deepens Edo's transportation revolution with 50 new luxury buses



50 NEW LUXURY BUSES

GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

MATTHEW OKAGHA

The administration of Governor Monday Okpebholo has once again demonstrated its commitment to people-oriented governance with the acquisition of 50 new luxury buses aimed at strengthening transportation services and improving mobility across Edo State.

The latest addition to the state's transport fleet comes on the heels of the earlier procurement of 100 brand-new Hiace buses for the New Edo Line transport scheme, a development that has continued to attract commendation from residents and stakeholders who view transportation as a critical driver of economic growth and social development.

For many Edo residents, the new buses are not just vehicles; they are symbols of a government steadily responding to the needs of the people through practical and impactful governance.

At a time when Nigerians are grappling with severe economic challenges caused by rising inflation, high transportation costs and increasing hardship, many believe Governor Okpebholo's intervention in the transport sector could not have come at a better time.

Transportation remains one of the most important sectors in any developing society. It connects communities, drives commerce, supports education, improves access to healthcare and facilitates economic productivity. A reliable transport system directly affects the quality of life of citizens, especially low and middle-income earners who rely heavily on public trans-

portation for their daily activities.

Recognising this reality, the Okpebholo administration appears determined to build a transportation system that is modern, reliable, affordable and accessible to all categories of Edo citizens.

Across major roads and motor parks within the state, discussions among commuters and transport operators have increasingly centred on the visible efforts of government to reposition the transportation sector. Many residents believe the acquisition of additional luxury buses will help reduce the burden faced by commuters while improving the safety and comfort of travellers.

The initiative is also expected to create employment opportunities for drivers, mechanics, transport administrators and other support personnel within the sector, thereby contributing to the local economy.

Political observers say what distinguishes Governor Okpebholo's leadership style is his apparent emphasis on projects with direct impact on ordinary citizens. Rather than merely making policy pronouncements, the administration has consistently moved towards visible implementation of projects across several sectors.

In less than a year, the government has continued to make strategic interventions in transportation, road infrastructure, healthcare delivery, education, security and urban renewal.

One of the signature projects of the administration remains the ongoing Ramat Park Flyover project in Benin City. When the project was first announced, some critics doubted its feasibility and described it as overly

ambitious. However, with construction work progressing steadily, the project is gradually becoming a strong symbol of the administration's infrastructural vision and determination.

For many supporters, the governor has shown courage, political will and commitment in confronting developmental challenges that previous administrations struggled to address.

The administration's road infrastructure drive has also continued to attract attention. Across different parts of Edo State, roads are being rehabilitated and reconstructed in line with the government's broader objective of improving connectivity and stimulating economic activities.

Residents of several communities have continued to applaud the government for opening up roads that had remained in deplorable condition for years. Improved roads, combined with enhanced transportation services, are expected to significantly ease movement within the state and support commercial activities.

Beyond infrastructure, Governor Okpebholo has also received commendation for his approach to governance, which many describe as inclusive, pragmatic and development-focused.

Stakeholders believe the governor understands the pulse of the people and has continued to prioritise policies capable of improving living conditions across the state. From traders and artisans to civil servants and students, many citizens see the administration's projects as deliberate efforts aimed at reducing hardship and restoring public confidence in governance.

The acquisition of the 50 luxury buses is also being viewed as a strategic investment in the future of Edo State. Modern transportation systems are often regarded as vital indicators of economic advancement and urban development. By strengthening the New Edo Line and expanding public transportation options, the government is laying the foundation for a

more organised and efficient transport network.

Observers note that efficient transportation can attract investors, boost tourism and encourage greater economic interaction between urban and rural communities. Farmers can move produce more easily, businesses can transport goods more efficiently and citizens can travel with greater convenience and security.

Many residents have particularly praised the governor for matching promises with action. In an environment where political promises are often greeted with scepticism, the visible execution of projects has helped strengthen public confidence in the administration.

For supporters of the governor, the growing list of ongoing projects across Edo State reflects a leadership driven by vision, purpose and commitment to development.

To many citizens, Governor Okpebholo represents a new phase of governance where leadership is measured not merely by speeches or political rhetoric, but by tangible projects capable of positively transforming lives.

As the administration continues to expand critical sectors of the economy, many Edo people are hopeful that the state is gradually entering a new era of infrastructural renewal, economic growth and sustainable development.

Indeed, with the acquisition of 50 new luxury buses and several ongoing developmental projects, the Okpebholo administration appears determined to leave lasting footprints on the sands of Edo State's history.

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The acquisition of the 50 luxury buses is also being viewed as a strategic investment in the future of Edo State. Modern transportation systems are often regarded as vital indicators of economic advancement and urban development.

FEATURE

AfDB: Rallying support to close financing gap for Abidjan-Lagos Highway

LUCY OGALUE (NAN)

The Abidjan-Lagos Highway stands at a decisive turning point as stakeholders shift from vision to financing, led by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) and its partners.

Observers say that the promise of a seamless coastal highway linking West Africa's economic powerhouses is being rekindled with the renewed vigor.

Spanning 1,028 kilometres across Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria, the corridor is designed to connect a region that accounts for more than 75 per cent of ECOWAS trade and a significant share of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

But beyond its scale, the highway represents something deeper: a test of whether Africa can deliver complex, cross-border infrastructure at scale.

The project is part of regional integration efforts under the Economic Commission for West Africa States (ECOWAS) with renewed momentum after its formal initiation around 2013.

For decades, the Abidjan-Lagos corridor has functioned as West Africa's busiest trade route; but also one of its most inefficient.

Long border delays, fragmented road standards and congestion have turned what should be a high-speed economic artery into a costly bottleneck.

According to infrastructure experts, these inefficiencies inflate transport costs, discourage trade and weaken regional competitiveness.

The highway aims to reverse this reality. Transforming a congested coastal road into a modern, six-lane economic corridor with smart border systems, freight lanes and integrated logistics infrastructure.

Stakeholders across West Africa have continued to describe the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor as a transformative project capable of deepening regional integration, boosting trade and accelerating economic growth across the sub-region.

For the AfDB, the project is not just about transport.

According to the bank's Director of Infrastructure, Mike Salawou, the project needs to become an economic corridor.

Salawou reiterated the need for a broader shift in thinking.

"It will support the growth of major economic hubs and improve links between large urban centres, secondary cities and rural areas within the five countries.

"The bank has inaugurated the Spatial Development Initiative to enable transformative industrialisation right along the highway, to stimulate the growth of major economic clusters," he said.

He said that experience from Asia and Europe showed that highways alone did not transform economies but corridors did.

Planners estimate the Abidjan-Lagos corridor could generate up to 16 billion dollars in economic gains, support tens of thousands of jobs and serve more than 170 million people by 2050.



The mission led by the African Development Bank Group met with the Ivorian Minister of Infrastructure and Road Maintenance, Yacouba Sié Hien, on 9 April in Abidjan.



1,081-kilometer Abidjan-Lagos highway

It is also central to the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which depends on physical connectivity to move goods across borders.

Estimated at about 15.6 billion dollars, the project is among the most expensive infrastructure undertakings in West Africa.

In April 2026, the AfDB, alongside ECOWAS and regional financiers, undertook a multi-country mission to mobilise funding for the project's construction and operation.

The mission, which signals a transition from planning to investment, also exposed a deeper reality: Africa's infrastructure ambitions are increasingly constrained not by ideas, but by capital.

ECOWAS Director of Transport, Chris Appiah, warned during the engagements that delays in securing financing, particularly for land acquisition and viability gap funding could derail the project's momentum.

The director urged participating countries and development partners to "spare no effort to make this project a reality in the near future."

Appiah noted that a seamless cross-border highway would significantly accelerate regional development and strengthen connectivity

among member states.

Private sector participation on the project is expected to play a major role, yet investors remain cautious, citing risks related to policy consistency, currency volatility and long-term returns.

Beyond financing, coordination across five sovereign states presents another layer of complexity as each country has its own regulatory frameworks, infrastructure standards and political priorities.

Even within recent discussions, Nigeria's Minister of Works, David Umahi, raised concerns over design standards and unequal distribution of corridor segments, noting that unresolved issues must be addressed at the highest political level.

The minister reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to the project, describing the Lagos-Abidjan corridor as one designed to match the scale and ambition of ongoing infrastructure projects across the country.

According to Umahi, infrastructure development remains central to the administration's economic agenda and regional integration strategy.

To mitigate fragmentation, a supranational body, the Abidjan-Lagos Corridor Management Authority, has

been established to oversee implementation.

Analysts say its effectiveness could determine whether the project succeeds or joins a long list of stalled regional initiatives.

They said if completed on the scheduled time of 2030, the highway could fundamentally reshape West Africa's economic geography.

"The project, when completed, could reduce travel time and logistics cost, improve trade flows and supply chains, grow industrial zones along the corridor, increase investor confidence, and strengthen regional integration.

"For countries like Nigeria and Ghana, it offers an opportunity to unlock coastal economic clusters and deepen participation in regional value chains," an analyst said.

The analysts say the project is also expected to reduce transport costs by at least 25 per cent, improving competitiveness across the region.

Although land acquisition across densely populated coastal areas could trigger delays and social tensions, environmental concerns particularly coastal erosion, flooding and ecosystem disruption require careful management.

More broadly, the Abidjan-Lagos Highway reflects a larger debate about Africa's development trajectory:

"Can the continent move from fragmented, project-based infrastructure to integrated, large-scale delivery? Can it mobilise private capital at scale while managing risks? Can regional institutions enforce coordination among sovereign states?"

For the AfDB, which has already provided technical support and helped structure financing frameworks, the project is a flagship test of its development model.

Nonetheless, between ambition and delivery, the stakes are high.

The project is finally entering its investment phase after years of studies, diplomacy and delays but history offers caution as Africa has no shortage of ambitious infrastructure plans. What it lacks, often, is execution at scale.

As an analyst puts it, the Abidjan-Lagos Highway is "a test of whether Africa can deliver on its own ambitions."

Observers say the path ahead remains unpredictable but highly consequential. Success will reshape West African trade and integration; failure risks leaving behind yet another broken promise. (NAN Feature)

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

Maikaba, Uwejamomere pick assistants, as U20 boys resume camp on Sunday

Newly-appointed Head Coach of the U20 men national team, Abdu Maikaba has picked Coaches

Ortega Deniran (first assistant), Abdullahi Biffo (second assistant) and Usman Mohammed (goalkeepers' trainer) to

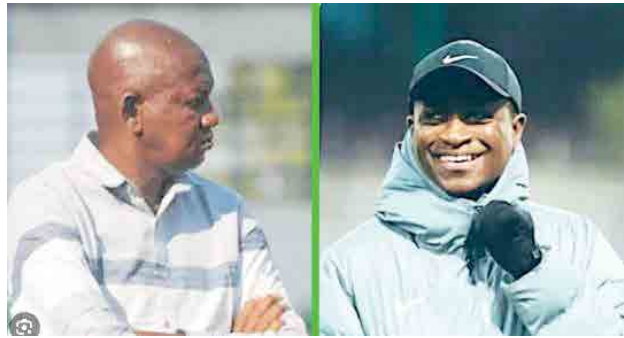
work with him in building a new Flying Eagles' squad that will make Nigeria proud.

Maikaba, who previously worked as assistant coach of two-time FIFA World Cup silver-medallists Flying Eagles, and also managed several of Nigeria's leading clubs, made known his list on Thursday, just as his team is set to resume camp in Abuja on Sunday, 17th May, with preparations to begin in earnest for the upcoming WAFU B U20 Boys Championship that will take place in July.

The competition will serve as the qualification tournament for next year's Africa U20

Cup of Nations. The Flying Eagles are seven-time winners of the continental tournament.

Similarly, the newly-appointed Head Coach of the U17 boys, Eboboritse Uwejamomere has picked Coaches Olumide Joseph Ajibolade (first assistant), Mohammed Kalli Kachala (second assistant) and Abdullahi Isa (goalkeepers' trainer) to assist him in building a new Golden Eagles' squad that will not only return Nigeria to the FIFA U17 World Cup finals, but work assiduously towards a sixth global title.



MAIKABA AND UWEJAMOMERE



Abuja to host two major National Tennis Tournaments in June

The National Stadium in Abuja is set to welcome Nigeria's tennis community next month as it prepares to stage two prestigious national tournaments back-to-back.

The CBN National Tennis Championships will kick off proceedings, running from 12 to 20 June, followed immediately by the DavNotch National Open, scheduled for 20 to 27 June.

Organisers say the back-to-back events will provide local players with extended compet-

itive opportunities on home soil and are expected to attract top-ranked Nigerian talents as well as emerging prospects from across the country. Nigerian sports history

The tournaments come as part of efforts to boost grassroots tennis development and raise the profile of the sport in Nigeria.

Further details regarding entry requirements, seeding, and spectator arrangements are expected to be released in the coming days.

World Cup: Iran hold World Cup departure rally despite continuing

Iran hosted a World Cup departure rally attended by thousands of fans in Tehran's Enqelab Square on Wednesday night, even though concerns remain about the team getting into the United States and competing at the tournament.

The players, who will continue their preparations at a training camp in Turkey next week, were cheered by the crowd as they made patriotic statements from a stage, and the kit they will wear at the June 11 to July 19 tournament was unveiled.

"This is the best send-off in the last four World Cup campaigns," Iranian FA (FFIRI) President Mehdi Taj told state TV.

"The players are with the people, and the crowd stands with the country's dignity, honour, and strength. Whatever the result, may Iran's flag be raised there and defended." Soccer

Iran's national soccer team head coach Amir Ghalenoei and Iran Football Federation President Mehdi Taj attend the team's farewell ceremony ahead of their departure to the 2026 World Cup in Tehran, Iran, May 13, 2026.

Iran's participation in the World Cup has been in question since the U.S. and Israel started the regional war by launching air strikes on the Islamic Republic in late February. Taj was refused entry to

co-host nation Canada for the FIFA Congress two weeks ago because of his connection to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), triggering fears there may be issues for some of the Iranian delegation getting into the U.S.

As in Canada, the IRGC is classified as a "terrorist entity" in the U.S., and Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said no one with ties to the organisation would be admitted to the country.



IRAN WORLD CUP DEPARTURE RALLY

What Nigeria must do to host AFCON – Ex-Super Eagles star Nsofor

Former Super Eagles forward Obinna Nsofor has urged Nigeria to improve the maintenance of its sporting

facilities if the country hopes to successfully host the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON). Nsofor made the remarks

during an interview with Billa FM, where he criticised the poor state of stadium infrastructure across the country.

According to the former international, Nigeria lacks a proper maintenance culture, a situation he said has affected many stadiums built with huge investments. "In Nigeria we don't have a maintenance culture. Nigeria sports events

"We spend huge money building stadiums and after a few years everything starts falling apart. If we are serious about hosting AFCON, then we must first tell ourselves the truth because CAF cannot approve facilities that are below standard," Nsofor said.



OBINNA NSOFOR

President Federation Cup national draws hold Friday in Abuja

The draw for the national competition of the 2026 President Federation Cup will hold at the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) Secretariat, Abuja, on Friday.

A statement by Ademola Olajire, NFF Director of Communications on Thursday, said the draw follows the conclusion of national playoff match-

es in both competitions.

Four teams were eliminated from the women's competition during the playoffs, while six teams crashed out of the men's competition.

A total of 32 teams will compete in the women's category, while 64 teams will participate in the men's competition.

Defending champions Kwara

United, Shooting Stars, Enugu Rangers, Bendel Insurance and Rivers United are among top contenders in the men's competition.

Others expected to challenge strongly for the title include Nasarawa United, Ikorodu City and Barau FC.

In the women's category, holders Rivers Angels will battle with Nasarawa Amazons, FC

Robo Queens, Ibom Angels and Bayelsa Queens for honours.

Naija Ratels are also among teams expected to compete strongly in the women's national competition.

Women's teams for the national competition include Ahudiyannem Queens, Abia Angels, Ibom Angels, Bayelsa Queens and Delta Queens.

C'River launches initiative to export football talents

The Cross River Government has launched an initiative, "From Cross River to Europe" to send homegrown football talents to European leagues

Kalita Aruku, the Chairman of the State Youth Empowerment Scheme, disclosed this while speaking with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Calabar on Wednesday.

He said the initiative, though unprecedented, would set a new benchmark for youth empowerment in Nigeria and the State in particular.

According to him, the initiative which will be coordinated by his office is designed to transit young football talents from local pitches to global stages.

"By providing a structured

pathway for professional development, the programme will effectively eliminate lack of opportunity that have long stifled the dreams of Nigerian talented youths," he said.

While commending Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River for the initiative, Aruku said the programme will not only create opportunities but also boost sporting activities in the State.

He explained that the process for scouting for these talents would be multi-layer involving scouts from within and outside the country.

"Cross River Governor is a trailblazer. No government in the history of the country has ever taken the bold step of directly sponsoring young football talents to Europe,



CROSS RIVER

Nigerian Football: Thirty-six years after professionalism, NPFL still battles old challenges

KUNLE SOLAJA

Thirty-six years after professional football was introduced in Nigeria, the country's top-flight league continues to grapple with many of the same structural problems critics warned about decades before the professional era began.

The Nigerian Professional Football League officially commenced on May 12, 1990, following nearly 40 years of debate over whether the country was prepared for the financial realities of professional sports.

When professionalism was first proposed in the 1950s, opponents questioned whether Nigerian clubs could survive the burden of player salaries, stadium maintenance and

administrative costs.

Former football administrator Derby Allen warned in 1953 that most clubs lacked suitable stadiums and sustainable revenue streams to operate professionally.

More than seven decades later, many NPFL clubs are still heavily dependent on state government funding, while issues such as poor infrastructure, irregular player welfare, low commercial returns and weak marketing continue to limit the league's growth.

Despite these challenges, the league has survived political transitions, administrative crises and financial instability to become one of Africa's longest-running domestic competitions.

The league's history has featured re-

markable moments and strange twists.

Kwara United F.C. endured a 14-match losing streak in 2000, while Udoji United F.C. controversially emerged champions in 1996 following boardroom decisions.

Traditional giants have also suffered dramatic declines. Bendel Insurance F.C., one of the pioneer clubs of the 1972 National League, were relegated for the first time in 1995 and later spent a decade outside the top division after another relegation in 2008.

Defending champions Shooting Stars SC suffered relegation in 1999, becoming the first title holders to fall out of the top flight, while Bayelsa United F.C. repeated the unwanted feat in 2010 and has now suffered another drop.

Even continental giants, Enyimba F.C., once experienced relegation in 1991. Another relegation looms large at the end of this season.

Only Enugu Rangers have maintained an unbroken stay in the top division since the National League era began in 1972.

Administrative instability has equally shaped the NPFL's story. In 2005, the league left direct NFA control with the establishment of the Nigeria Premier League. The League Management Company later emerged after a court ruling declared the NPL illegal in 2012/13.

Today, the Nigeria Premier Football League board oversees the competition, which continues to seek improved television coverage, sponsorship and stronger club structures.

As the league celebrates its 36th anniversary, many observers believe its future success will depend on finally resolving the same financial and organisational issues identified long before professionalism arrived in 1990.

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many NPFL clubs are still heavily dependent on state government funding, while issues such as poor infrastructure, irregular player welfare, low commercial



BENDEL INSURANCE FC



SHOOTING STARS SC



KWARA UNITED F.C



Enabulele Salutes Westgate FC, Discloses Plans For Grassroots Football Development in Edo

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele, has reiterated his commitment to grass-

roots football development in Edo State, saying that the Commission has concluded its plans to work in collaboration with the state Football Association (EFA) on football tournament aimed at discovering and nur-

turing young talents.

Enabulele disclosed this yesterday when he received the management and coaching crew of Westgate FC at the Commission's office in Benin City following the club's qualification for the ongoing NFF President Federation Cup round of 64.

He said that Bendel Insurance management in its magnanimity has deliberately reserved ten slots for talented players in the state league as part of efforts to encourage indigenous players and school children.

Receiving the Westgate FC team who visited him to formally inform him of their re-

cent victory in their first match of the President Federation Cup in Enugu and qualification for the round of 64 of the competition, Enabulele commended them for the achievements and assured them of support as they prepare for the next stage.

"congratulations to you on the achievement and I challenge the players and officials to remain focused and disciplined as they continue their campaign in the national tournament."

According to him, the qualification presents an opportunity for the players to showcase their talents on a bigger stage while representing Edo State with pride.



The Executive Chairman, Edo State Sports Commission, Hon. Amadin Desmond Enabulele.

NLO Clubs seek more support for grassroots football development

Club officials participating in the ongoing Nationwide League One (NLO) at the Area 3 football pitch in Abuja have called for more support for grassroots football development.

The officials who cited funding and welfare challenges affecting teams in the competition, made the call in separate interviews on the sidelines of the competition.

They described grassroots football as a critical platform for youth development and talent discovery in Nigeria.

Stanley Ndubisi Igbo, Team Manager of RBM Sports FC, said his team was enjoying a strong campaign and currently tops Group A with two matches left to play.

"We have a very important match against Paul E FC, and our last game will be against Police Machine. It is going to be like a Champions League final because the competition is very tough," he said.

Igbo disclosed that RBM Sports FC had amassed 14 points after seven matchdays, while Police Machine trails closely with 13 points.

According to him, the competition features nine teams in the group after one club withdrew, allegedly due to financial difficulties, he said.

He said that as far as grassroots football is concerned, funding remains a major chal-

lenge because there is little or no support from the government," he said.

"In some environment, private clubs like ours receive support, but here we do everything ourselves," he said.

Also speaking, Chairman of Woodpecker Football Club of Abuja, retired Brig.-Gen. Ola Toye, described the league as

an important developmental platform for young players.

"This competition is part of our development plan because it gives the boys exposure and the right mentality through league experience," he said.

Toye revealed that his side secured a 3-2 victory on matchday six and still had two games remaining in the campaign.

He, however, noted that maintaining a football club at the grassroots level remained financially demanding, especially for privately-owned teams.

"You know what it takes to feed the players, transport them, train them, and keep them together. It is not easy, especially for those of us sponsoring clubs personally," he said.

Junaid begins new era at Guards Polo Club, unveils ambitious programmes

A new era has begun at the prestigious Guards Polo Club, Abuja, following the election of Mustapha Junaid as president.

Junaid emerged president of the club on April 6, after previously serving as first vice president.

An active polo player and administrator, Junaid pledged to reposition the club and further strengthen its reputation as one of Nigeria's leading polo destinations.

"We are committed to building on the club's rich heritage and taking Guards Polo Club to greater heights," he said.

According to him, the club boasts world-class polo facilities capable of competing with top polo destinations around the world.

"Our facilities remain among the best globally and continue to attract top players and distinguished guests from within and outside Nigeria," he added.



MUSTAPHA JUNAID

Junaid also noted that the club's serene ambience and lush green polo fields would continue to receive proper maintenance and upgrades.

He disclosed that several programmes and initiatives had been designed to enhance members' experience and promote the growth of polo nationwide.

Amusan wins Nigeria's first gold at Senior Athletic Championships



TOBI AMUSAN

Nigerian sprinter Tobi Amusan has won Nigeria's first gold at the Senior Athletic Championships in Accra, Ghana on Wednesday.

The world record holder beat her opponents to come first in the women's 100m hurdle in Day 2 of the championship, adding to her rich medal haul on the continental level.

Compatriot Adaobi Tabugbo also won bronze in the same cat-

egory, adding to team Nigeria's excellent performance since day 1 of the championships.

The win is Amusan third African Championships gold and it was presented to her by the World Athletics President, Sebastian Coe.

Speaking with journalists earlier at the Championships, Amusan advised young Athletes not succumb to fear in pursuit of their dreams.



PHILIP SHAIBU

HomeSports reduces youth crime, unemployment, Says Coach

Abdulrahman Gbadamosi, Coach of Sebioba FC, says sports can help reduce youth crime and unemployment in Nigeria if given proper attention and support.

Gbadamosi made the declaration yesterday in Lagos, insisting that many young people become involved in crime because they are idle and do not have jobs or activities to keep them busy.

He said sports could help youths stay focused, disciplined, and hopeful about their future.

"When young people are engaged in sports, they are less likely to join bad groups or become involved in criminal activities.

"Sports teach discipline, hard work, patience, and team-

work. These are values that can help young people succeed in life," he said.

Gbadamosi said football and other sports could also create jobs for many youths across the country.

He stressed that sports provided opportunities not only for players, but also for coaches, referees, trainers, sports journalists, medical workers, and event organisers.

The coach said many talented youths in different communities were unable to achieve their dreams because of lack of support and poor sports facilities.

He said that some young athletes train on bad pitches and without proper equipment.

Neurospark FC target NNL promotion as club secure NLO play-off spot

Neurospark FC Coach, Sola Morakinyo, says the club's target is to secure promotion to the Nigeria National League (NNL) after qualifying for the playoffs stage of the 2026 Nationwide League One (NLO) season.

Morakinyo spoke after his team emerged as winners of the Area 10 group in Abuja, with 17 points from seven matches and a superior goal difference of +10.

The first-time campaigners edged NAF FC, who also finished with 17 points but had an inferior goal difference.

Neurospark sealed qualification with a 3-1 victory over Crown Tee FC in the final group game played simultaneously with

other fixtures at the Old Parade Ground, Area 10, and the Area 3 Sports Complex in Abuja.

"We aim to get this team promoted to the NNL, and we believe with hard work and God's help, we can achieve it," he said.

Morakinyo described the qualification as a reward for the hard work and belief within the team.

"It means a lot because we have put in a lot of work. This is a new team that is just six or seven months old.

"The spirit of the players has been high from the first match," he said.

The coach, however, admitted that the team still has areas to improve on in spite of the qualification.



NEUROSPARK FC

Open Letter To CAF Secretary General

DEAR MR SAMSON ADAMU, SECRETARY GENERAL CONFÉDÉRATION AFRICAINE DE FOOTBALL (CAF)



President Bola Tinubu (second from right) in a handshake with CAF President Motsepe (third from right), while Mrs Odumegwu-Ojukwu (right), Gusau (third from left), Pinnick (second from left) and Samson Adamu (left)

DOUGLAS BAYE-OSAGIE

Though belated, congratulations on your appointment as acting Secretary General of CAF. This is a historic milestone for Nigeria and African football. I hope this letter finds you well.

Subject: Urgent Appeal to Review the U-17 AFCON Zoning Qualification Structure and Prioritize Nigeria's Youth Football and Refereeing Development

The first time you came before the public to address issues concerning Nigeria was this Tuesday in Nairobi at the African Forward Summit, when you met with senior officials of the Nigerian Football Federation during a courtesy visit to President Tinubu to discuss hosting the CAF General Assembly and CAF Awards. This engagement is welcome, but the question remains: will it translate into tangible development for the game in Nigeria?

Having previously served as CAF's Director of Tournaments and Events, your extensive experience in managing logistics and overseeing major continental competitions makes this the best time to make a strong case for Nigeria and the rest of West Africa, so that our best youth teams are not left out of continental and global football events.

Under CAF's qualification format, Nigeria's U-17 and U-20 teams are boxed into a qualification quagmire because of the unfair advantage built into the current zoning system for the rest of the African continent. Since the change in the qualification format in 2017, Nigeria has found it relatively difficult to reach the finals of the U-17 World Cup because of the hurdle of qualification. It makes little sense to showcase African football's future while systematically blocking

the nation that built that future from participating.

The U-17 AFCON kicks off this week in Morocco, but Africa's most successful team in the competition's history will be absent through no fault of their own. That absence alone highlights how the current qualification structure can exclude merit and weaken the continent's representation on the world stage.

The competition, which runs from 13 May to 02 June, is expected to once again showcase the next generation of African football stars, following in the footsteps of players such as Victor Osimhen, Mohamed Salah, Seydou Keita, Samuel Eto'o, and Nwankwo Kanu, who all rose through youth football structures before achieving global success.

With eight quarter-finalists automatically qualifying for Qatar 2026 and two additional places available through play-off matches between the third-placed teams in each group, the margin for error has become smaller than ever. Yet Nigeria remains locked out by a system that punishes merit.

The new qualification structure means that more teams enter the competition with realistic ambitions of reaching the World Cup, increasing competitiveness across all four groups. Yet this increased ambition is undermined when the qualification system itself prevents the strongest teams from participating.

Let us begin with history. The reason FIFA expanded Africa's U-17 World Cup slots to 10 was not accidental. It was earned by West Africa, and specifically by WAFU Zone B nations — Nigeria and Ghana — who have dominated this category for decades and brought global prestige to the continent.

Nigeria remains the most successful nation in FIFA U-17 World Cup

history with five titles. Ghana has won it twice and reached four finals. Between them, they account for seven of Africa's appearances in the final. Their consistency forced the world to respect African youth football and was the single biggest justification for FIFA increasing our slots.

Yet under the current CAF zoning model, WAFU Zone B — the most decorated zone in U-17 history — is restricted to just 2 slots for the U-17 AFCON. Meanwhile, CECAFA receives 3 slots and COSAFA receives 3 slots.

This is where the puzzle becomes painful. With all due respect to our brothers in CECAFA and COSAFA, no East African or Southern African nation has ever reached the knockout stages of the FIFA U-17 World Cup. The competitive record is clear and documented.

WAFU Zone B comprises Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, and Mali. These nations consistently produce some of the most exciting young talents in African

football at cadet level. Players from this zone dominate youth academies, European scouting reports, and the headlines at every U-17 tournament.

It would be deeply shameful for the African continent to reduce their representation simply to favor other regions, especially when their competitive record speaks for itself. Excellence should not be sacrificed for geography.

So we must ask: on what sporting or developmental basis does CAF allocate 3 slots to zones with zero knockout-stage pedigree, while restricting the zone that built Africa's reputation to only 2 slots? This is not equitable distribution. This is competitive self-sabotage.

The intent of zoning — to encourage regional development — is commendable. But development cannot come at the expense of merit. When the best teams cannot qualify because of artificial caps, Africa sends a weaker delegation to the World Cup. That harms all of us, not just WAFU B.



But development cannot come at the expense of merit. When the best teams cannot qualify because of artificial caps, Africa sends a weaker delegation to the World Cup. That harms all of us, not just WAFU B.

The U-17 World Cup is not a participation festival. It is a competitive tournament where Africa's global ranking is defined. Every early group-stage exit by an unprepared team reinforces negative stereotypes about African football that Nigeria and Ghana spent 40 years dismantling.

Beyond youth qualification, there is another pressing issue of concern: refereeing. CAF recently announced that 33 centre referees, 36 assistant referees, and 11 video assistant referees have been shortlisted for preparatory training in Cairo from November 8 to 13. However, none of the officials on the list is from Nigeria.

The last time a Nigerian referee officiated at the continental tournament was in 2006, when Emmanuel Imiere represented the country. Since then, Nigeria has consistently failed to make CAF's referee rosters. This is a reflection of deeper structural issues that require urgent attention.

You need to do more in terms of training, exposure, and nomination of Nigerian referees for CAF competitions. Having no Nigerian official on the continent's highest stage for nearly two decades is unacceptable for a football powerhouse.

Therefore, I respectfully appeal to your office to initiate an urgent review of the U-17 AFCON qualification structure before the next cycle, and to establish a clear program for the development and elevation of Nigerian referees. Consider a hybrid qualification model with a final playoff round, and partner with the NFF to accelerate referee development.

Africa deserves to be represented by its best on the pitch and in the middle. You have the opportunity to correct this imbalance and ensure CAF's policies align with both development and excellence. The world is watching, and our children are counting on you.



Beyond the Headlines

With
Kelly Odaro, PhD

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The Nigerian
OBSERVER
That The People May Know

The dark gospel of instant wealth

The recent gruesome killing of Alexander Omogiate, a 200-Level student of the University of Benin, at the entrance of the university has once again exposed a disturbing reality in contemporary Nigerian society — the frightening extent to which individuals are willing to go in the pursuit of money.

What should ordinarily be a place of intellectual pursuit and youthful aspiration suddenly became the scene of a brutal act that sent shockwaves through the academic community and beyond.

Reports that emerged shortly after the incident suggested that the killing may have been connected to a fraudulent financial arrangement in which the victim allegedly failed to remit money to some associates involved in the deal. While investigations may eventually clarify the precise circumstances surrounding the tragedy, the implications of the incident are already clear. Nigeria is witnessing a dangerous culture in which wealth is pursued with reckless abandon, often with little regard for human life.

From internet fraud syndicates to ritual killings, the country has witnessed a troubling rise in crimes motivated by the desire for quick riches.

Amid Nigeria's persistent economic challenges, a more sinister affliction continues to fester — ritual killings. This grotesque practice, once whispered about in hushed tones and largely confined to the realm of folklore, has evolved into an alarming reality in many parts of the country. Almost regularly, Nigerians wake up to grim media reports detailing the discovery of mutilated bodies or the arrest of individuals suspected of engaging in blood rituals in the hope of acquiring wealth or power.

Some years ago, Evbuotubu community in Benin City was thrown into mourning following the gruesome murder of a young man whose head was reportedly severed in what many suspected to be a ritual-related killing. The barbarity of the act shocked residents and once again raised questions about the growing influence of occult practices linked to the pursuit of wealth.

Over the years, Edo State has recorded several disturbing cases that reveal the extent of the problem. In 2020, a similar case rocked the Otuo community in Owan East Local Government Area where three young men and a woman were reportedly set ablaze by a mob after being accused of beheading a secondary school student in a suspected ritual killing. Earlier, in 2018, four brothers allegedly murdered their own grandmother in Ohovbe Quarters in Ikpoba Hill, Benin City, in what was widely reported as a money ritual.

In another shocking discovery in 2019, police uncovered a shrine where

human skulls and body parts were found, indicating that ritual killings were being carried out on a disturbing scale. The horror did not end there. In 2022, more than twenty mummified bodies were reportedly discovered in a building in Benin City, further reinforcing fears that ritual killings had become entrenched within certain criminal networks.

Despite widespread condemnation from government authorities, civil society organisations, and religious leaders, these horrific acts continue to occur with alarming frequency. One of the major reasons for this persistence lies in the deeply ingrained societal attitude that glorifies sudden wealth without questioning its source.

Across many Nigerian communities, individuals who display conspicuous wealth are often celebrated without scrutiny. They are given chieftaincy titles, honoured at social gatherings, and accorded special recognition within religious institutions simply because of their financial influence. Rarely does anyone pause to ask how such fortunes were acquired.

This culture of blind admiration creates fertile ground for desperate individuals to resort to extreme measures in their pursuit of wealth and social recognition. When society appears to reward affluence without regard for morality, it inadvertently sends a dangerous message to young people struggling to find their footing in an increasingly harsh economic environment.

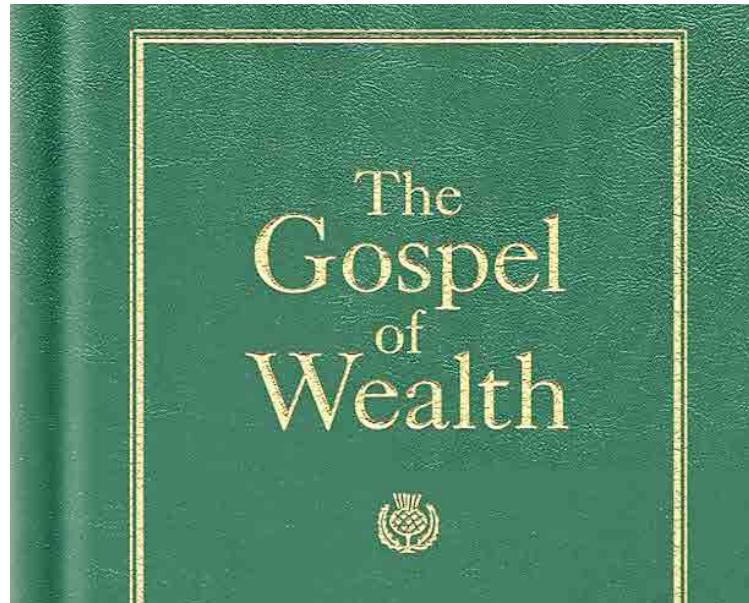
It is worth recalling that there was a time when wealth in Nigerian society was associated with diligence, enterprise, and perseverance. Farmers, traders, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs built their fortunes gradually through years of honest labour. A person's affluence was regarded as a reflection of hard work and commitment.

Today, however, that value system appears to be gradually eroding. In its place has emerged a troubling doctrine that celebrates instant wealth irrespective of the means through which it is obtained. The popular mindset of "making it by any means necessary" has become dangerously pervasive.

The consequences of this shift are evident across various segments of society. Young people, confronted by limited job opportunities and mounting economic pressures, increasingly seek shortcuts to wealth. While many pursue legitimate ventures such as entrepreneurship and digital innovation, others are drawn into criminal activities ranging from internet fraud to ritual killings.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this crisis is the role played by institutions that should ordinarily serve as moral guardians of society.

Religious institutions, for instance, have traditionally been regarded as



bastions of moral instruction. Yet in many instances, individuals whose sources of wealth raise serious questions are welcomed with enthusiasm in places of worship. They are given prominent seats, publicly celebrated during services, and sometimes entrusted with leadership roles within the congregation.

When such practices occur, the moral message becomes dangerously distorted. Young observers may conclude that the origin of wealth is irrelevant as long as it brings prestige and influence.

Traditional institutions have also not been entirely immune from this trend. The institution of chieftaincy, once reserved for individuals of exemplary character and service to their communities, has in many places become heavily commercialised. Titles that once symbolised honour are now sometimes bestowed on individuals whose reputations are far from admirable.

Political elites and influential fig-

ures further reinforce this dangerous culture when they associate openly with individuals whose wealth is widely suspected to have dubious origins. Invitations to prestigious events, lucrative government contracts, and public endorsements all serve to legitimise questionable fortunes.

The media, too, play a complex role in shaping societal attitudes. While investigative journalists have exposed many criminal networks, other segments of the media frequently glamorise extravagant lifestyles. Lavish parties, luxury vehicles, and opulent mansions are often showcased without adequate scrutiny of the sources of such wealth.

For those who lack patience or legitimate opportunities, the temptation to pursue wealth through illicit means becomes stronger. In extreme cases, this desperation leads individuals into the horrifying world of ritual killings.

At the core of ritual killings lies the complete dehumanisation of victims. Individuals are reduced to mere instruments for sacrifice, their lives taken in the misguided belief that human blood or body parts can generate wealth or supernatural favour.

Victims are often unsuspecting individuals: children lured with sweets, young women deceived by fake lovers, travellers ambushed along lonely roads, or acquaintances betrayed by trusted associates. The cruelty involved in these acts reflects a level of barbarism that should have no place in any civilised society.

Unfortunately, Nigeria's criminal justice system has struggled to provide an effective deterrent against such crimes. Arrests are sometimes announced, but convictions remain relatively rare. Investigations are often slow, prosecutions prolonged, and cases occasionally compromised by corruption.

In some instances, suspects with financial influence manage to manip-

ulate the system, securing bail or quietly influencing the course of investigations. For the families of victims, such outcomes deepen their grief and reinforce the perception that justice is elusive.

If Nigeria is to confront the menace of ritual killings and greed-driven violence effectively, a comprehensive societal reorientation is essential.

Schools must incorporate value-based education that emphasises the dignity of labour and the dangers of illicit wealth. Young people must be taught that genuine success is built on perseverance, creativity, and integrity rather than shortcuts.

Religious leaders must take a firm and uncompromising stance against individuals whose wealth is suspected to have been acquired through dubious means. Places of worship should never become sanctuaries for financial criminals.

Traditional rulers must also safeguard the dignity of their institutions by ensuring that honours such as chieftaincy titles are reserved for individuals of proven character.

The media must intensify investigative journalism aimed at exposing criminal networks rather than glorifying ostentatious lifestyles. Content creators should prioritise positive role models who exemplify integrity and hard work.

Equally important is the need for serious reform within the police and judicial systems. Law enforcement agencies must be properly equipped to investigate ritual killings thoroughly and prosecute perpetrators without interference or favouritism.

Parents and guardians must also educate their children about personal safety. Young people should be warned about the dangers of engaging in dubious financial dealings, accepting rides from strangers, or venturing into isolated areas alone.

The killing near the University of Benin should serve as a sobering wake-up call. When a young life can be violently taken at the gate of a university because of money, it reflects a society where the value of human life is dangerously diminishing.

Nigeria must urgently recalibrate its moral compass. Until society collectively rejects wealth obtained through bloodshed and criminality, the cycle of violence will continue.

Posterity will judge harshly any society that allows greed to triumph over humanity. The tragedy unfolding across communities today must not be ignored. If decisive action is not taken, the altar of blood money may continue to claim more innocent victims.

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