

Nigeria unveils geospatial database to drive credible census, modernise nat'l planning

ABUJA

Nigeria has launched a national geospatial database aimed at strengthening preparations for the forthcoming Population and Housing Census, with authorities saying the initiative will enhance the credibility, accuracy and verifiability of national population data through modern technology.

The project was unveiled on Thursday in Abuja at a high-level engagement on Consolidating Nigeria's Geospatial Database in Preparation for the Upcoming Population and Housing Census.

The initiative marks the commencement of an 18-month programme designed to modernise Nigeria's population data systems and strengthen both geospatial and demographic data infrastructure, according

to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

UNFPA Resident Representative, Ms Muriel Mafico, represented by Deputy Representative Mr Koesson Kuawu, said population and housing census data remain fundamental to effective governance, economic planning, national development and informed decision-making.

She noted that Nigeria's capacity to plan and deliver on

development priorities depends heavily on the availability of credible, timely and disaggregated data.

Mafico expressed concern that Nigeria's last census, conducted in 2006, has left the country relying on outdated population estimates despite significant demographic, social and economic changes over the years.

According to her, this gap has weakened evidence-based

planning and hindered effective implementation of both national and global development programmes.

She stressed that updated census data is essential for the Renewed Hope Agenda, as well as for tracking progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

She added that UNFPA has provided technical support,

including advisory services, development of census project documents, and updating Nigeria's geospatial database in line with requirements for the 2030 census round.

The Chairman of the National Population Commission (NPC), Mr Aminu Yusuf, represented by Delta State Commissioner, Mrs Blessing

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O The Nigerian OBSERVER

That The People May Know

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#200

PDP faction loses as Supreme Court voids Ibadan convention

• **No victor, no vanquished,' says Enugu Chairman**

ABUJA

The Supreme Court has nullified the national convention held by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Ibadan, Oyo State, on November 15 and 16, 2025.

In a split decision, three of the five justices held that the appeal filed by the Turaki-led faction of the PDP lacked merit.

Delivering the lead judgment,

Justice Stephen Adah ruled that the appellants acted in violation of a subsisting order of the Federal High Court, which had restrained them from proceeding with the convention.

The apex court upheld earlier rulings that voided the convention, which produced the Turaki-led national executive.

Adah stated that the Ibadan convention was set aside because it was conducted in fla-

grant disobedience of a Federal High Court order that placed the exercise on hold pending the fulfilment of certain conditions.

He stressed that disobedience to a lawful court order is unacceptable and must not be tolerated in the interest of the rule of law and democracy.

According to him, proceeding with the convention despite the subsisting order amounted to an affront to the authority of

the court and a mockery of the judiciary.

The majority judgment also condemned what it described as forum shopping by the organisers, who approached the Oyo State High Court in Ibadan to obtain a favourable ruling.

While noting that both the Federal High Court and the Oyo State High Court are courts of coordinate jurisdiction, the Supreme Court criticised the con-

duct of the judge and lawyers involved, describing it as shameful and embarrassing.

However, Justices Haruna Tsunami and Abubakar Umar, in a dissenting judgment, held that the dispute was an internal affair of the PDP that should not have been entertained by any court.

They further argued that former Jigawa State governor, Sule Lamido, failed to exhaust the party's internal dispute resolution

mechanisms before approaching the Federal High Court.

The two justices consequently dismissed the suit on the grounds that it was not justiciable.

In October 2025, the Federal High Court in Abuja had restrained a PDP faction led by Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde and Bauchi State

CONTINUES ON PG 2 >>



RESUMPTION OF ABUBAKAR:

L-R: Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Joash Amupitan; new INEC Commissioner, Rear Admiral Jamila Abubakar, and Mallam Abubakar Tukur, during the resumption of Rear Admiral Sadiq Abubakar at INEC headquarters in Abuja yesterday.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

Edo workers rally for May Day as NLC flags insecurity, poverty

BENIN CITY

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Edo State Council, will today mark the 2026 May Day celebration at the Samuel Ogbemudia Stadium in Benin City, beginning at 10 a.m.

The theme of this year's celebration is "Insecurity, Poverty: The Bane of Decent Work."

Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, is expected to attend as the Special Guest of Honour.

In a statement, the State Chairman of the NLC, Comrade Bernard Joman Eguakhide, said buses have been stationed at strategic locations across Benin City to convey

stakeholders to the venue.

The statement invited all workers in the state, including public and civil servants as well as those in the organised private sector, to attend the event without fail.



COMRADE EGUAKHIDE

NHRC condemns alleged extrajudicial killing in Effurun Delta

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Stock market rakes in N5.6trn gain, market cap hits N152trn

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Oil price hits highest since 2022 after report Trump to be briefed on new Iran options

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Born abroad, capped at home is Coach Eric Chelle, Super Eagles diaspora drive a lazy way out?

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World Malaria Day: LAPO distributes free drugs, rallies women on prevention

MONDAY OISE

BENIN CITY

In commemoration of the 2026 World Malaria Day, the Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO), in collaboration with the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency and Ikpoba-Okha Local Government

Area, has intensified grassroots efforts to combat malaria through free medical outreach and public sensitisation.

Speaking at the event held at the Evbuomodun Primary Health Care Centre, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, LAPO President, Faith Osazuwa-Ojo, said that initiative reflects a shared commit-

ment to improving health outcomes at the community level.

Marking the day under the theme, "Driven to End Malaria: Now We Can, Now We Must," she described the campaign as more than an awareness exercise, stressing that it is a call to action against a disease that remains both preventable and treatable, yet continues to impact lives and livelihoods, particularly in vulnerable communities.

She noted that this persistent burden underscores the need for sustained interventions and collective responsibility.

Osazuwa-Ojo disclosed that LAPO's commitment to community health has been consist-

ent and deliberate, revealing that since 1996, no fewer than 672,653 people across seven states have benefited from its free health screenings, awareness campaigns, and referral services.

According to her, the organisation's goal is to ensure that quality health information and services reach those who need them most, adding that the current theme reinforces the reality that ending malaria is achievable, but requires continuous action at both individual and community levels.

She reaffirmed LAPO's commitment to preventive healthcare, strengthened awareness, and sustained collaboration

with partners to ensure that no community is left behind.

Also speaking, a resource person and team lead from LAPO NGO, Mrs. Jenifer Oviawe, said the outreach was designed to educate and sensitise residents on malaria prevention and eradication strategies.

At the event, nursing mothers and women were educated by Mrs. Osejere Agnes on preventive measures, including clearing bushes around homes, proper disposal of items that can hold stagnant water, and consistent use of insecticide-treated mosquito nets.

In the course of the exercise, 59 female adults and 17 male

adults were screened for malaria, while among children, 21 females and 11 males were also examined.

Free malaria drugs were subsequently distributed with support from the Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency.

The Okaighele of Evbuomodun community, Hon. Idemudia Lucky, commended LAPO for its intervention and pledged community support toward malaria eradication efforts.

The campaign also extended to Aduwawa Market in Evbuomodun, where traders and market women were sensitised on the importance of malaria prevention.

PDP faction loses as Supreme Court...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Governor Bala Mohammed from proceeding with the convention.

Justice James Omotosho held that the party failed to conduct valid state congresses as required by the 1999 Constitution, INEC guidelines, and the party's constitution.

The court orders followed suits filed by aggrieved party members, including Austin Nwachukwu, Amah Abraham Nnanna, and Turnah Alabh George.

In a separate ruling, Justice Peter Lifu directed the PDP to halt the convention until it allowed Sule Lamido to participate in the national chairmanship race.

Lamido had challenged his exclusion from the contest, arguing that he was denied the opportunity to purchase the nomination form.

On November 14, 2025, Lifu issued a final order restraining the party from holding the convention, affirming that Lamido's exclusion violated the PDP constitution and its internal regulations.

Despite the court orders, the

party proceeded with the convention, maintaining that the matter was an internal affair beyond judicial intervention.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Enugu State, Mr Vitus Okechi, has called for unity among party members following the Supreme Court judgment nullifying the Ibadan national convention.

Okechi made the appeal in a telephone interview with journalists, urging party faithful to close ranks and rebuild after the protracted internal crisis.

The Supreme Court had earlier voided the convention held in Ibadan, Oyo State, which produced a factional national executive.

Reacting, the Enugu PDP chairman described the verdict as one that leaves "no victor, no vanquished," stressing the need for reconciliation within the party.

"There is no winner and no loser; we are all one family and there is no victor, no vanquished."

"I am calling on the PDP family to unite; let's move the party forward," he said.



OBI VISITS MOHAMMED:

Governor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State (right) and the presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP) in the 2023 general elections, Peter Obi, during a visit to the Government House, Bauchi.

Nigeria unveils geospatial database...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Brume-Ataguba, said census planning must now be anchored on accurate and integrated spatial data systems.

He said the new initiative would strengthen Nigeria's national geospatial database to support census preparation, evidence-based planning and broader development objectives.

He explained that a modern geospatial database is not merely a technical tool but a core component of national planning architecture, with applications across health, education, infrastructure, disaster response, agriculture and local governance.

He, however, clarified that the project does not replace the census nor alter statutory responsibilities, but rather enhances the technical capacity of institutions involved.

The Statistician-General of the Federation, Mr Adeyemi Adediran, represented by Mr Salihu Itopa, Director of Information and Communication Technology at the National Bureau of Statistics, said the project would strengthen Nigeria's statistical system and improve the credibility of census outcomes.

He noted that geospatial intelligence has become central to

modern governance globally, supporting infrastructure planning, population tracking, resource management, emergency response and targeted interventions.

He added that the quality of population data ultimately determines the quality of national statistics and, by extension, the quality of development decisions.

Also speaking, the Director-General of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), Mrs Abisoye Coker-Odusote, represented by Mallam Sherrif Balogun, said identity systems remain critical to ensuring a credible census.

She said the integration of geospatial intelligence into census planning is both timely and essential, especially as Nigeria prepares for its first national census in nearly two decades.

According to her, the National Identification Number (NIN) provides a unique identity for citizens and legal residents, and when combined with geospatial data, it significantly enhances the integrity of population records.

In his keynote address, Dr Chris Nnanatu of WorldPop, University of Southampton, emphasised the need for integrating multiple datasets to achieve accurate national planning and census execution.

2027 race: Ex-council boss Ilaboya joins race for Owan West Assembly seat

MONDAY OISE

SABONGIDDA-ORA

A former Chairman of Owan West Local Government and sports journalist, Hon. Frank Ilaboya, has formally declared his intention to contest for the Owan West Constituency seat in the Edo State House of Assembly in the 2027 general elections.

The seat is currently occupied by Hon. Blessing Agbebaku, Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, who defected to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC)

and is positioning his re-election bid around retaining the Speakership for Owan West.

Ilaboya made his declaration at the APC Secretariat in Sabongidda-Oru, in an event attended by party executives from all 11 wards in the local government area, alongside a large gathering of party members.

Addressing supporters, Ilaboya expressed confidence in the party's strength in the area, noting that Owan West remains a stronghold of the APC.

He said that his ambition is driven by a deep desire to ensure effective representation

for the constituency and to secure tangible dividends of democracy for the people.

Reaffirming his commitment to the development of Owan West, Ilaboya commended Governor Monday Okpebholo for what he described as an unwavering commitment to rapid development in Edo State within just over a year in office, as well as efforts to unite the party.

"I am not afraid to take up challenges. It is the turn of Owan West to get it right, and the destination is the Edo State House of Assembly," he declared.

He also praised the APC apex

leader in Owan West, Chief Lucky Ohimai, popularly known as Tarex, for fostering unity among party executives and members and strengthening the party's structure in the locality.

In his remarks, the Owan West APC Chairman, Hon. Frank Davids, welcomed Ilaboya into the race and assured all aspirants of a level playing field.

He urged them to conduct their campaigns with decorum, avoid mudslinging, and engage constructively with ward executives and members.

Davids noted that the mode of selecting the party's candidate, whether by consensus or primary election had yet to be determined.

Auchi court sentences 3 for rape as BHI hails Edo justice system accountability

IGARRA

The Auchi High Court in Edo State has convicted and sentenced three persons to 12 years imprisonment each in two separate sexual violence cases involving minors, in judgments hailed as a major boost in the fight against gender-based violence.

The cases, supported by the BraveHeart Initiative for Youth and Women (BHI), involved the rape of a 13-year-old girl

in Igarra Community and the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl in Imoga Community.

In a statement issued to newsmen, BHI disclosed that Ibrahim Momoh was convicted and handed a 12-year prison sentence for raping the 13-year-old victim in Igarra, following more than two years of sustained litigation.

In the second case, the court convicted Ofuna Alaike and Lucky Samuel for the gang rape of a 17-year-old girl in Imoga

Community, sentencing both men to 12 years imprisonment each after nearly four years of persistent legal pursuit.

The organisation described the convictions as a significant milestone in efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence, noting that the judgments reinforce the importance of accountability and justice for survivors.

BHI expressed gratitude to the MacArthur Foundation and the BHI Supporters Group

for their financial support, which enabled the prosecution of the cases.

It also commended state counsel from the Edo State Ministry of Justice and police investigators for their dedication and roles in securing the convictions.

Reaffirming its commitment, the group pledged to continue supporting survivors of sexual violence and to strengthen access to justice across communities in Edo State.

NEWS

NHRC condemns alleged extrajudicial killing in Effurun Delta

ABUJA

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has condemned the alleged extrajudicial killing of 28-year-old Mene Ogidi in Effurun, Delta.

Reacting to the killing, the Executive Secretary of NHRC, Dr Tony Ojukwu SAN, in a statement in Abuja, described the incident as “deeply disturbing and a direct assault on human dignity”.

“No Nigerian should lose his/her life in the hands of those who swore to protect them. Every life matters and must be protected.”

“The reported action of the officer involved is condemnable, unacceptable, and com-

pletely inconsistent with the principles of justice in a civilised society.

“I am concerned over the recurring incidents of excessive use of force by law enforcement officers and I call on the Nigeria Police Force to take urgent and decisive steps to address the issue” he said.

Ojukwu specifically urged the police authorities to subject officers deployed on special duties to periodic mental and psychological evaluations to ensure they are fit to carry arms and engage with civilians responsibly.

He further called for the immediate disciplinary action against ASP Nuhu Usman in line with extant laws and police regulations.

Ojukwu also emphasised the need for the Nigeria Police Force to fully implement the recommendations of the Commission’s Panel on Police Brutality as a necessary step toward meaningful reform and prevention of future violations.

“We hereby call for adequate compensation and justice for the family of the victim,” he stated.

The NHRC boss, warned that justice delayed only deepens public distrust in state institutions and undermines confidence in law enforcement.

He assured that the NHRC will continue to monitor the case closely and will persist in its advocacy for accountability, justice, and the protection of the fundamental rights of all

Nigerians.

“Nigeria must never normalise brutality. Justice must speak louder than silence.

No badge should become a license to kill”, he concluded.

The Delta Police Command, claimed that the deceased was apprehended, following intelligence linking him to attempted shipment of a parcel allegedly containing a Beretta pistol and

ammunition.

ASP Usman, the officer that led the operation, allegedly opened fire on the suspect who was already under their control.

Jandor withdraws from Lagos guber race, cites Tinubu’s endorsement of Hamzat

LAGOS

Dr Abdul-Azeez Adediran popularly known as Jandor a leading Lagos State Governorship aspirant, has announced his withdrawal from the race citing President Bola Tinubu’s endorsement of the Deputy Governor Dr Obafemi Hamzat

as APC consensus candidate.

Adediran, the Lead Visioner of the Lagos4Lagos Movement, disclosed this at a news conference on Thursday.

Announcing, Adediran said: “We made it known from day one that we have a single aspiration—to contest for the governorship of Lagos State in 2027. We also pledged to support whoever the party eventually presents as its candidate.

“In line with our earlier position that we will align with the decision of the party and the President, I hereby announce my withdrawal from the governorship race.

“We have always said that whoever the party presents will be our rallying point. We are

committed to working for the success of the party and all its candidates in the 2027 elections.”

He disclosed that the step followed a meeting involving the Governance Advisory Council (GAC), the President, and the Deputy Governor, an official statement confirmed the endorsement of Hamzat as the party’s preferred candidate.

He, however, pledged to stay and work for the party in the forthcoming general election to ensure victory for the ruling party in the state and the re-election of Tinubu.

Adediran, the 2023 PDP governorship candidate, urged his supporters to remain steadfast and united in support of the APC.

Oborewori pledges justice for slain Delta youth

ASABA

Governor Sheriff Oborewori of Delta has condemned the killing of a defenceless youth, Mena Oti by a police officer, ASP Nuhu Usman.

The governor in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Sir Festus Ahon, described the act as barbaric, unlawful and a grave violation of the sanctity of human life.

Oborewori expressed deep sorrow over the tragic incident and extended heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased.

He noted that no citizen deserved to be subjected to such brutality and death, emphasising that protection of lives remained paramount under his administration.

He commended the Inspector-General of Police, Olatunji

Disu, and leadership of the Nigeria Police Force for the swift and decisive disciplinary actions taken, including the approval for dismissal and prosecution of the officers found culpable.

He said the move was a strong signal of accountability and a step toward restoring public confidence in the system.

The governor, however, insisted that all officers implicated in the heinous act, as captured in the widely circulated video, must be thoroughly investigated and brought to justice in accordance with the law.

He stressed that justice must not only be done, but must be seen to have been done.

Oborewori assured the bereaved family of the state government’s full support in pursuance of the matter.

He also reaffirmed that the state would closely follow up

the case to its logical conclusion.

He pledged that no stone will be left unturned in ensuring that justice is served and that such tragic incidents are prevented in the future.

The governor urged residents to remain calm and law-abiding, reiterating his administration’s commitment to the protection of lives, rule of law, and promotion of a just and humane society.

Osun 2026: Adeleke tasks corps members on neutrality ahead Aug poll

OSOGBO

Governor Ademola Adeleke of Osun has advised the 2026 Batch ‘A’ Stream II corps members posted to the state to be law abiding and remain neutral ahead of the August 15 govern-

norship election in the state.

The 2,600 corps members, comprised of 1,400 females and 1,200 males, were deployed to the state for their service year.

Adeleke gave the advice on Thursday at the swearing-in and official opening ceremony of the orientation course at the NYSC Permanent Orientation Camp in Ede.

He said that the presence of corps members deployed to the state reflected the NYSC’s vision of promoting national unity, integration and mutual understanding among Nigerians.

The governor said “Osun remains a peaceful and accommodating state where corps members can live, learn and contribute

meaningfully to society.

“The orientation course remains a vital component of the service year and is designed to instill discipline, leadership qualities and resilience in participants.

“The course will expose corps members to paramilitary drills, lectures, skills acquisition and social activities needed for effective service delivery.”

Adeleke also advised corps members to participate actively in all camp activities and take full advantage of the opportunities provided.

He commended the NYSC state coordinator, camp management and the state governing board for their roles in the smooth running of the scheme.

Adeleke reiterated his administration’s commitment to the welfare and security of corps members in the state.

“I encourage you to integrate with your host communities, respect local customs and contribute positively to socio-economic development.

“As you may be aware, Osun will be approaching a gubernatorial election in August and you are expected to remain neutral, professional and committed to the rules guiding your service,” he said.

The governor further said that the NYSC scheme was non-partisan and warned the corps members against involvement in partisan politics.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **OSONDU NNAOMA JOSHUA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **OSONDU NNAOMA CHIEMENA**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

RECONCILIATION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **OMUGHELE JOAN OGHENEYERHOVBO** and **OMUGHELE JOAN NYERHOVBO** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **OMUGHELE JOAN OGHENEYERHOVBO**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **JORO ABISHAG UMARU**, now wish to be known and addressed as **UMARU ABISHAG JORO DANIEL**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS AGANMKIONYI JULIET OSAYUWAMEN**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS. CELESTINE JULIET OSAYUWAMEN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CORRECTION OF NAME

The general public is hereby notified that **NWAABI AMARACHI GLORY** and **NWAABI AMARACHI GLORIA** are one and the same person. Henceforth, I wish to be known and addressed as **NWAABI AMARACHI GLORY**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **OSAWA PRECIOUS OSATOHANMWEN**, now wish to be known and addressed as **EDOMWONYI OSAWA PRECIOUS OSATOHANMWEN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS OJO ATINUKE LISA EDE**, now wish to be known and addressed as **MRS. AKINDAHUN ATINUKE LISA EDE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

MISSING DOCUMENT

This is to inform the general public that the original Oba of Benin land approval certificate dated the 22nd day of July 1962 in respect of a portion of land measuring an area of approximately 50 feet by 100 feet lying, situate and being at the new layout of Ward 7/E, (now known and called Isonoro Street) New Benin, Benin City belonging to late **MR. WILLIAM OGBEWI OMORODION** who died on the 17th day of June 1978 and given final burial ceremony on the 20th day of July 1978 in accordance with Benin native laws and custom to which he was subject to till death is missing. The missing document was accordingly incriminated at the Nigeria Police Force Divisional Headquarters, Adesuwa, Benin City on the **27th day of April 2026**.

Any person who transacts any business with the said document does so at his or her risk.

SIGNED: **EFOSA UWAIFO ESO**,
principal Partner, E. S. UWAIFO AND ASSOCIATES LEGAL CLINIC,
63, Muritala Muhammad Way (by Virginia Junction), Benin City, Edo State.
For and on behalf of **Mr. Osa Ogbewi Omorodion family**.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **MISS ONOVO STELLA ONYEKACHI**, now wish to be known as **MRS. OSAGIEDE STELLA ONYEKACHI**. Former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public take note.

ActionAid empowers 135,000 farmers with sustainable farming skills

ABUJA

ActionAid Nigeria says it has equipped over 135,000 small holder farmers and youths, mostly women, with skills to adopt climate-resilient farming practices across several states.

The Country Director, Andrew Mamedu, said the intervention was implemented through the Strategic Partnerships for Agroecology and Climate Justice in West Africa (SPAC) project to promote agroecology and strengthen inclusive food systems.

Mamedu spoke at a national town hall meeting on “Land Use Act and Alternative Frameworks for Access and Control over Land for Smallholder Women Farmers and Young People in Agroecology” in Abuja.

He emphasised that land re-

mains central to agroecology, resilience, and sustainable livelihoods, describing it as more than just a productive asset.

According to him, the organisation has also recorded progress in supporting farmers to access and control land through community and institutional engagement.

He cited several examples, including the allocation of three hectares of land to Ojoloro Agbe Farmers’ Cooperative in Ugebe community, Akoko North-East Local Government Area, by community leaders.

Mamedu added that three hectares were earlier allocated in Ibusa, Delta, by the state Ministry of Agriculture for the establishment of an agroecology model farm, while one hectare was provided in 2026 to Oke-Agbe/Irun Farmers

Group in Akoko North-West Local Government Area by the traditional ruler.

He further said 17 hectares had been committed for allocation to farmers across Dutse, Kiyawa and Miga LGAs in Jigawa, alongside 1.2 hectares donated by Dutse Local Government Council in 2025.

“In the same year, two acres of land were allocated to a smallholder woman farmer in Akunnara community in Ondo West Local Government Area, while over 44 acres were accessed by women farmers across Delta State through community engagement,” he said.

He noted that the achievements demonstrated the impact of collaboration among communities, traditional institutions and government actors, but stressed that systemic barriers still limit equitable access to land; especially for women and young people.

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.

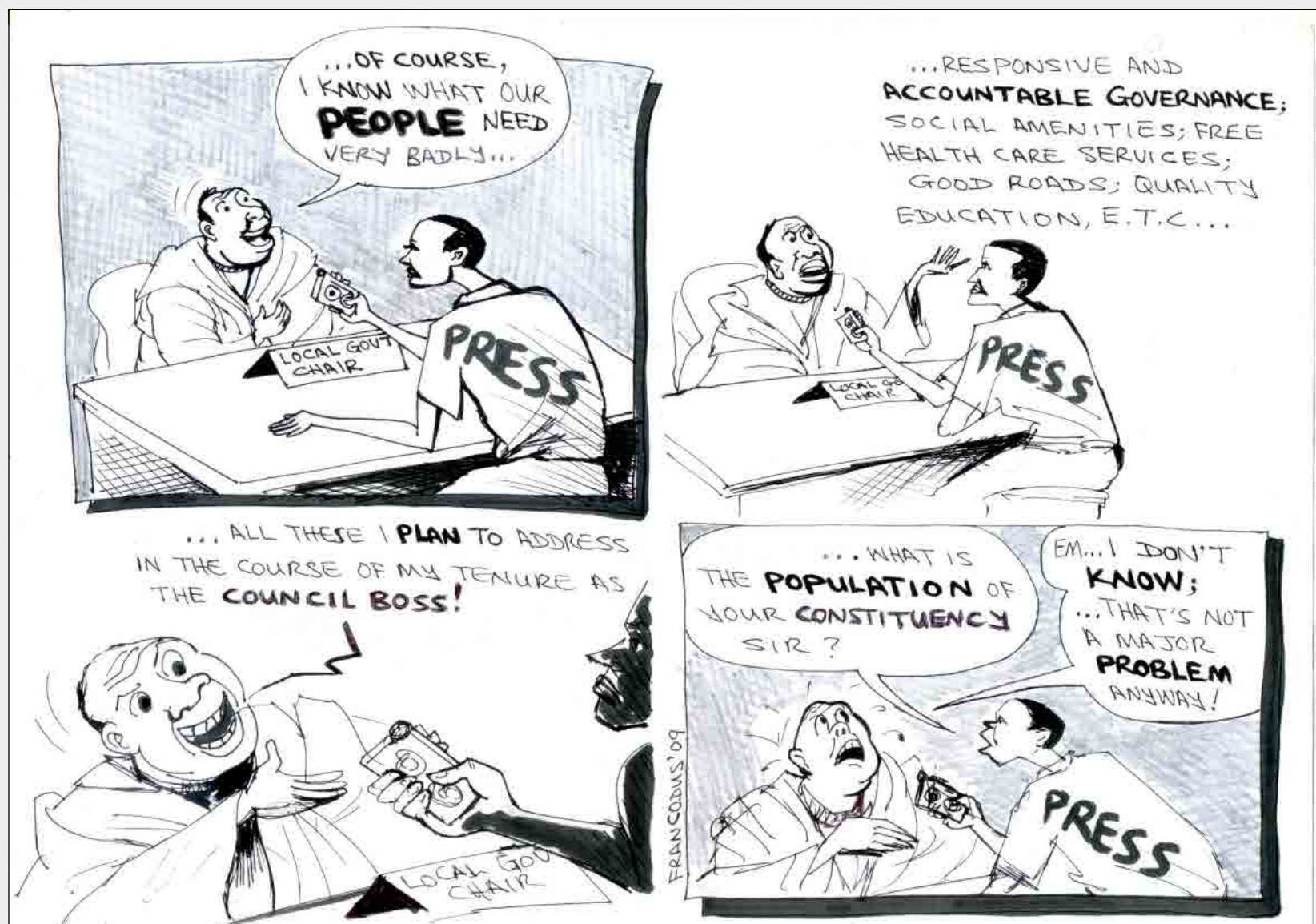
At the same time, residents in vulnerable communities must play their part by paying attention to early warnings and taking simple preventive steps where possible.

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."



Troops neutralise 216 terrorists, apprehend 284 across theatres in April —DHQ

ABUJA

The Defence Headquarters has said that troops neutralised no fewer than 216 terrorists and apprehended 284 suspects in a series of coordinated operations con-

ducted across various theatres in April.

The Director, Defence Media Operations, Maj.-Gen. Michael Onoja, disclosed this on Thursday in Abuja while briefing newsmen on ongoing military operations nationwide.

Onoja said the troops also rescued scores of kidnapped civilians, dismantled terrorist enclaves, and destroyed logistics networks in sustained offensives carried out across the six geopolitical zones.

According to him, the oper-

ations, conducted in collaboration with other security agencies and supported by local communities, have significantly degraded the operational capabilities of insurgents and criminal elements.

In the North East, Onoja said troops of Operation HADIN KAI sustained aggressive operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists

in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.

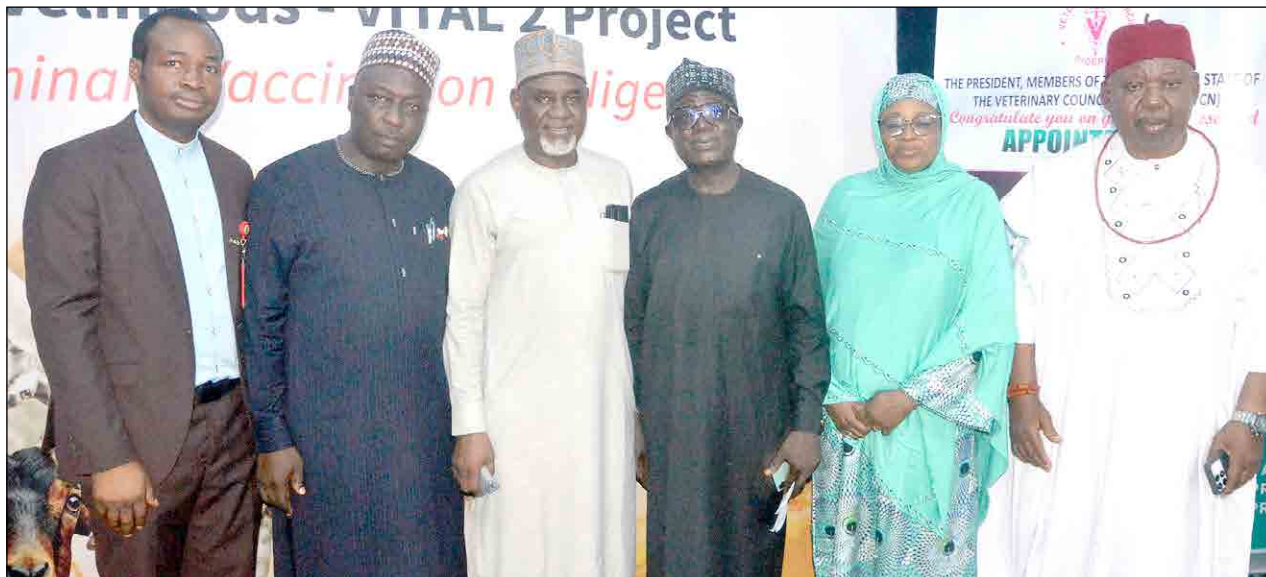
He said the troops neutralised 136 terrorists, apprehended 114 suspects and rescued abducted civilians as well as recorded the surrender of nine insurgents and their families.

Onoja noted that notable operations included the rescue of 90 captives from the Mandara Mountains and the repelling of a major terrorist attack on April 24, during which 21 insurgents were killed and

weapons recovered.

He added that coordinated ground and air operations in the Timbuktu Triangle and Sambisa Forest further led to the neutralisation of terrorists and destruction of enclaves.

In the North West, Onoja said troops of Operation FANSAN YAMMA neutralised 24 terrorists, arrested two suspects and rescued 70 kidnapped victims across Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states.



NATIONAL ROADMAP VALIDATION:

L-R: Acting Registrar, Veterinary Council of Nigeria (VCN), Dr Fadipe Ebenezer; President of VCN, Prof. Mathew Adamu; celebrant/newly appointed Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Gashua (FUGA), Prof. Yaqub Geidam; Chief Veterinary Officer of Nigeria, Dr Samuel Anzaku; Vice President of VCN, Prof. Halima Gambo, and Secretary, Board of Trustee, Nigerian Association of Animal Health and Husbandry Technologists (NAAHHT), High Chief Lucky Ikukaiwe, during a brief program to celebrate the VC at the validation of the National Roadmap for the Veterinary Service in Nigeria (2026 -2036), in Abuja on Wednesday.

FG moves to revitalise River Basin operations, boost food production

IDAHOSA MUSA

BENIN CITY

The Federal Government's renewed push for water infrastructure development and food security took centre stage in Benin as the Minister of Water Resources and Sanitation, Joseph Terlumun Utsev, engaged the management and staff of the Benin-Owena River Basin Development Authority (BORBDA), pledging urgent interventions to reposition the agency for optimal performance.

The minister, who began his working visit at the Authority's facility, said River Basin Development Authorities remain pivotal to achieving national food security goals, given their strategic access to land, water and human resources.

Utsev stressed that improved agricultural productivity

through effective water management would not only create jobs but also strengthen economic growth and national stability.

He explained that his visit was aimed at assessing operational realities on the ground and identify practical solutions to long-standing challenges affecting the Authority's efficiency.

During an interactive session with management, staff and union leaders, the minister acknowledged a range of concerns, including poor access roads to the facility, staff welfare issues, delayed promotions, inadequate training and the need for salary restructuring.

He assured that the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation would engage relevant authorities to address the concerns, noting that while some issues would be handled internally, others would require broader institutional collaboration.

Utsev expressed dissatisfaction with the level of decay observed in parts of the facility, describing it as disheartening, but reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to restoring infrastructure and improving working conditions.

In his welcome address, the Managing Director of the Authority, Dr. Olufemi Samuel Adekanmbi, outlined critical operational challenges, including poor office infrastructure, lack of utility vehicles and security concerns across project sites.

Adekanmbi also emphasised the need for continuous staff training, describing it as essential to boosting productivity and aligning personnel with modern technological demands.

He further highlighted the urgency of addressing salary structure issues and improving conditions at both the permanent site and central office, warning that neglect could hamper the Authority's mandate.

Meanwhile, the minister also

paid a courtesy visit to Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, where both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to deepening collaboration in the water and agricultural sectors.

Utsev commended the state government's support, particularly ongoing road projects leading to federal facilities in the state, while the governor reiterated the importance of federal-state synergy in achieving sustainable development.

Governor Okpebholo assured the minister of the government's to addressing security issues around the Authority's areas of operations in the state particularly in Obayanto, raised by the minister and encroachment on project sites.

Governor Okpebholo, who expressed concern over vandalism of public assets, disclosed that he had personally inspected some of the River Basin facilities and pledged continued support to protect critical infrastructure.

Abductors of 15 worshippers in Ekiti demand N1bn ransom

ADO-EKITI

The Eleda of Eda-Oniyo, Oba Joseph Awolola, has said that abductors of 15 worshippers in Eda-Oniyo, Ilajeje, Ekiti, have demanded N1billion for their release.

Recall that 15 worshippers at the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) No. 2, Eda-Oniyo, Ilajeje Local Government Area of Ekiti were abducted on Tuesday during a vigil.

A guest pastor to the church was also killed during the incident.

Oba Awolola disclosed this during the visit of a government delegation to the community.

The delegation led by retired Brig.-Gen. Ebenezer Ogundana, Special Adviser on Security to Governor Biodun Oyebanji; also included the State Commission-

er of Police, Mr Michael Falade and the Ilajeje Council Chairman, Mr Pius Alaba.

The traditional ruler expressed the traditional council's readiness to cooperate and assist the government in curtailing such ugly incident within the council.

In his remarks, the Chairman of Ilajeje Local Government Area, Mr Pius Alaba, said among those abducted was a family of four, comprising a mother and her three children.

Alaba said that efforts were ongoing to facilitate the release of the kidnapped victims.

Meanwhile, the Ekiti government through its Commissioner of Information, Mr Taiwo Olatunbosun, has condemned the attack on the worshippers.

Olatunbosun described the incident as heinous and unacceptable.

Police arrest 16 suspected cultists at Polytechnic Ibadan, recover guns, others

IBADAN

The Police Command in Oyo State has arrested 16 suspected cultists at the Polytechnic Ibadan and recovered dangerous weapons.

The Command's Public Relations Officer, DSP Ayanlade Olayinka made this known in a statement on Thursday in Ibadan.

Olayinka said the cultists, who were members of Aiye Confraternity, were arrested within the Polytechnic premises when planning a critical meeting that could have led to a breach of peace which was prevented by the Police.

He said the state Commissioner of Police, Mr Abimbola Olugbenga, personally led a team of operatives to the identified location of their meeting

after getting approval from the school authorities.

According to him, the operation was executed with precision and professionalism.

"During the course of the operation, a total of 16 suspects comprising 14 males and two females were arrested at and around the venue.

"Preliminary investigation reveals that some of the suspects had been on the Command's watchlist for their alleged involvement in a series of murder cases and cult-related activities within the State."

The PPRO listed the items recovered from the suspects to include two locally made cut-to-size guns, two English pistols, 16 live cartridges, four axes and assorted charms.

NMA hails Soludo on recent appointment of medical professionals

AWKA

The Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Anambra branch has commended Gov. Chukwuma Soludo for appointing core medical professionals into key positions of the state's health sector.

The NMA made the commendation in a statement on Thursday, noting that such ap-

pointment would enhance service delivery in the sector.

The statement was signed by Dr Okam Princeston and Dr Obiaeli Ifeanyi, chairman and secretary of the association respectively.

Soludo recently appointed Dr Ezeaka Uwaeme as Executive Secretary, Anambra State Health Insurance Agency (ASHIA).

Soludo also appointed Dr

Obianuju Okoye as Executive Secretary, Anambra State Primary Health Care Development Agency, while Dr Nkem Okeke was appointed as Executive Director, Anambra State AIDS Control Agency.

The association said the appointments reflected a commendable commitment to merit, professionalism and the strengthening of healthcare

governance in Anambra.

"NMA Anambra branch warmly acknowledges and appreciates your recent appointments of distinguished medical professionals to key leadership positions within the state's health sector.

"The association is especially pleased with the corrective step taken in appointing a qualified medical doctor as

the Executive Secretary of the Anambra State Primary Health Care Development Agency.

"This decision aligns with global best practices, where leadership of primary health-care systems is entrusted to professionals with appropriate clinical and public health training, ensuring effective policy implementation and improved health outcomes," it said.

"The NMA said it was confident that the appointees, given their experience and

professional competence, would contribute significantly to advancing the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of health-care delivery across Anambra."

The group reiterated its commitment to continued collaboration with the Soludo's administration in the pursuit of a robust, equitable and a sustainable health system in Anambra.

NEWS

Stock market rakes in N5.6trn gain, market cap hits N152trn

LAGOS

The Nigerian stock market closed on a bullish note on Wednesday, recording a gain of N5.554 trillion for investors at the end of the trading session.

The rally was driven by increased investor interest in high- and mid-cap stocks, including Airtel Africa, Zichis Agro Allied Industries, UAC of Nigeria, CAP, Jaiz Bank, and 45 others.

Market capitalisation rose from N147.174 trillion to N152.728 trillion, representing a 3.77 per cent increase.

Similarly, the All-Share Index gained 8,625.79 points, or

3.77 per cent, advancing from 228,579.80 to 237,205.59.

While the Year-to-Date return grew by 52.43 per cent, the market breadth closed positive with 50 gainers against 43 losers.

Airtel Africa, UAC of Nigeria, CAP and Zichis Agro Allied Industries led the gainers' chart by 10 per cent each, settling at N3,021.30, N165, N132 and N19.80 per share respectively.

Jaiz Bank soared by 9.99 per cent, ending the session at N8.81 per share.

On the flip side, Cadbury and John Holt led the losers' chart by 10 per cent each, finishing at N66.15 and N12.60 per share respectively.

Also, E-Tranzact declined by 9.97 per cent, finishing at N15.80, Morison dipped by 9.92 per cent, settling at N10.62 while Haldane McCall shed by N9.74 per cent, closing at N3.43 per share.

A total of 1.33 billion shares valued at N69.09 billion were traded across 83,445 transactions, compared to 907.9 million shares worth N68.24 billion that was exchanged in 72,886 deals earlier on Tuesday.

This showed an overall growth in the market activity.

Access Corporation led the market in both volume and value, with 281.31 million shares traded worth N7.29 billion, representing 21.09 per cent and 10.55 per cent of the day's total volume and value, respectively.

Commenting on the bullish session, Mr. David Adonri, Vice President of Highcap Securities, said highly capitalised

stocks largely dictated the market's direction.

He explained that such stocks tend to influence overall market movement whenever they record significant price changes.

"Airtel Africa rose by the maximum 10 per cent, and that gain alone was substantial enough to drive the market upward," he said.

Adonri added that other large-cap stocks, including Aradel, also recorded appreci-

able gains, while some banking stocks that had declined in the previous session rebounded.

"Stocks like GTCO, Zenith Bank, WAPCO and UBA all posted recoveries," he noted.

He further stated that while the highly capitalised stocks set the tone for the rally, they were strongly supported by mid-cap stocks, which collectively contributed to the market's positive performance.

65th AGM: NGX Group shareholders commend leadership, seek sustained performance

LAGOS

Shareholders of Nigerian Exchange Group Plc (NGX Group) have commended the board and management for the group's performance and strategic direction in the 2025 financial year.

The shareholders gave the commendation during the 65th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the group in Lagos.

They acknowledged the group's disciplined execution and its role in strengthening the Nigerian capital market as they urged the group on continued focus on growth and long-term value creation.

They noted that recent developments reflected a more structured and better-regulated market environment.

Speaking during the meeting, President, New Dimension Shareholders Association, Mr Patrick Ajudua, commended the

leadership of the group for delivering a strong financial outcome.

He noted that the results reflected both improved market conditions and deliberate strategic execution.

He also commended the group's FTSE Russell frontier market status, noting that NGX market capitalisation surpassed the N145 trillion mark for the first time, alongside progress in the settlement cycle migration and the extension of trading hours.

"The numbers speak to a business that is gaining strength and direction," he said.

Similarly, Chairman of the Progressive Shareholders Association of Nigeria, Mr Boniface Okezie, lauded the group's commitment to innovation and infrastructure development.

"The market is becoming more forward-looking, supported by strong leadership at the group level."



LAGOS LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2026:

Ekiti State Commissioner for Finance, Akintunde Oyeboode; CEO, Ruwa Capital Management, Adesuwa Rhodes; Executive Secretary, Lateef Jakande Leadership Academy (LJKA), Ayisat Agbaje-Okunade; Head of Artist Services and Relationships at TRACE, Simi Badiru, and CEO, Caverton Offshore Support Group, Olabode Makanjuola, at the Lagos Leadership Summit 2026 organised by LJKA in Lagos on Wednesday.

Ports rehabilitation: NPA assures stakeholders of seamless operation

LAGOS

The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) has assured stakeholders of seamless operation and no disruption during the rehabilitation of the Apapa and Tin Can Island ports in Lagos.

The NPA General Manager, Corporate Communication and Strategy Unit of the Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA), Mr Ikechukwu Onyemekara, gave the assurance during a chat with newsmen in Lagos.

The Federal Government announced the Lagos ports rehabilitation will begin in Q2

2026, with completion expected in 48 months.

In March, Nigeria and the UK sealed a 746 million pounds export finance deal to support the redevelopment of two major ports in Lagos.

Under the deal, UK Export Finance (UKEF) will guarantee loans for the refurbishment of the Apapa and Tin Can Island port complexes.

As part of the agreement, British Steel will supply 120,000 tonnes of steel for the port projects under a contract valued at 70 million pounds.

The deal is expected to generate 236 million pounds in

supplier contracts for British companies, as at least 20 per cent of project components must be sourced from the UK.

According to Onyemekara, the rehabilitation will be carried out in batches to ensure cargo discharge at all terminals continues uninterrupted.

"Rehabilitating our ports is a bold step by the Federal Government. We need to appreciate the Government and support the effort," he said.

"If Nigeria is to lead in maritime trade, it is critical that our ports are modernised and capable of receiving larger, modern vessels.

"Some ports in West and Central Africa are already receiving larger vessels because they have modernised facili-

ties. Most cargoes destined for other countries end up in Nigeria due to our population," Onyemekara added.

He urged stakeholders to support the government to achieve seamless operations during the rehabilitation, which is scheduled to commence before the end of Q2 2026.

Onyemekara stressed that the rehabilitation will not disrupt operations. Once a berthing area is designated for reconstruction, it will be completed quickly before work begins on the next.

He said the segmented approach will sustain seamless cargo discharge and ensure continued revenue generation for the government.

Indigenous manufacturing driving livestock transformation, Nigeria's food security —FACCO boss

LAGOS

The Chief Executive Officer of FACCO West Africa, Mr. Femi Adelayo, has said that indigenous manufacturing is becoming a critical driver of livestock transformation in Nigeria, with the potential to improve food security and support a healthier population.

Adelayo disclosed this in an interview with newsmen in Lagos.

He said the convergence of local manufacturing, smart engineering and farm automation was redefining livestock production systems across the country, enabling Nigeria to address its persistent protein deficit while improving efficiency, biosecurity

and animal welfare.

According to him, structural inefficiencies, high production costs and overdependence on imported equipment have long constrained growth in poultry, dairy and piggery value chains.

"Today, we are witnessing a decisive shift. Indigenous capacity is no longer limited to assembling components; it now involves delivering integrated, end-to-end solutions tailored to Nigeria's climate, farmers and market realities," he said.

Adelayo explained that FACCO West Africa's operations are built around a systems-thinking model, where housing, feeding, processing and waste management work together to optimise livestock production.

Abakaliki residents solicit Govt's intervention over rising house rent

ABAKALIKI

Some residents of Abakaliki have appealed to the State Government to intervene over the sudden spike in house rents in Abakaliki, the state's capital.

The people made the appeal in separate interviews with newsmen in Abakaliki.

They frowned at the activities of house agents, who have allegedly hijacked the process of securing accommodation in the town.

A civil servant, Mr Chukwunonso Ukele, said it was un-

fair for house rent to be higher than a tenant's annual income.

He described the situation as unfortunate and unreasonable, pointing out that the development was getting worse everyday.

"This is not what I experienced when I came to Abakaliki five years ago.

"Some residents say the situation is caused by the nation's economy and more by the influx of internet fraudsters, otherwise called 'Yahoo Boys', into the state.

"These individuals make money secretly, sometimes

through rituals.

"If you observe, they hardly bargain, no matter how much the rent is," Ukele said.

Another civil servant, Mr Dennis Oyibe, spoke of the need for relevant authorities to check the activities of house agents in the state.

"Most of the agents are dubious and inflate rents beyond what property owners placed on their property.

"It is painful. We are beginning to witness urban-rural migration, although no place is easy in present-day Nigeria," he said.

Mrs Rita Nwali said the situation had become a major economic concern, pointing out that the trend became worse with the current economic challenges.

According to Nwali, the trend is largely driven by inflation.

"The high cost of building materials is a factor, but many of these houses were built 10 years to 20 years ago," she said.

She urged the government and relevant agencies to address the situation in order to reduce the financial burden on residents.

Safety beyond hard hats: WSO Nigeria pushes for mental wellbeing

EDWARD OSEGHE

As the global community marked the 2026 International Labour Organization's World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the World Safety Organization (WSO) Nigeria has called for a fundamental shift in how workplace safety is defined, urging employers to give equal priority to mental wellbeing alongside physical protection.

In a goodwill message to safety professionals and industry stakeholders, the Country Director of WSO Nigeria and Executive Director of SafERR Global Net-

works, Amb. Dr. Soji Olalokun, said that the year's theme, "Let's Ensure a Healthy Psychosocial Working Environment," reflects an emerging global consensus that workplace safety must go beyond visible hazards.

While reaffirming the importance of protective gear and conventional safety protocols, Olalokun stressed that such measures are no longer sufficient to address the full range of risks workers face.

He drew attention to the growing impact of psychosocial challenges, including stress, workplace bullying, role ambiguity, and weak organisa-

tional support systems; warning that these require urgent, structured interventions.

"Every worker deserves to return home safe, not only physically, but mentally," he said, urging organisations to accord psychological safety the same level of seriousness as physical hazards.

Highlighting WSO Nigeria's footprint, Olalokun disclosed that since 2013, the organisation, in partnership with SafERR Global Networks, has delivered accredited safety training and advocacy to more than 3.5 million people across key sectors like oil and gas,

construction, manufacturing, and the public sector.

He added that sustained collaboration with regulators and industry stakeholders has facilitated the integration of psychosocial risk assessments into Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) systems across the country. Through its ambassadorial and volunteer programmes, WSO Nigeria has also built a strong grassroots network of safety advocates promoting awareness and behavioural change.

According to him, the organisation has played a leading role in advancing conversations around mental health,

workplace stress, and bullying issues gaining increasing recognition in both policy and practice locally and globally.

Olalokun attributed the progress recorded to the collective efforts of partners, members, volunteers, and government institutions, emphasising that workplace safety remains a shared responsibility.

He challenged organisations

to critically evaluate their work environments, questioning whether employees truly enjoy clarity, respect, and the support required to thrive.

Reaffirming its commitment, WSO Nigeria pledged continued investment in training, advocacy, and practical tools to help organisations identify and manage psychosocial risks effectively.

Lagos 2027: Jandor picks APC governorship nomination forms, backs direct primaries

LAGOS

Dr Abdul-Azeez Adediran, popularly known as Jandor, has purchased the Expression of Interest and Nomination Forms of the All Progressives Congress (APC) to contest the Lagos State governorship election in 2027.

Adediran, the Lead Visioner of the Lagos4Lagos Movement, disclosed this in a statement on Wednesday in Lagos by his Spokesperson, Mr Gbenga Ogunleye.

Adediran took the step amid popular endorsement for the Lagos Deputy Governor, Dr Obafemi Hamzat, by President Bola Tinubu, Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu and Governance Advisory Council and others as the party's consensus candidate.

The aspirant said the step underscored his commitment to the party's laid-down procedures and internal democratic principles.

Adediran said: "This step reflects my disciplined adherence to the party's established processes and my unwavering belief in the internal democratic mechanisms of the APC.

"I reiterate my full alignment with the party's official position on the adoption of direct primaries for all elective offices.

"I am confident that this approach will further deepen participatory democracy, strengthen party cohesion, and

give every member a sense of ownership in the emergence of candidates," he said.

He also reaffirmed his loyalty to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the leadership of the party at both national and state levels.

"I reaffirm my profound respect, loyalty, and unwavering commitment to the National Leader of the APC and President Bola Tinubu.

"I equally extend my highest regards to the leadership of the party in Lagos State, its distinguished elders, and all recognised leaders whose guidance continues to shape the progressive ideals of the APC," he said.

The governorship aspirant appreciated party stakeholders and supporters for their backing, while recognising the rights of others to support different aspirants.

"While expressing deep appreciation to party leaders and stakeholders who have graciously endorsed me as their preferred aspirant, I also acknowledge, with utmost respect, the legitimate rights of other leaders and stakeholders who have chosen to support other aspirants.

"Such diversity of opinion remains a hallmark of a vibrant and democratic political party," he said.

Adediran further commended members of the JAGABAN-JANDOR 2027 Movement and other supporters for their contributions.

**PEACE WALK:**

Members of the Princess Anita Teens Development Initiative (PATDI) led by the Convener/Executive Director, Princess Anita Umeweni, during a peace walk and awareness campaign to promote a crime-free society among teens, at the Old Parade Ground in Abuja on Wednesday.

Tinubu endorses Hamzat as Lagos APC consensus governorship candidate

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has endorsed Lagos State Deputy Governor, Dr Obafemi Hamzat, as the consensus governorship candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), for the 2027 election.

Tinubu gave the endorsement after a meeting with members of the Governance Advisory Council (GAC) of the Lagos APC at

the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

The delegation was led by GAC leader, Tajudeen Olusi, and Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu.

Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, confirmed the development in a post on his verified X handle.

"President Tinubu formally endorses the Lagos APC consensus governorship candidate, Obafemi Hamzat, at a meeting with members of the Lagos Governance Ad-

visory Council," he wrote.

Speaking earlier with State House correspondents after the meeting, Sanwo-Olu described the endorsement as a historic moment for Lagos.

He said the visit was to formally present Hamzat to the President for validation, blessing and support ahead of the political process.

"It is a very memorable day for me personally. It is another full circle moment.

"The same team went through this about eight years ago when

both of us were presented as governorship and deputy governorship candidates," he said.

Sanwo-Olu said Hamzat possessed the credentials, charisma and competence required to govern Lagos State.

He praised the deputy governor for loyalty, dedication and commitment in the last seven years.

"He knows the room, he knows the design of the house, and he has been part of the journey for over 20 years," the governor said.

Kachikwu backs court verdict nullifying ADC congresses

ABUJA

The 2023 presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress (ADC), Mr Dumebi Kachikwu, has welcomed a Federal High Court judgment nullifying congresses and a convention conducted by a faction of the party.

Kachikwu, speaking at a news conference, said the ruling reaffirmed that the ADC was "not for sale" and showed that the party had resisted attempts by some individuals to take over its structure.

"I had long warned that the

African Democratic Congress is not for sale and that those who sought to take over the party through unconstitutional means would be shown the way out.

"With this judgment, it is clear that those attempts have failed woefully," he said.

He described the nullified congresses as illegitimate, noting that the court's characterisation of the exercise underscored the gravity of the breach.

According to him, the ruling should serve as a deterrent to individuals seeking to undermine party structures for personal gain.

Kachikwu added that the

party leadership would formally communicate the judgment to INEC and announce plans for a national convention.

"We will notify INEC of the judgment and propose dates and venue for the convention. The media will be informed accordingly," he said.

He reiterated that the ADC remained open to Nigerians committed to genuine reform and national development.

"We are confident of contesting the next election. The party provides a credible platform for those who want to deliver meaningful change," he said.

Kachikwu alleged that those behind the disputed processes were already seeking alternative political platforms.

"We are aware that they are shopping for other parties. We wish them well, but the ADC remains a platform for principled politics," he said.

He urged party members to remain vigilant, stressing that efforts to preserve the party's integrity were ongoing.

"The battle is not over until it is over. Our members must stay alert and committed to ensuring that the party remains true to its founding ideals," he said.

Plateau: INEC sensitises stakeholders on 2026 electoral act

JOS

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on Wednesday organised a one-day sensitisation workshop on the 2026 Electoral Act for election stakeholders in Plateau.

Speaking at the event, Prof. Sam Egwu, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) described the exercise as timely.

Egwu said that the training is geared towards ensuring free, fair and credible elections in 2027.

According to him, the exercise would enable participants to ac-

quire basic but necessary knowledge on the new electoral Act.

"This training is not just timely but necessary, as the general elections are around the corner.

"We have invited critical stakeholders to this activity so as to acquaint you with the provisions of the 2026 electoral Act.

"This is part of our commitment towards ensuring free, fair and credible elections in 2027," he said.

Participants at the training included, staff of INEC, representatives of political parties, religious bodies, security agencies, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), among others.

NEWS

Tinubu names Bianca Ojukwu foreign affairs minister

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has appointed Mrs Bianca Odumegwu-Ojukwu as Minister of Foreign Affairs,

following the resignation of Amb. Yusuf Tuggar.

This was contained in a statement issued by Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, on Wednesday in

Abuja.

Tuggar had resigned to participate in the 2027 general elections.

Odumegwu-Ojukwu previously served as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

In the same vein, the president nominated Amb. Sola Enikanolaiye as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, subject to Senate confirmation.

Until his nomination, Enikanolaiye, from Kogi, served as Senior Special Assistant to the President on Foreign Affairs and International Relations.

The Presidency described Enikanolaiye as a distinguished diplomat and seasoned public servant with over three decades of service in Nigeria's foreign service.

He previously served as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He also held diplomatic postings in Addis Ababa, Belgrade, Ottawa, London and New Delhi.

Tinubu said the appointments were part of ongoing efforts to reposition Nigeria's foreign policy architecture.

He said the move would en-

hance efficiency, strategic engagement and stronger global partnerships.

The President congratulated the appointees and urged them to work diligently in promoting Nigeria's national interest.

He also charged them to advance economic diplomacy, foster regional stability and safeguard the welfare of Nigerians at home and abroad.

Zulum Explains Choice of Gubio as Successor

MAIDUGURI

Governor Babagana Zulum of Borno has explained his decision to appoint Mustapha Gubio as his preferred successor ahead of the 2027 governorship election.

Zulum made the clarification in Abuja while presenting Gubio with the expression of interest and nomination forms of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Dauda Iliya, the governor said the move was aimed at sustaining the developmental strides recorded under his administration.

"I know how I came in as Commissioner for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (RRR) and how the office shaped a governance standard that changed the lives of our citizenry. Engr Gubio has demonstrated similar discipline, courage and uncommon commitment to public service," Zulum said.

He noted that Gubio had shown exceptional capacity in overseeing critical infrastructure

projects, particularly in housing development across urban and rural communities, which had significantly improved living conditions in the state.

The governor added that beyond infrastructure, Gubio had played a key role in rebuilding communities affected by insurgency, especially during his tenure as Commissioner for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement.

According to the statement, Gubio spearheaded reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected areas such as Bama, Konduga, Damasak and Mafa Local Government Areas, ensuring the restoration of schools, healthcare facilities and other essential services.

Zulum said the achievements aligned with his administration's vision of recovery, stability and sustainable development, describing Gubio as a natural choice to consolidate ongoing progress.

The governor emphasised that the endorsement reflected a strategic decision anchored on continuity, experience and a commitment to maintaining peace, resilience and transformational governance in Borno.



3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE:

Stakeholders at the 3rd International Conference organised by the Institute of Maritime Studies, University of Nigeria Enugu, Centre on Wednesday in Enugu.

Katsina renews Malaria elimination drive, focuses on health equity

KATSINA

Katsina State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to intensifying the fight against malaria, placing equity, access, and community-driven healthcare at the centre of its strategy to eliminate the disease.

The Commissioner for Health, Musa Adamu-Funtua, stated this in Katsina at a press conference as part of activities commemorating the 2026 World Malaria Day.

He said that the renewed resolve comes amid growing concerns that rural populations across Africa, especially those living in poverty and with limited access to education, remain the most affected by malaria.

According to him, global health projections indicate that key 2025 milestones set under the WHO's malaria reduction strategy may be missed if urgent and inclusive interventions are not scaled up.

He noted that infants and young children continue to bear the heaviest burden, saying that in 2022 alone, an estimated four out of five malaria-related deaths in the African region occurred among children under the age of five.

"The disparity is further deepened by socio-economic inequal-

ities, as children from the poorest households in sub-Saharan Africa are significantly more likely to contract malaria than their counterparts in wealthier homes.

"Vulnerable groups, including refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, and indigenous communities, also face heightened risks, often living in conditions where access to preventive and treatment services remains limited.

"Climate change and humanitarian crises, such as conflicts and natural disasters, have worsened the situation by displacing populations and exposing them to malaria-prone environments," he said.

According to him, against this backdrop, Katsina is aligning its policies with global calls to accelerate the fight against malaria for a more equitable world.

He said that they are focusing on eliminating barriers such as discrimination, strengthening community engagement, and expanding primary healthcare services to reach underserved populations.

The Commissioner reiterated that the ministry's efforts are guided by the blueprint agenda of Gov. Dikko Radda, which prioritises the health sector as a cornerstone for achieving Universal Health Coverage and improving overall wellbeing.

ENUGU

Stakeholders at the 3rd International Conference (Hybrid) on "Global Maritime Regulations to Tangible Actions", have called for effective implementation of maritime regulations in Africa to boost blue economy.

The conference was organised by the Institute of Maritime Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC).

Speaking at the event, Director of the Institute, Prof. Florence Orabueze, said that Africa was at a critical stage of maritime development, endowed with extensive coastlines, strategic shipping routes, and expanding port infrastructure.

"In spite of these developments, the continent is yet hindered by weak implementation of the established regulatory frameworks," Orabueze said.

According to her, while policies are often well-articulated,

their impact are undermined by poor execution.

"The strength of policy is too weakened by ineffective implementation.

"This gap demands urgent attention if Africa is to realise its maritime potential," she said.

On the conference, the director explained that it was designed to move stakeholders beyond policy discussions to solutions that would provide sustainable, measurable, and impactful outcomes.

She described the conference theme as timely and imperative.

In his address, Prof. Lucky Worika of Rivers State University, said that global maritime conventions, including safety, environmental, and operational regulations, remained ineffective without strong local enforcement mechanisms.

Worika however, listed key challenges affecting maritime governance in Africa to include

institutional capacity constraints, fragmented regulatory systems, infrastructural deficiencies, corruption, and weak inter-agency coordination.

He further suggested the need for integrated governance systems, improved port infrastructure, enhanced environmental compliance, increased investment in technology and regional cooperation in the system.

In his speech, the Managing Director, South East Development Commission (SEDC), Mr Mark Okoye, said maritime efficiency remained critical to economic growth, noting that 90 per cent of global trade were conducted in the sea.

Okoye, who was represented by the Executive Director, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Clifford Ogbede, said that in spite of Nigeria's role in the sector, the country faced the problem of inefficiency in

logistics and port operations.

He said that the blue economy provided over \$1.5 trillion opportunities annually across the world, urging Nigeria to tap the benefit by investing in inland waterways, aquaculture, and related sectors.

In his remarks, former Chairman of Enugu Sports Club, Chief Ben Etiaba, urged Nigeria to strategically position itself to harness maritime opportunities through stronger institutions, sound policies, and investment in research and human capital development.

Also contributing, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Prof. Simeon Ortuanya, represented by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Josephat Onwumere, commended the Institute for sustaining a conference platform aligned with global maritime trends and best practices.

"These engagements are crucial in shaping policy dialogue and fostering collaboration among academia, industry, and government," he said.

EFCC grills paramount energy MD over alleged N73.3m fraud

ABUJA

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has commenced investigations into the activities of the Managing Director of Paramount Energy Ltd. over alleged N72.3 million fraud.

EFCC Spokesperson Dele Oyewale, who said this in a

statement in Abuja, explained that the suspect was questioned over alleged obtaining by false pretence and stealing to the tune of N72.3 million.

"A petitioner alleged that he sent the said sum to the suspect for the supply of petroleum products to some of his branches.

"The said money was paid in six tranches between April 11,

2022 and May 24, 2022.

"After he collected the money, he kept promising to supply the products as agreed but failed to do so which then prompted preliminary investigations.

"We discovered that Chinazumaj Ajah and his company do not have the capacity to supply the products and he deliberately defrauded us of our business capital," the petitioner said.

Oyewale explained that investigations revealed that the suspect used the account of his company, Paramount Energy Ltd., to receive the said sum after which he transferred the money into his account for personal use.

He said that the suspect would be charged to court as soon as investigations were concluded.

Opinion

Can Nigeria eliminate malaria before 2030?

ABUJAH RACHEAL (NAN)

For Malam Idris Yusuf, a 43-year-old petty trader at the bustling Zone 4 Suya Spot in Nigeria's capital, the promise of a modern city is something he sees but rarely feels.

Behind his kiosk in Abuja, a clogged drainage channel has formed what he describes as a "black river." When the rains come, it overflows, creating a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes.

In February 2026, his youngest son fell ill. Within days, three neighbours followed.

"They tell us malaria is reducing in Abuja, but here, the mosquitoes are increasing," he said.

His reality reflects a deeper truth: even where progress is reported, malaria remains dangerously close to home.

Malaria transmission in Nigeria is widespread and persistent. An estimated 97 percent of the population is at risk, making exposure almost universal.

Nigeria also carries the heaviest malaria burden globally. It accounts for about 24.3 percent of global cases and 30.3 percent of global deaths—the highest for any country.

The Director-General of WAHO, Dr Melchior Aissi, said that across West Africa, Nigeria contributes more than half of all malaria cases, placing it at the centre of the region's elimination efforts.

According to the World Health Organisation, five countries, including Nigeria, account for over half of global malaria deaths, with children under five most affected.

In 2022 alone, more than 180,000 Nigerian children under five died from malaria, underscoring the disease's devastating human toll.

However, weak surveillance systems and underreporting in some regions suggest that the true burden may be even higher than official figures indicate.

Malaria is caused by parasites transmitted through the bite of an infected female Anopheles mosquito. Symptoms do not appear immediately.

According to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the incubation period typically ranges from seven to 30 days, though it may vary depending on the parasite species. This delay often complicates early diagnosis and treatment, especially in communities with limited access to healthcare.

In Abuja, Dr Dolapo Fasawe, Mandate Secretary for Health Services and Environment, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), said data suggest a decline in malaria prevalence; yet, lived experiences tell a different story.

At Wuse District Hospital, a significant proportion of patients still test positive for malaria, highlighting what experts describe as urban malaria—driven by poor sanitation, blocked drainage, and rapid population growth.

Meanwhile, in Abaji, malaria prevalence remains as high as 40.9 percent, where transmission is nearly constant. The contrast reveals a coun-



The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has allocated 10.78 billion dollars for 2026–2028, its lowest level in years. By early 2025, more than 40 percent of planned mosquito net distributions were delayed or at risk

try where geography still determines health outcomes.

According to the Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Nigeria, 2024—a comprehensive report produced by UNICEF Nigeria in collaboration with the Nigerian government and other partners—malaria in Nigeria is not evenly distributed.

Prevalence is about 31 per cent in rural areas compared to 13 per cent in urban areas. The report indicates that children in the poorest households are up to seven times more likely to be infected than those in wealthier homes, reflecting uneven access to prevention and treatment.

These disparities show that malaria is as much a development and equity issue as it is a health challenge.

Beyond its health impact, malaria continues to drain Nigeria's economy.

According to Prof. Muhammed Pate, Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, the disease costs the country an estimated 1.1 billion dollars annually through treatment expenses, lost productivity, and absenteeism.

The burden is worsened by high out-of-pocket spending, which accounts for 66 to 76 percent of healthcare costs, pushing many households deeper into poverty.

Policy analysts say Nigeria is shifting from malaria control to elimination, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals target of ending

malaria by 2030.

However, responsibility for delivering malaria services lies largely at the primary healthcare level, which local governments manage. This decentralised structure continues to raise questions about accountability, coordination, and last-mile delivery.

Despite increased commitments, Nigeria's malaria response remains heavily dependent on donor funding, raising concerns about sustainability at a time when global financing is tightening.

A major breakthrough is the rollout of the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine, now integrated into Nigeria's immunisation programme.

The Executive Director of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), Dr Muji Aina, said that following pilot successes in Kebbi and Bayelsa—where child malaria cases dropped significantly—the vaccine is being expanded to more states, including the FCT.

The ENHANCE Project, unveiled in 2026, aims to ensure vaccines reach underserved populations, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

Experts say climate change is altering malaria transmission patterns. In urban centres, flooding and poor drainage create year-round breeding sites, while in rural areas, shifting rainfall patterns are extending transmission seasons.

Observers note that what was once seasonal is becoming continuous, complicating control efforts.

Notwithstanding decades of interventions, prevention remains inconsistent.

Only about 40 percent of Nigerians have access to insecticide-treated nets. Just 31 percent use them regularly, and usage among children and pregnant women has declined in recent years. At the same time, growing resistance of mosquitoes to insecticides threatens the effectiveness of these tools.

Malaria in pregnancy remains a critical concern. Available records indicate that only about one in three pregnant women receive adequate preventive treatment, leaving many vulnerable to complications such as anaemia and low birth weight.

Children under five continue to bear the highest burden of illness and death.

Nigeria's health system includes more than 30,000 primary healthcare facilities, nearly 4,000 secondary facilities, and 83 tertiary hospitals. However, malaria control relies heavily on primary healthcare, where access and quality remain uneven—particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.

Experts say a significant proportion of malaria treatment also occurs outside formal health facilities, often through private medicine vendors, raising concerns about misdiagnosis, delayed care, and inappropriate treatment.

For Mr Odinaka Obeta, Executive Director of the Block Malaria Africa Initiative, the fight against malaria began in Jos after witnessing preventable deaths.

Through grassroots initiatives, Obeta worked with communities to improve sanitation, promote preventive practices, and encourage early treatment. His experience underscores a key lesson: malaria elimination requires community ownership,

not just awareness.

At the continental level, the burden remains overwhelming.

According to Dr Jean Kaseya, Director-General of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Africa accounts for 96 per cent of global malaria cases and 97 per cent of deaths.

He noted that emerging threats—including resistance to antimalarial drugs and insecticides, climate change, and weak health systems—are making elimination more complex.

Aissi added that West Africa carries about 40 per cent of the global malaria burden, warning that funding gaps, weak systems, and climate pressures threaten progress. He called for stronger domestic investment and regional coordination.

"Now we can. Now we must. Ending malaria: now it is possible," he said during the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Health Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Global financing is tightening at a critical time.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has allocated 10.78 billion dollars for 2026–2028, its lowest level in years. By early 2025, more than 40 percent of planned mosquito net distributions were delayed or at risk.

Experts warn that reduced funding, combined with climate change and rising resistance, could lead to a resurgence of malaria cases and deaths.

For Yusuf, until the stagnant water behind kiosks like his disappears, malaria will remain not just a statistic but a daily reality.

For Nigeria, stakeholders say the path to elimination will not be defined by policies alone, but by whether change is felt where it matters most—in communities still living with the disease.

(NAN Feature)

Friday Sermon

Good Deeds That Have the Same Reward as Hajj



Supporting good and discouraging evil practices

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. We seek His help, His guidance, and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Him from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our actions. Whomever Allah guides, none can misguide and whomever He leaves astray, none can guide.

May peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his family, his companions, and all those who follow his path until the Day of Judgment.

Dear brothers and sisters in Islam, One of the greatest responsibilities placed upon us as believers is to stand firmly on the side of good and to actively discourage evil. This is not optional in Islam, it is a defining quality of a true believer and a healthy society.

Allah says in the Qur'an: "You are the best nation produced as an example for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah." (Qur'an 3:110).

This verse reminds us that our excellence as a community is tied directly to our commitment to promoting good and resisting evil.

UNDERSTANDING GOOD AND EVIL

Good (ma'rif) is everything that Allah has commanded—truthfulness, kindness, justice, modesty, charity, patience, and compassion.

Evil (munkar) is everything Allah

has forbidden—lying, oppression, corruption, injustice, immorality, dishonesty, and harm to others.

Supporting good is not limited to big actions; even the smallest acts count. Examples are: A kind word, a helping hand, a sincere smile and speaking the truth when it is difficult.

Likewise, evil is not only in major crimes, it can exist in everyday behaviour. Examples are: Spreading gossip, cheating in business or exams, oppressing others, and encouraging wrongdoing through silence.

THE DUTY OF EVERY BELIEVER

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot, then with his tongue. If he cannot, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith."

This hadith teaches us three levels of responsibility:

With your hand: Taking action when you have authority or ability.

With your tongue: Speaking out against wrong.

With your heart: Rejecting evil internally when you cannot act.

Silence in the face of wrongdoing can gradually make evil seem normal. And when evil becomes normal, society begins to decay.

SUPPORTING GOOD IN EVERYDAY LIFE Supporting good starts from within ourselves and spreads outward.

In the family: Teach children honesty and respect; Encourage prayer

and good character; Correct gently but firmly.

In the workplace: Be truthful and fair; Avoid corruption and shortcuts and Support integrity even when it is unpopular

In society: Speak against injustice; Help the needy and Promote unity and peace.

Goodness grows when it is supported. When people see good being appreciated, they are encouraged to do more.

THE DANGER OF IGNORING EVIL

When evil is ignored, it spreads quietly until it becomes powerful.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned that when people see wrongdoing and do not stop it, Allah may punish the entire community, not just those who committed the wrong.

Think of a leaking boat: if one person makes a hole and others ignore it, everyone will drown.

Today, we see many challenges like corruption in leadership and systems, dishonesty in daily dealings, social pressure to normalize wrongdoing, influence of media promoting immoral values among others.

If we do not actively discourage these, they will shape the future of our communities.

WISDOM IN DISCOURAGING EVIL

Discouraging evil does not mean being harsh, arrogant, or judgmental. Islam teaches wisdom and compassion.

Allah says: "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruc-

tion..." (Qur'an 16:125).

So, when advising others, be gentle, not aggressive. Be sincere, not self-righteous. Choose the right time and words. And Lead by example.

Sometimes, people are more influenced by what they see than what they hear.

THE ROLE OF LEADERS AND YOUTH

Leaders—whether political, religious, or community—have a greater responsibility. Their actions influence many people. When leaders support good, society improves. When they tolerate evil, society suffers.

The youth also play a powerful role. They are the energy and future of the world. When young people choose righteousness over corruption, they reshape the direction of society.

Do not underestimate your influence, no matter your position.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Before correcting others, we must examine ourselves.

Are we honest in our dealings? Just in our judgments? Kind in our words? Upright in our private lives?

It is not enough to speak against evil publicly while practicing it privately. True reform begins with sincerity.

THE REWARD OF SUPPORTING GOOD

Every effort to promote good is rewarded by Allah.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that whoever guides someone to good will receive a reward equal to the one who does it.

Imagine the impact:

You encourage someone to pray and you share in their reward. You help someone avoid wrongdoing and you share in their success. You support justice and you contribute to a better society. Goodness multiplies.

Dear brothers and sisters, We are living in times where right and wrong are sometimes confused. But as believers, we must remain clear and firm.

Support good, even when it is difficult.

Discourage evil, even when it is unpopular.

Stand for truth, even when you stand alone.

Because in the end, we will return to Allah, and we will be asked not only about what we did, but also about what we tolerated.

O Allah, guide us to what is right and make us among those who promote good and resist evil. O Allah, purify our hearts, strengthen our faith in you, and make us instruments of goodness in our families and society. O Allah, protect us from all forms of evil. Grant us wisdom, courage, and sincerity in all that we do.

Servants of Allah,

Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and helping others, and He forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression. He instructs you so that you may take heed.

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



JAAFAR JACKSON

MICHAEL JACKSON

Michael Jackson biopic box office records \$217m at global opening

The new musical film about Michael Jackson has smashed the global box office record grossing over \$217 million (£160million) in its opening weekend.

The film which stars Jackson's nephew, Jaafar Jackson in the lead role was revealed midweek but quickly gained momentum across international markets, including an X campaign which changed the button to Jackson's hat.

The new body of work beat the previous record holders in the genre,

beating the \$180million(£133million) taken by 2024 Oppenheimer, thereby given the king of pop the biggest global opening at the weekend for a biopic of any kind.

According to BBC report during the week, the current fund received has overtaken 2018's Bohemian Rhapsody which open with \$124 million (£133 million), during its opening weekend of 2024.

The performance establishes ' Michael' as the strongest global biopic launch in cinema history.

Music is warfare —Bella Shmurda

Nigerian singer, Bella Shmurda said at the weekend that entertainment serves as a tool for societal advancement.

Speaking in Bunmi documentary, the Cash App crooner described music as warfare, explaining that music is a tool for progress as well as instrument of goodwill.

"Music is warfare , music is a tool for the society and progress.It is an instrument of goodwill as well as a tool to keep people sane, and equally put them on the right state of mind"

"Music make people dance away their sorrow, make them feel alive to regain self - consciousness" he explained.

Bella added that fatherhood has significantly impact his style of music,noting that he is now more conscious about the kind of music he makes because he wants his children to be proud of his chosen career when they grow up.



BELLA SHMURDA



AKINDELE

Funke Akindele denies snubbing Pasuma

Nollywood screen goddess and filmmaker, Funke Akindele has denied speculations that she snubbed funji musical legend, Pasuma at a Lagos show last weekend.

A video circulating on X captured the moment the Fuji legend tried to allegedly get Akindele 's attention while she was exchanging pleasantries with some other guests at the event.

In the video, the actress continue her

conversation with other person which led to Pasuma getting back to his seat.

Since the video went viral, it has been speculated that the actress intentionally snubbed the funji legend.

Reacting, Funke Akindele denied the allegations, explaining that she greet and danced with the Fuji legend at the gig.

"Pasuma is my 'egbon', please all should stop this evil" she screamed.

Actor Solomon Akiyesi is dead

Akoko - edo born Nollywood actor and entrepreneur, Solomon Akiyesi is dead.

The tragic incident was confirmed on Monday this week by the president of the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Abubakar Yakubu.

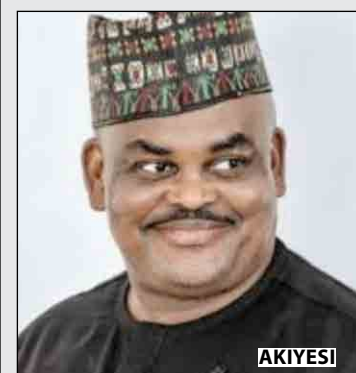
According to Yakubu, Akiyesi died in his sleep on Sunday night and his body has since been deposited in Abuja mortuary.

He however disclosed that the Guild is still waiting for further details surrounding the circumstances of the actor's death from his family.

Born in Edo state, specifically the Akoko -edo/ososo axis of Nigeria, Solomon Akiyesi was an active participant in the Nollywood industry for many years and appear in several movies.

He featured in movies like " Heart of a saint, Desperate ladies, Pretty liars and Bridge of contract" amongst others.

His death has come as a shock to Nigerians with some expressing disbelief as tributes begin to pour in following the tragic news.



AKIYESI

Why I get nervous about stage performance —Olamide

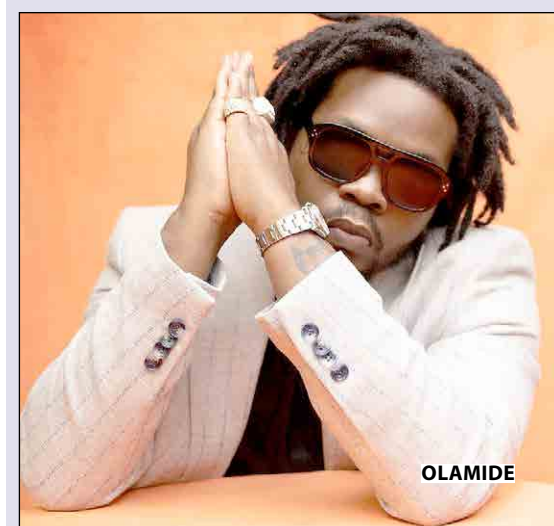
Nigerian rapper Olamide Gold has revealed why he often gets nervous about performing on stage.

Speaking in an interview recently,the Bad-doo crooner explained that his nervousness on stage was caused by the trauma of past horrible stage experiences.

He recounted instances where he had been attacked on the stage by someone grabbing his chain or hat.

The rapper described the experiences as scary, stressing that they make him nervous about future performances.

"I have had too many crazy experiences while performing.Someone from nowhere will just come and grab your chain or your hat" he lamented.



OLAMIDE

ArtsWorld with Francis Odupute 08023680030

Get ready for Miss Edo International 2026 Grand Finale!

Beyond the Crown"; that is the theme for this year's edition of the trending home-made beauty pageantry: the Miss Edo International 2026. The grand finale is billed for Sunday, May 24, 2026, at the Victor Uwaifo Creative Hub, Benin City.

According to the organizer, Debby Benson, "Miss Edo International goes beyond physical beauty by providing a platform for young women to showcase intelligence, creativity, and social impact initiatives. The winner is expected to serve as an ambassador for cultural promotion and youth empowerment. The event is designed to celebrate elegance, cultural heritage, and purposeful leadership among young women while promoting Edo State's rich traditions on a global stage.

She said, "The program will feature world-class pageantry, fashion exhibitions, cultural displays, entertainment, and awards, alongside networking opportunities for industry stakeholders and guests. The red carpet segment begins at 3:00 p.m., followed by the main event at 4:00 p.m.

This event is brought to you by Starworld potential theater, powered by Edo jobs under the Edo State Government, and proudly supported by *The Nigerian Observer Newspapers* as media partner.



Miss Edo International goes beyond physical beauty by providing a platform for young women to showcase intelligence, creativity, and social impact initiatives



MISS EDO INTERNATIONAL 2026 POSTER

Artist's Spotlight: Debra Cartwright

MEG MCCORMICK

Within Debra Cartwright's practice, oil paintings, watercolors, and illustrations create a terrain to confront and contemplate the history of medical injustice and its wake. Her elegant works engage viewers in a formalistic beauty while revealing narratives of Black women in America affected by the legacy of current disparity in health care.

She explains, "I'd love to share stories and have people look a little bit harder at areas of the world that are just an article or just a blip or just something you read in a textbook a long time ago. To sit with it for a little bit longer."

Cartwright's first drawings and doll sculptures were created from medical supplies as a

young child waiting in her mother's gynecology office. As she grew beyond this office into her adult life, Cartwright became exposed to the entirety of the medical world. Her encounters with these spaces created a disconnect from the community-oriented office she had grown up in.

Cartwright describes, "my friends were having medical complications or going through pregnancy, talking with them and doing research with them and realizing the disparity in health between Black women and everyone else." This disconnect and inequity is at the core of Cartwright's practice, prompting research surrounding the history of gynecology, abortion, and midwifery in America that fuels her work.

Through writing, reading, illustrations, and watercolor collages, Cartwright's work explores

these histories. In her oil paintings, Cartwright draws from Saidiya Hartman's "The Belly of The World: A Note on Black Women's Labors." Hartman relates racial capitalism's plundering of Black women's bodies to the exploitation and commodification of land. This connection informs Cartwright's work, creating what she describes as an "amalgamation of the inside, the outside of the body, and the landscape together", visually manifesting their intertwinement.

In her large-scale canvases human forms emerge from an abstracted landscape, referencing these exploitative relationships and relating them to the extractive practice of gynecology. Specifically influenced by painters from the Hudson River School, Cartwright uses the classical conversation of oil painting to raise critical

issues affecting Black women's health care today.

In a recent series, Cartwright researched experiments on enslaved women conducted by the man widely regarded as the father of gynecology, Dr. Sims. While he conducted horrific experimentations on many more women, only three are named in his documentation: Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsy.

Cartwright draws from these women's experiences to create narratives that transcend the only documentation that exists of their lives in secondary sources. She notes, "I would do these illustrations of them in community, them getting free, the interior and exterior of their lives." Drawing inspiration from Saidiya Hartman's practice of critical fabulation, Cartwright restores the agency and interiority the archive denies these women.

As Cartwright's work reflects their lives, she describes "placing myself in community with these women," bringing past and present together to explore how their experiences connect with her own." In her practice Cartwright is finding ways to, as she describes, "lay my own story on top of the story that is embedded within it." This pursuit is realized in her repurposing of scraps of legs, limbs, and bodies from *Essence Magazine*, where she worked for a decade before learning traditional oil painting. As her practice evolves, layering these connected experiences, Cartwright is continuing to involve her personal history in her work; she describes "diving more into my own play, as a child in that office and thinking about how I can rectify that with ... the horror."

As an artist-in-residence at Silver Art and a painting professor at Rutgers University, Cartwright is continuing to create work that inscribes the pertinence of health disparities and memorializes those affected by it, whilst interweaving her own personhood in new ways.

Propelling her own work, she questions, "What is the best way to say what I am trying to say? is it painting? If it's not painting, what is it?" This tension is moving Cartwright's practice toward installation and community projects, using painting as one component in a larger display to recontextualize and powerfully represent the history of medical injustice against Black women.



DEBRA CARTWRIGHT; 3. ONE OF THE ARTIST'S PAINTINGS

Courtesy: Silver Art

Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

Cultural protectionism or empowerment?

If we look at history in regards to the effects of how we have been able to protect and preserve it, I am sure if we do this against the backdrop of the Westerners, we would then realize that we have deliberately and intentionally deviated from the principles and norms of preserving our cultural philosophy which has in adversely affected how we view protectionism. Which part of our cultural heritage is protected? From the Nok culture to the bronze casting, ivory carvings, wood carvings, sculptures of the Benin Empire, which once stretched from Ogbé to Ghana, but now squeezed into a minority state called Edo State. Where are its once prided moats compared only to the walls of China?

If we again take this same path to the film industry, we can only laugh or cry at our high level of ignorance about how the culture of a people is preserved and protected. I am sure many were not lucky to watch the films of Eddie Ugbomah, Ola Balogun and their colleagues of their own era. If not for anything else but academic purposes, how can other generations watch these films, critically analyze them, appreciate and theorize their creative abilities in relation to filmmaking in their era and then compare to further eras after that?

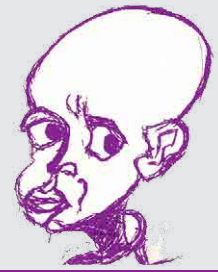
If a child's plan is to build a castle with sand and at the point people are beginning to notice his efforts, the sand castle is brought down, how do you appreciate the child's creativity or ability to make something out of nothing? I am sure if we do a little maths on the years gone by since "Living in Bondage" was shot as a movie, many parents were not born. I was not surprised when our discussion on the film "Rattlesnake" took a different route when a contributor was talking about the same film from the one shot again only recently. He even argued, from his own perspective, that we do not create time for research, when he was asked which of the "Rattlesnake" films he was referring to. He became quiet after he used google and therein realised he just faltered.

Today, films made by filmmakers and enjoyed by the film lovers, breaking box offices, like well trained athletes on the track are only preparing to run off the tracks into oblivion if

necessary steps are not deliberately and intentionally taken to preserve and protect them. We are a people who are smart at distorting facts and history, taking pages off books written in 1920 and replacing the same pages with the history of 2025. Moreover, we conduct research about ourselves and our culture from books in London libraries, written by white people just to authenticate ourselves and our cultural identity and philosophy. What an irony. If we must sustain the uniqueness of our organic film culture, we must begin to see the need to digitally preserve and protect our film culture.

Is it not sad that many Nigerian scholars think that the Nigeria film industry actually kick-started with "Living in Bondage"? It took a great fight, argument, research before the language changed from the era film started in Nigeria to either the coinage of the word Nollywood or most commercially successful film. Does that mean films shot in the era of Eddie Ugbomah, Ola Balogun and their contemporaries were not commercially successful? What parameters did these persons used to measure "successful"? If Nigeria as a nation was intentional about preservation and protection, all the plenty of times used in debating how to define when the Nigeria film industry started would never have surfaced. It won't be long before the generation of Zoomers to Betas would say the Nigerian film industry started in their era and probably make references to the most successful movies in the cinema box offices. It would certainly end in a chain circle until we ultimately do the right things, and if we are slow to make it happen, so much water would have rushed past before the bridge of preservation and protection is built. The form of preservation and protectionism I am dealing with here is proper record keeping of all our creative works for future generations to access, evaluate, appreciate and build upon as a form of advancement in defining a firm cultural philosophy for Nigeria. We must know that if we do not make a shift in strategy, the Nigeria film industry may end up all dressed with nowhere to go, but simply idling in a driveway while the rest of the world's cinema speeds pass us.

TATAFO



Royalties nor be beans...

If ya legs carri you waka enta any iwia dem de do film for Edo, Lagos, Enugu, Northern or Middle Belt of awa kontri, or weda na Asaba or eni oda place for Naija, you go see as pipo de sweat like cow wey escape full komuniti wey wan chop am. De real koko de start from di director wey go de hala Action! to de light boy wey de climb ladder laik NEPA wey wan cut light for yard. Ya eyes go jus de wosh beta drama bifor de real drama start as evribodi go de busy de struggle to make sure say evritin about de film de gidigba and kampe.

Anoda koko be say, afta de film don com out, afta de red carpet don end and de cinema popcorn don finish Kpatakpata, na wetin com kuma remain for de filmmaker? For mani of awa pipo, once de film work don finish, naim be say de kuza don also finish. Na yia de real ogbonge yanings about Royalties and who suppose grab am for enta.

For awa noma yanings, royalties na de kuza wey person go de receive until him kpai or delete, bicos as long as de film de market or eni platform, pipo mus to de wosh de films wey him kriete or join odas do. But for awa Naija film industri, mani pipo de treat dis royalties mata laik say na tori wey nor de real but wai? If we want make awa film industri grow reach wia e suppose de, we mus to undastand why royalties no be jus kuza, but na de lifeblood of eni serious filmmaker. Abi, we neva taya to de kontribut Kuza evri time wey one actor or film krew de sick? Espeshali, if de actor or krew person nor com from rich famili or no com get oda bizness for hand, omo, na deleting mode dat person jus use style enta be dat. I nor wan menshon names, but mani of us no mani actors wey jus delete laik dat bicos shame self respect to avoid insults nor let dem beg eni bodi for kuza. If to say, such pipo de get royalties, dia left hand no go no wetin dia right hand do konsaning dem health mata. Weda we bilif am or not, na kuza de shut up insult.

Wetin be Royalties sef and na how e fit helep film pipo? Make we use style broke am down for street level so dat we go undastand am. Jus imagine say you get house for inside town for Benin City, and you come out am for rent instead of to sell am at once and flex de kuza. No mata how e wan be, evri month or evri year, de tenants go pay you kuza because dem de stay inside ya property. Dis mata still also be laik civil savant wey don retaya and com de kolet kuza as penshon till him delete. Na dis Kain tin l de yan about for film pipo so dat de meaning of dat

word, celebri go get real meanings. How you go be celebri and yet nor fit build ya house, feed, pay ya pikins skool fees, or even helep to fit pay ya small small bills, bicos jobs no de com again laik bifor? Dat na big error na.

Royalties suppose de for pipo wey de act for films and for de pipo wey de gada to do evritin to rekod de films. Ya film, script, acting, work as krew na ya property or wetin oyinbos dem de call "Intellectual Property". Evri time dat film show for cinema, or e play for TV, cable, streaming platforms, e show for airplane, hotel, offices to kool de brain, for rekrieshon centas or eni bizness centa, dat means say, you suppose get small shishi from dat dis pipo. But sha, e get different types of royalties, but for filmmakers, de two main ones na Residuals and Licensing Fees. Residuals na kuza wey dem de pay actors, directors, and writers wen dem re-use de film afta de first place dem for show am. Licensing Fees different form Residuals bicos, na kuza wey platforms de pay to get de right to show dis films for eni period of time.

Royalties, as I take explain am so, suppose be de Life Insurance for Film pipo, abi nor be so? For Naija, we sabi celebrate wen person blow. Abi we neva see plenti actors for sosha midia de pepper us with designer clothes and motors? Sometimes we fit even wan curse baba God and begin ask am weda dis actors na two heads dem get. But mani times, all dis na packaging. Once dat actor stop to get new roles, or if sickness com nak am, hunger wey don gym wella go start tto wire am. Wai? Bicos dem no get wetin oyinbos dem de call passive income.

Retirement plan without penshon be laik who carri pump action put for him head and com press de triga. All of us no say filmmaking no be 9-to-5 hours job wia you go get penshon wen you reach 60 years or above. Abi we nor no? Ya penshon na ya back-end. Make you rison am na, if for example you de get royalties since from de films you don do for ya youth or all dis years, even wen you don old or nor com de get film jobs evri time or nor fit de jump for set as actor or krew again, na dos films go com de put kuza for ya table as at dat time. Now tell me wai you nor go fit com buy ya medicine and pay ya bills?

For dis industri, work no jus de always de laik dat. Today you fit de busy, tomoro evriwia fit jus fem. Royalties na wetin fit de helep filmmakers to survive dis dry periods wen dem neva see new project or nor fit de comot to go do film again. E de give

person mind to take time and write beta script, instead of to de rush do waka-pass work because of hunger.

If person write song, e de get royalty. If person write book, e de get royalty. Why e com be say person go spend millions of Naira produce film, or spend months write script, and afta dem pay am once, dat one don end? Royalties na de way to show say krievity get long-term value.

Even doo royalties sweet, to get am for Nigeria na big grammar. No be bicos say e nor possible but we get too mani obstacles wey de block de way for film pipo. De mata be laik mata of dog wey de roast oda dogs to chopulate. Hope una no say, na de same film pipo de use buy-out contract to delete de future gains of oda film pipo? Hunger don make mani film pipo sell dem birthrights for ordinari Akamu and Akara wey nor fit survive dem stomach from morning till evening. Which enemy worse pass "BUY-OUT CINTRACT"? Many producers or platforms go give you contract wey say We go pay you one-off, and you no go ever ask for eni kuza again. Bicos filmmakers de hungry, wan make name, and no say if dem nor sign am dem friend go quickly kolet de job, dem go jus kulelely sign away dem future for small kuza with de bilif say bigger jobs go land.

Lack of transparency na anoda demon wey de deal with cast and krew. Mani times, film pipo nor even no how much dia films de make. Some distributors go tell dem say de film no make profit, but you go see de film evri wia. If you nor no how much dem make, how you wan take calculate ya royalty?

Weak Collecting Societies still kontribut for dis wahala. For music, dem get agencies wey de kolet Kuza on dem behaf. Dem try to even get, but na to do Amin away dat gofment fit de put touch lights for dem yansh so dat e no go com be de case of monkey de work baboon de wak de food. For film, I nor go lie at all bicos me as filmmaker de get my royalties steadily evri year. All dis kuza nor be Fada christmas, as na de fight fight plus plenti talk talk join strong head to fit kolet small small kuza from platforms wey de use films of film pipo. If you be film person wey join film guilds, you suppose undastand wetin l de yan so. As dis payment of royalties by AVRS to film pipo for years now nor fail, dis one show say hope de for beta tins for film pipo. But wot about book pipo or oda krievity pipo wey dem krievity works different from musik and film?



NEWS**Foreign****Christchurch mass killer loses bid to overturn conviction**

A white supremacist who killed 51 people at two New Zealand mosques has lost his bid to overturn his convictions and sentence.

Brenton Tarrant is serving a life sentence with no parole after admitting to the murders and trying to kill another 40 worshippers in the March 2019 attack in Christchurch.

During a week-long hearing in February, Tarrant, now 35, argued he was incapable of making rational decisions at the time of his plea because of "torturous and inhumane" conditions in prison. He also launched an appeal against his sentence.

New Zealand's Court of Appeal rejected his bid on Thursday, ruling that his arguments were "utterly devoid of merit".

The facts around Tarrant's crimes are "beyond dispute", the panel of three judges said in a unanimous decision.

In his appeal, Tarrant claimed he made the guilty pleas while he was "irrational" and under a poor mental state.

The judges found his claims inconsistent and not supported by other witnesses, concluding that he was not "coerced or pressured in any way" to plead guilty.

"He has not identified any arguable defence, or indeed any defence known to the law. We have also rejected his claim that his guilty pleas were the product of him having an irrational state of mind induced by his prison conditions," they said on Thursday.

The massacre at Al Noor mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre, parts of which were live-streamed, led to stricter gun laws in New Zealand.

Aya al-Umari, who lost her older brother Hussein in the attack, said she was "pleased and relieved" with the court's decision, "and to see justice is being served again".

"I was confident that there were no solid grounds for the appeal, and the decision today confirms that," al-Umari told the BBC.

"I remember thinking at the sentencing that this [would be] the end of it, and we can try to move forward and collect the pieces after the destruction of our lives. But things like this appeal hearing... takes you right back to the moments of fragility.

"Hearing the outcome today really gives that reassurance and comfort around the right processes being followed," she said.

Within a month of the shootings, the country's parliament had voted overwhelmingly to ban military-style semi-automatic weapons as well as parts that could be used to build prohibited firearms.

The government also offered to compensate owners of newly-illegal weapons in a buy-back scheme.

Tarrant was born in New South Wales, Australia, but moved to New Zealand in 2017 - prosecutors said that was when he started planning his attacks against the Muslim community.



FUEL ATTENDANCE:
Oil prices jumped to their highest since 2022

Oil price hits highest since 2022 after report Trump to be briefed on new Iran options

Oil prices have jumped to their highest since 2022 after a report that the US military is set to brief Donald Trump on new plans for potential action in the Iran war.

US Central Command has prepared a plan for a wave of "short and powerful" strikes on Iran to try to break the deadlock in negotiations with Tehran, news site Axios reported. The BBC has contacted US Central Command and the White House for comment.

Brent crude rose by almost 7% to more than \$126 (£94) a barrel at one point, the highest since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Energy prices have risen this week as peace talks appear to have stalled, with the key Strait of Hormuz waterway still effectively closed.

After reaching \$126.31 a barrel at one point in Asian trade, the price of Brent crude fell back to around \$121 in European trade.

Crude oil is a key ingredient in petrol and diesel, and the jump in costs since the start of the Iran war has pushed up pump prices for motorists.

In the UK, petrol currently costs an average of 157p a litre, according to motoring group RAC, which is 24p higher than before the start of the war. Diesel is at nearly 189p a litre, up 46p compared with its pre-war price.

But the potential impact is wider than just fuel prices. The UK government has warned people could face higher energy, food and flight ticket prices as a result of the war.

Some airlines have already started to raise fares or reduce

flights. Fertiliser prices have also started to increase, which could have a knock-on effect on food prices.

The Axios report cited anonymous sources, saying the proposed wave of strikes would be likely to include infrastructure targets.

Another plan focused on taking over part of the Strait of Hormuz so that it can be reopened for commercial shipping, Axios reported, adding that doing so could involve troops on the ground.

The current Brent futures contract for June delivery is due to expire on Thursday. The more active July contract was up by about 1.7% at around \$112 a barrel.

Futures contracts are agreements to buy or sell an asset at a set date.

Oil traders have reacted

quickly to the possibility of further military action in the Gulf, economics professor Yeow Hwee Chua from the Nanyang Technological University said.

Even a small chance of the conflict escalating could have "outsized implications" on global energy supplies, he added.

The US said it would blockade Iranian ports for as long as Tehran continues to threaten vessels that try to use the Strait of Hormuz, severely disrupting global energy shipments.

Iran retaliated against US-Israeli airstrikes by threatening to attack ships in the waterway, through which about a fifth of the world's energy usually passes.

Oil prices had surged by 6% on Wednesday following reports that Washington was preparing for an "extended" blockade of Iran.

China to ban drone sales in Beijing citing security concerns

China will ban the sale of drones in Beijing and require permits to fly them under new rules that take effect on Friday.

Drones and key components will be prohibited from being sold, rented or brought into the Chinese capital. Drone owners will also be required to register their devices with the police.

China has gradually tightened regulations on drones in recent years, with authorities citing public safety concerns.

Drones and flying taxis are part of the so-called low-altitude economy, a strategic priority for China that is expected to generate more than two trillion yuan (\$290bn; £217bn) by 2035.

In some Chinese cities, drones are a common sight, used for food delivery, agriculture and cleaning buildings.

Chinese companies may dominate the global drone market, but the country is becoming one of the most difficult places to fly one.

Drones must be registered before they can be brought in and out of Beijing. And if users send their drones out of the city for repair, they need to pick up the device in person rather than have it delivered.

All outdoor drone flights in

Beijing will also require prior approval, and drone users must complete an online training session and pass a test on drone regulations.

There are exceptions: Drones may still be bought and stored for purposes like counter-terrorism and disaster relief, if approved by authorities.

But in recent years China has repeatedly tightened rules governing the use of drones in the country.

The drone restrictions in Beijing were approved in March. At that time, city authorities said management of drones must be strengthened to respond to "challenges" in low-altitude airspace safety.

Xiong Jinghua, a senior official in the Beijing Municipal People's Congress, said the goal was to "strike the best balance" between safety and ensuring technological and economic progress.

Last year, Beijing's entire airspace was designated a no-drone zone, with approval needed from air traffic authorities before people can fly their drones.

The recent sweeping regulations are likely to shake up the massive drone market in China, where according to government data there are more than three million registered drones.

Comey surrenders over charge of threatening Trump's life in Instagram post

Former FBI Director James Comey surrendered to authorities to face charges alleging that an image he briefly shared on social media posed a threat to the life of US President Donald Trump.

The case stems from a 2025 Instagram post shared by Comey, which contained a photo of seashells on a beach arranged to read "86 47". "Eighty-six" is a slang term for "get rid of", and prosecutors allege it encourages violence against Trump, the 47th president.

Comey denied any wrongdoing, saying he did not know what the numbers meant, and accused the prosecution of political motivation.

This marks the second time the justice department has brought criminal charges against Comey, a

longtime critic of Trump.

Comey did not enter a plea or speak during his brief appearance at a Virginia court on Wednesday afternoon.

His attorney, Patrick Fitzgerald, said the former director would seek dismissal on grounds of selective and vindictive prosecution - arguing he was targeted for speaking out against Trump.

Judge William Fitzpatrick read the charges against Comey. He nodded as he was read his rights and later smiled back at his family when he was leaving, the BBC's US partner CBS News reported.

Judge Fitzpatrick denied the justice department's efforts to set conditions of release for Comey, saying they were not

necessary, according to CBS.

Prosecutors have charged Comey with knowingly and willfully making a threat to take the life of - and to inflict bodily harm - on the president, and also, knowingly transmitting in interstate commerce a threat to kill him.

Each charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. In a video statement on Tuesday, Comey said he was determined to fight the charges.

"This won't be the end of it - but I'm still innocent, I'm still not afraid and I still believe in the independent federal judiciary.

Comey's original post from May 2025 contained an image of the seashells on a beach that spelled out "86 47", with the caption, "Cool shell formation on my beach walk".

Following a public outcry, Comey deleted the image and posted a follow-up note on Instagram.

"I posted earlier a picture of some shells I saw today on a beach walk, which I assume were a political message," he wrote. "I didn't realize some folks associate those numbers with violence. It never occurred to me, but I oppose violence of any kind so I took the post down."

Talking to reporters about the charges against Comey on Wednesday, Trump called him a "crooked man".

"If anybody knows anything about crime, they know 86," Trump said. "It's a mob term for kill him. The mob uses that term to say when they want to kill them, they say 86 the son of a gun."

Foreign

NEWS

Israel intercepts Gaza flotilla near Crete and detains 175 activists

Pro-Palestinian activists say at least 22 boats from a flotilla carrying aid for Gaza have been intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters near the Greek island of Crete.

The organisers of the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) denounced it as "piracy". They said those on board the vessels had been seized unlawfully 965km (600 miles) from Gaza, which is under an Israeli naval blockade.

The Israeli foreign ministry said about 175 activists from more than 20 boats had been detained and were being transported to Israel. It dismissed the flotilla as a "PR

stunt". GSF's tracking data showed that most of the remaining 36 boats in the flotilla were sailing close to Crete's south-western coast.

The flotilla set sail two weeks ago, with a total of 58 vessels joining from Spain, France and Italy aiming to break Israel's blockade of Gaza.

On Thursday, the GSF said that, as of 04:30 GMT, at least 22 of them had been "stormed by Israeli forces in complete violation of international law".

An earlier statement said Israeli naval forces had "intercepted vessels, jammed communications, including distress channels, and aggres-

sively abducted civilians".

"This is piracy. This is the unlawful seizure of human beings on the open sea near Crete, an assertion that Israel can operate with total impunity, far beyond its own borders, with no consequences," the GSF said.

Israeli reports said the navy warned vessels to retreat and took over those which did not.

The Israeli foreign ministry also posted a video that it said showed the detained activists "making their way peacefully to Israel" aboard Israeli vessels.

Israel insists that its actions comply with international law.

On Wednesday, the Israeli foreign ministry said the flotilla

was "nothing but a PR stunt: a provocation without humanitarian aid".

"The driving force behind the flotilla provocation is Hamas - joining hands with professional provocateurs - with the aim of sabotaging President Trump's [Gaza] peace plan transition to its second phase and intended to divert attention from Hamas's refusal to disarm," it alleged.

The Israeli military stopped the previous flotilla set up by the GSF from reaching Gaza last October, arresting and then deporting more than 470 people who were on board, including Swedish climate campaigner Greta Thunberg.

Burkina Faso ups security after Mali attacks

The ruling junta in Burkina Faso has tightened security in the capital Ouagadougou in the wake of coordinated attacks in its neighbour and ally Mali, security sources has reported.

On Tuesday, Burkina Faso's security ministry announced the launch of an operation aimed at strengthening security across the country and called for vigilance.

It also called on people to report any suspicious behaviour, particularly around sensitive infrastructure such as military barracks, airports, administrative buildings and other installations of national importance.

"A major security operation has been deployed in Ouagadougou and in other parts of the country," a police source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A second police source said units have been sent to strategic intersections in the capital.

"The units will also be gathering operational intelligence related to crime and terror-

ism," the source added.

The measures came after unprecedented jihadist and Tuareg rebel attacks in Mali, which like Burkina Faso and their Sahel ally Niger is also run by the military.

The three countries have faced repeated attacks from al-Qaeda and Islamic State-linked extremists for the last decade.

A Burkinabe military source said the army was on a "state of alert because we are at war."

"Vigilance and watchfulness are still the order of the day, so this [the security operation] is not exceptional even if the situation in Mali calls for greater rigour and vigilance," the source added.

Niger's junta on Wednesday cancelled its traditional 1 May parades across the country for security reasons.

The government of Ivory Coast, which neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso to the south, meanwhile said that its borders were secure but that it was expected an "influx of refugees" as a result of the Mali attacks.



BURKINA FASO SOLDIERS:

Soldiers loyal to Burkina Faso leader Ibrahim Traore are pictured in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

US charges Mexican governor and other leaders with aiding drug cartel

US prosecutors have accused the sitting governor of Mexico's Sinaloa state, Rubén Rocha Moya, of conspiring with cartel drug traffickers.

Rocha Moya, who hails from the party of Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, is charged alongside nine other current and former Mexican government officials.

In response, the Mexican government released a statement saying the US documents requesting the group's arrest and potential extradition lacked sufficient evidence.

There have long been allegations against Rocha Moya, who is governor of a state where the powerful Sinaloa Cartel is based. The organisation is embroiled in a violent conflict between two factions. He "categorically" denied any wrongdoing.

The indictment, released

in New York on Wednesday, claims the elected leaders "conspired with leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel to import massive quantities of narcotics into the United States in exchange for political support and bribes".

Rocha Moya is accused of having ties to the notorious Sinaloa Cartel and has been indicted over allegedly abusing his position as governor to protect one faction of the cartel, known as Los Chapitos.

"The Sinaloa Cartel is not just trafficking deadly drugs, it is a designated terrorist organization that relies on corruption and bribery to drive violence and profit," said DEA Administrator Terrance Cole.

He added that the group "used positions of trust to protect cartel operations, enabling a pipeline of deadly drugs into our country".

US Attorney for the Southern District of New York Jay

Clayton said in the statement: "As the indictment lays bare, the Sinaloa cartel, and other drug trafficking organisations like it, would not operate as freely or successfully without corrupt politicians and law enforcement officials on their payroll."

The indictment also included nine other current and former Mexican officials, including a high-ranking policeman, a senator and a mayor.

However, the Mexican foreign ministry said that the documents received from the US embassy lacked the necessary evidence - or, as the statement put it, "do not include the elements of proof" - against those whose arrest and eventual extradition was being requested.

The final decision would lie with the Attorney General's office, the statement added.

Mexican authorities later announced their own inves-

tigation to determine if "the accusation made by US authorities has legal grounds," attorney general spokesperson Ulises Lara said in a video posted to social media.

The governor himself denied the drug charges "categorically and absolutely".

"This attack isn't only against me, it's against the Fourth Transformation," Rocha Moya said in a statement on X, referring to the political project of Mexico's governing party.

The US indictment against a sitting governor in Mexico - one from the ruling party - is very rare in the bilateral relationship and represents a significant headache for President Sheinbaum.

The indictment is the latest step in an aggressive strategy by the Trump administration to clamp down on drug cartels and official corruption in Mexico.

Trump says US studying troop cuts in Germany, after Merz criticises war

The US is "studying" whether to reduce the thousands of troops it has stationed in Germany, Donald Trump has announced via social media.

It comes just days after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz criticised his approach to the war in Iran, suggesting that US had been "humiliated" by Iranian negotiators.

In his post, Trump said he was "studying and reviewing the possible reduction of Troops in Germany, with a determination to be made over the next short period of time." The US has a significant military presence in Germany, with more than 36,000 active duty troops assigned to bases across the country as of last December.

The BBC has reached out to the White House for comment.

Merz made his initial remarks on Monday in an address to university students in Marsberg, telling them that "the Americans clearly have no strategy".

"The Iranians are obviously very skilled at negotiating, or rather, very skilful at not negotiating, letting the Americans travel to Islamabad and then leave again without any result," he said.

He added that the "entire nation" was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership.

Trump responded the following day with a post to Truth Social, where he said Merz thought it was "OK for Iran to have a Nuclear Weapon" and "doesn't know what he's talking about."

"No wonder Germany is doing so poorly, both Economically, and otherwise!" the post read.

When asked about the post in a press conference on Wednesday, Merz said the "per-

sonal relationship between the American president and myself remains just as good as before."

He has not yet responded to Trump's suggestion that he could reduce US troops in Germany.

The US military deployment in Germany is by far its biggest in Europe, with about 12,000 troops in Italy and a further 10,000 in the UK. Many are stationed at the big Ramstein air base outside the southwestern German city of Kaiserslautern. And while Trump has proposed US troop reductions in Germany before, they have so far not come into effect.

In 2020, a proposal to move 12,000 US troops from Germany either to other Nato countries in Europe or back to the US, was blocked by Congress and then reversed by President Joe Biden.

At the time, Trump had accused Germany of being "delinquent" because its military spending was well below Nato's target of 2% of economic output (GDP). But that has changed dramatically under the Merz government: Germany is projected to spend €105.8bn (£91bn) in 2027 - with total defence expenditure next year set to reach 3.1% of GDP.

Merz said after talks with Trump in Washington in March that Trump had assured him the US would maintain its military presence in Germany, adding that he had not expected anything else.

However, while Merz has this week complained of the economic consequences for Europe of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Trump has been angered by the response of Nato allies in Europe to the war in Iran.

Feature

Restoring lost glory: A reflection on Senator Monday Okpebholo's stewardship

EBOR CLETUS RAPHAEL JR.

His Excellency, Senator Monday Okpebholo of Edo State, has spent just over a year in office. Some would argue that such a short period is insufficient to assess a government, given the complexity of leadership, especially against the backdrop of failing infrastructure requiring urgent attention.

However, in his determination to make a lasting impact, Governor Okpebholo rolled up his sleeves and went straight to work upon his inauguration. With a clear understanding of the issues, he immediately embarked on a school renovation programme, including the outright rebuilding of some where necessary. This effort reflects an appreciation of the role of education in human capital development as a panacea for societal advancement. Consequently, many communities across the three senatorial districts have benefited from the school renewal initiative. To complement this, a sizeable number of teachers who were previously on casual contracts have had their appointments regularised and have been absorbed into the state civil service.

In addition to this, the administration has undertaken extensive road rehabilitation across the state. The impact is most evident on major federal highways, particularly the Benin-Auchi Road, Benin-Agbor Road, and Benin-Sapele Road, which had become largely impassable after years of neglect. Without timely intervention, access to Benin City through these routes would have remained extremely difficult. Today, the situation has



HIS EXCELLENCY, SENATOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

improved significantly. Beyond federal roads, many towns across the state have effectively become construction sites. In the coming months, Benin City is expected to witness the comple-

tion of its first inner-city flyovers. The Ramat Park flyover is nearing completion and is expected to ease traffic congestion in that axis while enhancing the area's aesthetics. Similarly, the

Adesuwa Junction flyover is projected to address persistent traffic bottlenecks in that part of the city.

Recently, a large town hall was commissioned in Udomi. The significance of this project lies in its capacity to host government functions and corporate retreats, as demonstrated earlier in the year. This development contributes to opening up rural areas and discouraging unproductive rural-urban migration and its associated challenges. The establishment of a government-owned School of Nursing in the community further strengthens this effort. It is also on record that several primary healthcare facilities across various communities have been rehabilitated, while others are undergoing upgrades or expansion to meet the health needs of residents.

The transport sector has also received attention under the Okpebholo administration. Over 100 air-conditioned buses have been acquired to revitalise the previously moribund Edo Line Transport Services. Now rebranded as the New Edo Line, the organisation has, within about a year of its revival, expanded its presence across several states in the country. In addition to improving mobility, it has contributed to job creation and offers potential for increased state revenue.

Security remains one of the most pressing challenges confronting the Federal Government of Nigeria, and subnational entities, including Edo State, are not immune to threats such as kidnapping and banditry. However, there has been noticeable improvement compared to the situation about a year ago. Areas such as Ekpoma and parts of Edo North

Senatorial District, which previously experienced heightened insecurity, have seen some level of relief. While security management is largely outside the direct control of state governments due to the structure of Nigeria's security architecture, the governor's approach and responsiveness suggest a measure of progress within existing constraints.

This write-up was not initially intended as a scorecard of the administration, which is still less than two years old. Rather, it began with a different focus entirely. However, upon reflection, it became necessary to acknowledge developments that extend beyond infrastructure and governance.

A few years ago, I contributed features to this newspaper. After publication, I found it difficult to read my work due to poor print quality, which was discouraging. Recently, however, I came across a copy of the same publication. While it was still *The Nigerian Observer*, the difference was immediately noticeable. The layout had improved, and the print quality was sharp and clear. This transformation appears deliberate and well-executed.

It is therefore fitting to recognise that, alongside other achievements of the current administration, the revitalisation of *The Nigerian Observer* and its renewed presence on newsstands also counts as part of the broader story of renewal in Edo State. The management of the newspaper deserves commendation, just as the governor does.

• Ebor Cletus Raphael Jr. is a philosopher and management consultant. He writes from Benin City.

Religion and youth behaviour: Influence beyond sacred places

EJEMOGO REBECCA ANWURI

In a world filled with distractions, pressures, and conflicting values, religion continues to shape the attitudes and behavior of many youths in profound ways even beyond our widest imagination.

Religion, broadly defined as a system of beliefs and practices that connects humanity to spirituality and moral values, provides individuals with a framework for living. For young people especially, these teachings often serve as a compass during one of the most critical stages of life. Youths represent the future leaders of society, and their conduct today determines the moral and developmental direction of tomorrow.

One of the most significant ways religion influences youth behavior is through the reduction of crime and deviant activities. Religious scriptures such as the Bible and other holy books lay down clear moral guidelines about what is right and wrong. They emphasize virtues like honesty, self-control, and respect for others.

Many young people who internalize these teachings become more conscious of their actions, understanding that there are consequences—both spiritual and social—for wrongdoing. This moral awareness can discourage involvement in crime and other harmful behaviors.

Religion also promotes peaceful living among youths. In a society characterized by diverse personalities, ethnic backgrounds, and belief systems, conflict can easily arise. However, religious teachings often emphasize love, tolerance, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence. When young people embrace these principles, they are more likely to resolve disagreements amicably rather than through violence. Nigeria's history of ethno-religious crises, such as the conflicts in Jos, illustrates how a lack of tolerance can lead to devastating consequences. Many of these clashes might have been mitigated if the core religious values of mutual respect and understanding had been fully upheld.

Beyond discouraging crime and promoting peace, religion instills in

youths a strong sense of responsibility. It teaches accountability—not only to a higher power but also to family and society. Many religious youths actively participate in community service, charitable activities, and humanitarian outreach. They are encouraged to earn an honest living, support the less privileged, and contribute positively to societal development. Through these acts, religion nurtures a generation that sees responsibility not as a burden, but as a duty.

In conclusion, religion continues to play a significant role in shaping the behavior of youths in society. Through its moral teachings and emphasis on values such as discipline, peace, and responsibility, it influences young people to make positive and constructive decisions. Although the society is constantly evolving, the ethical guidance provided by religion remains relevant in addressing many of the challenges faced by youths today. Therefore, when properly understood and practiced, religion can serve as an important foundation for nurturing responsible and morally upright



FEATURE

Love, luxury & gratitude: Inside how Simi celebrated her 38th birthday

ADEKUNLE RACHEAL

When it comes to heartfelt moments and effortless charm, Simi knows exactly how to capture attention and her 38th birthday on April 19, 2026, was no exception. What started as a calm, reflective celebration quickly turned into one of the most talked about celebrity moments of the year.

A SOFT START FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

Rather than going all out from the start, Simi eased into her new age with a quiet, emotional reflection. Sharing elegant birthday photos online, she described the past year as "big, long, heavy, and blessed". It wasn't just a typical birthday caption. She acknowledged growth, challenges, and the strength it takes to keep going, especially as someone constantly in the public eye. Fans connected deeply with her words, praising her honesty and grounded nature.

"SOFT LIFE" ENERGY... WITH A TWIST

If there's one thing fans love about Simi, it's her playful personality. She teased her followers about keeping low-key, joking that people might start to worry if she didn't step out to celebrate.

But while it looked like a calm birthday on the surface, something unforgettable was quietly being planned behind the scenes.

ADEKUNLE GOLD STEALS THE SHOW

Then came the moment that

changed everything.

Her husband, Adekunle Gold, delivered a surprise that instantly lit up social media. In a beautifully captured reveal, he gifted Simi a brand new Mercedes-Benz GLE-Class, a luxury SUV that screamed elegance and comfort.

As if that wasn't enough, he also presented her a sparkling diamond ring, adding even more emotion to the moment. Simi's reaction said it all—pure shock, joy, and love. She laughed, gasped, and embraced him, clearly overwhelmed in the best way. Later, she summed up the entire experience in a simple but powerful phrase: "soft n spoiled."

And honestly, fans couldn't agree more.

A CELEBRATION OF LOVE AND FAMILY

Beyond the luxury and surprises, what made this birthday even more special was the timing. Simi and Adekunle Gold recently welcomed their second child, making this a deeply meaningful period in their lives.

So, this wasn't just about timing turning 38, it was about stepping into a new beautiful chapter as a growing family. The joy, the gratitude, and celebration feel fuller and more personal.

SOCIAL MEDIA GOES WILD

As expected, the internet didn't stay quiet. Fans, fellow artists, and celebrities flooded her comment sections with birthday wishes, heart emojis, and admiration.

Many people couldn't stop talking



SIMISOLA KOSOKO

about:

THE GENUINE LOVE BETWEEN SIMI AND ADEKUNLE GOLD

The balance of simplicity and luxury in her celebration

Her authenticity, which continues to set her apart

For many fans, it wasn't even about the car or the ring, it was about the energy. The happiness felt real, not staged, and that's what made it trend.

WHY THIS BIRTHDAY STOOD OUT

Celebrity birthdays happen all the time, but this one felt different. It had: Emotion - honest reflections and gratitude

SURPRISE - A GRAND ROMANTIC GESTURE

Relatability - a mix of simple and extravagant moments
Simi didn't just celebrate her birth-

”
So, this wasn't just about timing turning 38, it was about stepping into a new beautiful chapter as a growing family.

day, she shared a piece of her life, and people felt it.

THE REAL HIGHLIGHT

At 38, Simi continues to show that success isn't just about music or fame, but about growth, love, and staying true to yourself.

Her birthday was more than just a glamorous event. It was a reminder that even in the spotlight, the most meaningful moments come from connection, gratitude, and the people who truly matter. And if this celebration is anything to go by, Simi is not just living. She's thriving.

Why saving money seems impossible for young people

RACHEAL OMIJIE

To young individuals earning money feels easy and saving complicated. You wonder why after receiving your salary or allowance, you just buy immediate needs and before you know, it, disappears, nothing to keep. You blame it all on the economy. "High cost of living, risen inflation". This is because you have not come to the understanding of how certain factors hinders you. Which makes us create and assume reasons why it is impossible.

Several of these factors including, lack of discipline and consistency, peer pressure and social comparisim, lifestyle inflation, lack of financial literacy, impulse spending, poor financial planning, and many others.

Many people lack financial literacy, they don't understand the concept of saving, what saving is, how it can be structured, the benefits it brings, so because of this you don't classify saving as important, you don't see the need for it.

Most young individuals have no clear financial goals or targets to hit. As your income increases your spending increases. "I want this bag, I always wanted to get it, give me 5 different colours" then you wonder

why.

Peer pressure and social comparisim is also a major reason, trying to keep up with the trend, promotes

excessive spending which leads to buying unnecessary things "liability". Trying to keep up with friends " my friends just bought a Bentley, I must

get one too, I can't afford to be left behind "

Matter of fact when an individual has poor financial planning, mon-

ey gets into your account, no clear budget, you don't track your expenses, and then you engage in impulse spending, eating the money that could have been saved. Easy access to money, when your savings are kept in the same account as your spending money (flex)

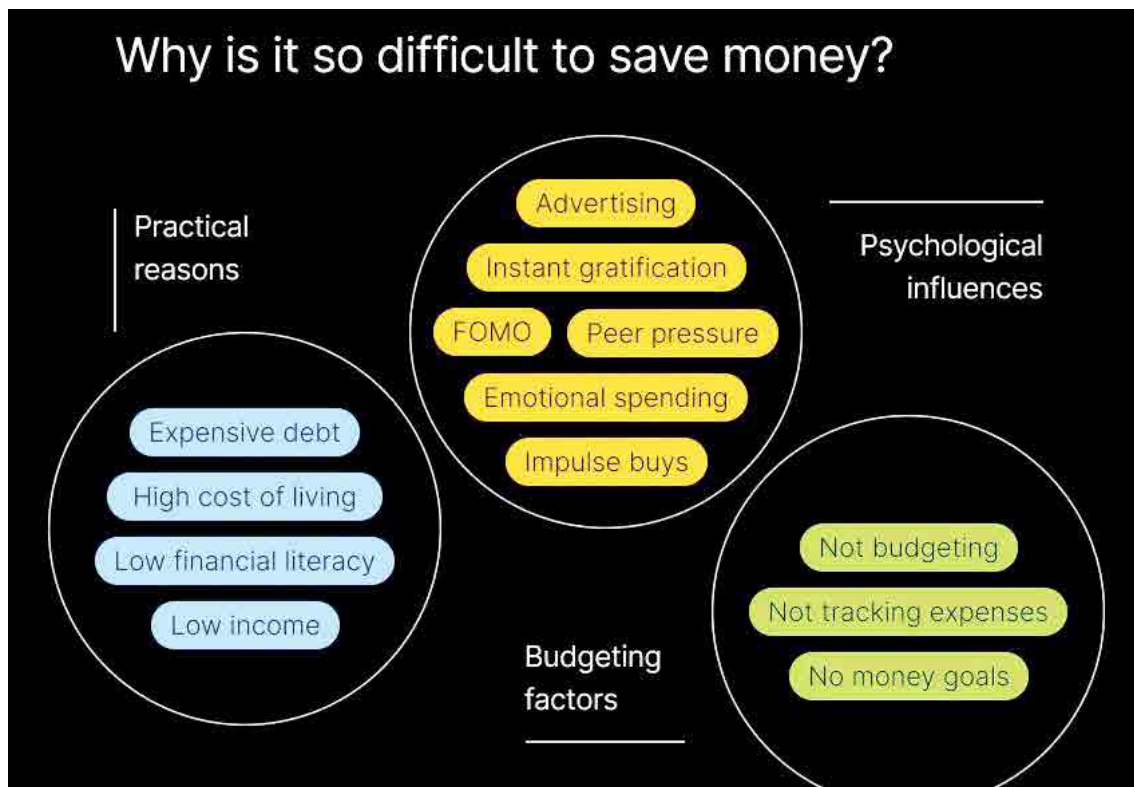
Lack of discipline and consistency, you say, "I want to save", you start today, you don't continue the next, not understanding that saving is an habit a continuous process

All these falls under the psychology of money, because how you think and behave with money determines how well it will work for you. Over time all these factors makes saving feel impossible.

The beginning of saving is not the amount, it is the consistency which most people fail to realize.

Just a little amount every month, to tracking your spending habits, creating a budget, knowing your needs and wants, resisting the urge to spend recklessly, making financial goals, and aiming to achieve them. It doesn't happen within a day it's a process.

This way you can attain future financial stability, because you understand the concept behind saving, which promotes financial discipline and independence.



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

SEBASTINE EBHUOMHAN

Tuesday, 28th April, 2026. Abuja. His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, will receive massive votes from the people of the Niger Delta and be re-elected without shedding sweat, contrary to the negative expectations of the opposition.

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

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

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

Dr. Otuaro said, "It is on record that since His Excellency, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic, came into power in 2023, his love for Niger Delta and the people of the region has been massive, uncommon and incomparable. He has extended his love by way of support to the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Without the huge support of Mr. President and the excellent supervision of the National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, we



HIGH CHIEF DENNIS BRUTU OTUARO PHD

PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU

would not have achieved all that we have achieved today."

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

Since he assumed office in March 2024 as the Administrator of the PAP, Dr. Otuaro has embarked on a conscious, deliberate and planned redirection of the Programme to its original vision: the reformation and empowerment of ex-agitators and

people of impacted communities through dialogue, consultation, transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and rule of law in the relentless pursuit of education, vocational skills training, after-training empowerment, peace building, conflict resolution, job placement and beneficial partnerships, which are the key necessities for sustainable security, peace, and development in the Niger Delta.

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

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

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

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

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

Last year, 2025, the Programme trained batches of hundreds of participants in its Leadership, Alternative

Dispute Resolution and Mediation Training aimed at repositioning Niger Delta youths for leadership with the capacity for alternative resolution of issues at community level. More are expected to be trained this year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Low awareness fueling rising liver disease crisis, experts warn

ABIEMWENSE (NAN)

A young man survived a sudden health crisis only after his liver failure was detected early—an outcome health experts say underscores how awareness and timely intervention can save lives.

Medical experts have raised concern over low public awareness of liver diseases, warning that these conditions remain silent killers and are fast becoming a major global health burden affecting millions of people worldwide.

In commemoration of World Liver Day on April 19, health professionals observed that the 2026 edition attracted far less attention compared to major global health campaigns such as HIV awareness programmes.

They argue that this poor visibility

weakens the impact of awareness efforts, limiting public understanding of liver health, early warning signs, and preventive measures that could significantly reduce disease incidence and deaths.

Consultant gastroenterologist and hepatologist, Dr Kolawole Akande, said the limited attention given to liver health initiatives reduces their effectiveness in shaping behaviour and encouraging preventive healthcare practices across communities.

He explained that World Liver Day was established to draw attention to liver health and promote early detection and treatment of liver-related conditions before they progress into severe, life-threatening stages.

However, he noted that inadequate awareness continues to slow progress in tackling diseases such as hepatitis, fatty

liver disease, cirrhosis and liver cancer, which collectively contribute to high morbidity and mortality globally.

According to him, the liver is one of the body's most vital organs, performing nearly 500 essential functions daily, including detoxification, metabolism regulation and nutrient storage necessary for sustaining life.

Despite its importance, he said many people only become aware of liver disease when it is already advanced, making treatment more difficult and reducing survival chances due to delayed diagnosis.

Akande stressed that liver diseases often develop silently without obvious symptoms, making routine medical check-ups essential for detecting early-stage damage before it becomes severe or irreversible.

He added that early liver damage

can be reversed if detected promptly, but late diagnosis severely limits treatment options and increases the risk of complications and death.

"A growing concern among health professionals is the rising prevalence of lifestyle-related liver conditions, particularly non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, which is increasingly linked to modern living patterns," he said.

"Poor diet, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption and lack of physical activity are major risk factors driving the increase in liver disease cases, especially in urban and developing communities."

Akande called on policymakers and healthcare providers to actively promote healthy lifestyles, including regular exercise and balanced diets, to curb preventable liver diseases and improve public health outcomes.

He also noted that viral hepatitis remains a major public health challenge, particularly in developing countries where access to healthcare services, vaccination and screening is limited or inconsistent.

"Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by infectious viruses or other harmful agents, leading to complications such as chronic disease, liver failure and cancer, some of which are fatal," he said.

Akande advocated expanded vaccination coverage, improved screening systems and wider access to treatment as key measures to combat hepatitis and reduce its impact.

He warned that many people live with hepatitis without knowing their status, increasing personal health risks and contributing to continued transmission within communities.

FEATURE

Faith at crossroads: How religious fundamentalism fuels division in Nigeria

AISHAT MUHAMMED

In a country where religion is woven into the fabric of daily life, Nigeria's two dominant faiths-Islam and Christianity -have become both a source of strength and a flashpoint for conflict. While millions draw hope and moral guidance from their beliefs, the rise of religious fundamentalism has deepened boundaries, fueled intolerance, and threatened national unity. This often occurs as a result of misunderstanding among people of different religious groups which result to conflicts and religious war thereby causing unrest in the society.

Religious fundamentalism is when people stick strictly to the core beliefs and practices of their faith, often interpreting sacred texts literally. It's about adhering to traditional values and resisting modern or liberal interpretations.

RIGID BOUNDARIES, FRAGILE PEACE

Fundamentalist movements within both Islam and Christianity often enforce strict divisions between "true believers" and "outsiders". These boundaries are not merely theological – they spill into politics, education, and community life. Boundaries creates divisions, undermines social cohesion and interfaith dialogue.

In Northern Nigeria, Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Boko Haram have weaponized faith to justify violence, while in some Southern communities, Christian fundamentalists preach exclusivity that alienates Muslims and traditional believers. These boundaries creates social fragmentation, making coexistence difficult.

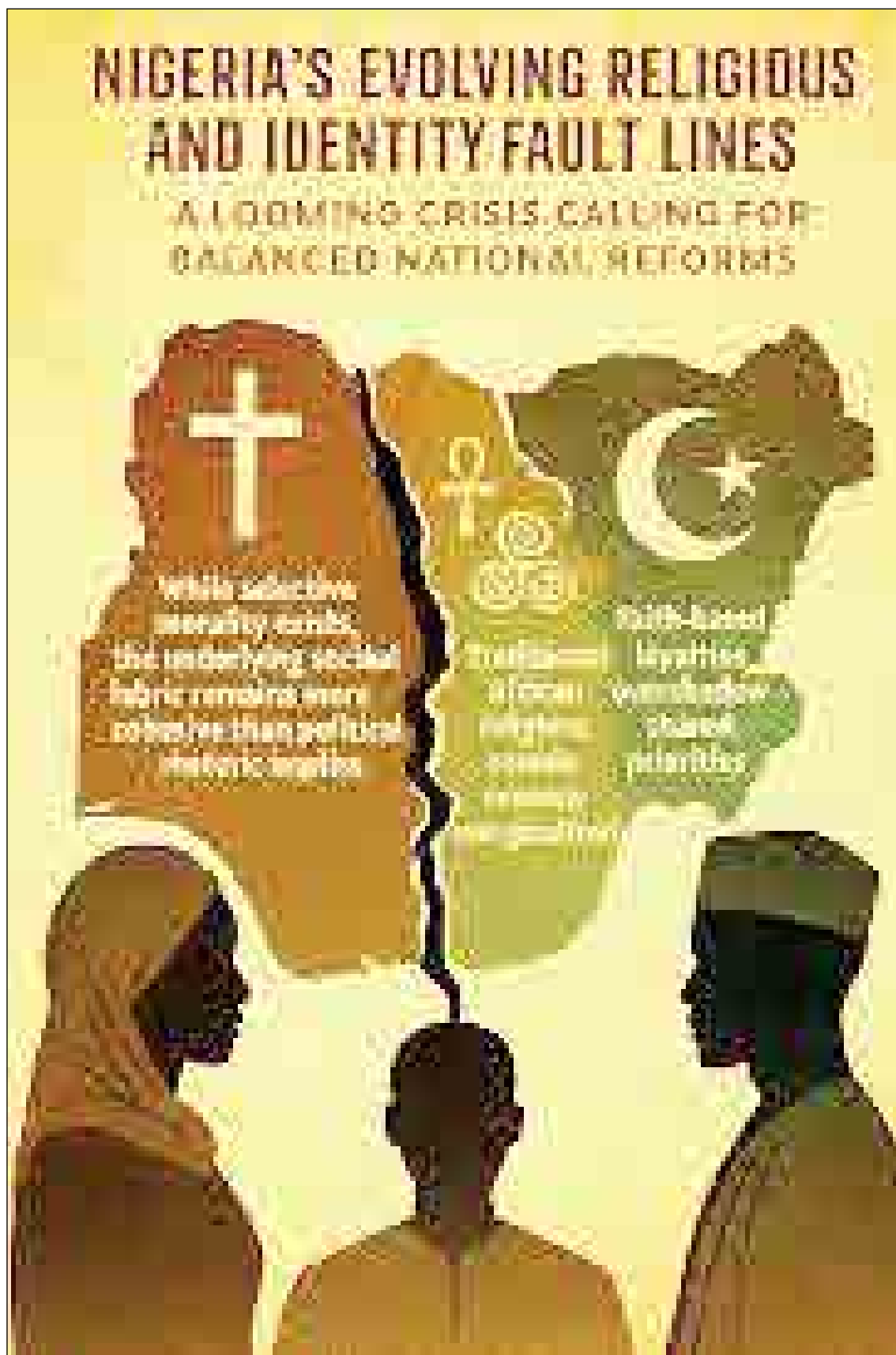
Yes everyone has a right to uphold his/her religious beliefs, yes everyone has the right to practice whichever religion but that should not be done at the expense of peace and togetherness in the society. Religious boundaries should be respected by both Muslim and Christian faithful, if any word or action would be considered blasphemous or offensive by any of the religious faithful then it should be avoided so as not to cause unrest and violence in the society. The result of violence is a fragile peace, constantly tested by suspicion and mistrust.

INTOLERANCE AND SOCIAL FRAGMENTATION

Intolerance has become one of the most visible consequences of fundamentalism. Churches and mosques alike have been targeted in violent attacks, while interfaith marriages are discouraged or outright condemned. In many communities, children grow up with little exposure to peers of other faiths, reinforcing stereotypes and deepening divides.

Fundamentalist groups often claim exclusive ownership of truth, rejecting other faiths or secular perspectives. Religious intolerance has to do with the dislike or detest people have towards people of other religion or who have different religious beliefs from them.

Intolerance fuels hatred, discrimination and persecution of minorities and it should be abolished or reduced to the barest minimum.

**GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS UNDER SIEGE**

Women often bear the brunt of fundamentalist ideologies. In areas under extremist influence, girls are denied education, forced into early marriages, or subjected to strict dress codes.

This fundamentalist ideologies restricts women's rights, education, and bodily autonomy. This suppression extends to freedom of speech, education, and cultural expression.

Christian fundamentalist groups, meanwhile have resisted reforms on reproductive rights and gender equality, framing them as threats to "biblical values".

Human rights advocates argue that these restrictions are less about faith and more about control, undermining

Nigeria's constitutional commitment to equality.

VIOLENCE IN THE NAME OF GOD

Perhaps the most alarming consequences of religious fundamentalism is violence. Boko Haram's insurgency has claimed thousands of lives, displacing millions in the northeast. In the Middle Belt, clashes between Christian farmers and Muslim herders – often framed in religious terms – have devastated communities. Even in urban centers, sermons and rallies sometimes stoke hostility rather than harmony.

This violence leads to terrorism, insurgency, and political instability. Fundamentalist ideologies often

justify violence in the name of religion. Radical Islamists groups, evangelical extremist, and other movements use religion to mobilize followers for political dominance, destabilizing societies.

It is worthy to note that Islam does not promote or encourage violence or jungle justice in any form. Islam stands for peace and encourage peaceful coexistence among people as the word "Islam" is an Arabic word which means "peace" so violence is a direct opposite of what Islam truly stands for. If a Muslim feels offended either by word or action by a Christian he/she should make a report to the appropriate authorities so that necessary actions would be taken accordingly if the person is found guilty



Religious leaders should come together for a peace talk and should encourage their devotees to uphold peace and respect people with different religious beliefs.

and vice versa rather than taking laws into their own hands which is totally wrong.

THE WAY FORWARD

Experts say Nigeria must confront fundamentalism head – on by:

- Promoting Interfaith dialogue to breakdown stereotypes. Encouraging cooperation between religious communities to reduce suspicion and hostility. Religious leaders should come together for a peace talk and should encourage their devotees to uphold peace and respect people with different religious beliefs.

- Strengthening secular governance to ensure religion does not dictate state policy. Governments must protect minority rights and uphold secular principles. Government policies must promote inclusiveness across different religious groups and freedom of choice of religion should be held high.

- Investing in Education that teaches tolerance and critical thinking. Promoting critical thinking and tolerance through schools and universities should be done as illiteracy is one of the major causes of fundamentalism.

- Protecting Minority Rights to prevent exclusion and persecution. The minority religious groups' rights should be protected and exclusion and exclusion of these groups should be abolished so as not to fuel violence within them.

Nigeria's diversity is its greatest strength, but religious fundamentalism threatens to turn that diversity into division. As Islam and Christianity continue to shape the nation's identity, the challenge lies in ensuring that faith unites rather than fractures.

Religious fundamentalism is not just a spiritual issue – it is a political and social challenge that threatens peace, equality, and democracy. Addressing it requires education, inclusive governance, and interfaith cooperation to build a more tolerant and pluralistic world.

ENTERTAINMENT

FEATURE

Staying relevant for me means going with what's in vogue without losing my originality — THEBB02

With a rich discography that includes hit songs like 'The New Kid On The Block TNKOTB', 'Zinga Zinga Ling (Lean)', 'Eye Dey Red', 'Massarati', 'Rich African Love', 'Benin Man', among others, THEBB02 has no doubt earned himself relevance and longevity in an industry where stars easily fade away. In this interview, the iconic music maker reveals how he achieved this feat, among other interesting facts about his music...

Your sound stands out in today's music landscape. What inspires your music the most?

The ability to stay relevant at all times. Making conscious effort to make sounds that are relatable.

As a leading originator, my first instinct is going through my humongous library of songs, motifs, rhythms, melodies, tunes, nuanced musical jargons, which are all the inspired melodies and vibes from God my Maker through the benefit of my salvation in Christ Jesus. Next thing is making sure production kits or sound modules stay current and up-to-date with the soundscapes that are in vogue, as in the 808 kick and the log drums and whatever other sound palette that is in the air for that time.

As an ever-evolving (timeless) producer, my tunnel vision/focus is to find common ground to lace together a very soulful and catchy beat with accompanying relatable/organically viable, lyrical topics and messages, so that decades from now, when you go back to the song you can't help but appreciate the work put into it. When you are able to achieve that as a producer, then you are sure to have a legacy worth revisiting that is made up of evergreen discography.

Also, events and situations happening around me serve as a launch pad and a means of communication in creating relatable intellectual property that will forever resonate with communities around the world. This is why the world till today can still resonate and find such curated catalogues from the greats such as Stevie Wonder, Beethoven, Prince, Michael Jackson, Mozart, Bach, Missy Elliot, Alanis Morisset, Carole King, Osayomore Joseph, the Great Ojo, Billy Joe, etc. Little tidbits for studio owners: Make sure to remodel your studio every so often, at the least once every six months, as it can serve as a stimulus for the creative minds who come into your studio space.

Walk through your creative process – from idea to finished track?

I have always felt a strong sense of responsibility based on music motifs, innuendos, and melodies I have been blessed with over time; the avalanche of ideas that keep coming into my spirit that I am yet to put out into the world. Writing a song is like second nature to me. It is just something that is supernaturally and divinely embedded in my DNA. I can be watching a programme on TV and hop on my studio chair and create a song that is relatable or something I have experienced as a special moment with someone, maybe heartbreak; for example, the song 'Eye Dey Red' which is a response to negativities in society.

Walking you through my creative



THEBB02

process is going through the songs that God has put in my spirit that I haven't gotten into yet. Feeling duty-bound, or when I get into my creative mood, it could be from a baseline or lyrical idea that is so poignant/potent. I do my best in this process to key in the message alongside the melody such that it is easily ready to swallow, in a way that is musically soothing to the audience. So, most times my musical process comes from the melody approach. A lot of songs I have been blessed with are from the rhythm and melody perspective and that's the case 70% of the time. There are so many songs on my phones. Thousands. Each song has its own melodies, ideas, and innuendos that only I can decode and make palatable or user-friendly for the audience. Take, for example, 'Hallelujah is My Daily Song', the lyrics come from a song that my mother would often sing in her native tongue.

The messaging resonated with me and I wanted to find a way to express that. Meaning that things happen for me in a positive way every day, so this is a way of expressing that whole experience. It's like giving thanks to God that I am always winning; a congratulatory lifestyle. I love the messaging.

There are also ideas that God will drop in my spirit with already-made lyrical message to it. For those ones I must and will stick to the topic and the subject matter. Moreover, there are also those ideas that I get from over-time exposure to already existing melodies or tunes ecosystem that I create from.

There are times when God just drops a lyric in my spirit. So, there are many ways that I can get into that creative zone. Many times, I look in my library and say, 'God, I haven't done even 1% of all the songs you dropped in my spirit', and that sure puts me on the edge of my seat. There are those

I also title based off how they come to me originally, like the one I talked about my mother. Sometimes I sit with my engineers and they want me to jump on some beat and I give them the ideas and melody to it. Sometimes I create based off what is popular in mainstream culture.

When I write a song, I don't pay much attention to the length of the title as much as I care about passing the message therein to the audience. For example, I have a song, 'Have you ever asked yourself what love is good for'. My songs are intellectual properties or materials. When you hear it, you know some work went into it. For me, I am always about the melodies first.

We have big studios in Boston, Lagos and Benin, so sometimes my guys want me to hop on a beat and I try it out. If I hear a potential song, I jump on it and do the necessary justice to make it palatable for the global audience.

Which artistes, legends, or genres influence your style the most?

Hip hop all day. Pop music all day. Songs with an African soul contextuality and African vibe energy.

Growing up, my father was a voracious listener, so I grew up listening also to country music and RnB. I grew up listening to Lionel Richie, Rick James, James Brown, Bob Marley & the Wailers, Iroy and Uroy, Eddy Grant, great Nigerian musicians like Sunny Okosun, Osayomore Joseph, Shina Peters, Ebenezer Obey, I.K. Dairo, etc. These are largely the legends that inspire me. The relics/vibes of those melodies can come to me even now.

Do you know how you know if a new song that you are working on in the studio is going to be a potential hit song? It's when you take a break from it; when you go to bed and wake up and want to hear it all day. My library is 70% hip hop/pop and 30% kind of Nigeria Afrobeat/other Nigerian tribal beats and melodies.

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

Staying original to me is me just being myself, a creation of God. All of my intellectual properties come from God, my Originator. A lot of my materials are original, so I tap into that essence. For example, when cooking stew, tomatoes and oil are core components. Although in this day and age, especially here in America, some may try to experiment and change the way stew is cooked, or try to modernise the way we cook from back in the day, like adding or removing certain ingredients or by being overly conscious or being mindful of the volume of each ingredient used in the dish. In the same manner, when I am putting my materials and songs together, the total musical component and the pertinent trajectory in that regard dictate how I will present the overall sound.

For THEBB02, keeping what is soulful and original is the part that is easy. Keeping the signature sound is the tomatoes, seasoning and oil. I believe that this is the only part I will maintain as my signature sound. Majority of the ingredients I throw into, for example, a particular song I am just rapping, just singing or just hyping, etc, those are key components you consider when putting a track together, which is a big part of being THEBB02.

Also, if you don't change or follow certain viable trends, then you are taking the risks of fading away soon enough. So, for you to be able to stay relevant or sustain longevity, you have to stay with what is in vogue but don't lose that original sauce. For me, doing this is so natural as they are God-given materials (assets). Hopefully, you have realised by now that I was giving a lot of my narration in descriptive language involving cooking as Bigmanity logo is the big cooking pot. It's an ode (homage) as we are always cooking for our family (the ion and 02 nation(s). Notice how I spell that family. It is an endearing and respectful homage to our fans who we personally call and regard as chosen family, because there is a family you are born into, and there are families you choose.

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

FCT Minister Inaugurates Committee to oversee FCT Sports Associations Elections

The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, has inaugurated the 2026 FCT Sports Associations Screening Committee, tasked with overseeing the electoral process for sports associations across the territory.

The inauguration ceremony, held on Wednesday, was conducted on behalf of the minister by the Director of Sports for the FCT, Luka Istifanus. He said the committee comprises

individuals of proven integrity and is expected to ensure a credible and transparent process as elections into various sports associations begin.

"We have the approval of the Honourable Minister to constitute and inaugurate this committee, which will lay the foundation for credible elections into the FCT sports associations," Istifanus stated.

In his acceptance remarks, the committee chairman, Godwin

Bamigboye, expressed appreciation to the minister and the FCT sports leadership for the confidence reposed in the team. He pledged that members would carry out their responsibilities diligently and in line with expectations.

Bamigboye also noted that beyond overseeing the elections, the committee would explore avenues to advocate for the advancement of sports administration in the territory, including efforts to elevate the FCT Sports Department

to a full-fledged commission.

Other members of the committee include Secretary Clinton Agbor, alongside Dr. Charles Agadu, Iyiola Ogundele, Esther Whobba, Niyi Busari, Hon. Albert Atiwurcha (representing all FCT Sports Associations), and Uche Unwudoh.

The committee is expected to play a central role in ensuring a smooth and credible transition of leadership across sports associations.



SUPER EAGLES COACH, ERIC CHELLE (LEFT)

3SC Fans urge Chelle to extend Invitation to Adegoke

Some section of Shooting Stars Sports Club (3SC) of Ibadan fans have pleaded with Super Eagles coach, Eric Chelle to consider Qamar Adegoke for invitation to the Unity Cup in London.

The fans, according to Mutiu Ijadunola, who serve as their spokesman, said with Adegoke's performance in the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL), he shown he could be understudy Victor Osimhen if encouraged and properly guided.

Adegoke has proven to be the NPFL's most clinical striker averaging 0.68 goals per 90 minutes over 29 matches, Adegoke's per-

atry instincts thrive even in the NPFL's defensive climate.

At 21, he offers the stamina for high-pressing systems and the discipline (only one yellow card) required for international stages.

His Market Value is placed at at €491k, making him the league's most valuable domestic asset. "London is the perfect 'shop window' for his talents. He isn't just a prospect; he is a specialist right-footed "Number 9 hitting his peak at the ideal time," Ijadunola said.

He added that it would be unfair for Chelle to ignore Adegoke and deny him the opportunity to showcase his talent in London.

UEFA Champions League: Arsenal, Atletico trade penalties in Champions League semi-final draw

Julian Alvarez's penalty secured Atletico Madrid a 1-1 draw against Arsenal in a nervy Champions League semi-final first leg clash on Wednesday.

Viktor Gyokeres sent the Premier League leaders ahead from the spot just before the interval after he was fouled, but Alvarez followed suit 10 minutes into the second half after Ben White's handball.

Arsenal were upset at a late penalty decision being overturned following a VAR review when David Hanccko made contact with Eberechi Eze in the area.

Atletico had the better of it for long periods, but Arsenal's solid defending helped them leave the Spanish capital in a good position to return to the Champions League final 20 years after their last appearance.

What the game lacked in the dizzying goal rush of Paris Saint-Germain's 5-4 win over Bayern Munich in the other semi-final the night before, it was replaced with tension and a desperation not to fall behind.

Toilet paper rained down from the stands of the Metropolitan stadium minutes before kick-off, in a striking — if wasteful — display, which invited cynical jokes from some quarters about the calibre of the spectacle ahead.

In a tussle between arguably

the continent's two biggest teams never to lay a finger on the trophy neither wanted to blink first.

Atletico still have an outdated defensive reputation but pinned Mikel Arteta's miserly Arsenal back in the early stages, with David Raya tipping Alvarez's shot around the post.

The Gunners, a long way from Arteta's eve-of-the-game demand, dominate proceedings, looked to smash and grab, with Marc Pubill blocking from Martin Odegaard on a quick breakaway.



ADEMOLA LOOKMAN

CAF Champions League: Sundowns, AS FAR Get Revised Timeline for CAF Final Showdown

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has officially rescheduled the first leg of the 2025-26 CAF Champions League final, offering both finalists greater clarity as they prepare for Africa's biggest club fixture.

The opening leg between Morocco's AS FAR and South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns will now take place on Sunday, May 17, instead of the initially fixed Friday, May 15. The return leg remains unchanged and is set for Sunday, May 24, in Rabat.

The first leg will be staged at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in Pretoria, while the decisive return fixture will be held at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Complex in

Rabat, where AS FAR will look to capitalise on home support.

The adjustment follows a formal request by Mamelodi Sundowns, who sought a 48-hour postponement to address logistical concerns, including attendance,

scheduling, and preferred kick-off conditions. The South African side pushed for a weekend fixture to maximise fan turnout and enhance the matchday atmosphere for a continental final—an appeal CAF has now granted. Soccer



SUNDOWNS AND AS FAR PLAYER

Football World Expects Nigeria's Victory over Malawi on Saturday

The world football fraternity awaits the qualification of Nigeria's Falconets (U20) women football team this Saturday at the Remo Stadium, Ikenne in Ogun State as Nigeria clashes with their counterparts, The Scorchers of Malawi in the final hurdle to the World women's U20 Cup finals in Poland.

Nigeria's Falconets have appeared a record eleven times in the African final phase and moved forward the eleven times to the world cup finals in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2022 and 2024.

For the Poland race, Nigeria rounded up Rwanda 5-0 on aggregate winning 1st leg 1-0 in Rwanda and raided them 4-0 in the 2nd leg. That was at the 2nd round of the African qualifier.

At the 3rd round, Nigeria sent Senegal gasping for breathe 3-1 on aggregate with a 1-0 victory at Ikenne in the 1st leg and a stunning 2-1 victory in the 2nd leg in Dakar.

Now, Nigeria faces the Scorchers of Malawi who will try to burn them out of the Poland race on Saturday in the 1st leg at Ikenne and 2nd leg at Blantyre for the 2nd leg on 9th May. The Malawian Babes are already in Ikenne plotting their game plans against the Falconets.

A look at the Nigerian performances shows two girls P. Oscar who scored two goals against RWANDA in the 2nd legs and L. Kindness who was absolutely unkind to Senegal scoring the only goal in the 1st game and sending the Senegalese back to the boardroom to adjust for next edition with the winner.



NIGERIA'S FALCONETS (U20)

World Relays: Ashe rejoins Nigeria, heads to Botswana with AFN President



FAVOUR ASHE

Nigerian sprinter Favour Ashe has reaffirmed his commitment to represent Nigeria, months after initiating a move to switch allegiance to Qatar.

Ashe has now been included in Nigeria's squad for the 2026 World Relays scheduled to take place in Gaborone, Botswana.

The 100m specialist, who is among a select group of active Nigerian sprinters to have broken the 10-second barrier, is expected to play a key role for

the team at the global event.

Sources confirmed that Ashe is already en route to Gaborone, where he will link up with his teammates ahead of the competition.

He is travelling alongside the president of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria, Tonobok Okowa, as preparations intensify for the championships.

His return is seen as a significant boost for Nigeria's relay prospects, given his speed credentials and experience on the international stage

Born abroad, capped at home is Coach Eric Chelle, Super Eagles diaspora drive a lazy way out?

DOUGLAS BAYE-OSAGIE

The news that Eric Chelle is tracking Femi Azeez of Millwall, fresh off being rated the best right winger in the English Championship, and William Osula of Newcastle United for a potential Super Eagles debut, reignites a familiar debate: have we now fully committed to scouting Europe's leagues rather than combing the NPFL and grassroots for homegrown talent?

This is not just about questioning patriotism. Full respect to Ademola Lookman, Alex Iwobi, Semi Ajayi, Bright Osayi Samuel and Calvin Bassey. They have been absolutely dedicated to the badge. They can also tell you about the immense pressure of wearing the green-white-green and what their journey on African turf has been so far.

But the pattern is clear. Our recruitment drive increasingly starts in London, Amsterdam, and Brussels before it starts in Lagos, Benin City, Kano, or Abuja. The question is whether this dependency on foreign-born players has crippled the organic growth of our national teams.

Yes, these players are exposed to the best training facilities and elite coaches from a young age. They are tactically schooled and physically conditioned to modern standards. Yet exposure does not always equal execution when it matters most on the continent.

Have they shown the mental capacity and rawness to navigate the chaos of African World Cup qualifiers? The pitches in Ndola; the humidity in Conakry, hostile crowds in North Africa, and the dark arts of CAF football. Remember, we have missed back-to-back World Cups now.

This run of failure is coming on the heels of looking for shortcuts. In the past, when the Super Eagles had a problem, we looked back at home. The solution came from Shooting Stars, Rangers, Bendel Insurance, Enyimba, or the academies scattered across the country. Coach Stephen Keshi in the 2013 AFCON had the guts to play an unknown Sunday Mba from Warri Wolves against a midfield of Gervinho (Arsenal), Cheick Tiote (Newcastle), Yaya Toure (Manchester City) and Didier Zokora (Trabzonspor). Mba, not only started the match, he also scored the winning goal. It wasn't just about his talent; it was the belief the coach had in him that made him play well against a star-studded Ivorian team.

Since the retirement of Mikel Obi, we haven't had Number 10 with the confidence to manage a game and dictate the rhythm of the attack. We have creators, but not controllers. We have runners, but few conductors who understand the African tempo.

The big question is, is it that we don't have players in the local league or youth academies we can nurture into a playmaker? Or is it that the coaches handling the national football teams are lazy?

Eric Chelle must not be lazy. He cannot limit his next phase of talent discovery to only foreign-born players. Scouting Europe is easier. The data is cleaner, the agents are louder, and the passports are ready. But easy does not mean right for Nigeria's long-term health. If he must lead Nigeria



COACH ERIC CHELLE (LEFT)

to the next Olympics in 2028 or the World Cup in 2030, he needs to keep an eye on our local talents.

Even when the national U17 and U20 teams are falling short because of poor preparation and selections, our academy teams still prove what is possible at home. Nigerian academy sides like Sporting Lagos and Beyond Limit have won the Gothia Cup in Sweden in recent years, with clubs from all over the world participating. The same goes for other academies churning out bright stars to Europe from tattered playing surfaces in Nigeria. That tells you the raw material exists. What's missing is the transition from those U17 stars to the Super Eagles.

We should be intentional about building a base of young talents who have mastered the rhythm and temperament of the African game before involving our foreign-born players. Let the NPFL not be ridiculed for a lack of talent. Let scouts watch Remo Stars vs Rivers United with the same urgency they watch Millwall vs. Sunderland.

The problem is not uniquely Nigerian. It is affecting our neighbours Cameroon too. The urge to cap foreign-born players hasn't brought good fortune for the Indomitable Lions either. They have lost their fear factor and invincibility on the continent.

Our foreign players haven't integrated properly, and this has shown in World Cup qualifiers and the Africa Cup of Nations itself. Cameroon used to arrive every African Nations Cup as one of the favourites. Not anymore. The chemistry looks forced, the identity diluted, and the results have followed.

After Cameroon's loss to Senegal at the 2023 AFCON, Samuel Eto'o made a statement of concern in the dressing room that cuts to the heart of this issue: "Dear brothers, I understand you. Many of you were not born in Cameroon and have never played for a club in Cameroon."

14. Eto'o continued: "The advice of a Cameroonian coach is beneficial to a footballer from the start of his career until the end. You who were born there have too many rights over the leaders. Cameroon taught me that I am a soldier within the national team. I will die with this spirit."

"Cameroon has just suffered humiliation just because love for the federation is not 100 percent. Excuse

me for talking about myself. I could play two matches on the same day for the love of our beautiful country. I did it, Roger Milla did it and Francois Omam-Biyik did it."

"You play with too many reserves, what are you afraid of? Dying for the homeland surpasses all the money on

the earth." Those were Eto'o's words. The issues are the same in Nigeria and not very far off. It is about mentality, identity, and total buy-in.

In 2024, Mikel Obi also weighed in, encouraged foreign-born players not to treat Nigeria as a second choice. "Nigeria should not be your second

choice. When you're called upon to represent the country, you should take it with pride and dedication. We need committed players who will give their all to the team."

Mikel's words serve as a timely reminder of the importance of passion and dedication when the national team calls. The idea that the Super Eagles is a fallback option should not be entertained by players who have lost out on places with their European countries of birth.

However, this is not a call to shut the door on the diaspora. Femi Azeez and William Osula may well become great Eagles. The point is let there be a balance. We cannot outsource the soul of the team. We must blend the foreign-trained polish with the local-trained grit, and we must do it deliberately.

The Super Eagles' identity was forged in the heat of Lagos, the mud of Enugu, and the cauldrons of African qualifiers. If we forget how to build from home, we can will keep borrowing players but lose the spirit that made the world fear us. Chelle's real test isn't who he caps. It's whether he can build a team that fights like Nigeria, not just one that plays like Europe.



Sports



Carter Efe, Portable to feature in celebrity boxing showdown

Boxing fans will today have value for their money as social media stars Habeeb 'Portable' Badmus and Carter Efe will climb the squared ropes for a celebrity bout, tagged 'Chaos in the Ring'.

The fight organized by Balmoral Promotions in partnership with Amir Khan promotions will feature nine bouts and will take place at the Balmoral Hall of Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos.

Speaking ahead of the fight during their face-off, portable, who previously defeated Charles Okocha and Speed Darlington in celebrity fights to win two belts, said he is prepared to add another belt to his collections, even as he warned his opponent not to ven-

ture going into the ring with him.

"I'm warning Efe not to risk his life going into the ring with me because, I will not show him

any mercy.

"He should realize that Charles Okocha and Speed Darlington are bigger than him, yet, I showed

them my boxing skills. I won't show him any mercy on Friday because I want to use him to collect my third belt" he boasted.

Efe who was unperturbed by Portable's record, fired back that he's not afraid of him declaring emphatically that the ring will be the final judge.

"What I want to tell Portable us that, I have beaten many people in the past and in this fight, the ring will be the final judge as there won't be any hiding place for him.

Meanwhile, the main bout of the night, will be a symbolic WBO Peace fight between the Itokiri and Ijaw communities of Nigeria Delta region who will be represented by Arenyeka and Appah,



World Cup: Iranian football delegation turned back at Toronto Airport, missed FIFA congress

An Iranian football federation delegation led by Mehdi Taj was reportedly denied entry into Canada this week, forcing the group to abandon plans to attend a key pre-World Cup meeting.

According to Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency, the delegation, which included the federation secretary general Hedayat Mombeni and his deputy Hamed Momeni, arrived in Toronto with valid visas but chose to return to Turkey after what they described as "unacceptable behaviour" by Canadian immigration officials.

The officials had been en route to Vancouver to participate in the FIFA Congress, a gathering that has taken on heightened significance with the FIFA World Cup less than two months away.

In a statement carried by Tasnim, the Iranian federation said the treatment of its officials amounted to an insult, particularly given Taj's past affiliation with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Canadian authorities declined to comment on the specific case, citing privacy laws, but reiterated a longstanding policy regarding individuals linked to the IRGC.

"We have been clear and consistent: IRGC officials are inadmissible to Canada and have no place in our country," the government said, noting that it has taken measures to hold the organisation accountable.

Canada formally designated

the IRGC as a terrorist organisation in 2024, a move that has since influenced immigration decisions involving individuals associated with the group. Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree reinforced that position, stating that members of the IRGC are not welcome in the country.

The controversy has also drawn criticism from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human

Rights, which questioned why Taj had been granted special permission to travel in the first place, arguing that such exemptions undermine Canada's human rights commitments.

Football's global governing body, FIFA, has reportedly expressed regret over the incident and is seeking to resolve the situation. According to Tasnim, FIFA President Gianni Infantino expected to meet with the Ira-

nian delegation at FIFA headquarters. Soccer

A source at the Congress indicated that FIFA had dispatched a representative to mediate at Toronto airport, but the effort failed to prevent the delegation's withdrawal.

The absence of Iranian officials was also felt at the Asian Football Confederation gathering in Vancouver, further underlining the ripple effects of the incident.

UCL: All square in Madrid as Atletico trade penalties with Arsenal

Atletico Madrid held Arsenal to a 1-1 draw on Wednesday in the second semi-final of the UEFA Champions League at the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium in Madrid, Spain.

Atletico were in control for most part of the first half but handed Arsenal the lead when Gyokeres was brought down by David Hanks inside the box. Gyokeres made no mistake as he converted the penalty to give Arsenal the lead at halftime.

The host equalized in the 56th minute after VAR determined that Ben White had touched the ball with his hands in the box while defending Marcos Llorente's shot.

Argentine striker Julian Alvarez converted the resulting penalty with a thundering shot into the left corner beyond David Raya.

Arsenal thought they had another chance for a winner but a VAR review overturned a second

penalty awarded to them.

"We gave it a go. We went behind early from a penalty that I thought was a bit dubious.

"We had chances to win it but it will all be decided in the second leg. They defend very well and have some very quick players up front," Atletico captain Koke told Movistar Plus.

"We failed to finish off the

game with the chances we had. We hope the match in London isn't our last in the Champions League this season," Koke added.

The winners after the May 5 return leg will face Paris St Germain or Bayern Munich in the final in Budapest on May 30, with PSG leading 5-4 from their first leg played in Paris.



ATLETICO MADRID AND ARSENAL MATCH

2028 LA Olympics: Nigeria draws Sudan, Comoros in preliminary round

Nigeria has been drawn against Sudan or Comoros in the African qualifying phase of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games women's football tournament.

The draws was conducted on Wednesday at the Confederation of African Football (CAF) headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

The 10-time African champions Nigeria, which was drawn bye, will play against the winner of Round One fixtures between Sudan and Comoros in the weekend of Oct. 5 and 13.

Meanwhile, a total of 35 countries are involved in the qualifying campaign.

They are Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina

Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti and Equatorial Guinea.

Also Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa and South Sudan will take part.

Others are Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The competition will take place in five qualifying rounds,

with two teams to represent Africa at the Los Angeles Olympic Games women's football tournament from July 11 to July 29, 2028.



FRANK ONYEKA

Promotion clause triggered as Coventry seal Frank Onyeka signing

Coventry City FC have completed the permanent signing of Frank Onyeka from Brentford FC following their promotion to the Premier League.

Onyeka initially joined the Sky Blues on loan in January, with a clause in the agreement requiring the move to be made permanent if promotion was achieved. That condition has now been activated, with Coventry set to pay €9m for the Nigeria international.

The midfielder made a solid

impact during his loan spell, contributing one goal and one assist in 14 Championship appearances, while also earning a nomination for the club's Goal of the Season award. His performances played a role in Frank Lampard's side securing a return to the top flight.

Coventry will round off their campaign with a final fixture against Watford FC, as Onyeka prepares to continue with the club on a long-term basis ahead of their Premier League campaign.

School sports build discipline, unlock careers —NSSF president



OLABISI JOSEPH

The President of the Nigeria School Sports Federation (NSSF), Olabisi Joseph, says school competitions build discipline and open career opportunities for students in sports.

Joseph yesterday that regular inter-school contests encourage punctuality, responsibility and respect for rules among students.

She said these habits shape behaviour in school and every-

day life, helping students develop structure and accountability.

She added that organised sports teach resilience, teamwork, leadership and respect for authority.

According to her, these qualities improve academic performance and social conduct.

"Discipline learned from sports often shows in school, where students become more fo-

cused, organised and committed to their goals," she said.

Joseph explained that competitions build mental strength, sharpen focus and help students manage pressure from an early age.

She noted that school sports reveal talent, enabling gifted students to be identified, trained and exposed to higher-level competition.

"School competitions help

us find hidden talents and give them the opportunity to grow into top athletes," she said.

Joseph said many elite athletes began in school competitions, stressing that regular exposure is vital for reaching full potential.

She added that competitions give young athletes visibility, attracting scouts, sponsors and scholarship opportunities locally and internationally.

FEATURE



Reclaiming Edo from kidnappers: Okpebholo's security strategy

In public discourse, particularly within democratic societies, truth must remain sacrosanct. Political affiliations, personal sentiments and partisan loyalties should never eclipse the obligation to acknowledge facts when they are evident.

In a climate where political commentary is often shaped by emotions and ideological leanings, intellectual honesty requires that developments be assessed with fairness and objectivity. It is in this spirit that the emerging security strategy of the Edo State government under the leadership of Governor Monday Okpebholo deserves careful examination.

Governance in Nigeria is frequently accompanied by intense scrutiny and criticism. Such criticism is not only inevitable but also necessary for democratic accountability. Citizens expect transparency, responsibility and measurable progress from those entrusted with public authority. However, fairness also demands that genuine efforts at reform be recognised when they occur.

For several years, insecurity has constituted one of the most pressing challenges confronting Edo State. Although insecurity is a national phenomenon in Nigeria, the manifestations within the state had reached disturbing proportions prior to the advent of the present administration. Among the most alarming developments was the proliferation of kidnapping-for-ransom, which gradually transformed into a lucrative criminal enterprise across many parts of the country.

In Edo State, the consequences of this criminal activity were deeply felt by ordinary citizens. Travellers navigating highways that connect the state with neighbouring regions increasingly did so with apprehension. Farmers who form the backbone of rural economies feared venturing into their farmlands. Commercial transport operators faced the constant threat of attacks, while entire communities lived under the shadow of uncertainty.

Kidnapping-for-ransom represents not merely a criminal act but a complex socio-economic menace. Victims are often abducted and held in forests or remote hideouts where they endure traumatic conditions while their families struggle to raise exorbitant ransom payments. The emotional toll inflicted on victims and their relatives is profound, often leaving long-lasting psychological scars.

Beyond the human suffering involved, the economic implications of insecurity are equally devastating. When communities become unsafe, commercial activities decline. Investors hesitate to commit resources to



areas perceived as dangerous. Agricultural productivity suffers as farmers abandon fertile lands out of fear. In such an environment, development inevitably stagnates.

It was against this troubling background that Governor Monday Okpebholo restructured Edo State Security Network (ESSN), an initiative designed to strengthen the state's security architecture and complement the efforts of existing federal security agencies. The reorganisation of the ESSN represents a strategic attempt to confront insecurity through a more localised and intelligence-driven approach.

In a bid to strengthen the ESSN and other security agencies in the state, Governor Okpebholo launched the "Operation Flush Out Kidnappers and Cultists". He also provided logistical support through the procurement of about 60 Hilux vans and 400 motorcycles to enhance the mobility of security operatives, enabling them to navigate difficult terrain and respond more swiftly to criminal activities.

With the reorganisation of the Edo State Security Network and the provision of the necessary operational tools, crime and criminal activities within neighbourhoods have been significantly reduced. Many criminal elements have consequently fled the state.

Nigeria operates a federal security structure in which the primary responsibility for law enforcement rests with national institutions such as the police, the military and other federal agencies. While this arrangement provides a unified framework for national security, the realities of crime management often require subnational governments to devise supportive mechanisms that address local peculiarities.

The ESSN is essentially conceived as a coordinated community-based security initiative aimed at enhancing surveillance, intelligence gathering and rapid response across Edo State. The philosophy underpinning the initiative is simple but powerful: effective security often depends on local knowledge and community participation.

In many instances, criminal activities flourish when there is a disconnect between formal security institutions and grassroots communities. Conventional security agencies, despite their professionalism and commitment, sometimes struggle with

limited manpower and insufficient familiarity with local terrains. This gap can inadvertently create opportunities for criminal elements to operate undetected.

Community-based security frameworks seek to bridge this gap. By integrating individuals who possess intimate knowledge of their local environments, such systems are better positioned to detect suspicious activities and provide timely intelligence that can assist law enforcement agencies.

The Edo State Security Network embodies this principle. Operatives within the network are drawn from communities across the state, ensuring that the system benefits from indigenous knowledge of geography, social dynamics and behavioural patterns within different localities. Such familiarity can be invaluable in identifying unfamiliar movements, suspicious gatherings or emerging criminal threats.

Another significant advantage of the ESSN lies in its capacity to strengthen collaboration between communities and conventional security agencies. When citizens perceive security structures as accessible and responsive, they are more likely to volunteer information that can help prevent crime. Intelligence provided by community members often constitutes the first line of defence against criminal networks.

Since the operationalisation of the network, reports from various parts of Edo State suggest that security operations have become more proactive. Surveillance activities have been intensified, while coordinated patrols have increased visibility in areas previously regarded as vulnerable.

The ESSN also reflects an important recognition by the Okpebholo administration that security is a prerequisite for development. Economic growth, investment and social stability are difficult to achieve in environments characterised by fear and uncertainty. Without safety, the prospects for sustainable development become severely constrained.

Agriculture provides a clear example of this relationship between security and development. Edo State possesses vast agricultural potential, with fertile lands capable of supporting diverse crops. However, farmers cannot fully exploit this potential if they fear attacks from criminal gangs while working on their farms. By



GOVERNOR MONDAY OKPEBHOLO

improving security conditions, the ESSN indirectly supports agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods.

Similarly, transportation and trade benefit from improved security. Commercial drivers and traders are more willing to move goods across different parts of the state when they feel protected. Markets flourish when people can travel freely without constant anxiety about their safety.

However, security initiatives such as the ESSN also require careful management to ensure that they operate within the boundaries of the law and respect the rights of citizens. Community-based security systems must maintain professionalism, discipline and accountability in order to avoid abuses that could undermine public trust.

Training, supervision and coordination with established security agencies therefore remain critical components of the network's effectiveness. The success of such initiatives often depends on how well they integrate with the broader security framework of the country.

Another important dimension of the ESSN is intelligence gathering. Modern security management increasingly relies on information rather than mere force. Criminal networks often thrive on secrecy and mobility, making it essential for security institutions to develop sophisticated intelligence capabilities.

Community operatives who are familiar with local environments can provide valuable insights into unusual movements or behavioural patterns that might otherwise escape attention. Such intelligence can enable security agencies to anticipate criminal activities before they occur rather than merely responding after incidents have taken place.

Preventive security strategies are generally more effective than reactive ones. By identifying threats early, authorities can disrupt criminal opera-

tions and protect potential victims. The ESSN therefore represents an attempt to shift the security paradigm towards proactive prevention.

While it may still be early to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term impact of the initiative, initial indications suggest that the strategy is beginning to produce encouraging results. Reports from several communities indicate that criminal activities, particularly kidnapping operations, are being confronted with greater determination.

Public cooperation will also play a decisive role in the long-term success of the initiative. Security is not solely the responsibility of government institutions; it is a collective endeavour that requires active participation from citizens.

Leadership, in its essence, involves the willingness to confront complex problems with innovative solutions. The establishment of the Edo State Security Network reflects an attempt by the Okpebholo administration to address insecurity through a strategy that combines local participation with institutional coordination.

Ultimately, the true measure of governance lies in its impact on the daily lives of citizens. When families can travel without fear, when farmers can cultivate their lands safely, and when communities regain confidence in their collective security, the dividends of leadership become tangible.

The Edo State Security Network is still in its formative stages, but its emergence signals a recognition of the critical link between security and development.

For Edo State, the ESSN represents an ambitious attempt to reclaim public spaces from criminal elements and restore the sense of safety that every citizen deserves.

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