

# Why NECO honoured Okpebholo as Edo emerges among top performing states

Governor Monday Okpebholo has been honoured by the National Examinations Council following Edo State's emergence as one of the top performing states in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) Internal examinations conducted by the council.

NECO said the Edo State Governor received the Ex-

cellence Award after the state recorded the third highest percentage of candidates who obtained five credits and above since the establishment of the examination body in 1999.

The award was announced by the council headed by its Registrar and Chief Executive, Prof. Dantani Ibrahim Wushishi.

According to NECO, the

honour was based on measurable and data-driven achievements, including high pass rates, improved access to examinations and sustained investment in the education sector.

The council explained that the award recognises state governments and institutions that have consistently demonstrated excellence in academic

performance and participation in its examinations.

"It also reflects the critical role of sub-national governments and institutions in driving educational outcomes and improving standards. By rewarding excellence at the state level, the award encourages healthy competition and stronger commitment to quality education," the council stat-

ed.

NECO further noted that the recognition aligns with its broader mission of promoting quality education and ensuring that assessment outcomes contribute meaningfully to national development.

The examination body described the honour as not only a recognition of achievement but also a challenge to other

states and institutions to improve standards within Nigeria's education system.

The latest recognition marks the second major award received by the Okpebholo administration in the education sector within less than two years in office.

In February, Governor Ok-

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# Okpebholo, Igbinedion, others bid Idahosa's mother final farewell

RICHARD EWEKA

## BENIN CITY

The burial ceremony of late Mrs Esther Idahosa, mother of the Edo State Deputy Governor, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa, climaxed on Sunday with a Special Thanksgiving Service attended by Governor Monday Okpebholo,

former Governor Lucky Igbinedion and several other dignitaries in Benin City.

The thanksgiving service, which marked the conclusion of the funeral rites for the late matriarch, was held at Living Faith Church, Sapele Road, Benin City, amid a large gathering of political leaders, government officials, associates,

family members, friends and sympathisers from within and outside Edo State.

Governor Okpebholo, who led top government functionaries to the church service, joined the Deputy Governor and members of the Idahosa family in celebrating the life and legacy of the deceased, who passed on at the age of 95.

The Governor's presence at the event was widely seen as a demonstration of the close relationship between the state leadership and the Deputy Governor, as well as support for the family during the period of mourning and remembrance.

Among dignitaries at the service were former Govern-

nor of Edo State, Chief Lucky Igbinedion; former Deputy Governor, Lucky Imasuen; the Deputy State Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Sylvester Aigboboh; members of the Edo State House of Assembly; commissioners in the state executive council; political associates, traditional leaders, clerics and other well-wishers.

The church auditorium was filled with mourners and sympathisers who gathered to honour the memory of the deceased matriarch, described by many as a caring mother, devoted Christian and woman of virtue whose influence extended beyond her immediate family.

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### THANKSGIVING SERVICE:

L-R: Senator Roland Owie; Deputy Chairman, All Progressive Congress (APC), Edo State, Sylvester Aigboboh; former Governor, Chief Lucky Igbinedion; Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo; his deputy, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, with his wife, Amb. Osaretin Idahosa, during a thanksgiving service to climax the burial ceremony of the Deputy Governor's mother, Madam Esther Idahosa, in Benin City.

# INC crisis deepens as Diri halts new Exco inauguration

PHILIP EKE

## YENAGOA

Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, has advised the outgoing executive committee of the Ijaw National Congress led by Prof. Benjamin Okaba and its Electoral Committee not to proceed with the planned inauguration of a new executive scheduled for May 14, 2026.

Governor Diri said the decision became necessary following legal disputes arising from the recent controversial election conducted by the apex Ijaw socio-cultural body.

In a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Daniel Alabrah, the governor explained that his position was informed by the need to preserve unity within the Ijaw na-

tion and allow ongoing dispute resolution processes to run their course.

Diri, who is a pioneer Organising Secretary of the INC, said his major concern as a leader and stakeholder was to ensure peace, harmony and cohesion among Ijaw people.

He also expressed displeasure that the INC leadership allegedly used his name and official designation in publicising the proposed inauguration without informing him or obtaining his consent.

According to him, such an action was capable of creating confusion and sending wrong signals within the Ijaw nation.

"Let me be unequivocal that I am not in support of anyone trying to fractionalize the INC

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Food prices rise despite yearly decline —NBS

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Federal High Court CJ approves posting for newly appointed judges

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Putin says he thinks Ukraine conflict 'coming to an end'

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Nigeria qualify for FIFA U20 Women's World Cup Poland 2026

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# 2026 Hajj: Edo pilgrims hail reappointment of Oghieaga as Amirul Hajj

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

## AUCHI

Intending pilgrims from Edo State have commended the state government for reappointing His Royal Highness, Mallam Ali Sulayman, the Oghieaga of Ivbie, as Amirul Hajj for the 2026 pilgrimage exercise, describing the decision as deserving and widely welcomed by pilgrims across the state.

The commendation came during the final screening exercise for intending pilgrims ahead of their departure to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where participants lauded the government for retaining what they described as experienced and reliable leadership for the exercise.

Speaking during the screening in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area, one of the intending pilgrims, Mallam Murtala Muhammad Kabir, said the reappointment had further boosted the confidence of pilgrims in the success of the 2026 Hajj operation.

According to him, the Oghieaga has consistently demonstrated humility, accessibility and a strong sense of

responsibility in the discharge of his duties, qualities that have contributed significantly to the smooth coordination of Hajj activities in Edo State.

The pilgrims particularly praised the Amirul Hajj for personally attending the screening exercise and directly interacting with intending pilgrims, noting that his presence reflected genuine concern for their welfare and spiritual preparedness.

They stated that beyond supervising the exercise, he also ensured that pilgrims were adequately guided on the necessary procedures and official requirements needed for a smooth and hitch-free pilgrimage.

The intending pilgrims further recalled his performance during the previous Hajj exercise, which they described as one of the most successful and best coordinated pilgrimages undertaken by Edo State in recent years.

According to them, the achievement was made possible through his leadership qualities, discipline and administrative experience.

They also commended the formal presentation of the 2025 Hajj report to Edo State Governor, Senator Monday

Okpebholo, describing the gesture as a demonstration of transparency, accountability

and due process.

The pilgrims expressed optimism that the 2026 Hajj ex-

ercise would record greater success under the leadership of the Oghieaga and prayed for

Allah's guidance, wisdom and protection upon him throughout the spiritual exercise.



**FINAL ORIENTATION PROGRAMME:**

R-L: Alhaji Eranga Muhammadkabir, Executive Secretary, Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board; Mallam Musa Uduimoh, Chairman of the Board; Mallam Ali Sulayman, the Oghieaga of Ivbie and Amirul Hajj 2026, and Hajiya Aisha Sulayman, during the final orientation programme for intending pilgrims held at Arafat Mosque, Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area.

## Okpebholo, Igbinedion, others bid...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Delivering the sermon during the thanksgiving service, Pastor Emmanuel Ebiwoye preached from the Book of Mark 4:11, admonishing Christians to remain steadfast in faith and maintain total trust in God irrespective of life's challenges and uncertainties.

He reminded worshippers that death remains an inevitable phase of human existence and urged believers to live lives worthy of emulation, stressing that the true legacy of every individual lies in the impact

made on humanity while alive.

Special prayers were later offered for the Idahosa family, Governor Monday Okpebholo, the Edo State Government and sustained peace, unity and development in the state.

The thanksgiving service formed the final activity in the burial programme for late Mrs Esther Idahosa, whose passing drew tributes from political leaders, associates and members of the public who described her as a pillar of support to many and a woman whose life reflected humility, discipline and service to humanity.

## Why NECO honoured Okpebholo as...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

Okpebholo was named Governor of the Year in Education by New Telegraph Newspapers for what the organisers described as landmark reforms in the education sector during his first year in office.

Among the reforms cited were the construction of over 100 schools across Edo State,

the recruitment of 6,000 teachers and the increase in monthly funding for state-owned universities from ₦41 million to ₦500 million.

Stakeholders in the education sector described the NECO recognition as evidence of increasing investment in education and its positive impact on learning outcomes in public schools across the state.

## INC crisis deepens as Diri halts...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

or cause disaffection in the Ijaw nation," the governor stated.

"At the moment, Ijaw leaders are working towards resolving the crisis that arose from the purported election of a new INC leadership. The matter is still a subject of litigation, so why the hurry?"

"My advice to the outgoing Okaba-led executive is to tread cautiously and allow the dispute resolution processes to proceed.

"As a leader of the Ijaw nation,

my uppermost concern and responsibility is to ensure that our people remain united and co-exist peacefully," he added.

Governor Diri cautioned against actions capable of promoting division and disunity within the Ijaw nation through the leadership structure of the INC.

He maintained that the INC remains the foremost and most effective platform for the articulation of Ijaw interests, stressing that no effort should be made to undermine its integrity, legitimacy and cohesion.

## Menopause is transformative phase, not decline —Expert

LAGOS

Menopause should be understood as a transformative stage in a woman's life, rather than a condition of decline, a health expert has said.

Dr Adeola Ekine, Special Adviser to the National President of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), stated this in Lagos, urging a shift in perception and greater awareness of women's health issues.

She explained that with proper awareness and acceptance, menopause could be

seen as a period of reflection, strength and renewed self-understanding, rather than loss.

Ekine identified a major gap in women's health education as the silence surrounding menopause, noting that cultural norms often discourage open discussions about reproductive health and bodily changes.

The former Chairperson of the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Lagos State chapter, observed that while many women were educated about menstruation and childbirth, they remained largely unprepared for menopause.

She noted that emotional and mental health impacts such as mood swings, anxiety, irritability and low self-esteem were often ignored in public discourse.

"There is little guidance on how hormonal changes affect psychological wellbeing, relationships and daily functioning," she said, adding that sexual health concerns such as reduced libido and vaginal dryness were also rarely discussed.

Ekine further explained that menopause was often misunderstood as a sudden event rather than a gradual transition, noting that many women were unaware

of perimenopause, which could last several years.

According to her, the lack of awareness contributes to confusion, anxiety and even misdiagnosis of symptoms.

She advocated the inclusion of menopause education in secondary school curricula alongside puberty education, stressing that early awareness would help demystify the condition and reduce stigma.

"Early education will empower future generations of women with knowledge and confidence to manage their health proactively," she said.

## Diabetes risk rises as expert urges shift from processed foods

LAGOS

A public health expert has called for an urgent shift in Nigeria's dietary habits, warning that poor nutrition is fuelling the rising burden of diabetes across the country.

Dr Akujuobi Igwe, an epidemiologist and public health consultant, made the call in Lagos, urging Nigerians to move away from highly processed foods and adopt diets rich in fibre, fruits and vegetables.

He explained that diabetes mellitus, a non-communicable

disease, results from either insufficient insulin production (Type 1) or the body's inability to use insulin effectively (Type 2).

According to him, unhealthy eating patterns characterised by excessive consumption of processed foods and low intake of fruits and vegetables are major contributors to the disease.

Igwe stressed the importance of moderation and timing in food intake, noting that lifestyle changes are crucial in both preventing and managing Type 2 diabetes.

"Be conscious of what to eat, when to eat and the quantity con-

sumed. Reduce refined foods and increase fibre-rich diets, fruits and vegetables," he said.

He also warned against high-calorie diets, which could lead to obesity and insulin resistance, while advocating regular exercise, avoidance of smoking, and reduced intake of alcohol and energy drinks.

The expert noted that global diabetes prevalence is rising, with projections indicating that by 2030, over 500 million adults may be affected.

He cited a World Health Organisation (WHO) report indicating that more than 24

million adults in Africa are living with diabetes, adding that Nigeria accounts for a significant proportion.

Igwe attributed the rising prevalence in Nigeria to urbanization, poor dietary habits and an ageing population, noting that the disease remains less common in rural areas where traditional lifestyles persist.

He called for stronger regulation of food products and increased public awareness, warning that widespread consumption of unregulated processed foods could have severe health consequences.

## Food prices rise despite yearly decline —NBS

ABUJA

Nigeria's food market recorded a fresh uptick in March 2026, as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported a month-on-month increase in the prices of key staples including eggs, beans, garri, onions and ginger.

The development was contained in the NBS Selected Food Prices Watch report for March 2026, released in Abuja.

According to the report, the

average price of a crate of eggs (30 pieces) declined by 20.12 per cent year-on-year, dropping from ₦7,670.56 in March 2025 to ₦6,127.63 in March 2026.

However, on a month-on-month basis, the price rose by 2.00 per cent from ₦6,007.35 recorded in February 2026.

Similarly, the average price of 1kg of brown beans fell sharply by 49.39 per cent year-on-year, from ₦2,616.26 in March 2025 to ₦1,325.85 in March 2026. On a monthly basis, howev-

er, the commodity recorded a 1.41 per cent increase from ₦1,307.44 in February.

The report also showed that the average price of 1kg of white garri dropped by 41.19 per cent year-on-year, from ₦1,362.96 in March 2025 to ₦801.40 in March 2026, but rose by 1.38 per cent month-on-month from ₦790.62.

Onions recorded a 19.63 per cent year-on-year decrease, falling from ₦1,434.85 in March 2025 to ₦1,153.14 in March 2026. Month-

on-month, however, the price increased by 1.59 per cent from ₦1,135.12 in February.

In contrast, fresh ginger posted a significant annual increase of 20.46 per cent, rising from ₦4,600.23 in March 2025 to ₦5,541.25 in March 2026, with a marginal month-on-month increase of 0.61 per cent from ₦5,507.43.

Palm oil prices declined by 4.71 per cent year-on-year, from ₦2,511.77 in March 2025 to ₦2,393.38 in March 2026, but rose slightly by 0.27 per cent from ₦2,386.96 in February.

**NEWS****Burial ceremony of Madam Esther Idahosa, mother of Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon Dennis Idahosa**

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, with his wife, Ambassador Osaretin Idahosa (right); Rita Enoguese Agbonavbare (centre); Edward Odion Idahosa and his wife, during the Service of Songs for their late mother, Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa, in Benin City. PHOTOS: MOSES OBOH



Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, with the member representing Ovia Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, Hon. Omosede Igbinedion, during the funeral procession of his late mother, Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa in Benin City.



Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (left) with members of his family - Rita Enoguese Agbonavbare and Ovhokhan Idahosa, during the lying-in-state of their late mother, Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa, in Benin City.

**Okpebholo's support keeps me going, says Idahosa at mother's socials**

BERNADETTE IDALU

**BENIN CITY**

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, on Saturday expressed deep appreciation to Governor Monday Okpebholo and other sympathisers for the overwhelming support shown to his family following the death of his mother, Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa.

Speaking at the grand reception and social dance held at the Military Hospital Ground, Airport Road, Benin City, in honour of his late mother, Idahosa said the goodwill and solidarity received from Edo people gave the family emotional strength in its moment of grief.

He particularly described the support and show of love from Governor Okpebholo as uncommon, noting that it would continue to inspire his

loyalty and commitment to service.

"With the love that the Edo people have shown to me today, I will continue to be a servant to them. I will continue to be loyal to my Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, and continue to do my best for the growth and progress of our dear state," he said.

The deputy governor, while paying glowing tribute to his mother, said that much of his personal growth and values were shaped by her guidance and upbringing.

"I learnt a lot of things from her — virtues and attributes that shaped my life. It made me realise that we are here for a reason and only for a limited time. Even if one lives up to a hundred years, one will still leave someday.

"So, while here, make great impact in the lives of peo-

ple, bring people close to you, promote them and encourage them to be the best they can be," he stated.

Idahosa noted that his late mother's kindness and motherly disposition extended beyond her immediate family, stressing that she touched and positively impacted many lives within and outside her community.

He also thanked friends, associates, political allies, public servants and family members who stood by the Idahosa family during the period of mourning.

"I am grateful to have them. I pray that God rewards them. At their own time of need, I will also be there for them," he added.

Dignitaries, political associates, friends and well-wishers from across the country attended the event to celebrate the memory of the deceased matriarch.

Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa (née Enabulele) died on April 8, 2026, at the age of 95 after a brief illness.

**'Live meaningful lives,' clerics urge at Esther Idahosa's Service of Songs**

BERNADETTE IDALU

**BENIN CITY**

A service of songs and night of tributes held on Friday in honour of the late Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa was marked by calls on attendees to live impactful and God-fearing lives.

The solemn but colourful event, held at Etete Layout on Ugbor Road, Benin City, drew a large gathering of dignitaries, political associates, clergy, family members and friends who came to celebrate the life of the deceased matriarch, who died on April 8, 2026, at the age of 95.

The ceremony, which had the atmosphere of a Christian carnival, featured gospel ren-

ditions, dancing, tributes and prayers, as mass choirs ministered throughout the night.

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa, paid glowing tributes to his late mother on behalf of the family, appreciating guests for their support and solidarity.

Clerics from different Christian denominations attended the event, alongside political office holders, civil servants, business leaders, members of the armed forces, lawmakers, judges and associates of the Idahosa family.

Reverend Felix Omobude opened the service with prayers, asking for the presence of Jesus Christ to fill the gathering, while the choir of the Christ Apostolic Church of God Mission

(CACGM), the home church of the deceased, led worship sessions in Edo dialect.

A documentary presentation highlighting the life and times of Madam Esther Idahosa was also showcased at the event.

Former Edo State Governor and Senator representing Edo North, Adams Oshiomhole, in his goodwill message, urged the family not to mourn like unbelievers, noting that the deceased lived a fulfilled life and witnessed her son become deputy governor of Edo State.

"Though her death brings mixed feelings, she lived long enough to witness the success of her children. May the family continue to be guided by love and unity," he said.



Benue State Deputy Governor, Barr. Dr. Samuel Ode (left); Akwa Ibom State Deputy Governor, Senator (Dr.) Akon Eyakenyi (2nd left); host, Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (2nd right); and Bayelsa State Deputy Governor, Dr. Peter Akpe, during the reception hosted by the children of late Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa, Mother of Edo State Deputy Governor in Benin City

# Electricity consumers decry deteriorating power situation

**ABUJA**

Many residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), have decried the deteriorating power situation in spite of Federal Government's intervention.

The consumers residing in Kuje, Lugbe, Kurudu and Zuba, spoke to newsmen in Abuja on Sunday.

They said that the Federal Government had spent a lot of money trying to fix electricity

but to no avail.

Mrs Caroline Uneru, residing in Kuje expressed concern over the situation, adding "everyday, we hear that government has put in billions into the power sector, yet there is no improvement.

"The money we are hearing about that is invested into the power sector what is it used for, government should set up an audit committee to look into the issue as this is a very serious problem," she said.

Mr Stephen Adelaja, resident in Lugbe said that the amount that had expended in the sector was enough to give consumers 24 hours electricity without interruption.

According to him, the situation keeps deteriorating every day without improvement.

"On my part, I feel government should find a way of looking at the problem and

proffer solution to it rather than putting in more money without commensurate result," he said.

Mr Godwin Olapa, also residing in Lugbe said that the power situation in the country was worrisome.

Olapa said that in spite of the funds that goes into the sector, there was no improvement in electricity.

He said that government should find a lasting solution to epileptic power situation for improved economy.

Mrs Akugbe Odigie, resident in Kurudu said that the power situation in her area had not improved as they could not boast of electricity for up to five hours in a day.

Odigie urged the government to not just put more

money into the sector, it should ensure that the funds were properly utilised.

Mrs Ejoro Umokoro, who resides in Kubwa, said that government should do everything possible to monitor the activities of the sector instead of putting in more money.

Umokoro said that electricity in her area had not improved as they could not boast

## Army arrests terror suspects, recovers arms in Kaduna, Abia operations

**ABUJA**

Troops of the Nigerian Army have arrested two suspected criminals and recovered arms and other incriminating items in separate operations in Kaduna and Abia states.

The operations were conducted under the Joint Task Forces of North West and South East Operations FANSAN YAMMA, and UDO KA, respectively as part of ongoing efforts to curb insecurity.

Operational report made available to newsmen said that troops of 2 Battalion deployed at Forward Operating Base Dogon Dawa arrested a 32-year-old suspect, Ibrahim Adamu, during a snap roadblock at Damari in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State.

It revealed that items such as an AK-47 magazine, three mobile phones and substances sus-

pected to be Indian hemp, were recovered from the suspects.

The report added that preliminary analysis of the suspect's phone revealed photographs linking him to armed groups, including images of him in military camouflage holding a machine gun.

"In a separate operation, troops of 14 Brigade under Operation UDO KA arrested a 22-year-old suspect, Ifeanyi Ezebuio, in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia.

"He was found in possession of a foreign-made Ruger pistol, which he claimed belonged to his late father.

"Both suspects and recovered items are in military custody for further investigation," it said

The Nigerian Army said the operations underscored its commitment to denying criminal elements freedom of action and ensuring the safety of citizens.

It reaffirmed its resolve to sustain aggressive operations against all forms of insecurity across the country.



### NATIONWIDE BASELINE STUDY:

Special Assistant to the Minister of Livestock Development, Prof. Eustace Iyayi (R), and Functioning Permanent Secretary, Edo State Ministry of Livestock Development, Dr Icomiare Adebudo, during the nationwide baseline study to establish a credible, evidence-based foundation for its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to support data-driven growth in Nigeria's livestock sector, in Edo State at the weekend.

## Police get more patrol vehicles to secure coastal highway

**LAGOS**

The Federal Government has handed over three patrol vehicles to the Nigeria Police Force to strengthen security and curb vandalism on Section One of the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway.

The vehicles were presented by the Federal Controller of Works in Lagos, Mr Olufemi Dare, to the Assistant Inspector-General of Police in charge of Zone 2, Mr Olohundare Jimohvat the weekend.

Zone 2 of the Nigeria Police Force covers Lagos and Ogun states.

Dare said the gesture was in response to increasing cases of theft of steel fences and other materials installed on the highway.

He said the Minister of Works, Sen. Dave Umahi, was concerned about activities of vandals on the highway and had directed procurement of additional patrol vehicles to secure the road.

"We have had several meetings with the police on the need to strengthen security on the La-

gos-Calabar Coastal Highway, particularly Section One.

"The honourable minister is pained by reports of theft of steel fences and other construction materials on the road.

"That is why we are handing over these three patrol vehicles to support police operations and ensure that activities of vandals are brought to a halt," Dare said.

He expressed confidence that the vehicles would be deployed effectively to protect the infrastructure.

Receiving the vehicles, Jimoh commended Umahi for continued support to the police in safeguarding federal infrastructure.

He recalled that the Federal Ministry of Works had donated two specially-modified patrol vehicles and a surveillance control centre for monitoring the Third Mainland Bridge.

"This is not the first time the honourable minister has supported the police.

"Late last year, he provided two patrol vehicles and a multi-million-naira surveillance centre for the Third Mainland Bridge."

## Navy recovers 1,600 litres of illegally refined diesel in Rivers

**ABUJA**

The Nigerian Navy has recovered about 1,600 litres of suspected illegally refined Automotive Gas Oil (AGO) during an operation in Rivers.

This is contained in a statement by the Director of Naval Information, Navy Capt. Abiodun Folorunsho, on Sunday in

Abuja.

Folorunsho said the recovery was made under Operation DELTA SENTINEL by personnel of Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS) SOROH following intelligence on illegal refining activities.

He said the operation took place in Okolomade Community, Abua-Odual Local Government Area of Rivers, near the border with Bayelsa.

Folorunsho said the Anti-Crude Oil Theft team deployed to the Orashi Forest area, where aerial surveillance using an unmanned system led to the discovery of concealed sacks suspected to contain illegally refined AGO.

He said troops recovered 16 sacks containing about 100 litres each, totalling approximately 1,600 litres of the product.

According to him, the suspects fled on sighting naval

personnel, while the recovered items were handled in line with operational procedures.

He said the operation underscored its commitment to dismantling illegal refining networks and curbing crude oil theft in the Niger Delta.

Folorunsho reiterated that there would be no safe haven for economic saboteurs, as sustained operations continue across the nation's waterways and creeks.

## Food: Lagos residents lament low purchasing power

**LAGOS**

Some Lagos State residents have lamented the low purchasing power of the masses in spite of the drop in some food prices in the state.

The residents spoke to our correspondent in separate interviews on Sunday in Lagos.

They noted that in spite of the drop in some food prices, the majority of the masses can barely afford the costs due to low purchasing power.

Dr Dorka Ike, a medical practitioner and resident of the Surulere area of the state, said though some food prices have been stable for a while, a few residents can barely afford to feed.

"We cannot categorically say food items are exorbitant currently except for a few produce that are out of stock.

"Even the price of garri and some other food items has dropped. We used to buy a paint bucket of garri at N2,000 or N3,000 but now the same quantity is sold at N1,200 to N1,500.

"The problem is that most Nigerians have low purchasing power to procure these food items.

"Some Nigerians have cut down on food expenses due to low purchasing power. The cost of transportation is tearing deep into their pockets," Ike said.

On her part, Mrs Eugenia Uloma, a resident of the

Dopemu area of the state, said some food items are expensive while others are not.

"Food items like beef, chicken, fish and even tomatoes and pepper are actually on the high side.

"We really can't tell what is going on but we make do of what we have to buy the proteins we can afford.

"Even eggs have been on a consistent high since last year and currently, we cannot get a good crate of eggs for less than N6,000.

"However, prices of other staples like rice, beans, corn and garri have been considerably fair and stable since the beginning of the year.

"A bag of rice is still between N50,000 to N55,000. Even the

price of beans has been stable despite being out of stock.

"It's just that people don't have readily available resources to buy these items, the cost of living is increasing but salaries are not increasing.

Another resident of Gbagada area of the state, Mrs Cordelia Esho, only lamented over the cost of tomatoes and pepper as being overpriced.

"I was surprised when the price of garri dropped to N1,500 for a paint bucket, earlier this year I bought the same quantity of N3,000.

"But the price of tomatoes has tripled its price. I don't think I will stick enough for the month due to the price increment."

## NEWS

# Reps Speaker Abbas declares for 2027 re-election bid

## ZARIA (KADUNA)

Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abbas Tajudeen, has declared his intention to seek re-election in 2027.

Tajudeen made the declaration at a grand rally held at Filin

Mallawa Eid Ground in Zaria, Kaduna State at the weekend.

The event began with a solidarity walk from Babban Dodo through Zaria city to the rally venue.

Top government officials, lawmakers, APC leaders, traditional rulers and business

leaders attended the gathering.

Speaking at the rally, Tajudeen said his decision was driven by performance, service and measurable achievements.

"This declaration is not based on promises alone. It is based on work and results.

"It is also based on a record

that our people can see and verify," he said.

He thanked President Bola Tinubu for what he described as courageous leadership and reform-driven governance.

Tajudeen also praised Gov. Uba Sani for promoting peace, unity and development across

Kaduna State.

He appreciated the support of the All Progressives Congress, traditional rulers, religious leaders, youths and women.

According to him, before becoming Speaker, he sponsored 74 bills in the National Assembly.

He said 21 of the bills were signed into law, reflecting his legislative commitment.

Tajudeen said thousands benefited from his agricultural and economic empowerment programmes across the constituency.

He said tractors, fertilisers, vehicles, tricycles and motorcycles were distributed to support livelihoods.

He added that about 2,400 people received financial support for businesses and household income.

Tajudeen said he facilitated the N80 billion Education City project in Zaria, adding that about 30,000 students benefited from a N5 billion scholarship scheme.

He said schools across the constituency were rehabilitated to improve learning conditions.

On healthcare, Tajudeen said

several primary healthcare centres were facilitated in different communities, also highlighting the inauguration of a 100-bed specialist hospital in Zaria.

Reviewing the 10th House of Rep under his leadership, Tajudeen said more than 2,000 bills were introduced within two years.

He added that over 180 bills were passed, while more than 50 received presidential assent.

Tajudeen urged constituents to support his re-election bid for continuity in development.

"This is not the time for uncertainty. This is not the time for experiments. This is the time to consolidate the progress we have made together," he said.

He pledged to prioritise youth empowerment, education, healthcare, infrastructure and economic growth if re-elected.

In his remarks, Governor Sani urged voters to support Tajudeen and the APC in 2027.

Represented by Secretary to Kaduna State Government, Alhaji Abdulkadir Mayere, the governor said the party deserved continued support from the electorate.



## FORUM ON ATTACKS ON THE MEDIA:

Executive Director, International Press Centre (IPC), Mr Lanre Arogundade (5th R); Executive Director, CEMESCO, Dr Akin Akingbulu (5th L); National President, Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Comrade Alhassan Yahya (3rd L); Facilitator, Prof. Tunde Akanni (2nd L); another facilitator, Mr Oloja Martin (3rd R); Representative of the Director-General, National Orientation Agency (NOA), Dr Olukemi Afolayan (4th R); media professionals and other stakeholders, during a Forum on attacks on media professional and strengthening Media Protection held in Abuja.

## FRSC has zero tolerance for bribe taking —Sector Commander

The Sector Commander, Federal Road Safety Corps, (FRSC) Edo State Command, Corps Commander Preye Bedford has stated that the agency has zero tolerance for bribery and corruption.

Bedford said also that strict disciplinary measures are applied while dealing with corruption related matters involving erring staff members, a potent and effective internal mechanism that puts everyone in check.

Corps Commander Bedford spoke while receiving the management of The Groove Watch Magazine who paid him a courtesy visit in his office in Benin City.

"We have institutionally established disciplinary measures for dealing with erring staff because we have rules and regulations. If an officer is found violating the rule of engagement with the public, that officer will

be charged accordingly.

"I can assure you that the easiest way for an officer to cause his own sack from Road Safety job is through bribe taking, because we do not play with bribery and extortion.

Bedford however, said that the command has different teams of officers deployed for purposes of monitoring officers on duty on the highways, adding that proper check mechanisms are applied to prevent abuse and ensure effective service delivery.

A violation despite all of these safety valves to ensure good conduct amongst personnel, is treated with the strictest application of the rules of engagement in the fairest and upright manner devoid of victimization.

He cautioned drivers who engage in over speeding, stating that such acts often lead to crashes on our highways and

within cities.

"That is why from time to time we move into parks to talk to drivers about the dangers associated with it. We also continue with our campaigns to churches, mosques, markets, because when there are crashes, they affect a lot of persons, including families, friends and infrastructure".

He decried a common attitude of impatience among most commercial drivers hile driving, advising them to observe road safety regulations through respect for other road users including the pedestrians. He added that most of the traffic jams on our roads are caused by impatience among drivers.

He disclosed that as part of his command's efforts at sensitizing the public on safe driving, it has gone into partnership with the West Africa Road Safety Organization in educating road users, including trans-

porters, market unions, keke drivers and other stakeholders to make Nigeria roads safer.

The state Sector Commander said some of their experiences in road safety management informed officers' regular engagement with drivers at motor parks, including holding town hall meetings with different stakeholders.

He expressed regrets that most of the drivers do not turn up for such gatherings, a situation he said had compelled the agency to pass such enlightenment information through the various media outfits to reach the public.

He disclosed that drivers have no reason to be scared of the Road Safety Corps simply because they want to check their licenses. Ordinarily he explained, everyone on steering should have a valid driver's license, emphasizing that safety is a shared responsibility.

## Rising drug costs push Benin residents to native remedies

### BENIN CITY

Residents of Benin City, Edo State, have decried rising costs of pharmaceuticals in Nigeria, saying the situation now forces many people to abandon prescribed medications, patronise native remedies, or purchase incomplete drug dosages.

The residents expressed frustration during interviews with newsmen on Sunday, lamenting that worsening economic conditions had negatively affected access to proper healthcare and medical treatment across communities nationwide.

Increasing drug prices, consultation charges, and laboratory fees have made healthcare services largely unaffordable for many low-income earners struggling to survive the economic hardship.

At Best Care Pharmacy in the New Lagos Road area, Mrs Rose Imadiyi became emotional while explaining how financial difficulties prevented her from purchasing prescribed medications after recently falling ill in Benin City.

Imadiyi said the prescribed drugs cost about N7,000, while she had only N4,000 available for feeding and healthcare expenses.

"I chose my children over drugs because they still need to eat.

"I could not spend all the money on medication and leave nothing for food," Imadiyi added, emphasising that rising healthcare costs had forced many struggling families to make painful decisions between treatment and feeding needs.

A pharmacist, Dr Nkem Daniella Ogbidi-Emmanuel, attributed the growing trend to

worsening economic conditions, saying many patients now prioritised feeding above healthcare because they lacked resources required to meet rising medical expenses nationwide.

"A lot of people do not have the wherewithal to cater for their health needs because of the economic situation of the country today," Ogbidi-Emmanuel said while speaking on challenges facing patients recently.

"Many of them believe that if they can eat well, they can manage their illnesses," she said, adding that some people now regarded proper medical care as a luxury because of rising healthcare expenses.

"Some even see proper medical care as a luxury because apart from drugs, they have to pay consultation fees and for laboratory investigations," the healthcare provider said.

Ogbidi-Emmanuel said that some patients now requested medications without undergoing proper medical tests in efforts to reduce treatment costs, warning that such practices remained dangerous and could worsen underlying health conditions significantly nationwide.

"Some patients will say, 'Doctor, just give me medicine,' because they cannot afford tests for malaria, typhoid or other infections," she said while describing the growing desperation among struggling patients across the country.

"Even when medications are prescribed, many cannot afford to buy the complete dosage because drugs are not subsidised in Nigeria," Ogbidi-Emmanuel said while calling for improved healthcare support systems and government intervention nationwide.

## IPI reinforces mandate on press freedom protection

### ABUJA

Mr Musikilu Mojeed, the President of the International Press Institute (IPI) Nigeria, has reaffirmed the institute's mandate to protect press freedom in Nigeria.

Mojeed spoke in an interview on the sidelines of the opening of the IPI Nigeria Press Freedom Hub in Abuja.

He noted that in its 70 years of existence, IPI had been non-partisan and had contin-

ued to speak for independent journalism and the safety of journalists.

He said IPI's commitment to training dated back to 1972 when it founded the Nigeria Institute of Journalism (NIJ).

"The core mandate of IPI every single day is to protect journalists, protect free speech, protect press freedom, and ensure that journalists all over the world are safe," he said.

"Journalists in this country should be confident that this is a safe place for them.

"If every other thing fails, this institute will not fail here," he said.

He noted that with support from partners like the MacArthur Foundation, the institute had consistently trained journalists on their rights, safety and ethical journalism.

He explained that the new hub would create a safe space for journalists to document complaints and seek help for psychological issues.

"Once you operate by those codes, if there is a problem, we will come to your aid.

"We want to be sure that you are just operating in line with global best practices and in line with the code of our practice of journalism," he said.

He clarified that IPI's defence had always been based on moral strength and professional conduct rather than mere certification, warning against acts like blackmail.

"As long as you are ethical, whether you are a blogger or you are a journalist or you are an ordinary Nigerian, we will try our best for you," he said.

# NDLEA uncovers alleged drug stash mansion in Lagos, arrests 3 PWDs for drug trafficking in Anambra

## LAGOS

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) says it uncovered a mansion in the Lekki area of Lagos allegedly used as a stash house for illicit drugs.

The agency's spokesman, Mr Femi Babafemi, disclosed this in a statement on Sunday.

Babafemi said operatives of the agency's Special Operations Unit raided the mansion at 36 African Lane, Lekki Phase 1, on Friday and recovered several items.

It also said that it has arrested three persons with disability (PWD) for drug trafficking during interdiction operations in parts of Anambra and Kwara.

"The agency recovered 4,000 parcels of Loud, a strong strain of imported cannabis, weighing 2,326kg and valued at more than N5.8 billion.

"Two Mercedes-Benz buses and various designer sachets

used for packaging the drugs for retail distribution were also recovered during the operation," he said.

Babafemi said NDLEA operatives, in a separate operation on Wednesday, stormed a makeshift skuchies production factory in the Ijora Badia area of Lagos.

He said two suspects were arrested at the scene.

According to him, the suspects were caught cooking cannabis and mixing it with other illicit substances.

Babafemi said officers recovered 270 litres of already produced kuchies and 106g of Tramadol 225mg from the factory.

He said the operations were part of ongoing efforts to dismantle drug trafficking networks and curb the production and distribution of illicit substances across the country.

In a related development, the NDLEA has arrested three persons with disability (PWD)

for ing

On the arrest of the PWDs drug traffickers during interdiction operations in parts of Anambra and Kwara, Babafemi said that based on credible intelligence, one of the suspects

was on May 6, traced to Akpaka Forest, Onitsha where he was found with 250 Grammes of skunk in retail sachets.

He said that in a different raid at Ogbunike area of the state, NDLEA officers on May

7, arrested another PWD with 160.3 Grammes of Tramadol 225mg and 100mg.

He said that 80 suspected pills of Diazepam, 38.23 Grammes of suspected Exol 5 and 176.93 Grammes of suspected Skunk were also recovered during the operation.

"In Kwara, NDLEA operatives on patrol along Bode Saadu on

Friday, intercepted a commercial vehicle and in the course of a search, one of the passengers, a PWD was found with 6.3 Kilo Grammes of skunk concealed in a brown school bag," he said.

He added that another suspect was arrested with 129 Kilo Grammes of suspected skunk at Nyanya Karu, Nasarawa State on May 4.



## NEWS CONFERENCE:

Vehicle plate numbers recovered from vehicle snatching syndicates displayed by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) after a news conference in Abuja at the weekend.

## Woman drags husband to court accusing him of cheating

### ABUJA

A housewife, Roselyn Oche has dragged her husband, Attah, before a Customary Court in Garki, accusing him of being a philanderer.

Oche, who resides in Garki, Abuja made the allegation in a divorce petition she filed against her husband in court.

"My husband has had extramarital affairs with at least ten women during the pendency of our marriage, and I cannot reasonably be expected to continue living with him." She said

She told the court that as a

result of the distraction, her husband neglects his responsibilities towards their children.

She also told the court that her husband was putting her through extreme emotional manipulation.

She begged the court to grant her prayers for divorce, grant her custody of the children and order her husband to provide the upkeep for the children.

In response, the respondent who is a civil servant denied all the allegations as averred by the petitioner.

The presiding judge, Mr Festus Enomhose, adjourned the case until May 11, for hearing.

## Indecent dressing: Kebbi Hisbah frees 2 women, urges modesty

### BIRNIN KEBBI

The Kebbi Hisbah Board has released two women arrested for alleged indecent dressing in the Badariya area of Birnin Kebbi, after counseling them on the importance of modesty.

The Director of the Board, Surajo Usman, confirmed this in a statement issued to journalists on Sunday in Birnin Kebbi.

Usman said the board received complaints on Friday, May 8, from Badariya residents about women allegedly dressing inappropriately while staying in a house in the area.

"According to the residents, the women sometimes came outside the house in such attire, which raised concern in the community," he said.

He said Hisbah officers were deployed to investigate the report and verify the allegations,

adding that during the operation, two women suspected of involvement were arrested.

"During interrogation, the women admitted to the incident but said they had no malicious intent.

"They explained that extreme heat had prompted them to wear the clothing for relief and ventilation," he said.

Usman added that the women expressed remorse and pledged not to repeat the act.

"The Hisbah board counseled them on upholding morality, modesty, and respect for religious and community values, including wearing decent clothing even at home," he said.

The women were released and advised to conduct themselves decently going forward.

Usman urged the public to promote good moral conduct and cooperate with authorities to maintain peace and moral discipline in the community.

## Troops eliminate 3 suspected bandits in Katsina ambush, recover AK-4

### KATSINA

Troops of the 17 Brigade, Nigerian Army, have neutralised three suspected bandits during a successful ambush operation in Dutsin-Ma Local Government Area of Katsina State.

The Acting Assistant Director, Army Public Relations, 17

Brigade, Capt. Abayomi Adisa, disclosed this in a statement issued on Sunday in Katsina.

According to him, the operation, conducted by troops deployed at the Forward Operating Base (FOB) FUDMA, targeted terrorists fleeing sustained military offensives in the Matazu general area.

He said that the troops had

taken strategic blocking positions along the Turare-Kitiba-wa-Kuka-Mai Damusa Road when the fleeing criminals ran into the ambush at about 9:40 p.m. on Friday.

"During the encounter, the troops recovered one AK-47 rifle, a magazine loaded with three rounds of ammunition, one motorcycle, three cutlasses, assorted charms and a cash sum of N3,500.

Adisa further explained that

the operation formed part of ongoing offensives against terrorists and other criminal elements terrorising the state.

He said troops had continued to intensify operations aimed at restoring security across Katsina and its neighbouring communities.

The army spokesperson also urged residents to support security agencies with credible intelligence to assist ongoing efforts to rid the state of criminals.

## Ex-Accountant-General joins guber race, vows to implement people's budget

### AKWANGA (NASARAWA)

Dr Zakka Yakubu, a former Accountant-General of Nasarawa State, has declared his intention to contest the 2027 governorship election, pledging to run an inclusive administration anchored on a "people's budget" if elected.

Yakubu made the declaration on Sunday during a mega rally in Akwanga Local Government Area, where he formally announced his intention to contest the governorship ticket of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

A people's budget is a budgeting process designed to incorporate direct input from citizens to ensure government spending reflects the actual needs of the people.

According to Yakubu, his administration would ensure that

communities determine their most pressing needs before projects are captured in the budget.

"People's budget means that councillors will go to their wards and ask the people what they want and it will form part of the budget.

"Members of the House of Assembly will also engage their constituencies to know their priorities.

"If people need support in the health sector and the government is busy constructing roads, then there is a mismatch. Some communities need schools and government may be doing something entirely different. That is not good," he said.

Yakubu said that his administration would avoid embarking on "white elephant projects" and instead focus on interventions that directly improve the welfare of citizens.

"When you know the prob-

lems of the people, you will solve them according to what they want. This type of budget brings faster development because it focuses on the exact needs of the people," he added.

Yakubu thanked his supporters for their confidence in him and promised to prioritise community-driven development projects.

The former accountant-general also expressed concern that despite increased allocations to states and local governments following the removal of fuel subsidy, many residents were still living in poverty.

He urged citizens to hold public office holders accountable for the utilisation of government allocations.

"Why are people blaming President Bola Tinubu when he has done a lot for states and local governments? When I come on board, we will change

everything.

"You have your state governors and local government chairmen. Ask them what they are doing with the huge allocations they are receiving now," he said.

Yakubu further assured supporters that he possessed the experience and capacity to provide effective leadership for the state, citing his years of service as Accountant-General, Permanent Secretary, and his experience in both public and private sector.

He pledged to invest heavily in education and agriculture, strengthen healthcare delivery, empower youths through skills acquisition programmes, and support women economically.

He also promised to improve on the state's internally generated revenue and maximise Nasarawa's proximity to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, for economic growth."

## NEWS

## JUDICIARY

# Kano Justice Ministry sacks state counsel over alleged forgery, misconduct

KANO

The Kano State Ministry of Justice has dismissed State Counsel Mustapha Nura-Muhammad over alleged forgery, abuse of office, and gross professional misconduct.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Senior Special Assistant on Media to the state Attorney General and

Commissioner for Justice, Dr Abubakar Tijjani-Ibrahim, in Kano.

The statement said the dismissal was approved by the Kano State Civil Service Commission on April 1, following recommendations by the Senior Staff Promotion and Disciplinary Committee.

"Investigations revealed that the counsel, employed in 2024,

allegedly forged the names and signatures of senior legal officers to issue unauthorised and misleading legal advice in criminal cases pending before the courts.

"One case involving Commissioner of Police v. Umar Abubakar, pending before the Chief Magistrate's Court, Gyadi-Gyadi, over alleged armed robbery.

"Findings show that the of-

ficer allegedly forged the name and signature of F.T. Ahmad to issue purported legal advice aimed at implicating an individual unconnected to the matter, leading to the person's arrest and detention," it stated.

It added that in another case, State v. Tukur Lawan and two others, involving alleged armed robbery and kidnapping, the counsel allegedly forged the name and signature of B.A. Ahmad, a Chief State Counsel, to unlawfully termi-

nate the proceedings.

The statement said the suspect in that case, who had earlier been in detention, was later rearrested.

It noted that: "The ministry set up an internal disciplinary committee to investigate the matter and gave the officer a fair hearing in line with civil service procedures.

"The officer was queried and later suspended pending the outcome of disciplinary proceedings.

"The matter was subsequently referred to the Senior Staff Promotion and Disciplinary Committee, which recommended his dismissal for serious misconduct under Section 4, Rule 04406 of the Kano State Civil Service Rules.

"The action aligns with the commitment of Governor Abba Kabir-Yusuf's administration to strengthen accountability, disci-

pline, transparency, and professionalism in the public service and justice sector."

Reacting to the development, the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Abdulkarim Kabiru-Maude, SAN, said the ministry would not tolerate acts that undermine the integrity of the justice system.

"Legal practitioners, especially those entrusted with public responsibility, must uphold the highest standards of ethics, honesty, and professionalism.

"This administration remains resolute in sanitising the justice sector and ensuring that anyone found wanting faces the full consequences of the law.

"The ministry has begun steps to refer the matter to the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee (LPDC) for professional sanctions and will also pursue criminal prosecution," he said.



25TH ANNIVERSARY OF NECO:

Representative of the Vice President, Bashir Maidugu (M); Chairman, Niger State Council of Traditional Rulers, Dr Yahaya Abubakar (L); Chairman, Governing Board of National Examinations Council (NECO), Prof. Modupe Adelabu (2nd L); Registrar, National Examination Council (NECO), Prof. Dantani Wushishi (4th R), and others, during the unveiling of a book to mark 25th anniversary of NECO in Abuja at the weekend

## Ondo anti-land grabbing law 'll not spare anyone —Attorney general

AKURE

The Ondo State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Kayode Ajulo, has declared that the state's anti-land grabbing law will be enforced without fear or favour.

He insisted that no individual, regardless of status, influence, or position, will be shielded from prosecution.

Ajulo, who also chairs the state Anti-Land Grabbing Task Force, made the assertion while reacting to the ongoing trial of Oba David Okunato and others over alleged

land grabbing offences.

The Oba and other defendants were last Thursday remanded at the Olokuta Correctional Centre by an Akure Magistrates' Court, directing that Okunato would remain in custody, pending the perfection of their bail conditions.

In a statement at the weekend, in Akure, Ajulo said the state government would sustain its crackdown on land grabbers until sanity is fully restored to land administration across Ondo state.

He warned that individuals involved in illegal land transactions, forceful takeover of prop-

erty, fraudulent resale of land, and acts capable of triggering communal unrest would face the full weight of the law.

According to him, the menace of land grabbing poses a serious threat to investment and economic development in the state.

"I must tell you that the issue of land grabbing is capable of driving away investors, especially those who genuinely intend to invest in Ondo state.

"We cannot fold our arms and allow criminal elements to destroy the investment climate and peaceful coexistence in our dear state."

Ajulo stressed that the government was sending a "strong and unmistakable message"

that the era of impunity in land dealings had come to an end.

"We are determined to restore confidence in land transactions in Ondo state and reinforce public trust in the government's commitment to securing lives, investments, and property rights," he added.

The commissioner also commended Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa, describing his stance against land grabbing as bold and uncompromising.

According to Ajulo, the governor has made it clear that no individual, no matter how highly placed, would be allowed to undermine the peace, economic growth, and development of the state through illegal land activities.

## Federal High Court CJ approves posting for newly appointed judges

ABUJA

The Chief Judge (CJ), Federal High Court, Justice John Tsoho, has approved new posting schedule for judges, who were recently appointed after the National Judicial Council (NJC)'s recommendations.

This was contained in a statement issued by Dr Catherine-Oby Christopher, the Director of Information of the court in Abuja, and directed all affected judges to report at their respective new stations not later than May 13.

"Following the recent appointment of 14 new judges and the reposting of three existing judges of the Federal High Court, the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Justice John Tsoho, has approved and released a new posting schedule for judges of the Court to various judicial divisions across the country."

Justice Hassan Dikko was

posted to Gusau division, Zamfara; Justice Salim Olasupo Ibrahim and Justice Onah Chigozie Sergius, Abuja division; and Justice Sulaiman Amida Hassan, Osogbo division in Osun.

Justice Muhammad Saidu was posted to Minna division, Niger State; Justice Igboko Conchita, Akure, Ondo State; Justice Onuegbu Angela, Yenagoa division, Bayelsa; and Justice Galumje Edingah, Abakaliki division in Ebonyi.

Justice Ibrahim Eneabo is to report in Gombe division; Justice Abubakar Usman, Ado-Ekiti division, Ekiti; Justice Salihu Yunusa, Damaturu, Yobe; and Justice Ikpeme Basesey, Uyo in Akwa Ibom.

The CJ equally posted Justice Shehu Adamu to Maiduguri division, Borno; Justice Mohammed Buba, Dutse, Jigawa; Justice Binjin-Eigegebe Nendelmmu Judith, Lokoja in Kogi while Justice Usoro Uduak and Justice Nwoye Osinachi Donatus are to report at Lagos division.

## EFCC witness denies business dealings with ex-Kogi governor

ABUJA

An Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) witness, Lamalan Jibrin, has said he had no business dealings on any property with former Kogi Governor, Yahaya Bello.

Jibrin, who is the 15th prosecution witness in the trial of Bello and co-defendants, is a lawyer with the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA).

The witness was cross-examined by Bello's counsel, Abdullahi Yahaya, SAN.

Bello is charged alongside Umar Shuaibu Oricha and Ab-

dulsalam Hudu with 16 counts bordering on breach of trust.

They were alleged to have committed criminal breach of trust in respect of the sum of N110,446,470,089, among others.

Bello and his co-defendants, however, pleaded not guilty to the charge.

Jibrin also told the court that he never got instructions from any of the three defendants.

The witness admitted that he had earlier testified as the fifth prosecution witness at the Federal High Court in the suit matter, "FHC/ABJ/CR/550/2022" before Justice James Omotosho, where he

denied any dealings with the former governor.

He agreed that throughout the course of the transaction he never met any of the three defendants present in court.

The witness said he received instruction to be part of the transaction regarding the property, located at No. 35, Danube Street, Maitama, through one Shehu Bala.

Jibrin also admitted that he was not present when the payment for the property was made, adding that one Yakubu Haruna was the one who told him what was paid.

"So, because you were not there, you wouldn't know in what

currency the payment was made," Yahaya (Bello's counsel) asked.

"Yes, I was told," the witness responded.

Yahaya asked further that everything he knew about the currency was what he was told.

"Yes," the witness responded.

During his evidence in chief by the prosecution counsel, Kemi Pinheiro, SAN, the witness told the court how he was engaged in the documentation of the property.

He said, sometime in January 2021, he received a call from Bala, whom he said was his friend, that some agents introduced the property before the court for sale.

## Man, 48, docked over alleged N9.5m cement fraud

IBADAN

A 48-year-old man, Ayodeji Ayegoro, has appeared before an Iyaganku Chief Magistrates' Court, Ibadan, charged with defrauding a cement dealer of N9.5 million.

Ayegoro, whose address was not provided, is facing a three-count charge of conspiracy, fraud and stealing.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The Prosecutor, ASP Foluke Adedosu, told the court that the defendant committed the offences with others still at large on August 15, 2024, at No 4, Oluwatofarati St., Olunde, Ibadan.

Adedosu alleged that the defendant collected the N9.5 million from the complainant, Alhaji Yusuf Akinloye, on the pretext that he would supply him some bags of cement, which he failed to do.

She alleged that the defendant converted the money to his personal use.

Adedosu said that the offences contravened provisions of Sections 383 and 516 of the Criminal Law of Oyo State, 2000.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs A. T Oyediji, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N5million with two sureties in like sum and adjourned the case until June 16 for mention.

## Countries airlift nationals evacuated from virus-hit cruise ship

The first passengers evacuated from a hantavirus-stricken cruise ship docked near Spain's Canary Islands have been flown home.

Fourteen Spanish nationals on the chartered flight from Tenerife face mandatory quarantine at a military hospital in the capital, Madrid. They were followed by French nationals taken to Paris and Britons taken to Manchester.

Staff involved in the operation in Tenerife pulled white hazmat suits over the evacuees' clothes and hosed them down on the airport tarmac.

Three people have died in the outbreak on the Dutch vessel MV Hondius, including two who were confirmed to have had hantavirus.

Flights for Turkish, Irish and US citizens are also planned for Sunday, with other countries also preparing repatriation

flights.

Spain's Health Minister Mónica García said the operation was "proceeding normally" and that all passengers aboard the MV Hondius were asymptomatic.

The MV Hondius pulled into the port of Granadilla before dawn on Sunday, a month after the first of its passenger died.

The sun rose to reveal it had anchored offshore, with military police boats on patrol and a major operation unfolding on land to help more than 100 passengers and crew disembark.

At about 07:00 local time (06:00 GMT), medical teams went aboard to check everyone for signs of the virus.

Passengers could be seen from afar wandering around on the deck of the ship, or at the windows, all in white medical face masks, as the first evacuations took place on Sunday morning.

Several sat socially distanced on the first evacuation boat, filming and taking photos as they approached land, where they were met by officials in white protective suits.

While being couriered to the airport, some British passengers - clad in blue PPE - waved and gave thumbs up as they drove past the assembled media.

A plane bound for the Netherlands is expected to take 27 people, including Belgian, Greek, German and Argentine citizens.

Other flights are poised to depart after that, including to the US. The last evacuation flight is expected to leave for Australia on Monday.

The cruise passengers face having to self-isolate after leaving Tenerife, a gruelling prospect as the virus has an incubation period of up to nine weeks.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommend-

ed a 42-day quarantine period for the cruise passengers from their last exposure.

Passengers from the UK will be taken to an isolation facility where they will be kept for up to 72 hours. Medics will then assess whether they can isolate at home or at another suitable location based on their living arrangements.

There had been meticulous preparations to receive the ship, which is not permitted to reach shore: a security perimeter of one nautical mile was enforced around it as it approached the island.

Dozens of intensive care specialists were on stand-by at the Candelaria hospital in Tenerife in case anyone from the MV Hondius becomes seriously ill during the transfer. A strict isolation facility has one bed fully equipped to deal with infectious diseases, complete with testing kit and a ventilator.

## Lebanon says Israeli strikes killed 39

Thirty-nine people have been killed in another day of intense Israeli strikes in Lebanon, the country's health ministry said.

One Israeli strike on the southern town of Saksakiyeh killed at least seven people, including a child, the ministry said. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it had been targeting Lebanese armed group Hezbollah and was "aware of reports regarding harm to uninvolved civilians".

Israeli forces and Hezbollah have continued to trade fire since US President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire deal between the governments of Israel and Lebanon on 16 April.

Most of Israel's air strikes have hit southern Lebanon, with the military saying it is striking infrastructure and people linked to Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia and political party.

On Saturday, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported Israeli strikes across the south, including in Saksakiyeh.

The health ministry said that raid "resulted in an initial toll of seven martyrs, including a girl, and 15 wounded, including three children".

The IDF said it struck "Hezbollah terrorists operating from within a structure used for military purposes" in the area.

"Prior to the strike, steps

were taken to mitigate the risk of harm to civilians as much as possible, including the use of precise munitions and aerial surveillance," it said.

Details of the incident are under review, it added.

The Lebanese health ministry reported that another Israeli strike on a motorbike in Nabatieh hit "a Syrian national and his 12-year-old daughter".

"After they managed to move away from the site of the first strike, the drone attacked a second time," killing the father, the ministry said, adding the drone then targeted the girl "directly for a third time".

The girl was undergoing life-saving surgery, it added.

Meanwhile Hezbollah targeted northern Israel with a drone, which the Israeli military said wounded three soldiers.

According to Lebanon's health ministry, Israeli attacks have killed more than 120 people across the country in the last week, including women and children. The ministry does not distinguish combatants from civilians.

The Israeli military also occupies a strip of Lebanese land along the border, and officials say the aim is to create what they describe as a Hezbollah-free security zone to protect Israel's northern communities.



**EVACUATED FROM CRUISE SHIP:**

Passengers evacuated from hantavirus outbreak ship in Tenerife.

## Putin says he thinks Ukraine conflict 'coming to an end'

Russian President Vladimir Putin has suggested Russia's conflict with Ukraine could be drawing to a close.

Speaking after Saturday's scaled-back Victory Day military parade in Moscow, he said: "I think that the matter is coming to an end" - referring to the "special military operation" in Ukraine - while condemning Western support for Kyiv.

The parade - marking the Soviet victory in World War Two - lacked the usual display of tanks and missiles, as authorities feared Ukraine might target Red Square.

A US-brokered ceasefire reduced the danger of attacks and the parade passed off without incident. However Ukraine and

Russia later accused each other of violating the three-day truce.

Putin's comments came just hours after he used his annual Victory Day speech to justify the war.

In that speech he said Russia was fighting a "just" war and called Ukraine an "aggressive force" that was being "armed and supported by the whole bloc of Nato".

Later, when asked at a news conference about the West helping Ukraine, Putin said: "They (West) promised assistance and then began fuelling a confrontation with Russia that continues to this day. I think that the matter is coming to an end, but it is a serious matter."

Russian forces seized Crimea and parts of east-

ern Ukraine in 2014, then launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Putin said he would only meet Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky once a lasting peace deal was agreed to.

"A meeting in a third country is also possible, but only once final agreements have been reached on a peace treaty for a long-term historical perspective, to take part in this event and sign (treaty), but it must be a final step," he continued.

Putin said he had heard that Zelensky was ready to hold a personal meeting but added "this is not the first time we have heard such statements".

Putin said he would be willing to negotiate new security arrangements for Europe, and that his preferred negotiating partner would be Germany's former

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

The ex-chancellor is a long-standing friend of Putin, and controversial because of his work for Russian state-owned energy firms.

Last week European Council President António Costa said he believed there was "potential" for the EU to negotiate with Russia, and that Zelensky favoured such a move. Quoted by the Financial Times, Costa said he was consulting EU leaders on "what we need effectively to discuss with Russia when it comes to the right moment to do this".

As part of the US-led ceasefire deal over the weekend, Kyiv and Moscow agreed to a swap of 1,000 prisoners from each country. But Putin said on Saturday that Russia had not yet heard from Ukraine about any exchanges.

## Iran sends response to US proposals to end war

Iran says it has sent its response to US proposals to end the war.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said his country - which has served as mediator - had received the Iranian response but could not share any details. He did not say if the proposal has already been passed on to the US.

The US has not made details of its proposals public, either, but reports suggest they centre on a 14-point memorandum of understanding, which could lead to negotiations on Iran's nuclear ambitions.

A ceasefire meant to facilitate talks to end the war launched by the US and Israel in February has been largely observed, despite occasional exchanges of fire.

US news outlet Axios reported that the one-page, 14-point US memo, includes provisions such as a suspension on Iranian nuclear enrichment, the lifting of sanctions, and restoring free transit through the Strait of Hormuz.

It cited two US officials and two other sources - all unnamed - whom it described as briefed on the issues. These sources were reported as saying that many of the terms laid out in the memo would be contingent on a final agreement being reached.

The Iranian Isna news agency said Iran's response focuses on "ending the war and maritime security" in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has continued to block the waterway - leading to a rise in world oil prices.

The US, for its part, has been enforcing a blockade of Iranian ports to exert pressure on Tehran to agree to its terms - a move that has infuriated Iran.

On Sunday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian did not directly reference the proposal but said: "We will never bow our heads before the enemy, and if talk of dialogue or negotiation arises, it does not mean surrender or retreat."

US President Donald Trump this week predicted again that the war in Iran will be "over quickly" and said that most people "understand" his goal of ending Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium must be "taken out" before the war against Iran can be considered over.

"There's still enrichment sites that have to be dismantled," Netanyahu said in an excerpt of an interview due to air on CBS's '60 Minutes' show.

Earlier, Iran warned its neighbours about complying with US sanctions.

Military spokesman Mohammad Akraminia said vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz would face "severe consequences" if they did not co-operate with Tehran first, Irna news agency reported.

**NEWS****Foreign****Mali: Hundreds rally to show support for beleaguered army leader**

Hundreds of supporters of the Malian junta gathered at a stadium in the capital of Bamako on Saturday to reaffirm their support for Mali's transitional authorities.

They came at the call of the Malian junta, which has been in power since 2020 and is facing attacks from armed groups.

The renewed mobilization of supporters follows the coordinated attacks by armed groups last month, which left several people dead, including Malian Defense Minister Sadio Camara.

"The death of General Sadio Camara has deeply moved us and has not left us indifferent," said junta supporter Oumar Neité.

"We want to show the whole world that General Sadio may be gone, but there are hundreds of Sadio Camaras here. Mali is not dead, and it never will be," Neité added.

Mali was struck on April 26 by one of the biggest coordinated attacks on its army in Bamako and

several other cities by jihadis and rebels who seized several towns and military bases.

The Islamic militant group Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Azawad Liberation Front, a Tuareg-led separatist group, jointly launched the heaviest attack on the government since 2012, with the militants and rebels seizing several cities and towns, as well as military posts from the Malian military and its ally, the Russia-backed Africa Corps.

JNIM also announced a blockade of Bamako, set up roadblocks and said it was banning everyone from entering the city.

Mali has been ruled by a military junta that took power in a 2020 coup, promising to restore security amid a surge of extremist attacks. Since seizing the country, the junta turned to Russia as its new security partner, forcing traditional allies like France and a U.N. peacekeeping mission to leave.

**Benin opposition joins ruling coalition**

The opposition party that lost Benin's presidential election last month announced on Saturday that it was joining the ruling majority, two weeks before the inauguration of president-elect Romuald Wadagni.

The Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin (FCBE), which is considered a moderate party, was the only opposition group in the election running against the outgoing majority.

FCBE candidate Paul Hounkpe, who has since left the party, won 5.95 percent of the vote, making Wadagni the clear winner.

The country's main opposition force, the Democrats, was excluded from the presidential race after failing to secure enough backing.

The opposition in Benin has been weakened in recent years after being seen as a beacon of democracy in west Africa.

After 10 years in opposition, the FCBE announced on Saturday that it was joining the presidential bloc -- the Progressive Union for Renewal (UPR) and

the Republican Bloc (BR).

FCBE leaders justified the move due to its presidential result and its defeat in parliamentary elections, where it failed to obtain a single seat.

They also said they wanted to contribute "to the development of the country".

"The people have made their choice and the choice of the people is binding on us," said Yaya Garba, one of the party's leaders.

Leaders also congratulated outgoing President Patrice Talon for his two terms in office and for the "calm" organisation of the elections.

Wadagni's inauguration is due on May 24.

Before the April 12 presidential election, the ruling camp had won every seat in the parliamentary and municipal elections.

Talon introduced reforms in recent years which he maintained were intended to clean up political life but which have made it more difficult for the opposition to gain access to power.



**CELEBRATING OF RESULT:**

One Nation leader Pauline Hanson and candidate David Farley celebrate the result.

**Pakistan car bomb attack kills 15 police officers**

Fifteen police officers have been killed in a bombing and ambush of a checkpoint in north-western Pakistan, police say.

A suicide bomber rammed a vehicle loaded with explosives into the guard post in Bannu, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, late on Saturday night, which then detonated, police said.

The attacker then entered an adjoining building and fired at the remaining officers. Back-up units that rushed to the scene also came under fire.

A burgeoning Islamist militant alliance known as Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen, which has been linked to the Pakistani Taliban, has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Images from the scene show the checkpoint had been reduced to rubble, twisted metal and debris carpeting the surrounding area.

Police said three officers were pulled from the wreckage alive, who were taken to hospital and were now in a stable condition. A search and rescue operation is taking place.

Senior Bannu police officer Sajjad Khan described his force as having "shown courage and bravery in... a difficult situation".

"This cowardly act of extremists is intolerable and the blood of those killed will be accounted for," he said in a statement.

Pakistan's President Asif Ali

Zardari offered his condolences to the families of the victims and said the nation "stood shoulder-to-shoulder with its security forces", according to a statement.

"The nefarious intentions of terrorists will be defeated," the statement added.

Attacks by various armed groups in Pakistan are relatively common.

Dozens were killed and more than 160 injured in a suicide bombing of a mosque in the capital, Islamabad, in February, in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group.

It came just days after a series of gun and bomb attacks in Pakistan's south-western Balochistan province, which is

subject to a violent separatist movement.

Islamabad blames Afghanistan for harbouring militants who use Afghan soil to plot attacks in Pakistan, something the Afghan Taliban denies.

Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen formed in April 2025 from the alliance of the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGG), Lashkar-e-Islam and Harkat Inqilab-e-Islami Pakistan (HIIP), according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies.

It says HGG has a history of violent attacks in Bannu, while the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point in the US has said Lashkar-e-Islam was allied with the Pakistani Taliban.

**Australia's right-wing one Nation party scores historic parliamentary win**

Australia's One Nation party has won its first-ever lower-house seat in what is being seen as an important test for the right-wing populist party.

With almost all the votes counted, One Nation candidate David Farley won over 57% of the tally in Farrer, a vast regional constituency in New South Wales, with independent candidate Michelle

Milthorpe on almost 43%.

The contest was triggered by the resignation of Sussan Ley, who quit when she was ousted as leader of the opposition conservative Liberal Party.

While the result will not affect the Labor government's large majority, it is a clear sign that voters are moving away from traditional political parties in Australia.

Saturday's poll was the first

federal test of One Nation's support after the party recorded the second-highest number of votes out of any political party in the South Australian state election in March.

As news of the party's victory emerged, One Nation leader Pauline Hanson told supporters this was not just a win for Farrer, but a win for Australia, and said the party was "coming after those other seats".

Farley - whose background is in agribusiness - told supporters One Nation had "reached the end of its beginning, we're going through the ceiling".

"What are we doing tonight? We're like a mason, with a chisel, and a hammer and we're re-carving the letters into the Australian democracy."

Australia has a preferential voting system where voters rank candidates from their most to least preferred. The final tally is calculated as a challenge between two candidates after preferences are distributed to ensure that the winner is supported by a majority.

One Nation had never won a federal lower house contest be-

fore Saturday's poll. In the late 1990s Hanson initially held her seat as an independent before losing her re-election bid. She has since returned to the parliament as a senator.

During the campaign, Farley said he had "lost a bit of faith" in the major parties. "They say one thing to your face and then go and do something else in parliament," he said.

Farrer spans 127,000 sq km (49,000 sq miles), an area larger than South Korea, and takes in the regional centres of Albury, Griffith and Deniliquin. The seat has always been held by either the Liberal or National parties.

The by-election also marked tests for the new leaders of the Liberal and National parties, respectively Angus Taylor, who ousted Ley in February, and Matt Canavan, who replaced David Littleproud in March.

The Liberal-National coalition suffered its worst ever defeat in last year's federal election, and the two parties have struggled with infighting and poor polling since then.

**Macron tours East Africa in break with 'Francafrrique' strategy**

President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday embarks on a visit to Africa aimed at renewing France's engagement with the continent after years of strained ties with former French-speaking colonies.

In English-speaking Kenya, Macron will co-host a summit on Monday and Tuesday bringing together African leaders and business executives, as he seeks to cement his legacy one year before the end of his term.

He will also travel to Egypt and Ethiopia as part of his Af-

rica tour.

"The Africa Forward summit marks a major milestone in relations between France and the African continent," the Elysee Palace said.

The meeting will focus on economic development and cross-border investment, among other themes, the French presidency said, stressing that it will be the first such forum held in an English-speaking country.

Macron hopes to highlight France's renewed relationship with the continent as a "report

card on his Africa policy", said one diplomat.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing.

Once master of vast expanses of northern, central and western Africa, France has played a crucial role in the continent's post-colonial history, repeatedly intervening militarily since the early 1960s.

France has vowed to abandon

the so-called "Francafrrique" strategy, under which Paris sought to keep francophone Africa under its thumb through political collusion, exclusive access for French businesses and oblique financial deals including graft.

'Anglophone Africa' Macron has gone further than his predecessors in admitting France's colonial-era abuses in countries including Rwanda, Cameroon and Senegal. But he has ruled out any official apology for torture and other abuses carried out by French troops in Algeria.

# Sports

- Football
- Athletics
- Golf
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Boxing

## Nigeria qualify for FIFA U20 Women's World Cup

### Poland 2026

Nigeria's U20 girls, Falconets, have officially punched their tickets to the 2026 FIFA U20 Women's World Cup in Poland, after surviving a difficult afternoon in Lilongwe to triumph on 3-2 aggregate over Malawi's Young Scorchers.

Despite a narrow 1-2 defeat in the second leg on Saturday, the foundation laid in Ikenne seven days ago where an own goal by visiting defender Maureen Kenneth and a superb strike by Kindness Ifeanyi secured a 2-0 cushion, proved enough to sustain Nigeria's proud record of never missing a World Cup final tournament at this level.

The hosts, backed by a vocal

home crowd, wasted no time in testing Nigeria's structural resolve. The Falconets found themselves behind early in the first half when a defensive mishap allowed a Malawian forward to nod home the opener and ignite belief in the home team's comeback. Nigeria came close to responding with clinical precision.

Kindness Ifeanyi, a constant

threat on the right flank, delivered a tantalizing cross into the heart of the box. Favour Nkwocha met it with power, but her effort rattled the woodwork, denying the Falconets a vital equalizer. The Young Scorchers took their 1-0 advantage into recess.

Tension escalated in the 55th minute. Another uncharacteristic lapse in the Nigerian backline gifted the Young Scorchers their second goal of the afternoon. At 2-0 on the day and 2-2 on aggregate, the tie was on a knife-edge, and the Falconets' impeccable qualification record was under genuine threat. With the match drifting towards a stalemate, Coach Moses Aduku turned to his bench for a spark.



GIANLUCA PRESTIANNI WITH REAL MADRID PLAYER

### Vinicius: FIFA extends Prestianni's ban across football tournaments

FIFA has extended the suspension of SL Benfica winger Gianluca Prestianni to apply globally, following an earlier disciplinary decision by UEFA.

Prestianni was initially handed a six-match ban, with three matches suspended, after being found guilty of discriminatory behaviour during a Champions League play-off match against Real Madrid on February 17.

The incident involved a confrontation with Madrid forward Vinicius Junior, who reported alleged racist remarks to the referee. Prestianni has denied the accusation.

During the match, the exchange led to a temporary sus-

pension after the referee halted play for about 10 minutes to address the situation.

In its statement, FIFA confirmed that its disciplinary committee had enforced UEFA's sanction globally under its regulations, ensuring the ban applies across all competitions.

The 20-year-old had already served one match of his suspension, missing the return leg of the play-off tie.

With the global extension, Prestianni is now expected to miss additional fixtures, including Argentina's opening matches at the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.



MARGARET ICHEEN WITH THE WORLD CUP-BOUND FALCONETS

## NILDS backs 2026 Africa Challenge Trophy, women's golf development

The Director-General of the National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS), Abubakar Sulaiman has reaffirmed commitment to women development and inclusion.

Sulaiman spoke during a courtesy visit by the President of the Ladies Golf Association of Nigeria (LGAN), Dr Lami Ahmed, and other executives to the institute's permanent site in Abuja.

He assured the delegation of NILDS' readiness to support and co-host the 2026 All Africa Challenge Trophy (AACT) scheduled for Abuja.

The championship would hold from Nov. 2 to Nov. 7, followed by the Nigerian Ladies Open Golf Championship from Nov. 7 to Nov. 10 at the IBB International Golf and Country Club.

Sulaiman said the institute would provide technical and logistical support toward successful hosting of the continental tournament.

"We are committed to initiatives promoting women empowerment, inclusion and leadership development across all sectors, including sports," he said.

According to him, sports remain a veritable platform for

advancing gender participation, youth engagement, and national development.

Sulaiman stressed the need for increased female representation in governance, policymaking, and democratic institutions across the country.

"NILDS identifies with programmes encouraging women to take active roles in leadership and nation-building," he added.



MALLAM DIKKO SHEHU AND SULAIMON DG, NILDS

## LGAN celebrates Akande's appointment as Nigeria's ambassador to Sweden

The Ladies' Golf Association of Nigeria (LGAN) has congratulated Lola Akande on her appointment as Nigeria's Ambassador to Sweden.

Akande was a former Lagos State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation.

President Bola Tinubu approved her appointment as Ni-

geria's Ambassador to Sweden on March 6, alongside 64 other ambassadors-designate.

The ambassadors were assigned to various foreign missions after their confirmation by the Senate.

LGAN President, Lami Ahmed, described Akande as a distinguished golfer, disciplined leader and strong advocate for women empowerment.

Ahmed said Akande's appointment reflected the values of excellence, grace and strategic leadership nurtured through golf and public service.

"Akande has consistently demonstrated integrity, discipline and commitment in every responsibility entrusted to her.



LOLA AKANDE

## Rivers Cyclist completes 700km Ride, dedicates feat to Mother and Breast Cancer Awareness

Rivers-born cyclist Ikpo Godspower Boniface, popularly known as Ogechi Boniface, has completed an 8-day, 700km ride from Lokoja, Kogi State, to Port Harcourt, dedicating the feat to his mother, a breast cancer survivor. Boniface described the journey as a divine mission inspired by

his mother's battle and recovery, saying her courage gave him the conviction to take on the challenge under the theme "Stronger Together, Healthier Tomorrow."

Recalling the route, he said: "The journey was not quite an easy one, it's a 700km ride from Lokoja, Kogi State down to Port

Harcourt, passing through 5 major cities — through Okene from Lokoja to Auchi, from Auchi to Benin City, I got to Asaba, from Asaba I got to Onitsha, from Onitsha to Owerri and from Owerri we arrived in PH." The Emuoha-born Ikwerre athlete made the trip with TEAM SUB-

SEA Cycling Club Port Harcourt and support from Einstein Hospitals D/Line Port Harcourt.

Boniface said the tour has boosted his campaign to raise awareness on women's breast cancer, describing cancer as one of the leading causes of death among women.

## Fernandez's strike earns Chelsea a point at Anfield

Enzo Fernandez scored a free-kick to equalize for Chelsea as they hold Liverpool to a 1-1 draw at Anfield on Saturday.

Liverpool had taken the lead in the sixth minute of the game through Ryan Gravenberch's strike but Chelsea found the equalizer in the 35 minute.

Both teams had goals ruled out for outside while Szoboszalai and captain Van Dijk hit the woodwork for Liverpool as they pressed for a late winner.

The draw ended Chelsea's six-games losing run in the Premier League and gave caretaker man-

ager Calum MacFarlane his first point as Chelsea manager.

Chelsea are now ninth with 49 points from 36 games, while Liverpool remain fourth in the table with 59 points from the same games, a step closer to Champions League qualification.

Speaking to TNT Sports, Chelsea defender, Marc Cucurella, said his side put up a good fight.

"We aren't happy because we wanted the three points, but we are happy that we showed we're a really good team if we put in the effort and fight together. Hopefully we can learn from this game and play well in these last few games."



ENZO FERNANDEZ

## Sports



# NPFL 2026: Bendel Insurance FC succumbed to 2-1 defeat in Enugu

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Bendel Insurance Football Club, today suffered a 2-1 defeat in hands of Arch rivals Rangers International of Enugu in the match day 37 of the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

The 2-1 defeat at the Cathedral means a huge setback for the Benin Arsenal's push for third place finish as the hope is already dashed this season.

Godwin Obaje struck for the Flying Antelopes 15 minutes into the game but Bendel Insurance FC remained unruf-

fled and continued with their impressive performance and were rewarded with a goal by their youngest striker Alex Oweifaleya in 41st minute.

Alex Oweifaleya now have 10 goals to his credit in his first season in the premier league. In the match day 36 between

Bendel Insurance and Katsina Utd, Alex scored the only goal of the match in the 87th minute with a classy header and sealed victory for the Benin Arsenal.

As the second half resumed at the Cathedral, Bendel Insurance FC continued with their impressive outing and looked destined to take something home from Enugu until the controversial spot kick was awarded to the host which Godwin Obaje converted in the 66th minute of the game to get a brace and sealed victory for the title contenders.

Recall that Bendel Insurance were forced to 1-1 draw by Rangers International in their first round meeting in Benin.

The Benin Arsenal now pushed 6th position on the table with 55 points and will be at home against Remo Stars in the last fixtures of the season.



BENDEL INSURANCE FC



ABDU MAIKABA

## Kano SWAN celebrates Maikaba's Flying Eagles role

The Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN), Kano Chapter, has congratulated Abdu Maikaba on his appointment as Head Coach of Nigeria's U-20 men's national team, the Flying Eagles, by the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

This is contained in a statement issued on Friday in Kano by the association's Secretary, Muhammad Nur-Tijani.

Nur-Tijani described Maikaba as a seasoned tactician who previously managed the Golden Eagles and served as assistant coach of the Flying Eagles under Paul Aigbogun.

He recalled that Maikaba had also handled top clubs in-

cluding Enyimba, Wikki Tourists, Kano Pillars, and Plateau United.

The secretary added that Maikaba guided Akwa United to victory in the 2017 Federation Cup, Nigeria's oldest domestic football competition.

"SWAN Kano described his appointment as well deserved, in recognition of his dedication and contributions to Nigerian football," he said.

The association expressed confidence that Maikaba's experience would bring renewed success to the Flying Eagles.

The chapter pledged its support and urged Nigerians to rally behind him as he leads the U-20 team to greater heights

## 20 academies set for maiden Abuja Amateur Basketball Tourney

The push for grassroots basketball development gained momentum with the unveiling of the maiden Amateur Basketball Academies (ABA) tournament on Friday in Abuja.

Stakeholders, former players and administrators said the initiative would help discover and nurture young basketball talents through structured grassroots competitions nationwide.

Founder of the initiative, Lucky Abubakar, said no fewer than 20 academies would participate in the maiden Abuja Amateur Basketball Tournament in July.

Abubakar, a Deputy Comptroller of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), said the competition would feature boys and girls from academies within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

He said the tournament was designed to revive community basketball and provide opportunities for young players to develop their talents and gain exposure.

According to him, the ABA initiative was established to identify and nurture untapped basketball talents across communities, schools and local courts.

"Today marks the beginning of a journey that will transform lives, reshape communities and elevate young talents to the global stage.

"There is enormous basketball talent in our communities, but many young athletes lack the structure, exposure and opportunities needed to reach their full potential," Abubakar said.

He said the organisation would focus on talent discovery, nurturing, growth and development through structured grassroots programmes and regional academies.

"We are building a pathway from raw potential to refined excellence while preparing young athletes for international basketball opportunities," he said.

He noted that the initiative would also promote discipline, leadership, teamwork and character development among young athletes beyond basketball.

"We are not only raising basketball players, but also responsible citizens, role models and future leaders of society," Abubakar stated.

The initiative is expected to commence with a pilot edition in the FCT, with plans to expand the competition to other states in future editions.



AMATEUR BASKETBALL TOURNEY COMMITTEE

## 2026 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup: Falconet seal 2026 World Cup ticket

Nigeria's Under 20 women's national team, the Falconets on Saturday secured qualification for the 2026 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup schedule for Poland.

Falconets achieved the feat in spite of suffering a 2-1 defeat to Malawi U-20 in the second leg of their final qualifying fixture at the Bingu National Stadium in Lilongwe.

They progressed 3-2 on aggregate over Malawi's Young Scorchers.

The Nigerian side advanced

on aggregate after securing a crucial first-leg advantage, enough to withstand a spirited performance from the hosts.

Malawi's Faith Chimzimu nodded home the opener in the ninth minute to give her side an early lead and raise hopes of a comeback for the home team.

Nigeria came close to responding with precision when Kindness Ifeanyi, a constant threat on the right flank, delivered a tantalising cross into the penalty area.

Favour Nkwocha connected powerfully with the delivery,

but her effort rattled the woodwork, denying the Falconets a vital equaliser as the Young Scorchers took their 1-0 advantage into the break.

On resumption of the second half, Chimzimu struck again in the 56th minute to level the aggregate score temporarily and put the Falconets under pressure.

However, Nigeria responded swiftly through substitute Precious Oscar, whose 62nd-minute goal proved decisive in the encounter.

The goal restored Nigeria's aggregate advantage and ultimately secured the Falconets passage to the global tournament.

In spite of the defeat, the Falconets showed resilience and composure to navigate a difficult away fixture and book their place at the 2026 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup scheduled to take place in Poland.

The qualification further extends Nigeria's impressive record in women's youth football, with the Falconets remaining one of Africa's most successful teams at FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup level.



FALCONET

## Osimhen's brace seals Super Lig title for Galatasaray

Super Eagles striker, Victor Osimhen, scored twice as Galatasaray defeated Antylyaspor 4-2 to clinch the Turkish Super Lig title.

Galatasaray needed to win to emerge champions of Turkey but it was Antylyaspor that took the lead just before the half time break through Dikmen's strike.

Galatasaray responded well after the break when Gabon winger, Lemina, found the back of the net in the 56 minute.

Atalyaspor restored their lead in the 62 minutes through

Dikmen's second goal. But Osimhen scored two goals in the 66 and 88 minutes to give his side the lead.

Ayhan added a fourth for Galatasaray in stoppage time to put the game beyond Atalyaspor.

The victory seals the Super Lig title for Galatasaray for the fourth time consecutively with Victor Osimhen involved in the last two.

The Nigerian star striker has scored 61 goals in 75 games for the Turkish giants since he joined them from Napoli



VICTOR OSIMHEN

# FEATURE



## Governor Okpebholo's 'integrity-first' approach to governance

DR. PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE, PHD

Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo has been consistent in framing his administration around a simple but demanding idea: that integrity is not a moral decoration in governance, but the foundation on which public service must stand. In his words, “I believe in keeping people with proven integrity. Your profession does not allow room for misconduct, and that is critical in governance.”

This is a statement that goes beyond political messaging. It reflects an attempt to define how Edo State should be governed, who should manage its resources, and what standards should guide decision-making in public office.

This approach recently came under renewed attention following a courtesy visit by the leadership of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) to the Government House in Benin City. Led by ICAN President and Chairman of Council, Haruna N. Yahya, the delegation brought with it an assessment that placed Edo State among the most consistent performers in the institute's accountability rankings over a five-year period.

Unlike political endorsements, ICAN's evaluation is grounded in technical financial indicators. It assesses the timeliness of audited accounts, the quality of financial reporting, and how effectively state governments implement audit recommendations. These are measurable standards, not subjective impressions. They are designed to show how responsibly public funds are managed and how well financial rules are followed.

Within that structure, Edo State's consistent performance suggests something more than routine compliance. It points to a system that has placed emphasis on financial discipline and institutional order. In practical terms, it reflects how government decisions are recorded, reviewed, and corrected through audit processes.

What makes this performance particularly notable is the administrative philosophy that appears to support it. Upon assuming office, Governor Okpebholo retained several key financial officials, citing competence and integrity as his guiding criteria. In a political environment where changes in administration often trigger sweeping personnel replacements, that decision stood out. It sent a signal that continuity in financial management would be prioritized over political adjustment.

This choice has implications that go beyond staffing. It affects how institutions behave, how records are kept, and how seriously audit findings are treated. When financial officers



Edo State Governor Senator Monday Okpebholo

operate in an environment where professional standards are protected, systems tend to stabilize. Over time, that stability reflects in performance assessments like those conducted by ICAN.

The broader argument advanced by the administration remains that integrity is not an abstract value but a functional requirement of governance. Public finance depends on trust and accuracy. Once those are compromised, the effects are felt across sectors. Roads remain uncompleted, salaries become irregular, and public services weaken—not always because resources are absent, but because systems fail to manage them properly.

From this perspective, integrity becomes closely linked with development outcomes. It influences how budgets are executed, how contracts are awarded, and how public institutions respond to oversight. In governance terms, it is less about moral posturing and more about system reliability.

This view aligns with broader principles of public financial management, where strong accounting systems and adherence to auditing standards are recognized as essential for sustaina-

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*External validation provides evidence of performance, but governance is ultimately tested over time, under changing political and economic pressures.*

ble development. Governments that maintain transparent financial practices tend to make better decisions and use resources more efficiently.

In Nigeria, this remains a significant challenge. National assessments on corruption perception continue to highlight concerns about transparency and accountability in public institutions. These concerns are not limited to one tier of government but are reflected across different levels of administration.

It is against this backdrop that Edo State's consistent performance in ICAN's accountability rankings gains significance. It suggests that despite national challenges, some state-level systems are able to maintain higher standards of financial discipline. Whether this is sustained depends on institutional strength rather than individual leadership alone.

Beyond financial management, the administration has also linked its governance philosophy to inclusion. Representation, in this context, is treated as part of institutional trust-building. The governor's commitment to appointing members of the Igbo community into key positions, including commissioner and special adviser

roles, reflects an attempt to broaden participation in governance.

While such decisions naturally carry political interpretation, they also speak to a wider principle: that governance legitimacy is strengthened when diverse communities feel included in decision-making structures. In societies marked by diversity, inclusion often becomes a practical requirement for stability.

Another notable development is the emergence of an Edo State indigene, Hajia Queensley Safuratu Seghosime, as the president-elect of ICAN. Her elevation to lead Nigeria's foremost accounting body creates an interesting intersection between state governance and professional oversight. It also highlights the growing visibility of Edo professionals within national institutions responsible for financial standards.

Governor Okpebholo's public congratulations and assurances of support for her tenure reflect a recognition of that connection. It underscores the relationship between governance and professional regulation—two systems that, while distinct, often intersect in shaping public accountability.

Still, the central question remains whether integrity-driven governance can be sustained beyond rankings and formal assessments. External validation provides evidence of performance, but governance is ultimately tested over time, under changing political and economic pressures.

Systems must be able to function independently of personalities. Financial discipline must survive beyond individual tenures. Audit compliance must remain consistent even when political priorities shift. These are the conditions under which governance models are truly tested.

For now, Edo State presents a case where institutional discipline appears to be producing measurable outcomes. The ICAN rankings offer one form of verification, but the broader test lies in continuity. If these standards persist, they may offer insight into how subnational governments can strengthen accountability within Nigeria's complex governance environment.

In the end, integrity in governance is not proven by declarations. It is proven by systems that work, records that withstand scrutiny, and outcomes that can be independently verified. Edo State's experience under Governor Okpebholo, as reflected in current assessments, suggests an administration attempting to align those elements in practice.

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