

80% of Rivers residents spend income on rent —Tenants' union

PORT HARCOURT

The National Union of Tenants of Nigeria (NUTN) has decried the escalating cost of rent in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Rivers.

The union described the sit-

uation as a growing crisis with severe social and economic implications for residents of the capital city.

The Executive Secretary of NUTN, Mr Ceaser Enwefah, made the call in a letter to Governor Siminalayi Fubara, a copy of which was sent to newsmen in Port Harcourt on

Monday.

Enwefah said over 80 percent of residents now spend above 100 percent of their income on rent, urging the state government to act swiftly to prevent full-scale housing crises.

He noted that this trend had left many unable to meet other

essential needs, thereby worsening poverty levels.

"Rental costs now account for a significant portion of the high cost of living in the capital city, pushing many residents into extreme hardship," he said.

Enwefah said the current rental rates reached unprecedented levels across housing

categories in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor.

According to him, self-contained apartments now cost about N800,000 annually, while one-bedroom flats go for N1.5 million.

He added that two-bedroom apartments cost between N2 million and N2.5 million,

while three-bedroom flats range from N3 million to N4 million.

He projected further increases by December 2026, warning that rents could rise beyond the reach of average residents.

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The Nigerian OBSERVER

That The People May Know

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#200

SSANU, NASU strike paralyses activities at ABU

ZARIA (KADUNA)

The strike action embarked upon by the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) has paralysed academic and administrative activities at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU),

Zaria.

The JAC of SSANU and NASU directed an indefinite strike effective from May 1.

Newsmen who monitored the situation on campus, observed that key facilities, including the Senate Building, university library and sickbay, were under lock and key.

Similarly, the Works and Estate Department was shut

down, resulting in disruption of water and electricity supply across the institution.

Further findings indicated that the strike coincided with the ongoing first semester examinations, as lecture halls and classrooms remained closed.

Speaking during a peaceful protest at the university's main campus, the Chairman of SSANU, ABU branch, Mr

Shuaibu-Ahmed Halilu, said the action was in compliance with a directive from the national body.

Halilu, who also serves as JAC Chairman, described the strike as total and indefinite, affecting both academic and administrative operations.

"As you can see, we are at the central administrative block of the university and it is deserted.

"There is no electricity, wa-

ter and healthcare services in the university," he said.

He added that SSANU and NASU were not in rivalry with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), but were partners in progress, emphasising the unions' demand for equity.

According to him, the strike is based on five key demands,

including salary increase and payment of arrears, settlement of earned allowances and renegotiation of the 2009 agreement.

Others, he said, are improved funding of universities to enhance infrastructure and security, as well as rejection of the proposed 30 percent consolidated salary increase.

EIRS, Immigration partner on expatriate tax returns, data sharing

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS) has intensified efforts to boost revenue generation through strategic collaboration with the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), with a focus on expatriate tax compliance and data integration.

The Executive Chairman of EIRS, Mr John Odior, disclosed this during a familiarization visit to the Edo State Comptroller of the NIS in Benin City, Mr Steve Okezie Ibeabuchi, where he emphasised that national development requires coordinated action across institutions.

Central to the proposed partnership, Odior said, is the establishment of a robust data-sharing framework to enhance economic planning and improve revenue projections.

He stressed the need to ensure that expatriates and immigration personnel are fully captured within the tax net through proper filing of individual returns.

The EIRS chairman also proposed the integration of Tax Clearance Certificates (TCC) as a mandatory requirement for processing international passport applications, a measure aimed at strengthening fiscal discipline and improving compliance.

As part of the engagement, Odior conducted an educational session for immigration officers, clarifying the distinction between taxes collectible by federal and state authorities, as well as explaining provisions of new tax laws and the importance of tax clearance certification.

He further disclosed that the Edo State Government, under Governor Monday Okpebholo, has suspended revenue collection in the transport sector to ease the financial burden on motorists and commuters.

In his remarks, the State Comptroller of the NIS, Mr Ibeabuchi, acknowledged the critical role of taxation in national development and assured the EIRS of the Service's full support and cooperation in achieving shared objectives.



FAMILIARIZATION VISIT:

Executive Chairman, Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), John Odior (right) receiving a plaque from the State Commandant of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Akintayo Seidi Ayila, during a familiarization visit to the State Command of NSCDC in Benin City.

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SOCU intensifies NIN integration drive in Edo North

A team of officials from the State Operations Coordinating Unit (SOCU) has successfully concluded a three-day sensitisation and advocacy tour across local government areas in Edo North.

The exercise was aimed at strengthening the integration of the National Identity Number (NIN) into the State Social Register (SSR) to enhance social protection delivery across the state.

The initiative also focused on building the capacity of

field enumerators on the importance of NIN integration as a key requirement for effective and reliable beneficiary data management.

During the sessions, participants were informed that beneficiaries whose records are not updated with their NIN may not be eligible for future government interventions.

Explaining the technical process, the team noted that records without NIN integration have been migrated to a separate platform known as "TF."

However, such records are

automatically restored to the main Social Register once NIN integration is completed, ensuring data accuracy and inclusion.

Addressing the enumerators, the State Coordinator, Dr. Lucky Odiase, stressed the urgency of the exercise and announced a two-month timeline for the completion of NIN integration for all beneficiaries.

He added that while the process is largely manual, digital updates would be deployed where feasible, and enjoined enumerators to ensure proper and trans-

parent documentation.

He further emphasised the need for robust and credible Value Chain Household (PVH) data in the SSR, urging enumerators to approach the assignment with diligence and integrity.

To ensure practical understanding, the Head of Monitoring and Evaluation, Mrs. Sylvia Aisagbon, alongside the M&E Officer I, Mr. Leonard Otu, conducted hands-on training sessions, guiding enumerators step-by-step through the NIN integration process.

At Owan East, the Local Government Chairman, Hon. Azoma Mohammed, received the SOCU team warmly and pledged full support for the initiative, reaffirming the council's commitment to improving citizens' welfare through accurate data management.

Also part of the delegation was the SOCU Communications Officer, Mrs. Rose Imonikhe, who supported stakeholder engagement and information dissemination throughout the tour.

The State Coordinating Of-

fice (NASCO), in collaboration with the World Bank and the Edo State Government, has continued efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the delivery of social intervention programmes.

With increased awareness and cooperation from enumerators, the integration of NIN into the State Social Register is expected to significantly improve targeting and service delivery.

A similar visit is scheduled for Edo Central and Edo South in subsequent phases.

Police arrest 13 suspects over assault on journalist in Rivers

PORT HARCOURT

The Rivers State Police Command has arrested 13 suspects in connection with the alleged assault of a journalist, Mr Allwell Ene, in Port Harcourt.

Ene was reportedly attacked while investigating a phone purchase fraud in the Garrison area of the city.

The Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Blessing Agabe, who briefed journalists on Monday, said operatives of the Olu-Obasanjo Police Division swiftly responded to the incident and rescued the journalist from his attackers.

She said preliminary investigations began immediately, with the journalist giving a first-hand account of the incident.

"Afterwards, a coordinated operation was launched, leading to the arrest of 13 suspects," she said.

Agabe added that Ene was

carrying out a solo investigation in a known crime-prone area frequently raided by the police.

She noted that intelligence indicated that several persons in the area were allegedly involved in phone theft and harassment of residents.

"Investigations are ongoing, and efforts are being intensified to ensure all perpetrators are brought to justice," she added.

She also quoted the Commissioner of Police, CP Olugbenga Adepoju, as advising journalists to avoid undertaking investigative assignments alone in high-risk locations.

He urged the media to collaborate more closely with the police to ensure safety during investigative work.

Adepoju reaffirmed the command's commitment to protecting lives and property, as well as tackling criminal activities across Port Harcourt and its environs.

80% of Rivers residents spend...

CONTINUED FROM PG 1

"A significant part of the population is fleeing the capital city to escape the high cost of accommodation and harsh economic impact of rising rents," he said.

Enwefah noted that the union recently conducted a fact-finding study to determine the causes of the crises and propose solutions.

He said the study revealed that rental prices had increased sharply between 2023 and 2025 across all categories of housing in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor.

"A single room rose from N60,000 in 2022 to 180,000 in 2026, while self-contained apartments increased from N150,000 to N800,000," he said.

The NUTN official attributed the rise in rents to multiple factors, including an alleged housing deficit, the demolition of structures to pave way for the N200 billion Port Harcourt Ring Road and Bridges project.

He also cited the activities of unregulated agents, structural modifications by landlords, the conversion of residential buildings to commercial use, and urban planning violations.

"These practices have significantly reduced available housing units and inflated rental costs across the capital city," Enwefah said.

He warned that the situation could worsen if urgent measures were not taken to address the underlying issues.

"Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor risks becoming economically unwelcoming and socially unstable if this trend continues unchecked.

"The crises could escalate into widespread homelessness, slum development and social tension by 2030," he said.

The unionist urged Fubara to declare the housing sector in the affected areas as requiring priority attention, recommending the issuance of executive orders to regulate estate agents and prevent illegal housing conversion.

Enwefah also called for sanctions against violators, the establishment of a housing data system to monitor rent levels, increased land allocation for low-income housing, and the construction of student hostels near tertiary institutions.

"These measures will help address the housing deficit and make accommodation more affordable," he said.



A CONDOLENCE VISIT:

Edo State Deputy Governor, Hon. Dennis Idahosa (centre), and representatives of His Royal Majesty, Ewuare II the Oba of Benin, led by the Obazele of Benin Kingdom, Chief Osaro Idah (left), alongside the Obasogie of Benin Kingdom, Chief George Igiwhin Ekhator (right), during a condolence visit to the children of the late Madam Esther Imaguomwanruo Idahosa, mother of the Deputy Governor.

PHOTO: MOSES OBOH

Tinubu approves deployment of 4 perm secretaries

ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu has approved the deployment of four Federal Permanent Secretaries as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen governance and improve service delivery.

The decision was contained in a statement issued on Monday in Abuja by Mrs Eno Olotu, Director of Information and Public Relations, Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation.

Olotu said the deployment aligns with the Renewed Hope Agenda and is aimed at enhancing policy implementation and administrative efficiency across key sectors.

She noted that the Permanent Secretaries were selected through a competitive process and are expected to deploy their experience and expertise in their new assignments.

According to her, the postings are also designed to optimise performance, deepen inter-ministerial collaboration and sup-

port sustainable development.

The affected Permanent Secretaries and their postings are: Mrs Bekearedebo Warrens (Bayelsa State) – Political and Economic Affairs Office, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation; Dr Kamil Shoreire (Ogun State) – Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Others are Mrs Nkiruka Jones-Nebo (Enugu State) – Career Management Office, Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation; and

Mr Sani Aminu (Kano State) – Special Services Office, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation.

Olotu added that the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, congratulated the affected officials and urged them to justify the confidence reposed in them.

She further quoted Walson-Jack as emphasising professionalism, accountability and result-oriented leadership in achieving the Federal Government's development priorities.

PDP rejects Turaki-led interim leadership, dismisses NEC meeting

ABUJA

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) National Working Committee (NWC), led by Abdulraman Mohammed, has dismissed the 103rd National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting and the Tanimu Turaki-led Interim National Working Committee allegedly constituted at the gathering.

In a statement issued by the National Publicity Secretary, Jungudo Mohammed, the party said no such NEC meeting chaired by Sen. Adolphus Wabara was convened by

the authentic leadership of the party.

It declared that any resolutions arising from the said meeting were "null, void and of no effect whatsoever".

Mohammed argued that the PDP Constitution does not make provision for the establishment of a caretaker committee.

He further stated that even if the organisers claimed authority to convene such a meeting, they failed to comply with the Electoral Act 2026, which requires a minimum of 21 days' notice to the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC).

"There is no evidence of compliance, nor was INEC in attendance as required by law. This alone renders their actions null and void," he said.

He also faulted the involvement of Sen. Adolphus Wabara, noting that he had been expelled at ward level over alleged anti-party activities linked to his support for the election of Governor Alex Otti.

Mohammed added that attempts to present the Board of Trustees (BoT) as having executive powers were misleading, stressing that the BoT is strictly

advisory.

He urged regulatory authorities to take note of the development, describing the meeting as an attempt to mislead the public and create internal confusion.

"We therefore call on all party members, stakeholders and the general public to completely disregard this illegitimate assembly and its outcomes," he said.

According to him, the PDP remains committed to its constitution, the rule of law and democratic principles under the leadership of Mohammed and Sen. Samuel Anyanwu.

NEWS

Irabor demands data-driven overhaul of Nigeria's security architecture

EDWARD OSEGHE

OKADA

Former Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Lucky Irabor (Rtd), has called for an urgent transformation of Nigeria's security framework, urging a shift from largely reactive responses to a system powered by data, prediction and advanced technology.

Irabor made the call while delivering the guest lecture at the 2026 Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan College of Arts and Social Sciences Annual Lecture Series at Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State.

Speaking on the theme, "Combating Insecurity in Nigeria: Artificial Intelligence and the Global Future," the retired general described the moment as a "national call to action," warning that Nigeria risks falling behind evolving security threats if it fails to embrace Ar-

tificial Intelligence (AI).

He presented a broad assessment of the country's security challenges, identifying terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and cybercrime as persistent threats that have reshaped daily life and eroded public confidence in the state.

"The persistence of insecurity in Nigeria has become one of the most pressing challenges confronting national development," Irabor said.

Drawing from his military experience, he acknowledged that conventional operations have recorded successes but stressed that they remain inadequate against increasingly adaptive non-state actors. According to him, such groups have expanded beyond traditional battlefields, deploying digital tools for recruitment, coordination and financing.

"Artificial Intelligence is no longer optional," he stated,

noting that it has become a decisive factor in modern warfare, intelligence gathering and national security management.

Irabor pointed to global trends, including predictive analytics and autonomous surveillance systems, as evidence of a shift toward real-time data processing and anticipatory response strategies. He argued that Nigeria must adopt similar technologies to enhance intelligence accuracy, improve situational awareness and enable faster, more informed decision-making.

"AI enables systems to analyse vast volumes of data, detect patterns and forecast threats at a scale impossible for human operators alone," he said, adding that such capabilities could significantly strengthen counter-terrorism operations and border security.

He, however, cautioned against an overreliance on technology, stressing the need for institutional reforms, ethical safeguards and human-centred policies.

"How well we integrate AI with human insight, ethical considerations and governance

structures will determine its effectiveness.

"Without this balance, the risks of misuse and rights violations become real," he noted.

The former defence chief also highlighted structural

challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited technical expertise and weak policy coordination, warning that failure to address them could widen the gap between Nigeria and more technologi-

cally advanced nations.

In his remarks, Vice-Chancellor of Igbinedion University, Prof. Lawrence Ezemonye, echoed the urgency of the theme, urging a departure from reactive security approaches.

EIRS, NSCDC forge alliance to tackle illegal revenue collection in Edo

BENIN CITY

The Executive Chairman of the Edo State Internal Revenue Service (EIRS), Mr John Odior, has called for a strengthened partnership with the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to bolster tax administration and curb illegal revenue collection across the state.

Odior made the call during a familiarisation visit to the State Commandant of the Corps, Mr Akintayo Seidi Ayila, where he underscored the need for deeper collaboration to promote a healthy tax system capable of

driving sustainable economic growth in Edo State.

He explained that the visit was aimed at fostering a professional relationship with the command, while also seeking its active support in enforcing tax laws and sanitising the revenue collection process.

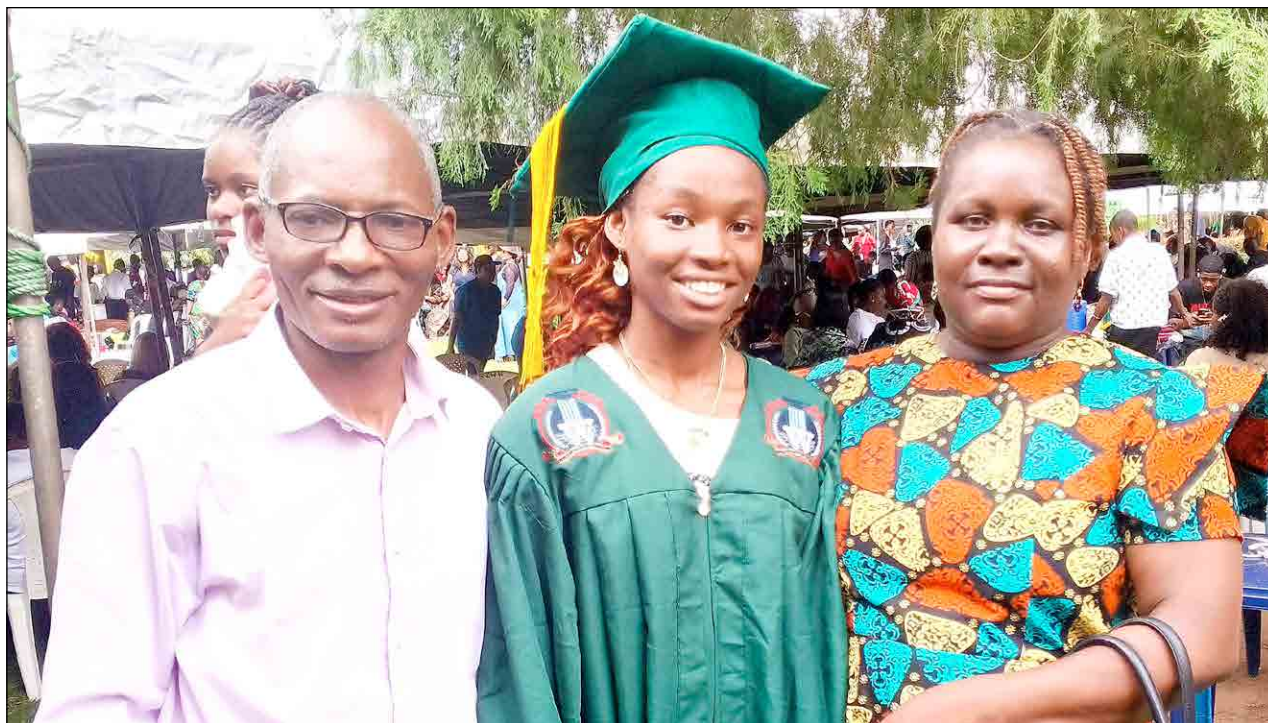
The EIRS boss expressed concern over the activities of "non-state actors" engaged in unauthorised revenue collection, noting that such individuals often operate in remote locations without government approval, diverting public funds into private hands.

According to him, the most

effective strategy to eliminate these illegal practices lies in robust intelligence gathering and proactive information sharing between EIRS and the NSCDC.

He appealed to the Corps to support public enlightenment efforts, stressing that tax compliance remains a civic duty essential for funding infrastructure and development in the state.

Responding, the State Commandant, Mr Ayila, reaffirmed the NSCDC's commitment to supporting the EIRS, noting that the Corps' core mandate includes the protection of critical national assets and infrastructure facilities largely funded through tax revenue.

**MATRICULATION EXERCISE:**

Francis Odupute of *The Nigerian Observer* newspapers (left), and his wife, Sophia Odupute (right), celebrate with their daughter, Treasure Chizitere Odupute, during her matriculation exercise at Wellspring University, Benin City.

785 matriculate at Wellspring University as VC pushes discipline, innovation

EDWARD OSEGHE

BENIN CITY

Wellspring University has admitted 785 students into its various academic programmes for the 2025/2026 academic session, with a strong charge on discipline, innovation and purpose-driven learning.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Isaac Rotimi Ajayi, disclosed this during the institution's 17th matriculation ceremony held at the university's main auditorium in Benin City.

Ajayi reaffirmed the university's commitment to fostering an academic environment anchored on excellence, character development and entrepre-

neurial thinking.

According to him, Wellspring University has continued to record strides in academic delivery, infrastructural growth and research development, while producing graduates equipped with leadership capacity and entrepreneurial skills.

He stressed that the institution places a high premium on entrepreneurship, innovation and digital competence as part of its broader vision to prepare students for relevance in a rapidly evolving global economy.

"Wellspring University is founded on strong values and a compelling vision to produce graduates who are intellectually sound, morally upright, God-fearing and globally competitive," he said.

3 dead, 1 injured in Lagos-Ibadan Expressway crash —FRSC

SANGO-OTA (OGUN)

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Ogun Command confirmed that three persons died while one other was injured in an accident that involved a Lexus Jeep and a Boxer bike along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway on Sunday.

The FRSC Sector Commander, Oludare Ogunjobi, confirmed the accident in a statement signed by the Command's Spokesperson, Mr Odunsi Afolabi, in Abeokuta. Afolabi explained that the accident that involved eight male adults happened at about 1.04 p.m. on Sunday at the Oniworo area on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway.

He added that the crash involved a blue Lexus Jeep with registration number, GGE 18 JV and a black Boxer bike with

no registration number.

Afolabi said that three persons lost their lives in the crash while one other sustained various injuries.

"The corpses of the victims have been taken to FOS morgue, Opara, while the survivors were taken to Victory Hospital, Ogere, for treatment," he said.

Afolabi attributed the cause of the crash to speeding and burst tyres.

He said that obstructions had been cleared by FRSC Ogunmak-in Unit in order to restore traffic flow, and the vehicles were moved to the MTD Alapako Police station for further investigation.

Afolabi quoted the sector commander as sending his condolences to the families of deceased victims, and praying that God would grant them the fortitude to bear their losses.

NUJ Edo, IPC call for greater protection of Journalists on World Press Freedom Day

BENIN CITY

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, and the International Press Centre (IPC) have called for stronger protection for journalists and renewed commitment to press freedom as the world marks World Press Freedom Day 2026.

In a statement signed by Festus Alenkhe, Chairman, and Andy Egbon, Secretary, for the NUJ Edo State Council, alongside Melody Akinjayan for the IPC, the organisations praised journalists in Edo State and across Nigeria for remaining committed to truth-telling, de-

spite growing challenges.

They noted that journalists continue to face intimidation, economic hardship, cyberbullying, and other threats while carrying out their duties, insisting that a free and independent press remains central to democracy, accountability, and citizens' access to information.

The NUJ Edo State Council condemned harassment, arbitrary arrests, and attacks on media professionals, stressing that journalism should not be criminalised. The union urged the Edo State Government, security agencies, and non-state actors to ensure the safety of reporters, especially those cov-

ering elections, protests, and investigative assignments.

It also called on Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to comply with the Freedom of Information Act by granting journalists access to public records in a timely manner, warning that unnecessary secrecy often creates room for misinformation and speculation.

On journalists' welfare, the council appealed to media owners to improve working conditions through fair remuneration and insurance coverage.

It equally reminded journalists of their responsibility to remain ethical, factual, and professional while resisting misinformation and inducement.

The NUJ, however, commended the Edo State Government for

maintaining engagement with the media and called for stronger collaboration through regular press briefings, training opportunities, and support for community radio stations.

Similarly, the IPC, through its Safety and Protection of Journalists Hub, highlighted the importance of a free and responsible media in promoting peace, democratic governance, and social cohesion.

The organisation disclosed that in 2025, it documented no fewer than 23 attacks involving 28 journalists and two media organisations across Nigeria.

According to the report, the incidents ranged from threats to life and unlawful arrests to abduction, intimidation, physical assault, and other forms of harassment.

Editorial

Obi's defection: A defining moment for leadership

The confirmation of the defection of former Anambra State governor and 2023 Labour Party presidential candidate, Peter Obi, has once again provoked a national conversation; one that extends beyond party politics to the deeper question of leadership in Nigeria.

In a statement issued by his media aide, Valentine Obienyem, Obi attributed his decision to what he described as a "toxic political environment," marked by intimidation, insecurity, and conditions he believes are unconducive to sincere public service. For many Nigerians who followed his 2023 campaign and the wave of enthusiasm it generated, such concerns are neither new nor entirely unfounded.

Nigeria's political space is undeniably demanding. It tests conviction, resilience, and the ability to navigate a complex and often hostile system. Yet this latest move comes barely seven weeks after his exit from the Labour Par-

ty, drawing attention, not just to his stated reasons, but to a recurring pattern.

From his earlier movement between major political platforms—from the All Progressives Grand Alliance to the Peoples Democratic Party, and later to the Labour Party, his trajectory reflects repeated repositioning at critical moments.

While political realignment is not unusual in a democracy, the timing and frequency of such shifts inevitably invite scrutiny. Realignment, in itself, is not a fault. Democracies evolve, alliances shift, and politicians often recalibrate in pursuit of broader goals.

However, leadership at the level Obi aspires to demands more than movement; it requires steadiness of purpose and the ability to remain anchored, even when circumstances are unfavourable. Repeated repositioning at sensitive junctures raises legitimate questions about long-term resolve.

For many of his supporters,

particularly within the 'Obidient Movement,' this development may be difficult to reconcile. It is not merely about a change of party affiliation; it touches on the contrast between a figure who inspired hope and actions that now appear, to some, as a withdrawal from difficult political terrain.

Leadership is most clearly revealed in periods of strain, not comfort. When difficulties within a political party, arguably a more contained arena result in repeated exits, it becomes reasonable to question how such a leader might respond to the far greater pressures of governing a diverse and complex nation like Nigeria.

Nigeria is too significant for uncertain leadership. Although the country abounds in ideas and ambition, it has frequently fallen short in producing leadership that combines vision with commitment and endurance. Its size, diversity, and challenges demand, not only good intentions, but a demonstrable capacity to stay on course and confront obstacles

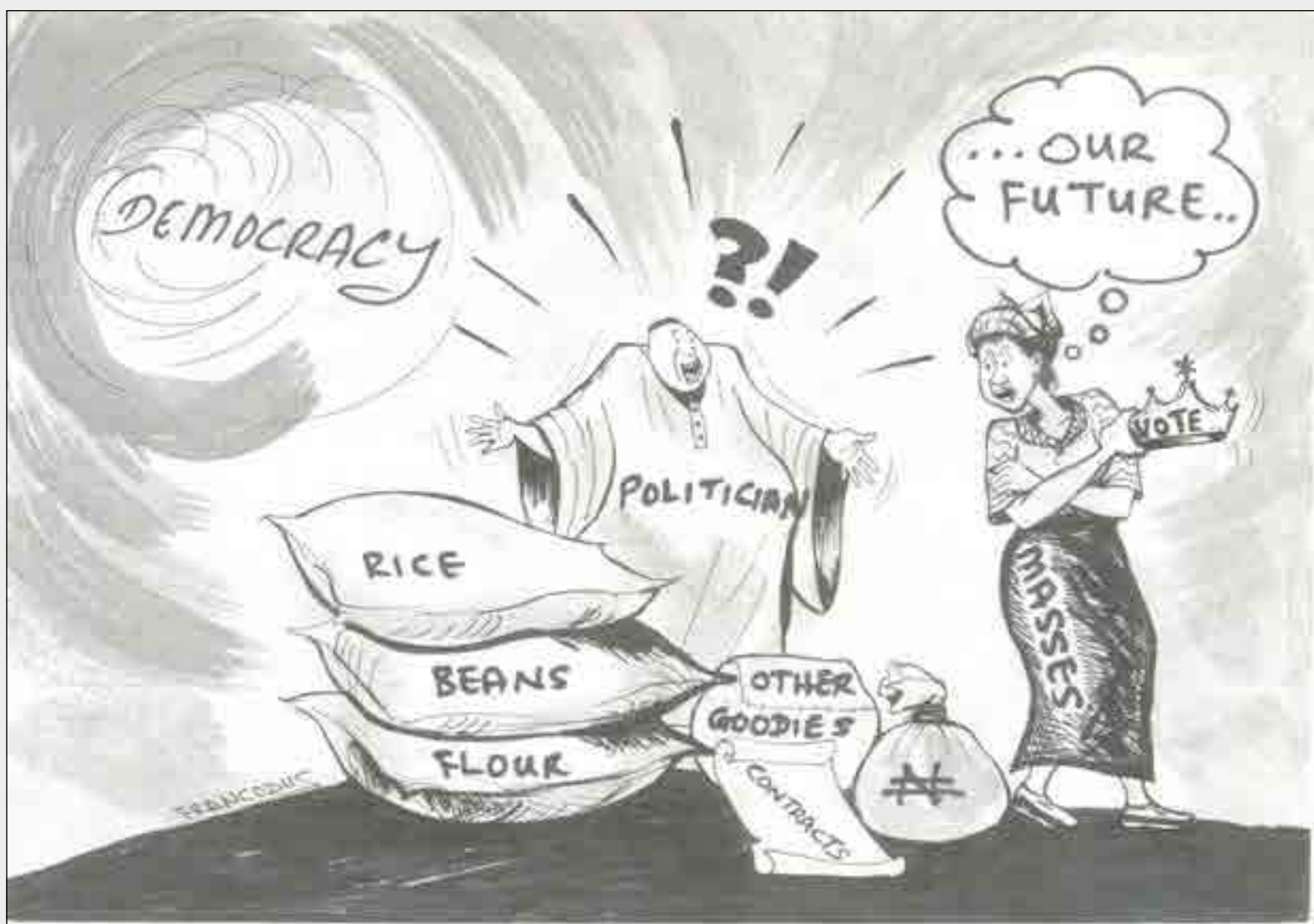
without retreat. This does not diminish Obi's past accomplishments, including his tenure as governor of Anambra State.

However, past service must be weighed alongside present choices, particularly in a political climate that is more demanding than ever.

His recent decisions, whether strategic or otherwise, will inevitably shape public perception of his readiness for higher office. Ultimately, this moment extends beyond Obi himself. It is also about Nigerian voters, who must continue to refine their expectations of leadership.

The electorate must look beyond rhetoric and examine patterns, because leadership is measured, not by promises alone, but by conduct over time.

For now, his latest defection may be politically strategic. However, in the court of public opinion, steadfastness remains the ultimate measure of leadership—one that cannot be postponed, rationalised, or applied selectively.



Police foil cult initiation, arrests many in Rivers forest

PORT HARCOURT

Security operatives have arrested 13 suspected cultists during an initiation ceremony in Eleme Local Government Area of Rivers.

The suspects were apprehended in a forest between

Alode and Onne in the early hours of Sunday.

An eyewitness, identified as Lene, told reporters in Port Harcourt on Monday that about 100 young men had gathered at the location for the initiation ritual.

He said while the initiation

exercise was ongoing, police operatives stormed the gathering.

“On sighting the approach of security operatives, many of the cultists fled deeper into the forest.

“However, over 13 of them were apprehended at the scene,

while others escaped,” he said.

Lene identified the group as members of the Aiye Confraternity, popularly known as Black Axe.

He said the initiation of new recruits was often conducted in the forest to strengthen territorial control in the local gov-

ernment area.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the Police Command in Rivers, ASP Blessing Agabe, confirmed the arrest of the suspects.

“Yes, I can confirm the arrests. Investigation has commenced,” she said.

Agabe, however, did not provide further details on the operation.

Cult-related activities have

remained a security concern in parts of the state.

On Saturday, the Police, along with the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force, Department of State Services, and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, launched a joint operation.

The initiative was introduced to combat rising cases of kidnapping, cultism, and other violent crimes in the state.



INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTER DAY:

Controller-General, Federal Fire Service, Samuel Olumode (R), speaking with children, during the commemoration of the International Firefighter Day in Abuja on Monday, 4th May, 2026.

PHOTO BY: JOHNSON UDEANI/NAN

Tinubu to reposition Police through education —Alausa

FUNMILAYO ADEYEMI

The Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa, says President Bola Tinubu is committed to repositioning the Nigeria Police Force through strengthened education and training institutions.

Alausa said this on Monday in Abuja when the Inspector-General of Police, Mr Tunji Disu, led senior police officers on a courtesy visit to his office.

He said discussions focused on the establishment of a southern campus of the Police Academy in Erije, Abeo-

kuta, Ogun, in line with the President's agenda to improve professionalism and security delivery.

“This meeting is in continuation of President Bola Tinubu's agenda to reposition the police to deliver on its core mandate and improve security across the country,” he said.

Alausa added that the proposed campus was expected to admit its first set of students between September and November 2026, following expedited resource verification by the National Universities Commission (NUC).

He directed the NUC to

fast-track the verification process to enable academic activities to commence as scheduled.

The minister also disclosed plans to convert over 42 police colleges nationwide into monotechnics to strengthen technical and professional training within the Force, noting that a presidential waiver had been secured to ease the transition.

According to him, deliberations included accrediting five to six of the proposed monotechnics to offer industry-relevant courses aimed at enhancing police operational capacity.

He said three committees

had been constituted to drive implementation.

These include a Resource Verification Committee chaired by the NUC Executive Secretary, and another on capacity improvement in police colleges chaired by a Deputy Inspector-General of Police alongside the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

A third committee on infrastructure and physical development for the southern campus will be chaired by the Executive Secretary of TETFund in collaboration with senior police officers.

Ogun pilgrims arrive Saudi Arabia as Gateway Airport begins Hajj operations

ABEOKUTA

The first batch of Muslim pilgrims from Ogun has safely arrived in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

This was made known in a statement in Abeokuta on Monday by Governor Dapo Abiodun's Special Adviser on Media, Mr Kayode Akinmade.

According to the statement, the pilgrims arrived at the King Abdulaziz International Airport at 4:15 a.m. (Nigerian time) after departing the Gateway International Airport, Iperu, at 11:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Akinmade disclosed that the contingent comprised 345 pilgrims—151 males and 194 females—as well as officials of the Ogun State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board.

The special adviser explained that, on arrival, the pilgrims were received by the Saudi Hajj officials and airport authorities before undergoing immigration and security checks.

“They were subsequently transported by buses to their hotel accommodations in Medina ahead of the commencement of Hajj rites.

“The departure marked the commencement of the 2026

Hajj operations at the Gateway International Airport and its first international flight.

“The airport was inaugurated on April 4 by President Bola Tinubu during a visit to Ogun,” Akinmade said.

Speaking ahead of the inaugural flight, the statement quoted the governor describing the development as a milestone in the state's aviation and economic growth.

Abiodun said the flight was the first 4,600km nonstop international trip from Iperu, reflecting the administration's commitment to infrastructure development.

Lagos unveils ferry safety mentorship programme

LAGOS

The Lagos State Waterways Authority (LASWA), in partnership with Interferry, has launched Africa's first Ferry Safety Development and Mentoring Programme to enhance safety, efficiency and professionalism.

The Special Adviser to the Governor on Blue Economy, Mr Oluwadamilola Emmanuel, said this in a statement on Monday in Lagos.

Emmanuel said the landmark initiative in Africa was set to revolutionise ferry safety practices, boost operational efficiency, and significantly elevate professional standards among industry operators.

He said the 18-month programme would feature mentorship from Interferry experts and facilitators from maritime

institutions, companies and regulatory agencies across Nigeria.

“50 participants, including captains, engineers and safety officers, were selected after a verification exercise conducted on March 18.

“The programme, scheduled to begin in May 2026, will adopt a hybrid model combining online learning, virtual mentoring and monthly practical sessions,” he said.

He said that the key modules to be covered are ferry design and construction, safety management systems, maritime regulations, and maintenance techniques, both preventive and predictive.

He said the initiative reflected the Lagos State Government's commitment to safer waterways and a globally competitive ferry transport system.

FRSC intensifies action against speeding, mixed loading

ABUJA

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), has said it's intensifying efforts to tackle mixed loading, speeding and other major causes of road traffic crashes in the country.

The Corps Marshal, Malam Shehu Mohammed, said this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) Abuja on Monday.

Shehu disclosed that the FRSC high command had earlier convened to review operations, evaluate challenges and develop practical solutions to improve road safety nationwide.

According to him, the meeting is aimed at making Nigerian roads safer and more motorable for all categories of road users.

The corps marshal identified mixed loading, where articulated vehicles carry both goods and passengers as a growing concern, noting that the practice posed serious risks to lives.

“We are also confronted with speed. Speed is always one of the key reasons why we are having crashes,” he said.

Mohammed explained that the corps was adopting localised strategies tailored to specific environments to address road safety challenges more

effectively.

He said such strategies would involve collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including security agencies, community leaders, non-governmental organisations and other government institutions.

The FRSC boss stressed the need for sustained public enlightenment on safe driving practices and adherence to road safety regulations.

He urged motorists to imbibe a culture of safety consciousness, discipline and responsibility while using the roads.

On the way forward, Mohammed assured Nigerians of the corps' commitment to strengthening its operations and delivering on its mandate.

“FRSC will continue to work and execute its mandate in line with the Constitution, while also building public trust and confidence that our roads will be safe and properly managed.

“We will ensure that reckless drivers who cause crashes or bully other motorists are removed from the roads,” he said.

Speaking on the impact of ongoing capacity-building programmes for FRSC personnel, the corps marshal noted that training remained a continuous process and may not yield immediate measurable results.

NEWS**Expert seeks destruction of ordnance recovered after Biafra war****ABUJA**

Bomb expert Prof. Bala Yakubu has urged the Federal Government to immediately evacuate or destroy about 1,600 deadly Biafra civil war ordnance recovered from the old battlefields.

Yakubu who made the call in an interview with newsmen in Abuja on Monday, said that evacuating and destroying them would help avert disaster.

According to him, the ordnance currently at the Mine Action Centre in Owerri, Imo, were recovered from the old Nigeria Biafra battlefields since 2015.

"My company, Deminers Concept, was engaged by the Umaru Musa Yar'dua govern-

ment to eliminate threats of explosions in farmlands in the former war zone.

"The ordnance were cleared across Southeast, South South and parts of North Central of Nigeria, including areas in Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Akwa Ibom Cross River, Rivers, and Delta.

"However after clearing them, we did not destroy them because there was no commitment from the government.

"This was in spite of our numerous letters drawing the attention of successive administrations after the late Yar'dua's to it."

The expert revealed that in 2022, one of the mortar bombs exploded, causing civilian casualties.

He said that in view of this,

there was the urgent need for the federal government to take drastic action so as to put an end to the suffering of residents within that area.

He also disclosed that Deminers Concept, had so far cleared about 17,632 remnants of locally fabricated weapons; "Ogbunigwe", "Ojukwu buckets" and

many others from the old battlefields across the country.

He added that 682 antipersonnel landmines and 143 anti vehicle mines had also been cleared.

"Those landmines are rusty and old, but they are still lethal till date; that is why the UN insists that they must be cleared,

based on the convention that Nigeria is signatory to.

"For the people to be completely free, there are a few marked locations of less than 15 per cent within Imo that will be cleared if the government pays us. We have been pleading with them for more than ten years now.

"What remains to be done in the area is the removal of knocked out armoured vehicles of Nigerian Army and Biafran Red Devil tanks which are supposedly to be donated by government to the Army Museum.

"We need to finish that to free the people from any danger," he emphasised.

Alia commends Benue APC stakeholders for embracing peace**MAKURDI**

Governor Hyacinth Alia has commended stakeholders of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Benue for honouring his invitation to a reconciliation meeting.

This is contained in a statement issued on Monday by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr Tersoo Kula, in Makurdi.

Alia specifically lauded the stakeholders for embracing the path of peace after three years of lingering internal crises within the party.

He expressed optimism that the resolutions reached would usher in a new phase of unity, cooperation, and cohesion among APC members in the state.

The governor urged stakeholders and their supporters to sustain the momentum by embracing dialogue, mutual respect, and collective responsibility in advancing the party's interests.

He also wished all stakeholders success in their respective aspirations and called for continued collaboration in the pursuit of peace, development, and good governance in the state.

Alia commended the peaceful conduct of the meeting and the spirit of reconciliation demonstrated by participants, describing the outcome as a major step toward rebuilding trust and confidence within the party.

He noted that the presence of key party leaders, including the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Sen. George Akume; former Governor, Sen. Gabriel Suswam; and former Deputy Governor, Chief Stephen Lawani.

The governor also acknowledged the attendance of past and serving members of the National Assembly, members of the Benue State House of Assembly, serving federal government appointees, and other critical stakeholders.

Police launch manhunt after bandit attack in Katsina**KATSINA**

The Police Commissioner in Katsina State, Ali Umar-Fage, has ordered an aggressive manhunt for bandits behind the reprisal attack on communities in Kankia.

The CP recalled earlier operations recorded major successes against armed bandits operating within the local government area before the deadly attack.

He disclosed this in a statement by Abubakar Sadiq-Aliyu, the Police Public Relations Officer of the command.

Umar-Fage said operatives on April 29 foiled a cattle rustling attempt in Gadar Yan Tulu and Kartaka villages.

"Police recovered 205 animals, comprising 91 cows and 114 sheep, during the operation," he said.

Umar-Fage added that on Saturday, officers repelled another attack on Matinjini village. "Several bandits fled with gun-

shot injuries, while eight motorcycles linked to their operations were recovered," he stated.

He said the criminals later regrouped and attacked Jeka da Kolo and Kwagoro villages on Sunday.

"The attack occurred around noon, killing 11 persons before tactical teams were mobilised to repel the assailants," he said.

Umar-Fage described the attack as "cowardly and barbaric" and expressed condolences to families of the victims.

He assured residents that all those responsible would be tracked down and prosecuted.

The commissioner said additional tactical teams had been deployed to affected communities to strengthen ongoing security operations.

"Bush combing operations and coordinated patrols are ongoing to track the fleeing suspects," he said.

He reaffirmed the command's commitment to protecting life and property across the state.

**A MEETING ON THE SIDELINES:**

L-R: Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy, Mrs. Fatima Mahmood; Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Dr Adegboyega Oyetola; Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization (IMO) Mr. Arsenio Dominguez; Acting High Commissioner of Nigeria to the UK, Amb. Mohammed Maidugu, and Director-General, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, Dr Dayo Mobereola, during a meeting on the sidelines of the 84th session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee in London.

IMO Summit: Nigeria pushes for fair maritime transition**LAGOS**

Nigeria has urged the global maritime community to ensure fairness, equity, and stronger support for developing economies in shipping's transition to net-zero emissions.

The call came during the 84th session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee, organised by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in London.

Nigeria's Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Dr Adegboyega Oyetola, led the country's delegation at the high-level gathering.

This is contained in a statement issued in Lagos by the minister's Special Adviser, Dr Bolaji Akinola.

Oyetola reaffirmed Nigeria's support for global decarbonisation efforts within international shipping and maritime operations.

He, however, stressed that climate frameworks must recognise the economic circumstances and development priorities of emerging economies.

"Decarbonisation must not become an additional burden on developing countries already confronting economic and infrastructure limitations," the minister said.

He maintained that any transition plan must promote

inclusion, fairness, and balanced responsibility among maritime nations.

Oyetola said the global push toward net-zero emissions by 2050 must align with broader sustainable development objectives.

According to him, environmental progress should not undermine economic growth, trade competitiveness, or social stability in developing states.

"Climate ambition must go hand in hand with development realities and shared global responsibility," he added.

On the sidelines of the committee meeting, Oyetola held strategic discussions with top

international maritime leaders.

He met with IMO Secretary-General, Arsenio Dominguez, during talks focused on strengthening Nigeria's engagement with the organisation.

The minister also met the President of Saudi Arabia's Transport General Authority, H.E. Fawaz Al Sehal.

During the engagements, Oyetola reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to deeper international cooperation across critical maritime priorities.

Discussions centred on maritime security, technical cooperation, capacity building, blue economy development, and a fair energy transition.

LP releases 2027 primaries timetable, fixes nomination fees**ABUJA**

The Labour Party (LP) has released its timetable and schedule of activities for the conduct of its 2026 primary elections, with concessions for women, people living with disabilities and youths.

The National Publicity Secretary of the party, Ken Asogwa who disclosed this in a statement on Monday in Abuja added that the timetable was in compliance with the 1999 Constitution, the Electoral Act, 2026 and the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) revised timetable and schedule of activities for the conduct of the 2027 Elections.

According to him, the timetable indicates that the sale of nomination forms for all elective offices will start on May 6 and end on May 16.

Asogwa said that the submission of completed forms would begin on May 17 and end on May 18.

"Screening of aspirants for House of Assembly and Governorship election will be on May 20 while that of the National Assembly and the Presidential election will be on May 22," he said.

He said that results of the screening would be published on May 23.

He added that appeals and petitions for house of assembly and governorship aspirants

would be on May 24, while those for national assembly and presidential aspirants would take place on May 25.

He further said that the final list of cleared aspirants would be published on May 26.

According to him, party primaries for house of assembly and governorship positions will hold on May 27, while those for national assembly and presidential positions will take place on May 29.

Asogwa also announced the structured fees for nomination forms for various offices.

"For house of assembly, the expression of interest form costs ₦1,000,000, while the nomination form costs ₦2,000,000, bringing the total to ₦3,000,000.

"For the House of Representatives, the expression of interest form costs ₦1,500,000 and the nomination form ₦3,500,000, totalling ₦5,000,000.

"Senatorial aspirants are to pay ₦2,500,000 for the expression of interest form and ₦7,500,000 for the nomination form, amounting to ₦10,000,000.

"Governorship aspirants will pay ₦5,000,000 for the expression of interest form and ₦20,000,000 for the nomination form, totalling ₦25,000,000," he said.

"For the presidential ticket, expression of interest form costs ₦10,000,000, while the nomination form costs ₦40,000,000, bringing the total to ₦50,000,000," he said.

Effurun shooting: Police deploy Tactical Team to arrest fleeing suspects

ABUJA

The Nigeria Police Force has deployed Tactical Teams to ensure the arrest and prosecution of the fleeing suspects in the Effurun shooting that led to the death of one, Mene Ogidi.

The Force Public Relations Officer, DCP Anthony Placid, at a news conference in Abuja, said the force had also, put a coordinated investigative measures in place.

Placid said the fleeing suspects include the driver who de-

livered the parcel from Yenagoa and the two members of the vigilante group involved in the case.

He said that the late Mene Ogidi, 28, was shot on April 26 in Effurun area of Delta.

The police spokesman said Ogidi had received a parcel from a friend in Yenagoa, Bayelsa delivered to him by a driver.

He said the deceased had proceeded to a motor park to waybill the parcel to Sapele, with the name, address, and phone number of the intended receiver written on it after collection.

He added that when the par-

cel was searched, it was found to contain a fabricated Beretta pistol and four rounds of 9mm live ammunition.

According to him, citizens who witnessed, this effected a citizen's arrest of the deceased and subsequently contacted the police.

"ASP Nuhu Usman, an Assistant Superintendents of Police and members of his team responded and arrived at the scene and the suspect was formally handed over to the team

"At that point, rather than follow established police rules of engagement and standard operational procedures, Usman shot and killed the unarmed, al-

ready-apprehended suspect."

He said that investigation by the Nigeria Police Force had established that the actions of Usman and members of his team constituted professional misconduct and abuse of office.

Placid said the team had exhibited conduct, likely to cause a breach of public peace by unlawfully killing Ogidi.

"Following the conclusion of investigations, Usman and three other members of his team have been arrested and are currently in custody," he said.

He said that internal disciplinary procedures had been concluded against all officers found culpable.

"The force wishes to state clearly and without ambiguity that all indicted officers have been recommended for dismissal from the Nigeria Police Force.

"The Police Service Commission has reviewed and ratified this recommendation.

"Their dismissal is therefore confirmed and takes immediate effect," he added.

He revealed that the case file had been formally forwarded to the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation for vetting and prosecution.

Placid said the force would cooperate fully with the AGF's office to ensure that the matter was prosecuted to its logical conclusion before a court of competent jurisdiction.

Kaigama, Izunaso call for value-driven media at CTV 15-year anniversary

ABUJA

The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama, and Sen. Osita Izunaso have emphasised the need for value-driven media content to promote truth, unity and moral values in society.

They made the call at the 15th anniversary celebration of Catholic Television (CTV) and the first anniversary of its migration to GOtv Channel 115, held in Abuja.

Kaigama commended the management of the television station for its consistency in evangelism and dissemination of positive messages through modern technology.

He said the station had remained committed to propagating the gospel and promoting truth in spite of numerous challenges.

"I thank God for the gift of modern technology that we can reach distances and go places without even leaving our environment and this is what the Catholic Television has been doing for the past 15 years.

"For 15 years of continuous service, in spite of the challenges and all, they have been serving and they are still serving.

"We are tired of bad news, violence, killings and bloodshed. We want the good news and the good news can only come from

Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life," he said.

The archbishop urged Nigerians to support media platforms that promote moral values, truth and societal harmony.

According to him, Catholic Television has become an important instrument for spreading hope and truth in the society.

"We need the modern media in order to amplify the Word of God, and you are the instruments to bring about this.

"I hope that your gathering here will be of great benefit to the Catholic Television, to the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja and indeed to the whole of Nigeria because we need the truth," he said.

Also speaking, Izunaso described the station as a platform that had continued to shape minds, strengthen families and uphold societal values.

He said Catholic Television had demonstrated that media could go beyond entertainment to inspire and transform lives.

"Today we celebrate not just a milestone, but a movement, one that continues to shape minds, strengthen families and uphold society.

"In an era where content is abundant but meaning is scarce, this platform stands as a beacon of hope, protecting values that build character, deepen spirituality and promote unity," he said.



UK PACK STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP:

L-R: Representative of Ministry of Power, Mr Shehu Ibrahim; Energy Consultant, Mr Oluwaseun Fadare; representative of Odua Group, Mr Shuaib Olawoyin; CEO, Quaint Energy, Durodola Mobolaji; Chairman, Quaint Energy, Mr Femi Adeyanju; Executive Director, Quaint Energy, Dr Mahmud Suleiman, during UK PACK stakeholders engagement workshop on imperatives for accelerating the delivery of the Ikere Gorge Hydropower project in Ibadan on Monday, 4th April, 2026.

PHOTO BY: OLAYINKA BODE-ARE/JAU/NAN

Kano to establish institute on water, sanitation, health

KANO

The Kano State Government has said that plans are underway to establish a new Institute on Water, Sanitation and Health in the state.

This is contained in a statement issued in Kano by the Ministry's Public Relations Officer, Farouk Ghali-Masanawa.

Ghali-Masanawa quoted the

State Commissioner for Rural and Community Development, Dr Abdulkadir Abdussalam, as saying this after he chaired a stakeholders' meeting on the establishment of the institute.

According to the Commissioner, the proposed institute, when established, would be the first of its kind in the country.

Abdussalam commended stakeholders for their support and cooperation towards the

realisation of the initiative's objectives.

He assured that the ministry would continue to provide necessary logistics for the committee to develop workable solutions to challenges in water, sanitation and health in both urban and rural communities.

Earlier, the Managing Director of the Kano State Rural Water Supply and Sanitation

Agency (RUWASA), Alhaji Shamwilu Abdulkadir-Isa, said the meeting was attended by representatives from the Kano State House of Assembly, academia, and ministries of health and local government affairs.

He added that the stakeholders contributed to discussions on the proposed establishment of the institute and strategies to improve water, sanitation and health delivery in the state.

Group plans nationwide medical outreach for vulnerable Nigerians

KANO

The Women Leaders Support Advancement (WLSA) Group has concluded plans to reach vulnerable Nigerians through a medical outreach across the 36 states of the federation.

Mrs Deborah Jan-Hornecker, founder of the group, said this in an interview with newsmen in Kano State.

Jan-Hornecker said that the programme would begin with a phased roll-out in the Northern region.

She said the outreach was part of a structured plan to cov-

er the entire country and bridge healthcare gaps in underserved communities, especially among women and children.

"Not all women have the opportunity to work and earn money, some cannot even afford basic medications like malaria or blood pressure drugs.

"That is why this intervention is important, it brings relief, dignity, and hope to the vulnerable," she said.

She said the group had carried out similar interventions in Nasarawa State, where hospitals in Karu Local Government Area received essential drugs and medical supplies.

"Our goal is to go round all 36 states of the federation, we are starting with the 19 northern states, with Kano as a key milestone.

"From here, we are moving to Zamfara and Kaduna, and once we complete the North, we will extend the programme to the southern part of the country," she said.

Jan-Hornecker said the initiative was driven by a commitment to support Nigerians who could not afford basic healthcare services.

"This is our little way of adding value to the lives of our people, not everyone can afford medical care, we are using

this intervention to close the healthcare gap," she said.

According to her, no fewer than 1,500 women and children benefited from free healthcare services during a two-day outreach at Sharada Primary Healthcare Centre in Kano Municipal.

She said participants drawn from the 44 Local Government Areas of the state received free consultations, medications, diagnostic tests and referrals for serious health conditions.

Jan-Hornecker said the nationwide roll-out underscored WLSA's commitment to improving access to healthcare and enhancing the well-being of vulnerable groups.

Awka residents seek action on smoking risks

AWKA

Some residents of Awka metropolis have raised concern over the health implications of cigarette smoking and called for measures to curb the habit.

The residents in Araba, Awka, said cigarette smokers are liable to develop various ailments, as smoking adversely affects vital organs of the body.

Dr Eze Samuel, a clinical psychologist at Paternoster Hospital, Awka, told NAN on Sunday that smokers were at risk of developing serious illnesses such as cancer.

He said that cigarettes contained harmful and carcinogenic substances that were hazardous to human health and could lead to life-threatening conditions.

"Smoking cigarettes affects individuals psychologically, medically and otherwise," he said.

Samuel urged the government to intensify public enlightenment through seminars, symposiums

and awareness campaigns on the dangers of smoking, adding that consistent monitoring could help control the habit.

Mr Nicholas Nnaji, a resident, said that cigarette smokers were liable to die young due to the health risks associated with smoking.

He advised smokers to desist from the habit, warning that it could cause serious damage to their health.

Mr Collins Ozigbo, a staff member of Odumegwu Ojukwu Teaching Hospital, said that smoking was toxic to the immune system.

He said his experience as a former smoker affected his performance as a sportsperson, making physical activities such as running difficult before he eventually quit.

Some residents called on the government to create more awareness programmes to help reduce cigarette smoking in the area.

NEWS

COAS urges enhanced combat readiness at regimental cadre convention

KADUNA

The Nigerian Army on Monday commenced the 2026 Regimental Cadre (Militia) Convention in Kaduna, with a strong emphasis on enhancing combat readiness, discipline and professional excellence across its formations.

Declaring the convention open, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt.-Gen. Wai-di Shu'aibu, said the role of Regimental Cadre personnel remained critical to both operational and administrative effectiveness of the Army.

The COAS was represented by the Commandant, Martin Luther Agwai International

Leadership and Peacekeeping Centre (MLAILPKC), Maj.-Gen. Dangana Allu.

The COAS said the theme, "Empowering Regimental Cadre to Drive Combat Readiness and Professional Excellence," underscored the need to strengthen the capacity of personnel responsible for enforcing discipline and implementing command directives at unit level.

He noted that the prevailing security challenges required a highly disciplined, motivated and mission-ready force, stressing that Regimental Cadre personnel were central to achieving that objective.

"As custodians of discipline and regimentation, you serve

as the bridge between command directives and their execution. Your conduct must reflect professionalism, integrity and leadership worthy of emulation," he said.

The COAS added that the convention was designed to equip participants with leadership skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to support commanders in enhancing operational effectiveness.

In his remarks, the Chief of Army Administration, Maj.-Gen. Isa Abdullahi, described the convention as a landmark initiative aimed at strengthening the professional and administrative framework of the Nigerian Army.

Abdullahi said Regimental Sergeant Majors occupy a strategic position as the senior-most non-commissioned officers, responsible for maintaining discipline, mentoring subordinates and ensuring effective implementation of policies at the grassroots level.

He explained that the programme aligned with the COAS' command philosophy of professionalism, discipline, capacity development and mission-oriented leadership.

"The effectiveness of any unit depends largely on the ability of Regimental Sergeant Majors to enforce standards, mentor troops and translate strategic directives into actionable outcomes," he said.

He urged participants to actively engage in discussions, share experiences and embrace continuous self-improvement to enhance their effectiveness.

Also speaking, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 1 Division, Maj.-Gen. Abubakar Wase, welcomed participants

and highlighted the importance of the convention as a platform for knowledge exchange and leadership development.

Wase said the evolving security environment, characterised by asymmetric threats and technological advancements, required a blend of experience, innovation and strong leadership.

He assured participants of adequate logistical arrangements, including accommodation, medical support and transportation, while urging them to remain security-conscious throughout their stay.

LASTMA moves to curb highway crashes by dispatch riders

LAGOS

The Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) on Monday, said it is intensifying efforts to address spate of accidents involving dispatch riders on major highways across the state.

The General Manager of LASTMA, Mr Olalekan Bakare-Oki, disclosed this in an interview with newsmen in Lagos.

Bakare-Oki noted that the agency had written to union representatives of dispatch riders, as part of its ongoing traffic safety advocacy and enforcement strategy.

"There are plans to convene a stakeholders' engagement with courier service operators and riders to promote strict adherence to safety regulations.

"The engagement will focus on encouraging riders to prioritise not only the safety of other road users, but also their personal wellbeing," he said.

The LASTMA boss noted that the Lagos State Government remained committed to ensuring optimal safety and security of lives and property.

According to him, the forthcoming engagement would bring together key stakeholders, including unions and service providers, to address concerns and improve compliance with traffic laws.

He said that the agency's school traffic advocacy programme, engages youths to promote road safety awareness and responsible behaviour, while ensuring that safety remains a priority among residents.

NDLEA arrests 6 suspects in Kano drug joints raid

KANO

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Kano Strategic Command, has arrested six suspects with different quantities of illicit substances believed to be narcotics.

The Commander of the NDLEA in Kano, Mr Dahiru Yahaya-Lawal, made the disclosure in a statement issued by the Command's Public Relations Officer, Sadiq Muhammad-Maigatari, on Monday in Kano.

He said that the arrests were made during a raid on some hot spots in and around the Bayero University, Kano, Old campus site.

Yahaya-Lawal said that the raid was part of "Operation Sharar Mafaka", following a formal complaint from the university's management.

The commander said that the suspects were apprehended for trespassing and engaging in the sale and consumption of illicit

substances within and around the university premises.

He added that items linked to the illegal activities were impounded and subsequently destroyed to render them unusable.

"This action demonstrates our commitment to ensuring a drug-free environment where students, staff and their families can live and work in safety.

"We will not relent in our efforts to dislodge all drug joints under Operation Sharar Mafaka," Yahaya-Lawal said

The commander noted that the success of the operation was due to effective collaboration between the agency and the university authorities, whose timely report enabled a swift response.

He warned that the agency would not tolerate the use of government or educational facilities for drug-related activities.

Yahaya-Lawal also urged members of the public and institutions to report suspicious activities to support ongoing efforts to eliminate drug abuse and trafficking in the state.



A VISIT IN LOKOJA:

Chief Judge, Kogi State, Josiah Majebi, (2nd left) receive leader of an advocacy team from Kogi State Health Insurance Agency; Executive Secretary of the agency, Dr Adekunle Aledare, (2nd right), and others, during the visit in Lokoja on Monday.

Kogi govt expands health insurance coverage to judiciary staff

LOKOJA

The Kogi Health Insurance Agency (KGSZIA) has intensified efforts to expand coverage as the state judiciary commences enrollment of staff into the health insurance scheme.

The Executive Secretary of the Agency, Dr Adekunle Aledare, made this known on Monday during an advocacy

visit to the Chief Judge of the State, Josiah Majebi, in Lokoja.

Aledare said health insurance provides access to quality healthcare services and protects beneficiaries from catastrophic health expenditure.

He disclosed that over 2,000 judiciary staff had already been enrolled in the scheme and were awaiting access to care.

According to him, the agency remains committed to en-

sureing that more public servants benefit from the scheme in line with the State government's healthcare objectives.

Responding, Majebi commended Gov. Ahmed Ododo for the initiative, describing the health insurance scheme as a significant step toward improving workers' welfare.

He noted that the programme would enhance productivity and overall wellbeing

of workers in the state.

The chief Judge assured that the Judiciary would follow due process to fully onboard its staff into the scheme within the shortest possible time.

Earlier, the Chairman of the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria in the state, Mr Emmanuel Waniko, expressed the union's commitment to ensuring that its members benefit from the Health Insurance Scheme.

NIS warns against fraudulent passport payment platforms

ABUJA

The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) has warned Nigerians against patronising fraudulent platforms for passport payments, while dismissing claims of third-party involvement in its application process.

This was contained in a statement issued by the Service Public Relations Officer (SPRO), Akinsola Akinlabi on Monday.

Akinlabi described as false and misleading the allegations suggesting that a religious organisation was linked to its payment system.

He maintained that its passport application process remained secure, transparent and fully government-approved,

and was accessible only through its official portal: <http://passport.immigration.gov.ng>.

He stressed that the portal was the sole authorised platform for all passport-related payments and processing for Nigerians both within the country and in the diaspora.

"The service has not authorised any religious body, private organisation or individual to act as an intermediary or receive payments on its behalf.

"The claims that a religious organisation appears in our payment process are entirely false and do not reflect the structure, integrity or processes of the NIS," he said.

He added that a simple verification of the NIS official portal would confirm the authenticity

and transparency of its system.

He cautioned that any third-party links or platforms claiming to process passport payments for the NIS were fraudulent and should be avoided.

He said the NIS had commenced investigation into the source of the allegations, noting that preliminary findings suggested the involvement of individuals attempting to mislead the public or damage the Service's reputation.

He assured that appropriate sanctions would be applied against those found culpable.

He reiterated that NIS operated strictly in line with government financial regulations and works only with licensed and accredited payment service providers clearly indicated

on its official platform.

He warned that payments made outside the approved channels were at the risk of the payer, adding that it would not be responsible for any loss or inconvenience arising from such transactions.

The NIS urged Nigerians to exercise caution, use only its official portal, and avoid unauthorised agents, websites and third-party platforms.

"The service does not recognise or provide any alternative payment options for passport applications or related services," he said.

Akinlabi assured the public of NIS commitment to safeguarding trust by strengthening its systems and monitoring processes to prevent fraud, misuse and misrepresentation.

Alleged false claim: DSS asks court to dismiss Sowore's no-case submission

ABUJA

The Department of State Services (DSS) on Monday urged the Federal High Court in Abuja to dismiss a no-case submission filed by Omoyele Sowore, the publisher of Sahara Reporters.

Sowore is standing trial for allegedly making a false claim

against President Bola Tinubu.

The DSS' counsel, Akinlolu Kehinde, SAN, told Justice Mohammed Umar that the prosecution, through its witnesses, had been able to establish a prima facie case against the defendant.

Kehinde said, in advancing their argument, the DSS filed its response to Sowore's appli-

cation on April 23.

He urged the court to refuse Sowore's request and order him to enter his defence.

Earlier, Abubakar, while adopting the processes, told the court that the prosecution failed to link his client with the alleged offences.

He applied that the court should dismiss the charge against Sowore, discharge and acquit him from the two-count cyberbullying charge on the ground that a prima facie case

was not made against him.

He argued that upon the review of the evidence led by the prosecution so far, the complainant failed to link him with the charges filed against him for allegedly calling the president a "criminal."

According to Abubakar, the prosecution failed to call vital witnesses.

He said this was fatal to the case of the prosecution.

After the adoption of the processes filed in the matter,

the judge adjourned the case until May 8 for ruling on the no-case submission.

Sowore is being prosecuted by DSS for allegedly making false claim against the person of Present Tinubu by referring to him as "a criminal" in a post

he made on his "X" and Facebook accounts.

DSS had filed a two-count amended charge, marked: FHC/ABJ/CR/484/2025, against Sowore, also a politician.

He, however, pleaded not guilty after his re-arraignment.



TRAINING OF SMALLSCALE DAIRY FARMERS:

Oyo State Coordinator, Federal Ministry of Livestock Development, Dr Kakulu Florence; Senior Special Assistant to the President on Livestock Development, Idris Abiola-Ajimobi; Director, Department of Animal Husbandry and Rural Development, Dr Olubukola Akinloye, during a training of 100 Small scale dairy farmers on good dairy farming practices by Federal Ministry of Livestock Development in Ibadan on Monday, 4th May, 2026.

PHOTO BY: OLABODE OLATUNJI/JAU/NAN

Alleged money laundering: Court remands ex Skye Bank Chairman Tunde Ayeni

ABUJA

Federal Capital Territory High Court on Monday remanded a former Skye bank Chairman, Tender Ayeni in Kuje Corrections facility, pending the determination of his bail application.

Justice Jude Onwuegbuzie gave the order after Ayeni's counsel, Ahmed Raji, SAN asked for a short date for defence to move the bail application.

The judge adjourned the case until May 13, for the hearing of the defendant's bail application.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) charged Ayeni with 17 counts bordering on money laundering to the tune of about N8 billion.

He however pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Following his not-guilty plea, the prosecution counsel, Ekele Iheanacho SAN, asked the court for a date for commencement of trial.

He also urged the court to remand the defendant in custody pending commencement of trial.

Counsel for Ayeni, Ahmed Raji SAN, however, told the court that the defence filed a bail application on behalf of Ayeni today and served same on the prosecution.

According to him, the charge was served on the defendant by EFCC last Friday, May 1, which

was a public holiday.

He urged the court to grant a short adjournment for the bail application to be moved.

Raji informed the court that Ayeni was a lawyer of over 35 years practice.

He then appealed to the court to release the defendant to him (Raji) and Olalekan Ojo SAN, assuring that they would present the defendant in court at the next adjourned date.

Court remands man in DSS custody over alleged false claims against military

ABUJA

The Federal High Court in Abuja on Monday ordered the remand of a man, Chidiebere Mark, in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS).

Justice Joyce Abdulmalik gave the order after Mark was

arraigned for claiming that the Nigerian military personnel were poorly fed.

The DSS had charged Mark, who lives at Plot 88, Sabo Lugbe, Abuja, with making a viral video post on his X handle (Justice crack) in which he made the allegation.

The defendant, however,

pleaded not guilty to the three-count charge when it was read to him, following which the prosecuting lawyer, E. Orubo, applied for a date to enable the prosecution to open its case.

Orubo urged the court to remand the defendant in the custody of the DSS.

Defence lawyer, Marshall

Abubakar, made an oral application for bail, which the court did not entertain, but ordered him to file a formal application for bail.

Ruling, Justice Abdulmalik ordered that the defendant be remanded in the custody of the DSS and adjourned until May 25 for the commencement of trial and hearing of bail application.

2 defendants admit knowledge of plot to topple govt in video evidence

ABUJA

Two of the suspected coup plotters, on Monday admitted that they had knowledge of the plot to overthrow President Bola Tinubu government in video recordings played at the Federal High Court in Abuja.

Navy Capt. Erasmus Oche-

gobia Victor (rtd.) and Insp Ahmed Ibrahim (2nd and 3rd defendants), whose video recording sessions during investigation were played in the open court before Justice Joyce Abdulmalik, made this known in the ongoing trial.

The video recordings were contained in a hard disc tendered by the prosecution lawyer,

Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, which the court admitted in evidence.

Lawyers to the defendants raised objection about the admissibility of the videos on the grounds that their clients did not make the statements voluntarily.

The defence lawyers also objected to having the recordings played in open court when they were yet to be admitted in

evidence.

Justice Abdulmalik, however, overruled them and ordered that the recordings be played, noting that it was the standard practice.

The judge, who noted the objection raised by the defence team, held that a trial-within-trial could be conducted to ascertain the propriety of the defence.

I have nowhere to go, I was married off at 14, divorced woman breaks down in court

KADUNA

A 44 year-old woman, Zainab Isah on Monday told a Shari'a court 1, sitting at Magajin Gari, Kaduna that she had nowhere to go after her divorce from her husband, Alhaji Abdulhamid.

She told the court that Abdulhamid married her when she was 14.

"I have been married to him for 30 years now and I gave him 10 children," she said.

Isha told the court that her husband divorced her on January 1.

"I am yet to complete my waiting period (Iddah), as required under Islam.

"I lived in peace with my co-wives but I can't leave my children for them; three of my children are sick", she said.

Earlier, Abdulrashid Musa, counsel to Abdulhamid, prayed the court to compel Isah to leave his house since they were no longer married.

He said he had issued two pronouncement of divorce to the defendant.

The first, he said was pronounced on December 29, 2025 adding that she had finished her Iddah.

He stated that all efforts made by him to ensure she leaves his house, failed.

He alleged that she was causing trouble for his other wives.

The complainant however, told the court that he was ready to pay for his ex wife's rent when she gets a new place to live with her children.

The Judge, Malam Mu'awiya Shehu said the rights of a woman for shelter, feeding and other provisions by the husband ends when divorce occur adding that only the children have the right to be taken care of.

He adjourned the matter to June 1 for the defendant to find a new place she can relocate with her children and to report any development to the court.

Teenager in court over alleged unlawful grazing, malicious damage

ADO-EKITI

An 18-year-old Haruna Abdullahi was, on Monday, arraigned before an Ado-Ekiti Chief Magistrates' Court, over alleged unlawful grazing and malicious damage.

Abdullahi, whose address was not given, is facing a three-count

charge bordering on unlawful grazing and malicious damage.

He, however, pleaded not guilty to the charge preferred against him.

The prosecutor, ASP Akinwale Oriyomi, told the court that the defendant and other at large committed the offence on April 24 in Ado-Ekiti.

He alleged that the defendant and other at large unlawfully grazed his cattle in an unauthorised place.

Oriyomi alleged that the defendant and other at large maliciously damaged farm produce valued about N5 million, property of one Musa Hammed.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **ABDULLAHI MANU**, now wish to be known and addressed as **UMAR SULEMAN**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CORRECTION/CHANGE OF NAME

I, formerly known as **EHIGIATOR ALEX OSAS**, now wish to be known and addressed as **EHIGIATOR ALEXANDER OSAS**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

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

CHANGE OF NAME

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

CHANGE OF NAME

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

ADDITION OF NAME

I, formerly known as **OSAYEMWENRE ENAYABA**, now wish to be known and addressed as **ENAYABA JOY OSAYEMWENRE**. All former documents remain valid. Concerned authorities and the general public please take note.

CHANGE OF NAME

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FP 4X2	73,000	78,475	80,700	86,753	4 X 2	45,260	48,655	34,400	36,980
FP 3X2	64,870	69,735	73,000	78,475	3 X 2	30,900	33,218	26,600	28,595
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E-Money gifts Carter Efe N50m for beating Portable

Lagos-based socialite and entrepreneur Emeka Okonkwo fondly called E-money has gifted comedian Carter Efe 50 million Naira following his victory over singer, Habeeb Okikiola, popularly known as Portable.

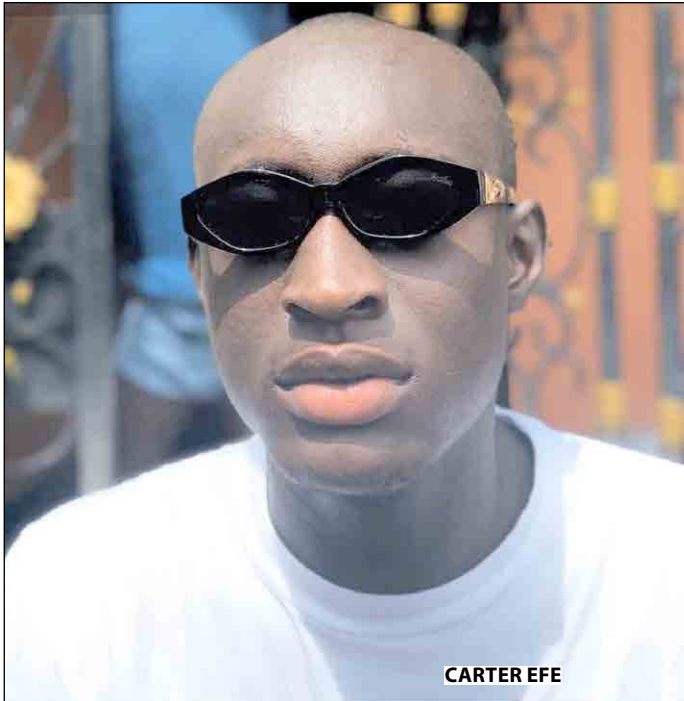
The prize money was announced after Carter Efe defeated Portable via unanimous decision at the chaos in the Ring four event held at Balmoral Hall of the Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, Lagos.

E-money confirmed the cash reward at the end of the event after being prompted by the chief executive officer of Balmoral Group promotions, Ezekiel Adamu.

"You know we put our money where our mouth is and so, congratulations Carter on your win. N50 million for you"

Adamu also commended the event, describing it as a successful and entertaining show that lived up to expectations.

"We promised chaos in Ring and we have delivered very entertaining fights tonight. There is more coming, thanks to everyone that made this a success and to the fighters for the great display" he concluded.



CARTER EFE



OGALA

OKAFOR

Chris Okafor: Actress Doris Ogala absence stalls trial

The arraignment of Nigerian actress, Doris Ogala at the federal High court, Ikoyi Lagos last Thursday was stalled due to her absence in court.

Ogala is facing four - count charge bordering on publication of personal materials of the founder of Grace Nation Bible Ministry, Pastor Chris Okafor, cyberbullying and harassment, attempted extortion and dissemination of inciting and false information to incriminate the cleric.

At the hearing on Thursday, Tolulope Mokuola, the prosecuting counsel, applied for a bench warrant to compel Ogala's appearance, citing her failure to attend despite being served with hearing notice.

Opposing the application, Temiloluwa Akindayini, the defence counsel told the court that Ogala underwent surgery on Tuesday April

28th, 2026 and currently recuperating in Abia state.

Akindayini added that an affidavit deposing Ogala's medical condition was filed before the court on April 22nd, 2026.

In response, the prosecutor faulted the defence for not serving the prosecution in advance of the alleged surgery.

In his ruling, Justice Akintayo Aluko declined the prosecution's application for a bench warrant and directed that the actress must be present in court for arraignment on June 9th, 2026, which is the adjourned date.

"The defendant must present a verifiable medical report from government hospital and ensure that same is served on the prosecution before the next adjourned date. Also, the defendant must be present in court for arraignment" the judge ruled.

Banky W wasn't my Ideal man initially —Adesua Etomi

Adesua Etomi-Wellington, wife of Nigerian singer, politician and clergyman, Banky W has reflected on her marriage, revealing that her choice of husband was not in the category of Banky W.

Speaking in a recent interview hosted by Teju Babyface along with her husband, Mrs Wellington explained that initially Banky W was not her ideal man due to his career paths but she settled for him because of divine instruction.

"Before I met my husband, I told God I didn't want to marry a musician, a pastor or a politician but God gave me all three in one," she said.

On his part, Banky W disclosed that Adesua confirmed he was her husband after several rejections."

He explained that he had known that she was his wife for a year and half but was waiting for her to be on same page with him.

"Adesua called me on phone one day and said Banky you know you are my husband right?"

The singer said Adesua's confirmation further strengthened his conviction which led to their getting marry as at the time they married.



ADESUA ETOMI

Nollywood actress, Oby Kechere is dead

Nigerian actress and film director, Oby Kechere, known for her role as Ms koi koi in the 2002 comedy classic, 'Aki na ukwa' is dead.

National president of Director Guild of Nigeria (DGN),



KECHERE

Uche Agbo broke the sad news on Saturday May 2, 2026.

Agbo said the actress died on Monday 27th April, 2026 after a protracted illness.

The statement read in part " it is with deep sorrow and a heavy heart that we announced the passing of madam Cecilia Oby Kechere, vice chairman of DGN, Abuja chapter." "We were informed on Friday that she passed on Monday April 27th, 2026, after a prolonged illness."

"Madam Cecilia was a graduate of theatre Arts, university of Ibadan, a committed professional and a valued member of DGN. Her contributions to the growth and unity of the Guild particularly the Abuja chapter will never be forgotten."

"On behalf of the national council and the entire DGN family, I extend my deepest condolences to her family, loved ones and all members of the Abuja chapter in this difficult time."

Oby Kechere hails from Mbaise in Imo state, Nigeria. She joined the Nigerian film industry, otherwise called Nollywood in 2001, first starring in the popular 'August meeting' films.

Nigeria is held back by bad governance —Korra Obidi

United States - based Nigerian dancer and singer, Korra Obidi has reflected on her time in Nigeria, lamenting that citizens function as their own government.

Speaking in a monitor episode of the one 54 podcast recently, the dancer said Nigerians has a lot of potentials but held back by bad governance.

She explained that citizens provide basic social amenities for themselves due to failure of government.

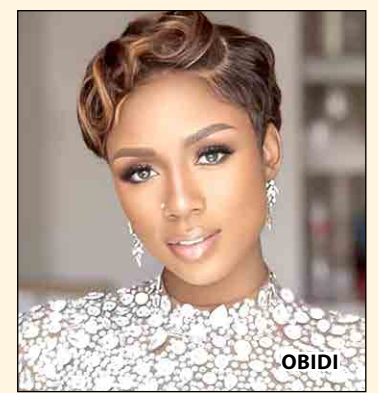
"Nigeria is blessed. It has no natural disaster. They have been predicting that the sea would flood Lagos but instead the sea is constantly being pushed back and reclaimed, people are building houses on the reclaimed land. Lagos is growing at an astronomical rate" she said

"There are over 250 million people in Nigeria, majority of which are youths. There is so much potentials in Nigeria. Tech is growing crazy here. It is the government that is hindering a

lot. Most people no longer care about the government"

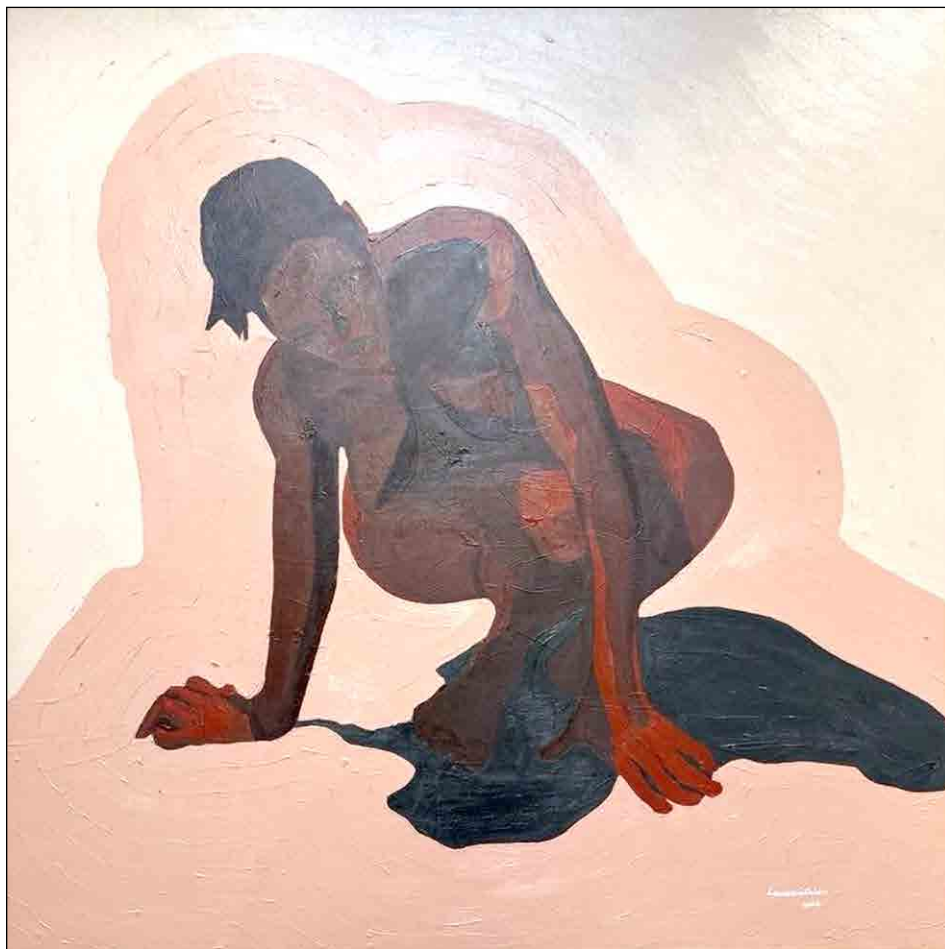
"In Nigeria you are your own government. You make your own water, dig your well and purify the water for you and your family. You get your own electricity, you have your own solar or generator"

" You basically have your own ministry. Everybody have their own kingdoms and just trying to survive" she recounted.

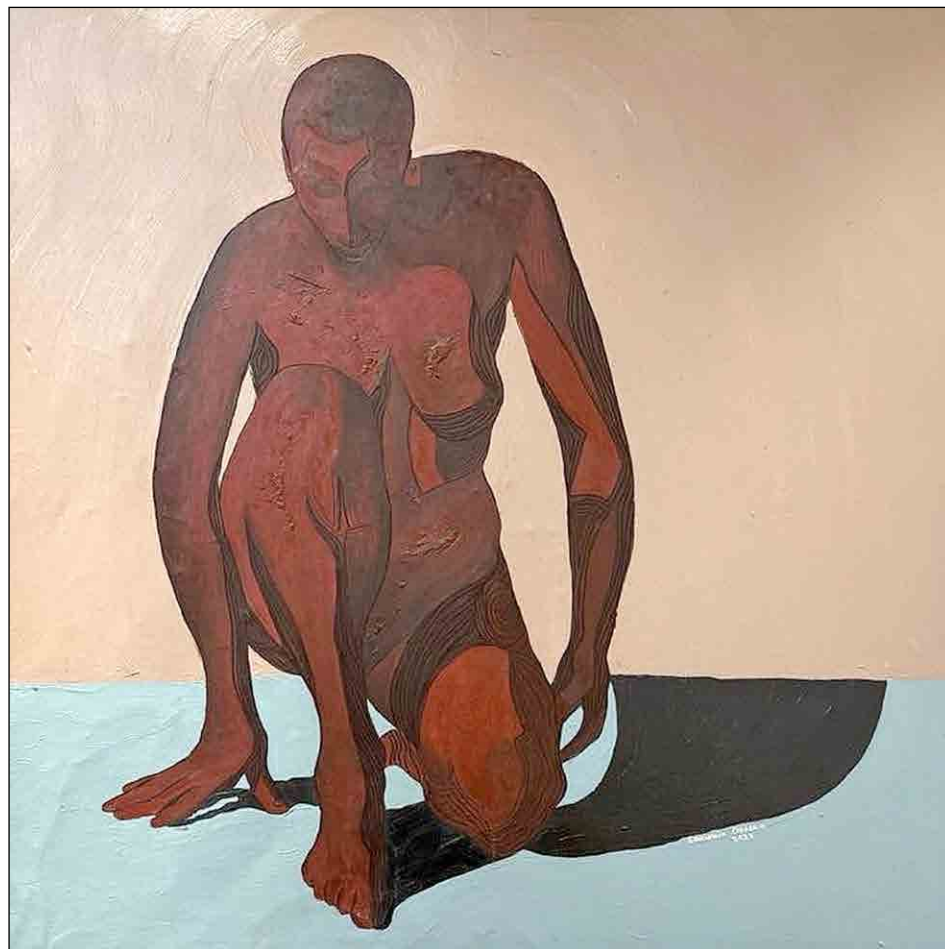


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REBIRTH

Lawrencina Ozioko's Art of fragility

OLUSHOLA O. OLAJOBI

In the always energetic city of Lagos Nigeria, where the spirit is willing but the flesh is often pushed to its breaking point, it is easy to forget that the human body is finite. We treat our bodies like machines, ignoring the creaks and groans until the engine fails.

Lawrencina Nnedinso Ozioko is a contemporary visual artist who is using her canvas to stage a quiet but urgent intervention. Born in Enugu and currently practicing in Lagos, Lawrencina is an artist with a mission that transcends aesthetics. She is holding a mirror up to one of the most critical issues facing Sub-Saharan Africa today, the fragility of human existence and the gaping wounds of healthcare inequality.

Lawrencina's work is tangible exploring the deep inward feelings through a deeply symbolic and iconological perspective.

Working primarily with acrylics on canvas, she introduces a surprising element, tissue paper. A soft, and absorbent material that is easily torn which she layered onto her canvases, thereby creating textured surfaces that serves as a direct metaphor for the human body, a visual representation of fragility.

Her technique involves layering, painting, and exploring the delicate nature of her materials, mirroring the way our own health requires careful, preservative handling.

Lawrencina's artistic philosophy is anchored in the poignant words of Martin Luther King Jr.: "Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman."

By drawing from personal experiences of growing up in an environments where healthcare was either overcrowded, unaffordable, or non-existent, Lawrencina's art asks the hard questions. Who is to blame? Is it the systemic failure

of governance or the cultural negligence regarding early detection?

Her work shines a light on the dark reality that in the 21st century, countless African dreams are buried prematurely not because of a lack of talent, but because of a lack of care.

As she notes, "I see our individual human bodies as homes to our respective dreams and hopes for a better future." When the home collapses, the dream dies with it.

Lawrencina is not just painting from intuition; she is painting with a deep well of knowledge. A graduate of the University of Benin (UNIBEN) with a BA in Fine and Applied Arts painting major and recent Master of Arts graduate in Art History from the University of Lagos (UNILAG), where she deepened her understanding of the trade.

Her commitment to growth was further recognized during the 2022/2023 African Female

Artists Mentoring Program (AFAMP), where she was celebrated as a dedicated practitioner. This blend of formal training, historical research, and raw talent allows her to create work that is not only visually captivating but conceptually rich.

Lawrencina Nnedinso Ozioko is an emerging voice in the Nigerian art scene who refuses to look away from the uncomfortable. Her paintings are a call to action. They urge us to stop viewing our bodies merely as vessels that move us around, but as the only home we will ever truly own.

In a region where preventative care is often a luxury, Lawrencina's art serves as a "visual prescription," reminding us that early detection is the best cure.

Her work is a plea for policy change, but also a personal appeal to every viewer to take good care of their body. It is fragile. It is precious. It is yours.

Considering lines through Tomiwa Ashaolu creations

Connecting dots moving in space is a basic element of art which has enabled humans to express themselves over the ages. From the prehistoric years of man's developments through the modern period of civilisation down to this age, line has been an integral part of man expressionistic skills popularly known as art.

Apart from being the foundation upon which all other man's expressions were built as seen in architecture; engineering; illustrations etc, line is also an art style which artists across cultures have adopted in narrating their stories although some artists have also enhance this basic approach with other mediums such as color preferences, materials of execution and etcetera in other to best expressed themselves amongst which Tomiwa Ashaolu's drawings and paintings stands out.

A visual artist with almost a decade of professional experience which are documented in exhibition catalogues, art fairs and other art events.

Ashaolu's works fuses visual element of lines in its multiple flows, directions and diversities in narrating his artistic visual stories that mainly focus on womanhood, the multiple forms of the struggles of the African women including gender equality, societal acceptance and joyous celebration using the Yoruba culture among other themes

Tomiwa Ashaolu is a post graduate student of painting major of the University of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria. He currently explores coffee, charcoal and acrylic on canvas and paper to create an interesting body of works though looking simple but loaded with context and messages to his audience.



Entertainment

— with Davidson Imosime Izegaegbe —

VISITING HOURS, A 'Gbovo' Eriamiantoe film

DAVIDSON IMOSIME IZEGAEGBE

The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." John Milton

We grew up as humans from childhood on the efficacy of spirituality. This has subconsciously become a compass by which the mundane and the spiritual roadmap distances are measured. Again, how would it feel, if we realized that we can be opportuned to have visiting hours, or just an hour, with our loved deceased relatives or friends?

The concept is as intoxicating as it is terrifying. It is the ultimate "what if," a bridge built of longing and impossible physics. If such an hour existed, would it be a sanctuary of healing, or would it simply be the cruelest form of a second goodbye or grief? The film VISITING HOUR, as directed by a medical doctor cum filmmaker, Dr Osaigbovo Eriamiantoe, is a psychological and psychiatric therapeutic experience through the film lenses on a simple knock on the connecting door between the living and the dead. Who says it is not possible?

Perhaps the shifting lines between the living and the dead is the secret utility of the hour. We all know how it is, the first time someone dies; we are often too traumatized to say a proper goodbye. We are either in unreasonable shock, or we are focused on the failed machinery of the hospital, or we are drowning in the logistics of a funeral and self guilt. The movie, Visiting Hour offers a clean attempt at our saying a proper goodbye. It is a departure handled with full consciousness and intentionality.

We have read books and seen movies in cinemas where people cry over dead relatives, friends wishing they could rise from their coffins during burial ceremonies. If this truly happens, would this encounter not immediately strip away the trivialities of our daily lives? If the clock ticks loudly, would the air of silence not likely be thick enough with the weight of things better not said?

For many, the first few minutes of the journey from the living to a place for such a reunion, as seen in the movie, would be consumed by the sheer sensory shock of such a moment. The specific pitch of laughter, the manner of adjusting eyeglasses, and the minds to preserve and portray the impressionistic blurs, to see details rendered seamlessly in high-definition once more before the viewers, would be an overwhelming cognitive overload. In this movie, 'Visiting Hours', the dead are not just mere ghosts or memories; they are participants in communication. They are there to listen, observe, speak, and perhaps most importantly, witness who we have become in their absence.

This film made us realize that most people carry a case file of ledger of regrets following deaths of loved ones. We found ourselves haunted by the "I love you" that were swallowed by time and pride, the apologies that were delayed by the drumbeat of procrastination until the hospital room was silenced. Visiting Hours would ultimately serve as a celestial courtroom for these unresolved debts within us as human beings. The film which saw a man lucky enough to realize, after his wife's death, that he now had to create time for their only child from the time he never had. Would you use your visiting hour to seek absolution or question the reality of such?

However, there is a secondary, perhaps more beautiful, use for this time: the reporting of sad griefs like, telling fathers about the birth of their child and the death of their wives who left them without a goodbye or never hearing the voice of



dead parents anymore from postponed phone calls. We often think of mourning as a process of looking backward, which most times transcends grief to what a one-hour visit to the dead would do to allow us say our goodbyes properly to enable us turn a static memory into a dynamic relationship, even if only for the duration of a lunch break.

Psychologically, the existence of Visiting Hours as narrated by the storyteller would fundamentally alter the way we live and view life. But again, as humans, if we knew we had a guaranteed hour of contact after death, would we be more devoted or careless with our relationships in the present? Or would the knowledge of that strict, one hour visiting moment make us more intentional?

There is a psychological phenomenon known as complicated grief, or as put by a psychiatrist consultant- pathological grieving- where a person becomes stuck in a cycle of longing which then prevents such persons from moving forward. Would these people not grab the opportunity of a one-hour visit to their lost ones if given the opportunity? However, it could be a dangerous trap to be able to see loved ones again, to feel the warmth of their hands and hear the clarity of their voices, only to have them snatched away again when the buzzer sounds. Will this not restart the grieving processes from day one again

and even worse. Or you do not think so? What if for a visiting hour, one loses a year from one's life; do you not think many grieving persons would rather waste their lives on earth visiting their lost ones till they exhaust their years and join their departed loved ones?

The cruelty of the hour is in its brevity as it's like a flash in the pan as expressed by the actors played by Seun Kentebete and Angela Edosa. As the end of the visiting hour hits, the desperation and scramble for meaning set in, the clock then ticking faster than the heartbeats as the dead leaves, thereby turning a moment's joy to a stark reminder that the dead are truly gone. Take for instance, the digital age which has already given us a pale imitation of this visiting hour. Imagine the voicemails saved in your phone cloud drives, videos on your social media handles, even your external hard drives for storage that allow us to visit the "dead" in a one-sided loop. The missing link here is the interactive element of Visiting Hours which changes the soul of the experience. It moves from observation with these digital storages to conversation.

Philosophically, this movie ultimately raises questions in our worried minds about the nature of the afterlife itself. If these dead can come back for an hour to meet with the living, where are they, when not visiting, the rest of the time? Are



The "Visiting Hour" is an attempt at imagination on how it can strip away the mystery of the Great Unknown and replace it with a scheduled appointment. For some, this would be a comfort; for the spiritually inclined, it might feel like a sacrilegious reduction of a divine mystery into a calendar event, but is it?

they waiting in a lobby? Are they floating with only them watching us? The "Visiting Hour" is an attempt at imagination on how it can strip away the mystery of the Great Unknown and replace it with a scheduled appointment. For some, this would be a comfort; for the spiritually inclined, it might feel like a sacrilegious reduction of a divine mystery into a calendar event, but is it?

One great thing about the movie is the great realization of how ephemeral life is. In the movie, we notice that as the hour wanes, the tone of the conversation inevitably shifts. The apologies have been made, the news has been shared, and the shock has worn off temporarily. Did you envisage how the final ten minutes before the end of the visiting hour would look like? This is the space for the last Instructions like, "How do I keep going?" "What should I do now all alone with our plans and promises?" "Are you okay without me?" Truly, the "Visiting Hour" is, in many ways, a mirror before us. We are not just visiting the dead; we are visiting the part of ourselves that died with them. Do note, as revealed by the movie, when the visiting hour expires, the dead silence returns. This is the reality of a second parting that creates a unique form of agony, unlike the first death, which is often chaotic, unexpected, or shrouded in the fog of illness and others. No matter what, the end of the Visiting Hour, if as imagined, may be a cold, calculated deadline for self actualisation.

If truly visiting hours with lost ones were real, our world would be a more melancholic place, as we would walk around with a rueful smile knowing that the people we see in around us are all carrying a date in their pocket, a future appointment with a ghost. Again visiting hours is cool but we cannot have it as the laws of physics suggest. Perhaps the exercise of imagining as posited by the film is enough. It reminds us that while we cannot yet visit the dead, we are still very much in the visiting hours of the living. Just as the film clearly shows, the clock of our visiting hour is always ticking, even though the veil is still closed. A living dog, truly, is better than a dead lion.

INTERVIEW

2026 Hajj: Logistics, early planning key to seamless pilgrimage —Edo Amirul Hajj

The Oghieaga of Iybie and Amirul Hajj for Edo State, HRH Mallam Ali D. Suleyman, has identified logistics, early payment by pilgrims, and improved medical arrangements as critical factors for a successful 2026 Hajj exercise. In this interview with by ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH, the royal father speaks on lessons from the 2025 pilgrimage, his reappointment, and preparations for the forthcoming Hajj, EXCERPTS:

Q: Your Highness, you recently led the leadership of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board to present the report of the 2025 Hajj exercise to the governor. What are the key issues highlighted?

A: The 2025 Hajj came with a number of challenges, despite the generous support from the state government. Virtually everything was provided, but some problems predated the current administration and affected operations.

One of the major issues was logistics, especially transportation in Saudi Arabia. Unlike some other states, we had no dedicated vehicles for the safe movement of pilgrims. There were also concerns around feeding, although government intervention helped us manage that effectively.

Medical logistics was another challenge. For instance, we lacked an ambulance, and when we lost a pilgrim, moving the corpse became very difficult. That experience underscored the need for better emergency arrangements.

Another critical issue we experienced this year is late payment by intending pilgrims. Normally, government provides a bailout to enable early booking, but this was not communicated to the governor in time. Saudi authorities had set a deadline, and at that point, fewer than 50 pilgrims had paid. Even when government later intervened, it was already too late. Out of about 350 intending pilgrims this year, only 93 could be accommodated.

Q: You have been reappointed as Amirul Hajj for 2026. What do you think informed the governor's deci-



EDO AMIRUL HAJJ

sion?

A: We were very open and honest in presenting our report to the governor. We highlighted challenges and also proposed solutions, including positioning Edo as a departure hub in South South with economic benefits.

I believe the governor saw that we had a good grasp of the issues and the capacity to address them. Perhaps he felt continuity was necessary to consolidate on the progress made.

For the first time in the state's his-

tory, government provided transportation for pilgrims from Lagos back to Benin. Previously, pilgrims were left on their own after arrival in Lagos. This time, buses were arranged ahead of our arrival, and pilgrims returned home the same day.

Throughout the exercise, we maintained constant communication with the government, even from Saudi Arabia. I believe this responsiveness and coordination played a role in my reappointment. Of course I'm not the

best. Ultimately, It is Allah's will.

Q: As preparations for the 2026 Hajj gather momentum, how would you assess the state's readiness?

A: With the governor's assurances, we are optimistic. He has promised to approve necessary requests promptly. In the past, delays in approvals affected procurement of medicines, logistics, and camp arrangements.

Now, there is a commitment to early planning. Engagement with the National Hajj Commission (NAHCON) is ongoing to ensure a smooth departure process.

We also expect improvements in return logistics, as seen last year. Our focus is on addressing previous gaps, especially in transportation within Saudi Arabia and support for vulnerable pilgrims.

Q: What advice do you have for intending pilgrims?

A: Proper screening is key. Hajj is not compulsory for those who are not medically fit. We must avoid situations where health complications create emergencies.

Pilgrims should consult their doctors and carry necessary medications, especially for conditions that medications may not be easily available or treated in Saudi Arabia because of the nature of the Hajj exercise.

Physical preparation is also important. Hajj involves a lot of walking, so light exercise beforehand will help.

Above all, pilgrims must embrace patience, sacrifice, and understanding. You will share space with others, so tolerance is key. These are the true hallmarks of Hajj.

Q: Based on your experience in 2025, what will you do differently in

terms of pilgrims' welfare?

A: We will place greater emphasis on welfare. For instance, the cost of Hadaya (sacrifice) has often been high. We intend to negotiate with service providers to make it more affordable. Last year, through our engagement with service providers, we paid half of what pilgrims used to pay in the past.

On accommodation, we will discourage overcrowding by reducing the number of occupants per room, ensuring better comfort and use of facilities.

Feeding was commendable last year, with African meals that satisfied pilgrims. We aim to improve on that.

Medically, we will maintain, if not exceed, the standard achieved last year. The medical team performed excellently, and we expect the same level of commitment going forward.

Q: What is your message to those who could not make the list this year?

A: It is always painful, especially for those who have paid. But Hajj is ultimately by divine invitation.

If possible, they should allow their payments to remain with the board. This will position them among the first to be enlisted for the next Hajj and help the state meet early payment deadlines.

They should take it as the will of Allah. Even making the intention carries spiritual reward, and we pray they will have the opportunity in subsequent years.

HRH Mallam Ali D. Suleyman expressed confidence that with improved planning, stronger logistics, and sustained government support, Edo State will deliver a more seamless and fulfilling Hajj experience in 2026.

Healthy living: Why the food we eat matters: from *Mama Put* to mortality

CLARETH SOLOMON

LAGOS/ENUGU – Meet Mama Nkechi. 54. Runs the best “Mama Put” on Owerri Road. Her jollof rice is legendary. Her fried meat sells out by 2pm. Last Tuesday, Mama Nkechi didn't open shop. She was at FMC Owerri, diagnosed with Stage 2 hypertension and pre-diabetes.

The same oil she fries for customers 6 days a week is frying her organs from inside.

This is Nigeria's silent epidemic. We are eating ourselves to death. And we call it “enjoyment.”

1. THE NIGERIAN PLATE: A DANGEROUS LOVE AFFAIR

Walk into any Nigerian home, restaurant, or owambe and the pattern is clear: *We eat plenty, but we don't eat well.*

Excess Oil: The average Nigerian consumes 24.8 litres of cooking oil per year. WHO recommends 8. That “orisirisi” stew is often 40% oil. We reuse oil 5, 6, 7 times until it's black.

That black oil contains acrolein and aldehydes – chemicals that inflame arteries and trigger cancer.

White Poison Trio: White rice, white bread, white garri. Stripped of fibre, they spike blood sugar faster than Coke. Nigeria now has 11.2 million diabetics – 1 in 17 adults. 60% don't know they have it. By the time they find out, kidney is gone.

Salt Overload: We season with salt, Maggi, knorr, curry, thyme, and more salt. WHO says 5g daily. The average Nigerian does 9g. Result? Hypertension now affects 31.2% of adults. That's 1 in 3. Stroke is the 3rd leading cause of death in Nigeria, after malaria and lower respiratory infections.

Meat Without Measure: From suya to nkwoobi to asun, we celebrate with red meat and organ meat. But WHO classifies processed meat as Group 1 carcinogen – same category as cigarettes. Our “point and kill” culture is becoming “point and die.”

Sugar Everywhere: Peak milk in tea. Malt and milk after rice. “Soft drink” with every meal. Fanta, Coke, La Casera. A

50cl bottle has 12 cubes of sugar. Diabetes Foundation Nigeria says sugary drink consumption rose 300% since 2015.

THE DIASPORA PARADOX: JOLLOF ABROAD IS KILLING US FASTER

You think it's better abroad? Data says no.

Nigerians in UK and US have 3x the hypertension rate of African Americans and white Britons. Why? We took Mama Put abroad but left the farm work behind.

In Lagos, you walk to the bus stop. In Houston, you drive to the African shop. Same plate of pounded yam and egusi, zero physical activity. Plus stress of immigration, bills, and racism. It's a deadly combo.

Dr. Adebayo Ojo, Nigerian cardiologist in Atlanta, told me: “I bury 2 Nigerians monthly under 50. Heart attack. Stroke. Kidney failure. All food-related. We are importing Nigeria's diet without Nigeria's lifestyle.”

THE ECONOMIC COST: WE CAN'T

AFFORD THIS MENU

Healthcare Bankruptcy: Treating diabetes costs N450,000 per patient yearly. Dialysis is N40,000 per session, 3 times weekly. NHIS covers less than 5% of Nigerians. So families sell land to keep daddy alive. The World Bank says Nigeria loses 1.3% of GDP yearly to non-communicable diseases. That's N2.8 trillion.

Lost Productivity: A 45-year-old manager dies of stroke. 20 years of experience gone. His company loses. His children drop out. Nigeria loses. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group estimates diet-related illness will cost us 12 million productive years by 2030.

Food Imports vs Food Deaths: We spend \$6 billion yearly importing wheat, sugar, fish, milk. We import the raw materials for the diet that's killing us. Then we spend billions more treating the diseases. It's economic madness.

THE WAY FORWARD: FROM MAMA PUT TO SMART PLATE

We don't need to abandon jollof. We need to re-engineer it. Here's how Nigeria – home and abroad – eats itself back to health:

The 50-25-25 Rule: * At every meal, fill 50% of your plate with vegetables – ugwu, okra, efo, cabbage. 25% with protein – fish, beans, chicken without skin, egg. 25% with complex carbs – ofada rice, sweet potato, unripe plantain, millet. Mama Nkechi can still sell, but she'll sell longevity.

Oil Audit: No more “ororo didun.” Use 1-2 spoons of groundnut oil or palm oil per pot. Never reuse oil more than once. Air-fry your meat. Grill your fish. Your heart will thank you. Lagos State Ministry of Health did this in 100 bukas in 2024 – hypertension among customers dropped 18% in 6 months.

Salt Intelligence: Replace half your salt with garlic, ginger, onions, scent leaf, curry leaf. Taste improves, BP drops. NAFDAC should mandate “low sodium” Maggi cubes. Ghana did it. Why can't we?

Foreign

NEWS

**INDIA PRIME MINISTER:**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a road show in support of BJP candidates in Bengal.

Modi's BJP conquers Bengal, one of India's toughest political frontiers

For years, India's West Bengal state was the great exception to Narendra Modi's political advance.

His Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had swept through India's Hindi-speaking heartland, expanded into the west and north-east, and overwhelmed once-formidable regional rivals. Yet Bengal - argumentative and steeped in a self-image of cultural exceptionalism - remained stubbornly resistant.

That made this state election unusually consequential. With more than 100 million people, West Bengal's electorate is larger than Germany's, turning its election into something closer to a nation choosing a government than a routine Indian state poll.

Monday's BJP victory there would rank among the most significant breakthroughs of Modi's 12-year reign. It is not merely the defeat of a three-term incumbent, but the completion of the party's long march into eastern India.

"Winning Bengal is a big victory for the BJP - a land of

promise that has long eluded its grasp," says author and journalist Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay.

Monday produced an extraordinary political churn across India's south as well.

A defeat in Bengal would end Mamata Banerjee's 15-year rule in the state

Modi's party headed for victory in West Bengal state

In Tamil Nadu, MK Stalin's DMK government was swept aside by actor-turned-politician Vijay and his fledgling TVK party, marking the dramatic return of film-star politics to the state.

In Kerala, the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) defeated the Left Democratic Front (LDF) after two consecutive terms, ending the last remaining Communist-led state government in India. Only in Assam did the BJP buck the broader anti-incumbent tide and retain power, while the party and its allies also held on to the federal territory of Puducherry.

Yet nowhere were the results more politically significant than in Bengal.

The state has seen only one change of government in nearly half a century: the Communist Left Front ruled for 34 years before the Trinamool Congress (TMC), led by the firebrand populist Mamata Banerjee, dominated the next 15 years until now. Political scientists have long described Bengal as a system that favours "hegemonic" parties.

Analysts see the outcome not as a sudden upheaval but as the culmination of a decade-long political project. Unlike the BJP's rapid rise in Tripura or its earlier breakthrough in Assam, Bengal was never a lightning conquest.

"The BJP has been a major force in Bengal for three successive elections, consistently polling around 39% of the popular vote," says Rahul Verma, who is a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research.

Once it established itself near the 39-40% mark, he argues, "the party really needed only another 5-6% to cross the line". Voting trends show the BJP mopping up more than 44% of the vote this time.

Exit polls had predicted a tight contest between the BJP and Trinamool Congress

What makes the result particularly striking is that the BJP achieved this despite still lacking the kind of deep organisational machinery that regional parties historically required to win Bengal.

The Trinamool Congress retained a denser grassroots network and the charismatic dominance of Banerjee. Yet the BJP repeatedly sustained a commanding vote share despite allegations of rival political intimidation and the challenge of taking on one of India's most entrenched regional parties.

"That suggests," Verma says, "the party's support now extends beyond the limits of its relatively thin organisational structure."

So what shifted the election so sharply towards the BJP?

For years, Banerjee's party forged a formidable social coalition: women, Muslims and large sections of the Hindu vote across both rural and urban Bengal.

Women, in particular,

Three dead in suspected virus outbreak on Atlantic cruise ship

Three people have died and a UK national is seriously ill in hospital after a suspected hantavirus outbreak on a small cruise ship in the Atlantic Ocean.

The operator of the MV Hondius ship, tour company Oceanwide Expeditions, said a Dutch husband and wife, as well as a German national, have died but the cause has not yet been established.

However, the Dutch company said hantavirus has been confirmed in the case of the 69-year-old UK national who is in intensive care in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Hantavirus is usually passed to humans from rodents via their faeces, saliva or urine. It can cause severe respiratory illness. Rarely, it can be transmitted between people.

Oceanwide Expeditions said there were two crew members on board "with acute respiratory symptoms, one mild and one severe".

They both require urgent medical care and are of British and Dutch nationality, it said, before adding that no other persons with symptoms had been identified at this time.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said it was "acting with urgency" to support the MV Hondius and thanked South African authorities for taking care of the British patient.

WHO's regional director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri P Kluge, said: "I am in close contact with our teams to ensure a co-ordinated, science-based response."

"Hantavirus infections are uncommon and usually linked to exposure to infected rodents."

"While severe in some cases, it is not easily transmitted between people. The risk to the wider public remains low. There is no need for panic or travel restrictions."

The MV Hondius vessel is currently off the coast of Cape Verde and has 149 people onboard.

Negotiations are in progress with local authorities following what Oceanwide Expeditions described as "a serious medical situation".

Outlining a timeline, the company said a passenger became unwell while onboard and died on 11 April.

His cause of death could not be determined, and his body was taken off the ship after it docked at St Helena on 24 April.

The wife also disembarked on St Helena and the firm said it was told she became unwell during the return journey and later died.

"At this time, it has not been confirmed that these two deaths are connected to the current medical situation on board," Oceanwide Expeditions added.

On 27 April, the firm said, another passenger - the British national - became seriously ill and was "medically evacuated" to South Africa.

The 69-year-old remains in a critical but stable condition in Johannesburg after it was confirmed a variant of hantavirus had been identified.

Although the cause of death has not been established, Oceanwide Expeditions confirmed the passenger was German.

"In addition, there are currently two crew members on board with acute respiratory symptoms, one mild and one severe," the firm said.

"Both require urgent medical care. These crew members are of British and Dutch nationality," it said.

Oceanwide Expeditions said the cause of the deaths were being investigated.

"The disembarkation of passengers, medical evacuation and medical screening require permission from, and co-ordination with, the local health authorities."

"Local health authorities have visited the vessel and assessed the situation. The medical transfer of the two ill persons on board has not yet taken place," the company said.

According to the South African government, MV Hondius departed from Ushuaia in southern Argentina about three weeks ago, before it completed its journey to Cape Verde, where it is anchored outside the capital, Praia.

It is described as a 107.6m (353ft) polar cruise ship, with space for 170 passengers in 80 cabins, along with 57 crew members, 13 guides and one doctor.

Ukrainian drone hits upmarket Moscow high-rise ahead of Victory Day celebrations

A Ukrainian drone hit an upmarket residential high-rise in Moscow in the early hours of Monday, resulting in no casualties but causing visible damage to the façade of the building.

It was the third night in a row that the Russian capital came under attack from drones, days before Russia holds a scaled-back 9 May parade to mark the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany.

An unverified video circulating on social media showed firemen entering a heavily damaged flat covered in dust

and rubble and with blown-out windows, while another showed drone debris strewn across the street below.

Two other drones were intercepted, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. Vnukovo and Domodedovo international airports suspended operations overnight.

A total of 117 were intercepted over several Russian regions between Sunday and Monday, the Russian defence ministry said. Sixty alone were aimed at the region of St Petersburg in what the regional governor Aleksandr Drodzhenko said had been a "massive" attack.

The residential building that was hit is located in an upscale neighbourhood in south-west Moscow, less than 10km (six miles) from the Kremlin and Red Square, where Saturday's parade will be held.

Ukrainian drones have attacked Moscow several times since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Drone alerts regularly shut down airports on the outskirts of the capital and disrupt aerial traffic, but much of the capital is protected by the Pantsir-S surface-to-air missile system and successful strikes so close

to the centre are relatively rare.

Betraying a sense of nervousness ahead of the 9 May celebrations, the Kremlin last week announced that due to a "terrorist threat" from Ukraine it would scale back the yearly grand military parade on Red Square. For the first time since 2008, no armoured vehicles or missile systems will feature.

Several local phone operators announced that mobile internet will be restricted in Moscow for much of the week ahead for "security reasons", Russian media reported on Monday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that the Kremlin was afraid that "drones will fly over Red Square. This is telling... We need to keep up the pressure."

Since the start of the war, Ukraine has developed an arsenal of long-range drones which are often able to hit targets many hundreds of miles from its borders.

Such drones now routinely hit energy infrastructure and refineries across Russia with the aim of slashing Russian oil production and revenue.

On Sunday Zelensky said three Russian oil tankers, a

cruise-missile carrier warship and a patrol boat had been struck in separate attacks on two Russian ports.

The tankers were part of Russia's "shadow fleet" used to evade Western sanctions imposed over Moscow's full-scale invasion launched in 2022, Zelensky said.

For its part, Russia continues to launch deadly aerial attacks on Ukrainian cities on a daily basis.

On Monday Ukrainian authorities said four people were killed and 18 were injured in a missile strike near Kharkiv, close to the border with Russia.

NEWS**Foreign****Israeli attacks kill dozens within days in Lebanon despite ceasefire**

Israeli strikes on southern Lebanon killed 20 people on Sunday, Lebanon's health ministry says - marking one of the deadliest few days there since a ceasefire began just over two weeks ago.

It brings to 77 the number of those killed since Thursday, according to the ministry. Israel says it is targeting the armed Shia Islamist group Hezbollah.

The Lebanese casualty figures do not distinguish between civilians and combatants. However, two of the dead and 14 of the injured are children.

Israel says 17 of its soldiers have been killed during the same period and accuses Hezbollah of firing hundreds of rockets and drones. Both sides accuse the other of violations, and diplomatic efforts to halt the fighting have so far failed.

On Monday, Israeli Army spokesman Avichay Adraee urged residents in several villages to move at least 1km (0.6 miles) from their homes.

The villages are all located outside the "yellow line" - a strip of Israeli-occupied territory extending roughly 10km from the Lebanese-Israeli border, where Israel says it continues to operate against threats, and which it regards as outside the terms of the ceasefire.

The Israeli military maintains that the agreement per-

mits it to act against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks". Lebanese officials dispute that interpretation and accuse Israel of repeated violations.

Hezbollah has also acknowledged carrying out a series of attacks, including drone strikes on Israeli soldiers in Naqoura, in the south of Lebanon close to the Israeli border, and rocket fire at troops in Qantara - in the south-east of the country. The group described those attacks as retaliation for Israeli bombardment of southern Lebanese villages.

Hezbollah also claimed earlier strikes using artillery and what it called "kamikaze drones".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged the growing threat posed by Hezbollah's drone capabilities, warning that it "will take time" to address.

Rounds of talks between Israel and Lebanon in the US, though symbolically significant as the first direct ambassador-level contact in decades, have produced no tangible results on the ground.

Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun has called on Israel to fully implement the ceasefire before any further negotiations can proceed.

In an address Monday morning, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem was dismissive of the diplomatic process.

Knowing Trump's 'Project Freedom' aimed to help stranded ships through Strait of Hormuz

President Donald Trump has announced the US will help "guide" ships that have been stranded by Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait has remained largely blocked since the US and Israel launched air strikes on Iran - and Tehran responded by blocking the crucial waterway through which 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas is meant to pass freely.

What does Trump's "Project Freedom" entail and could it lead to a resumption of hostilities?

WHAT DID TRUMP SAY?

The president said the US had been asked by countries "from all over the World" to help free up their ships which were "locked up in the Strait of Hormuz" and were "merely neutral and innocent bystanders".

And so, in response, the US would "guide their Ships safely out of these restricted Waterways".

"The Ship movement is merely meant to free up people, companies, and Countries that have done absolutely nothing wrong - They are victims of circumstance," Trump said in the post on his Truth Social platform.

He added this was "a Humanitarian gesture on behalf of the United States, Middle East-

ern Countries but, in particular, the Country of Iran" - as many of these vessels were "running low on food, and everything else necessary for largescale crews to stay on board in a healthy and sanitary manner".

Trump's announcement appears mild compared to previous statements against Iran.

It even makes it sound like Iran is a party to the operation - the president went as far as to say "Project Freedom" was being undertaken on behalf of Iran, too.

But that is not how Iran sees the operation.

A statement from the head of Iran's central command said it would attack "any foreign armed force" that tried to approach or enter the Strait, "especially, the aggressive US army".

Maj Gen Ali Abdollahi said that Iran had "repeatedly" stated that the Hormuz Strait "is under the control" of the Iranian armed forces, and safe passage through it must be co-ordinated with it "under all circumstances".

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping route in the Gulf region, is one of the world's most important shipping routes. Bounded to the north by Iran and to the south by Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Strait of Hormuz connects the Gulf with the Arabian Sea.

New alliances shakes up Nigerian political landscape

Two of Nigeria's most prominent opposition figures have announced they have switched parties in a dramatic political realignment ahead of next year's presidential election.

Peter Obi and Rabiu Kwankwaso, who finished third and fourth respectively in the 2023 presidential race, have both joined the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC), raising the prospect of a joint ticket to challenge President Bola Tinubu.

They were previously in the African Democratic Congress (ADC), along with former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, who came second in the last election.

While this could be seen as a fragmentation of the opposition, supporters of Obi and Kwankwaso say it will give their alliance greater focus.

Both men are former gover-

nors and command significant grassroots followings.

Obi is hugely popular among young voters across the south, while Kwankwaso wields considerable influence in the north.

The move comes just nine months after Obi, Kwankwaso and Abubakar joined the ADC but that alliance quickly became mired in legal battles over party leadership - something Obi blamed on the government.

Nigeria plans to repatriate nationals willing to leave South Africa after attacks

"The same Nigerian state and its agents that created unnecessary crises and hostility within the Labour Party that forced me to leave now appear to be finding their way into the ADC," Obi said on Sunday.

He was the Labour Party candidate in the 2023 election.

Allies of President Tinubu have

denied that they have been trying to sabotage opposition parties.

Obi, 64, and Kwankwaso, 69, were formally received at the NDC's national headquarters in Abuja by the party's national leader, Senator Seriake Dickson, on Sunday.

Speaking afterwards, both men called for national unity, greater opportunities for young people, and an end to the infighting that has plagued Nigeria's opposition.

However, their decision risks upsetting allies within the coalition built around the ADC, which had been positioning itself as the main vehicle for opposition unity.

Some figures within the bloc have privately expressed a sense of betrayal, raising fresh doubts about whether Nigeria's fragmented opposition can sustain a coordinated challenge

against President

In a statement, the Nigerian presidency played down the significance of the defections, suggesting they reflected "the normal fluidity of democratic politics" rather than any fundamental shift.

A presidential spokesperson said the government remained focused on governance.

"Political alliances will come and go," the spokesperson said. "But our priority is delivering economic reforms, improving security and ensuring stability for all Nigerians."

Tinubu is widely expected to seek a second term, although he has not yet confirmed it. His supporters recently paid the 100 million naira (£52,000; \$73,000) fee needed for the form to contest the primary elections for the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party.



POSTERS IN ISRAELI ATTACKS:

Lebanon's health ministry says 60 people have been killed in Israeli attacks in the past four days

Antisemitism 'allowed to come into the open' says Bondi victim's daughter

The daughter of a Bondi Beach attack victim has described how, since the shooting, she has received messages saying she too should have been killed.

Sheina Gutnick was the first witness appearing before Australia's royal commission into antisemitism, set up in the wake of a shooting at a Hanukkah event in December in which 15 people were killed.

Gunman Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police at the scene and his son Naveed Akram - the other alleged attacker - was critically injured and later transferred from hospital to prison.

The 24-year-old has been charged with 59 offences, including 15 counts of murder and one of committing a ter-

rorist attack.

"I saw people trying to excuse and justify the events as only anti-Zionist," Gutnick told a public hearing in Sydney on Monday as she listed the ways in which she was made to feel unsafe in her own country.

Her father Reuven Morrison was killed while hurling objects at the gunmen to stop them shooting.

Gutnick also told the hearing she'd seen a huge shift in antisemitism since October 2023.

"I felt as though antisemitism was allowed to come into the open," she said. "All of a sudden it was socially, morally acceptable for antisemitic comments to be made in public discourse."

Her father Reuven Morrison was "deeply proud" of being

Australian, Gutnick said in her evidence. He had fled the USSR at the age of 14 and later met her mother on Bondi Beach.

Now though, Gutnick said Bondi held "complicated" feelings for her, despite having beautiful childhood memories at the famous beach.

Another person giving evidence, known only as AAL, described how he had moved to Australia from South Africa in the 1980s and loved it from the start.

"I treated Australia as home from the day I stepped off the plane," said AAL, appearing to break down during his testimony. "I have to admit things have changed - I have to think very seriously whether this is the country for my grandchildren."

The royal commission said that as of Monday morning, nearly 7,500 submissions had been made. The first block of public hearings, which lasts until 15 May, will focus on lived experience of antisemitism.

Last week, former High Court judge Virginia Bell, who is overseeing the commission, published an interim report giving 14 recommendations including prioritisation of gun reforms and extending the policing arrangements for Jewish high holy days to other Jewish events as well.

Ahead of the public hearings on Monday, Bell acknowledged a "sharp spike" in antisemitism that had been "mirrored in other western countries," adding that it was linked to "events in the Middle East".

Feature

NUJ, NAWOJ launch Committee for Maiden Women in Security Summit 2026, vow to redefine security narrative

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

Stakeholders in the media and security sector yesterday convened online to inaugurate a planning committee for the *Women in Security Summit 2026 and Women in Security Awards*, in what has been described as a strategic intervention to place women at the center of Nigeria's security conversation.

The virtual meeting, which drew key players from the Nigeria Union of Journalists and the Nigeria Association of Women Journalists, signaled the formal take-off of preparations for the landmark summit slated for *June 2026*.

Comrade Aisha Ibrahim, National Chairperson of NAWOJ, set the tone in her address, describing the initiative as “not just another event on our calendar,” but “a strategic intervention that seeks to place women firmly within the security conversation—where decisions are made, where policies are shaped, and where the future of our nation is defined.”

Comrade Ibrahim stressed that NAWOJ is not a mere observer but a “driver of change” in the security space.

“Security is not just about borders and weapons; it is about people, communities, and the lived realities of

women whose voices must be heard and respected,” she said.

She added that the WINSEC Summit presents an opportunity “to spotlight competence, to celebrate excellence, and to redefine the narrative around women in security.”

Warning that “the success of this maiden edition will not be determined by intention, but by execution,” the NAWOJ Chairperson called for clarity, urgency, and shared responsibility from the newly formed committee.

“I urge us all to be deliberate, to be focused, and to be solution-driven,” she declared, before formally moving

for the adoption of the agenda.

“Together, we will not only deliver a successful summit—we will set a standard that cannot be ignored,” Ibrahim concluded.

NUJ President, Comrade Alhasan Yahaya, was represented at the meeting by *Comrade Tita Onyebuchi Nze, Assistant National Secretary, NUJ and WINSEC Project Coordinator*.

Speaking on behalf of the NUJ President, Comrade Onyebuchi disclosed that members of the committee were “carefully chosen based on their antecedents and capacity to deliver on given assignments.”

He charged the committee to “leave no stone unturned and explore all possible avenues for a result-oriented, scintillating, colourful outing come June 2026.”

The WINSEC Summit 2026 aims to celebrate excellence and spotlight the competence of women in Nigeria's security architecture, while creating a national platform for policy dialogue and recognition through the *Women in Security Awards*.

The planning committee has now commenced work on structure, timelines, and deliverables to ensure the maiden edition becomes a national reference point.

Skills vs certificates: Education or ability?

EJEMOGO REBECCA ANWURI

As the world evolves, people are in a constant dilemma on whether to consider acquiring skills to be more tenable than obtaining certificates or vice versa. Companies and organizations, during the process of recruitment, most times consider those with certificates as being qualified, while some organizations do not mind whether or not the person to be recruited has certification relevant to the job description, provided they have the required skills to get the job done. This raises a critical question: in today's world, is it education or ability that truly matters?

A certificate is a formal recognition or proof of an individual's completion of a course of study or other requirements established by a professional body.

Hence, it is a way to attest to an individual's knowledge and competence in a specific area.

Skills, on the other hand, are an experiential proof that a person has the ability to perform a specific task or activity. They are often acquired through practice, experience, and training.

Many people prefer certificates to acquiring skills because they believe that having theoretical knowledge grants a person access to information that a skilled individual may not have. This is why one may notice that when a person obtains a degree and decides to venture into being an artisan (e.g., tailoring), there is often a touch of difference and excellence compared to someone who is skilled at performing the task but has limited knowledge of how to refine that skill.

Also, certificates serve as entry requirements. Job vacancies, from online listings to posters on the street, often call for those with National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), and other professional certifications when seeking employees. Due to this, people who acquire these certificates are likely to be the first people to be employed. This gives them leverage over individuals who may have the skills and can perform the job better but are sidelined due to lack of certification. Furthermore, certificates help to groom holders to



become disciplined and committed. Students who invest four, five, or even seven years before they attain their certificates have undergone rigorous training that serves as a constant reminder of the value of discipline and dedication.

In addition, professional fields like medicine, law, and engineering require individuals to present their certificates before practicing. This is because society

seeks to avoid unqualified practitioners who may endanger lives or property. These fields are not ones that can easily be learned through informal skill acquisition, as they involve technical expertise and specialized terminology.

Skills, on the other hand, are a true reflection of the saying “actions speak louder than words” because they demonstrate what one can do without argument.

There have been cases where graduates who claim to be certified in a particular field cannot effectively apply their knowledge in practice. In such situations, someone who has been trained in that line of work may be preferred because they can prove their competence.

Skills enhance employability and productivity. In the past, certificates were the primary requirement for

employment, but in recent times, industries and organizations have recognized the importance of practical skills in solving problems. For instance, if a certified software engineer and a skilled software developer attend the same interview, the degree holder may explain concepts extensively, but when tested practically, the skilled individual may perform better, which is ultimately what organizations value.

Skills also encourage problem-solving. The acquisition of skills has enabled individuals to solve problems that theoretical knowledge alone cannot address. For example, digital skills such as AI automation, coding, cloud computing, machine learning, and software development have allowed skilled individuals to provide solutions that drive organizational growth.

In addition, many skills are self-taught or gained through experience.

Platforms like YouTube have served as valuable resources where individuals can access a vast library of learning materials. By watching and practicing, individuals can develop mastery without requiring formal classroom attendance, unlike certificate programs that often require physical presence.

Despite the advantages of both certificates and skills, there are shortcomings that create confusion about

which is more important.

A certificate without skill is like a fisherman going fishing without a net or hook. This implies that without practical ability, a graduate may struggle to perform basic tasks. When given responsibilities, their deficiencies become evident, as employers are more concerned with performance than definitions or theoretical explanations.

Also, certificates can lead to over-dependence on paper qualifications. This has resulted in people believing that certification alone guarantees success. While this may be true for some, many industries now prioritize competence over credentials. As a result, some graduates appear as liabilities rather than assets because they lack practical skills, even if they have excellent academic results.

On the other hand, skills alone can be limiting, as skilled individuals may lack opportunities due to the absence of formal proof. There are individuals who are highly competent but are unable to access job opportunities because they do not possess the required certifications.

Skills alone can also create challenges in gaining trust and credibility. Many organizations may hesitate to entrust responsibilities to individuals without formal qualifications, requiring them to

work harder to prove their competence compared to certificate holders.

In addition, the absence of certification can limit access to structured career paths. This creates what is known as the “paper ceiling,” where skilled individuals are filtered out by systems that require verified credentials. Furthermore, career advancement in many organizations depends on formal qualifications, meaning that while skills may help secure a job, certificates often determine career progression.

However, modern trends have led to the growth of online learning platforms and the rise of digital skills such as coding, web design, and content creation. As a result, many companies now value portfolios over degrees, shifting the focus from

“What do you have?” to “What can you do?”

Beyond the arguments and comparison, the real question is no longer which matters more, but how both can be integrated to produce competent individuals.

A practical way forward is for educational institutions to incorporate hands-on training into their academic programs. Learning should go beyond theory and include practical application, as practical experiences are often more memorable and impactful.

Xenophobia in South Africa: The Bleeding Wound Nigeria Can't Ignore

GRACE IJEOMA UMEH

PRETORIA/JOHANNESBURG – When 35-year-old Ikenna Okafor closed his phone accessories shop in Hillbrow last month, it wasn't because business was bad. It was because his South African neighbour told him, "We are coming for you tonight."

Ikenna is back in Awka now. Shop looted. Dreams burned. He is one of over 500 Nigerians who fled South Africa between January and April 2026 alone, according to unofficial figures from the Nigerian Union South Africa.

This is xenophobia. And it is bleeding Nigeria dry.

THE CYCLE THAT WON'T BREAK

South Africa's xenophobic attacks are not new. 2008. 2015. 2019. 2022. And now 2025/2026. Each wave leaves Nigerians dead, businesses destroyed, and diplomatic ties strained.

The trigger is always the same: high unemployment among South African youth, now at 46.5%, creates a scapegoat economy. Politicians whisper "foreigners are taking your jobs." Frustrated locals listen. Then comes the match: a crime allegedly committed by a Nigerian, a viral WhatsApp voice note, a community meeting. Then fire.

In September 2025, the murder of a South African taxi driver in Pretoria West sparked 11 days of violence. 17 Nigerians hospitalised. 42 shops owned by Nigerians razed in Johannesburg CBD. The Nigerian Consulate issued 3 evacuation advisories in 6 months.

HOW IT IS AFFECTING NIGERIA – THE HIDDEN COSTS

Economic Hemorrhage: Nigerians in South Africa remit over \$1.1 billion annually. MTN, Multichoice,



THE PROTESTERS

Shoprite may be South African, but Nigerians in SA are economic bridges. When they flee, that forex dries up. The Central Bank of Nigeria estimates xenophobic waves cost Nigeria \$300m yearly in lost remittances and forced repatriation costs.

Brain Drain Reversal, The Wrong Way: We lose twice. First, the doctors, engineers, and IT experts we trained with subsidized education leave for SA. Then xenophobia sends them back – traumatized, broke, and often to unemployment. Dr. Chioma Eze, a pharmacist who fled Durban in March, now sells zobo in Onitsha. "I had a house, a car, a life. Now I'm starting at 38," she says.

Diplomatic Fatigue: Nigeria-South Africa relations are stuck in a loop: Attack → Abuja summons SA High Commissioner → Pretoria apolo-

gizes → Memorandum of Understanding signed → Another attack. President-level calls no longer shock anyone. The "special relationship" forged in the anti-apartheid struggle is now special only in its dysfunction.

Psychological Toll on the Diaspora: Nigerian children in SA schools are called "kwerekwere." Parents live on edge. The Nigerian Union South Africa runs a 24/7 trauma hotline. Pastor Kingsley of Redeemed Christian Church of God, Rosettnville, says: "Every Sunday, I pray against death. That's not normal."

SOUTH AFRICA'S OWN GOAL

Xenophobia is economic suicide. South Africa needs skilled immigrants. Their hospitals run on Nigerian doctors. Their universities need Nigerian lecturers. Their tech startups hire Nige-

rian coders. The World Bank warned in 2024 that xenophobic sentiment costs SA 1.2% of GDP annually in lost productivity and investment fear.

Yet Operation Dudula and Put South Africa First movements grow. They forget: when Nigeria evacuated 640 citizens in 2019, Shoprite sales in Lagos dropped 31% in one quarter. Xenophobia is a boomerang.

THE WAY FORWARD – 5 THINGS NIGERIA MUST DO NOW

Economic Diplomacy With Teeth: Abuja must tie trade concessions to citizen safety. South African companies in Nigeria make N3.2 trillion yearly. That's leverage. The National Assembly should pass the "Diaspora Protection Bill" – if Nigerians are killed, SA firms pay reparations into a victims' fund.

Create Home, For Real: The main

reason Nigerians endure SA is because Nigeria is hard. Fix power, fix insecurity, fix ease of business, and Ikenna won't need Hillbrow. The 3MTT and Renewed Hope Infrastructure Plan must stop being press releases and become jobs.

Diaspora Security Network: NID-COM should fund legal aid desks in all 9 SA provinces. Not after attacks – before. Partner with SA Human Rights Commission. Train Nigerians on SA law, rights, and conflict de-escalation. Ignorance kills.

Name, Shame, and Prosecute: Nigeria must demand extradition of killers of Nigerians. The 2019 murder of Mrs. Elizabeth Ndubuisi-Chukwu in Johannesburg is still unsolved. Justice is deterrence.

Change The Narrative: Nollywood, Afrobeats, and our tech stars must tell new stories. South Africans love Burna Boy but hate "Nigerians." That disconnect is our failure. Let's export culture, not just crime headlines. The average SA youth has never met a Nigerian doctor – only seen "drug dealer" on Twitter.

FROM BIG BROTHER TO WOUNDED BROTHER

Nigeria led the anti-apartheid fight. We hosted ANC exiles. We paid Mandela's bills. Today, our children are called "foreigners" and hunted in the streets of the nation we helped free.

Xenophobia in South Africa is no longer a foreign affair. It is a Nigerian domestic crisis – economic, psychological, and generational.

Until Abuja treats it as such, until we build a Nigeria that Nigerians don't have to flee, the next wave is coming. And Ikenna's story will repeat, with a different name, a different city, the same fire.

The time to act was 2008. The next best time is now.

Osezua Delivers 11th OAUSTECH Inaugural Lecture

A Distinguished Scholar of Public Administration, Professor Ehiyamen Mediayanose Osezua is slated to deliver the 11th Inaugural Lecture of Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology (OAUSTECH), Okitipupa, Ondo State.

Titled, "Governing Without Results: Public Administration, Leadership And Institutional Failure In Nigeria. Quo Vadis," the lecture expected to be chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Temi E. Ologunorisa, is scheduled to hold at the institution's main auditorium at 1pm on Tuesday, May 5th, 2026.

One of Nigeria's most accomplished academics, whose career embodies scholarship, leadership, public service, and institutional transformation, Osezua is a professor at the Department of Public Administration in the School of Management Sciences and a leading scholar on Higher Education and Conflict Management. He has earned a reputation as a respected scholar, higher education administrator, policy thinker, researcher, public intellectual, editor, mentor, and civic leader whose influence extends beyond the walls of the university into broader society.

His intellectual contributions and professional engagements cut across Nigeria, the United States of Ameri-

ca, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Namibia, Russia, Togo, Mexico, and other parts of the world, making him a truly global academic voice in governance, leadership, higher education, institutional development, and public sector reform.

Born on 15 February 1973 in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, Professor Osezua who hails from Uhiele in Ekpoma, Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State, has taught at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, the University of Lagos, Osun State University and the University of Ilorin.

A Visiting Research Scholar at the University of Texas at Austin, USA from 2018 to 2022, Osezua has worked as a Professional Researcher from 2022 to 2023, and Resident Researcher in the Department of Government, Innovations for Peace and Development, University of Texas at Austin.

He is also adjunct professor of Public Administration at Austin Christian University, Texas, and has served as guest educator in the Round Rock Independent School District in the United States. He has also served as member, board of directors, Travis Central Appraisal District, Texas.

He is currently Dean, School of Management Sciences, Olusegun Agagu University of Science and

Technology, (OAUSTECH), Okitipupa, where he provides strategic, academic, and administrative leadership for the advancement of scholarship, institutional visibility, staff development, innovation, and academic excellence. His academic excellence has earned him a remarkable array of fellowships, grants, honors, and international research opportunities.

He has participated in and contributed to major academic and policy initiatives associated with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank's Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative, the United States Institute of Peace, the Brown International Advanced Research Institutes at Brown University, the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the University Research Committee of Obafemi Awolowo University, the Federal Government Scholarship Board, Abuja, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, and the Collaborative Multi-Country Moral Eyes Project.

An elected Member of Congregation to Senate at Osun State University, Osezua is a Member of Faculty Senate at Austin Christian University, and a Member of the Governing Advisory

Council of Austin Christian University. He equally served as elected Parliamentarian of the University of Texas at Austin Staff Council, where he was notably identified as the only Black African in that role during the 2024 to 2025 period. Across these positions, he has demonstrated administrative tact, institutional wisdom, collegiality, and a consistent capacity to build consensus and advance growth.

One of his most distinguished academic recognitions remains the Best Ph.D. Thesis Award in Africa conferred by CODESRIA in 2006, a landmark honor that speaks eloquently to the originality, relevance, and scholarly quality of his doctoral work. Professor Osezua was also named a Fellow of BIARI, Brown University, in 2017.

A prolific scholar of international repute, Professor Osezua has authored over 55 peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, edited works, and accepted manuscripts published in reputable national and international outlets across Nigeria, the United States, Romania, India, Uganda, Ethiopia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and other countries.

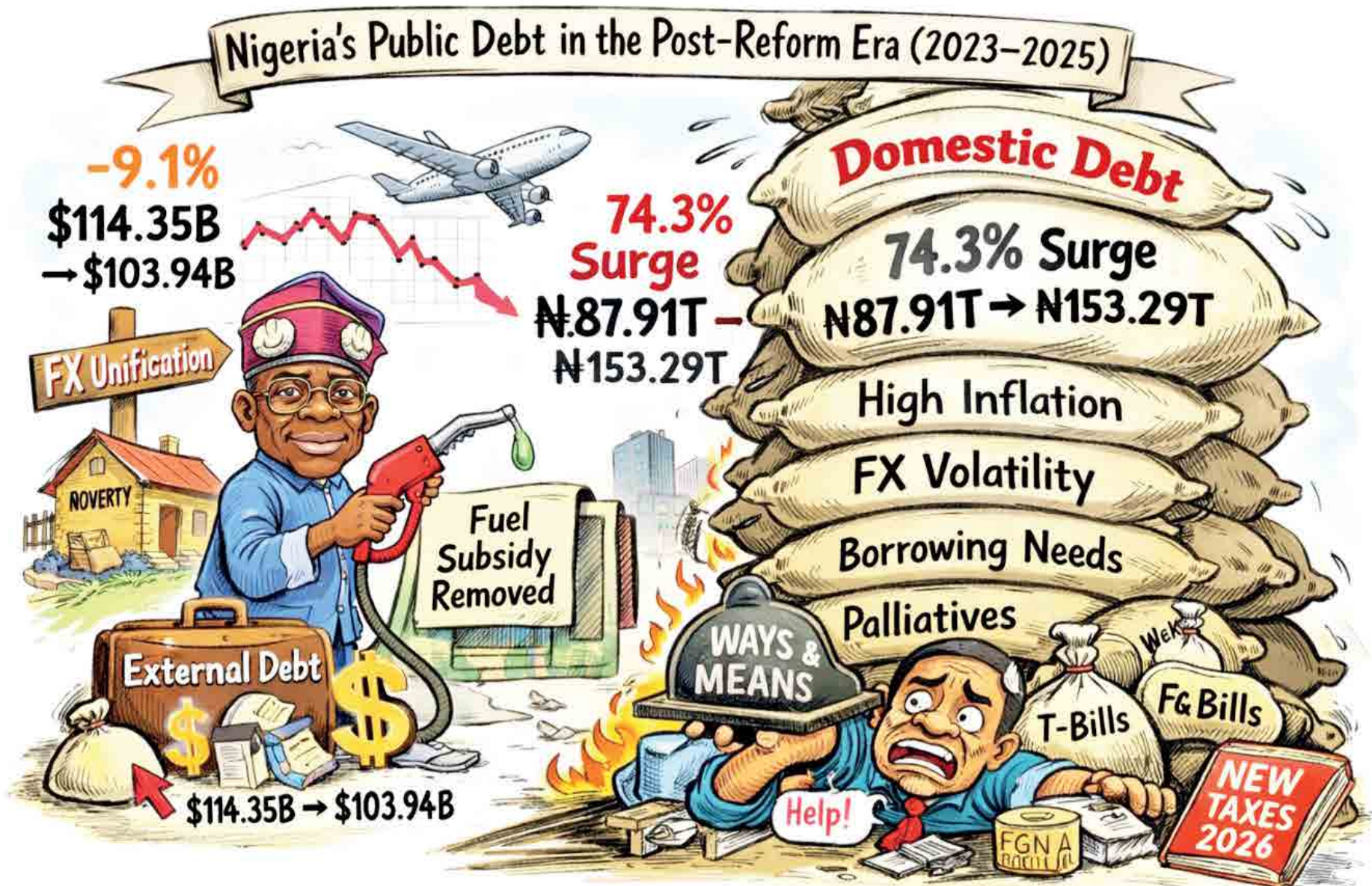
His more recent and notable works include studies on public-private partnerships and Bus Rapid Transit performance in Africa and Latin America, urban mobility transforma-

tion, leadership capacity as a panacea for public sector success, bureaucratic corruption and public service reform in Nigeria, party alignment and democratic consolidation, management of institutional conflicts in African higher education, and effective job supervision in the Nigerian educational sector. Through these scholarly contributions, he has become an important voice in contemporary conversations on public administration, institutional leadership, governance reform, and development in Africa and beyond.

Professor Osezua has equally made enduring contributions to scholarly publishing and academic visibility through his editorial leadership. He has served as Founding Editor-in-Chief of Management and Development Review at OAUSTECH, Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Ilorin Journal of Administration and Development from 2015 to 2019, Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Organizational Leadership and Management in the United States, Founding Editor-in-Chief of the Administrator's Quarterly Journal of the Chartered Institute of Public Administration of Nigeria, and Co-Editor of Contemporary Issues in the Management of Higher Education.

FEATURE

Economy – From subsidy pain to sustainable gain: Rebuilding Nigeria’s middle class



RAYMOND OSOGBE

In 2023, Nigeria removed fuel subsidy. Petrol jumped from N197 to N617 overnight. Bread moved from N800 to N1,500. Transportation doubled.

The government said: Temporary pain, permanent gain.

Three years later, May 2026, inflation is 28.4%. Unemployment is 37%. The middle class – teachers, bankers, civil servants, small business owners – is bleeding out.

The question is no longer “Was subsidy removal right?” The question is “Where is the gain?” And more importantly: “How do we rebuild what pain has broken?”

THE SUBSIDY HANGOVER: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

The Math Was Correct, The Method Was Not: Nigeria was spending N4.39 trillion annually subsidizing fuel in 2022 – more than health, education, and infrastructure combined. That was unsustainable. But removing it without cushioning was like performing surgery without anesthesia. The patient almost died.

The Middle Class Evaporated: In 2015, a Level 12 civil servant earned N150,000. It bought 2 bags of rice, paid rent, and left change for school fees. In 2026, that same 150,000 buys half a bag of rice. The World Bank says Nigeria’s middle class shrank from 23% in 2014 to 7% in 2026. We are becoming a nation of two ex-

tremes: very rich, very poor.

MSMEs Are Dying: Your neighbourhood tailor, printer, welder – all run on fuel. Diesel moved from 250 to N1,450/litre. Most can’t afford inverters or solar. So they close shop. SMEDAN reports 2.3 million small businesses shut down between 2023-2025. Each closure = 5 jobs lost on average. That’s 11.5 million jobs gone.

The Trust Deficit: Government promised N25,000 wage award, CNG buses, food palliatives. Most arrived late, leaked, or vanished. In Kano, bags of rice with President’s face were sold in markets. Nigerians now hear “palliative” and think “politics.”

DIASPORA REALITY: DOLLAR RICH, NAIRA POOR

Nigerians abroad sent home \$23.8 billion in 2025 – highest in Africa. But here’s the paradox: their families are poorer.

Why? Naira devaluation. In 2023, \$100 was N46,000. Today it’s N155,000. Sounds good? No. Because that N155,000 buys less than N46,000 did in 2023. A UK nurse sends £500 monthly to her mum in Ibadan. In 2022, it paid mum’s rent, food, meds. In 2026, it only pays rent.

The diaspora is subsidizing Nigeria’s failure. But they’re tired. “Japa” is no longer just for the young. Whole families are leaving. We’re exporting our middle class and importing poverty.

THE COST OF WAITING: 5 THINGS WE LOSE IF WE DON’T ACT

Human Capital Flight: Doctors, lecturers, IT experts – all middle class – are leaving. WHO says 1 doctor to 5,000 Nigerians. Standard is 1 to 600. We train them, UK and Canada employ them.

Tax Base Collapse: Middle class pays PAYE, VAT, education tax. When they disappear, government revenue dies. FIRS can’t tax the poor and won’t touch the rich. Result? More borrowing.

Social Instability: History shows: when the middle class dies, democracy shakes. They are the buffer between rich and poor. Without them, anger has no filter. #EndSARS was middle-class-led. Next protest may not be so organized.

Consumption Collapse: Middle class buys goods, drives demand, grows industries. When they stop buying, factories shut down. Nigerian Breweries shut 2 plants in 2025 due to “low demand.” Low demand = no jobs.

Generational Poverty: A child whose parents drop from middle class to poor rarely climbs back. Private school to public school. Balanced diet to garri. Dreams shrink. We are creating 20 million poor children from former middle-class homes.

THE WAY FORWARD: 7 STEPS FROM PAIN TO GAIN

Wage-Tax Swap, Not Wage Awards: Stop N35,000 handouts. Instead, exempt anyone earning below N250,000 monthly from PAYE tax for 24 months. Put cash directly in

pockets. Increase minimum wage to N150,000 and enforce it. A worker who can feed family won’t strike.

Energy Revolution for MSMEs: Subsidy money must become solar money. Bank of Industry should launch “N500bn MSME Solar Fund” – 5% interest, 5-year repayment. Give 500,000 barbers, welders, cold-room owners 3KVA solar + battery. Kill diesel, save jobs. India did it. Why can’t we?

Food First, Not Cash First: CBN should partner with AFEX and rice millers. Flood markets with 50kg bags at N45,000, not N90,000. Use BVN to limit to 2 bags per family monthly. Starve food inflation, not people. Kenya’s “unga subsidy” of 2023 worked. Copy it.

Transport CNG Deadline: The 11,500 CNG buses promised must hit roads by Q3 2026. Not “launched in Abuja.” Deployed to Lagos, Onitsha, Kano, Port Harcourt. FG should license 50 private CNG depots. Make conversion free for danfo and keke drivers. Transport is 40% of inflation. Crash it.

Diaspora Bonds That Actually Build: Don’t just collect diaspora dollars. Ring-fence them. Launch “Diaspora Infrastructure Bond” – 9% return, tax-free, invested only in power, rail, housing. Nigerians abroad want to help, but not into a black hole. Show projects. Show returns.

Middle Class Mortgage Revolution: FMBN should offer 6% mortgages for civil servants, teachers, nurses earning 100k-400k. 25-year tenure. No equity down. If Ghana can do 8% mort-

gages, Nigeria can do 6%. A man with a house won’t japa. He’ll defend Nigeria.

Cut Cost of Governance, Publicly: You can’t tell citizens “sacrifice” while convoys get longer. Sell 60% of jets in Presidential Fleet. Cut estacode by 70%. Slash National Assembly budget 40%. Put savings into a “Middle Class Rebuild Fund” with monthly public audit. Lead by example, not by press release.

SUBSIDY IS GONE. MIDDLE CLASS MUST NOT GO WITH IT

The pain of 2023-2025 is real. Fuel queues are gone, but hunger queues are here. We removed subsidy on petrol but created subsidy on suffering.

But Nigeria can still win. The N4 trillion we saved yearly must not vanish into debt service and corruption. It must become power for the welder in Aba, CNG for the danfo driver in Lagos, mortgage for the teacher in Sokoto, insulin for the banker in Asaba.

A country without a middle class is a country without a spine. We can’t stand tall begging.

From subsidy pain to sustainable gain is not automatic. It is a policy choice. It is a moral choice.

Government must choose people over politics. Rich must choose compassion over consumption. Diaspora must choose investment over lamentation.

Because if the middle class dies, Nigeria doesn’t just get poorer. Nigeria gets ungovernable.

The gain is possible. But only if we act – now, not next administration.

How low awareness is fueling liver disease crisis

ABIEMWENSE (NAN)

A young man survived a sudden health crisis only because his liver failure was detected early, proving that awareness and timely intervention save lives.

Health experts have raised serious concerns about low awareness of liver diseases, warning that these conditions remain silent killers and are increasingly becoming a major global health burden affecting millions worldwide.

In commemoration of World Liver Day on April 19, medical professionals noted that the 2026 event received far less attention than major global campaigns like HIV awareness.

Experts argue this lack of visibility reduces the effectiveness of awareness campaigns. Consequently, it limits public understanding of liver health, early warning signs, and preventive measures that could significantly lower disease rates and mortality.

Consultant gastroenterologist and hepatologist Dr Kolawole Akande warned that the limited attention given to liver health initiatives restricted their ability to influence behaviour and promote preventive healthcare practices among communities nationwide.

He noted that World Liver Day was created to highlight the importance of liver health and encourage early detection and treatment of liver-related diseases before they progressed into severe, life-threatening conditions.

However, he said insufficient awareness continued to slow progress in combating diseases such as hepatitis, fatty liver disease, cirrhosis, and liver cancer, which collectively contributed to high morbidity and mortality rates globally.

According to him, the liver is one of the body's most vital organs, responsible for nearly five hundred essential functions daily, including detoxification, metabolism regulation, and storage of nutrients necessary for sustaining life and health.

He said that in spite of its importance, many individuals only became aware of liver disease when it had advanced significantly, making treatment more difficult and reducing survival chances due to delayed diagnosis and intervention.

Akande emphasised that liver diseases often developed silently without noticeable symptoms, underscoring the importance of routine medical check-ups in identifying early-stage damage before it becomes severe or irreversible over time.

He said that early-stage liver damage could be reversed if detected promptly, but late diagnosis significantly limited treatment options and increased the likelihood of complications and death among affected individuals.

"A growing concern among health professionals is the rising prevalence of lifestyle-related liver conditions, particularly non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, which is increasingly affecting individuals due to modern lifestyle patterns and habits.

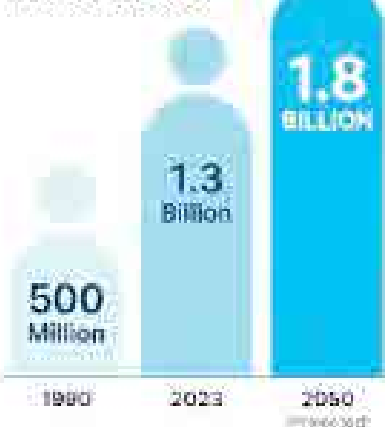
"Poor diet, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption, and lack of physical activity have been identified as major risk factors driving the increase in liver disease cases, especially in both urban and developing communities."

Solid Habits, Strong Liver: Reversing the Global Liver Crisis

A call to action against the projected rise of metabolic liver disease (MASLD) with actionable lifestyle habits

THE LOOMING GLOBAL HEALTH CRISIS

PROJECTED GROWTH OF MASLD CASES



A SILENT "1 IN 6" EPIDEMIC

17% of the global population (about 1.3 billion) will have liver disease (MASLD)

PRIMARY RISK DRIVERS



(Leading causes of liver-related deaths)

THREE SOLID HABITS FOR A STRONG LIVER



Akande stressed that policymakers and healthcare providers must actively promote healthy behaviours, including regular exercise and balanced diets, to prevent lifestyle-related liver diseases and improve overall public health outcomes sustainably.

"In addition to lifestyle factors, viral hepatitis remains a major public health challenge, particularly in developing countries where access to healthcare services, vaccination, and screening programmes remains limited or inconsistent.

"Hepatitis is a liver inflammation caused by infectious viruses or other harmful agents, leading to a wide range of health complications, including chronic disease, liver failure, and cancer, some of which are fatal."

Akande called for expanded vaccination programmes, improved screening systems, and increased access to treatment services as essential measures to combat hepatitis and reduce its widespread impact on populations.

He warned that many individuals were living with hepatitis without knowing their status, increasing their personal health risks while also contributing to the continued spread of infection within communities and across generations.

Globally, liver diseases accounted for at least 2 million deaths each year, yet many of these deaths are preventable through early detection, vaccination, improved awareness, and adoption of healthier lifestyle practices.

Akande emphasised that prevention efforts should begin with children, particularly through the administration of the hepatitis B vaccine at birth, which played a crucial role in reducing infection rates early in life.

According to him, hepatitis B is the most common cause of liver disease in Nigeria, in spite of being preventable through vaccination, highlighting the urgent need to improve immunisation coverage across the country.

"The vaccine is available free under Nigeria's National Programme on Immunisation, yet coverage remains low,

with less than twenty percent of newborns receiving the critical birth dose within the recommended timeframe.

"Scaling up vaccination coverage could significantly reduce the burden of hepatitis B, preventing countless cases of chronic liver disease and associated complications that place strain on individuals and healthcare systems alike."

Akande said that after receiving the birth dose, children must complete the full immunisation schedule to ensure long-term protection against hepatitis B and related liver complications later in life.

He also advised adults to undergo screening and vaccination, especially those born before hepatitis B vaccination became part of routine immunisation schedules, as they remained at higher risk of undetected infection.

According to him, adults who test negative should receive vaccination, noting that vaccines are widely available and relatively affordable, making prevention accessible for many individuals across different socioeconomic groups.

"High-risk groups require more frequent screening, including individuals with close contact to infected persons, those undergoing dialysis, people living with HIV, and individuals receiving frequent blood transfusions

or other exposures.

"Implementing these strategies effectively could drastically reduce liver disease deaths in Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of coordinated public health interventions and sustained commitment from both government and healthcare providers.

"Without urgent global action, projections indicate that viral hepatitis could lead to millions of new infections, increased liver cancer cases, and rising death rates by 2030."

Akande underscored the need for stronger government and institutional support to improve awareness campaigns and ensure that liver health education reaches diverse populations across urban and rural communities effectively.

He called for collaboration among public health authorities, healthcare providers, and community organisations to educate citizens about liver disease prevention, early detection, and the importance of maintaining healthy lifestyles consistently.

"Recommended measures include adopting healthier diets, reducing alcohol consumption, maintaining a healthy weight, and undergoing regular medical screenings to detect potential liver issues before they progress into severe conditions.

"Public education campaigns

should emphasise practical lifestyle changes while also highlighting the importance of early diagnosis, ensuring that individuals understand both prevention strategies and the need for routine health monitoring practices," he said.

Akande reiterated that prevention remained more effective than treatment.

Similarly, a general practitioner, Dr Jonathan Esegine, urged individuals to take proactive steps toward protecting their liver health, stressing that increased awareness could significantly reduce the global burden of liver disease.

Esegine advised adopting a balanced, plant-based diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats, which supported liver function and reduced the risk of developing chronic health conditions over time.

He also recommended maintaining a healthy weight through regular physical activity, as exercise played a crucial role in preventing fatty liver disease and improving overall metabolic health and wellbeing.

"Avoiding alcohol, smoking, and harmful substances is essential for protecting the liver, as these factors contribute significantly to liver damage and increase the risk of developing chronic and life-threatening conditions.

"Vaccination against hepatitis B remains one of the most effective preventive measures, helping to eliminate unnecessary disease burden and protect individuals from long-term complications associated with viral infections," he said.

Health experts say the theme for World Liver Day 2026, "Solid Habits, Strong Liver," emphasises that liver health is shaped by daily lifestyle choices, reinforcing the importance of consistent healthy behaviours over time.

They say adopting healthy habits offers a powerful, collective defense against liver disease, improving long-term health and easing the global impact of chronic liver conditions. (NAN Feature)

”
Without urgent global action, projections indicate that viral hepatitis could lead to millions of new infections, increased liver cancer cases, and rising death rates by 2030.

FEATURE

Indecent dressing: Who is to blame?

VICTOR ADEOTI (NAN)

The prevalence of immodest dressing among young Nigerian women has stirred intense national debate, eliciting strong opinions from parents, educators, religious leaders, and policymakers.

This trend, commonly manifested in the wearing of revealing or provocative clothing, has become increasingly visible in urban centres, schools, and social gatherings.

Yet, beyond the surface concerns lies a more complex conversation—one that touches on identity, culture, generational shifts and societal expectations.

For some, indecent dressing reflects a worrying erosion of moral values; for others, it is a form of self-expression shaped by evolving global fashion trends and the desire to belong in a rapidly changing world.

This divergence of views raises a critical question: where should society draw the line between personal freedom and cultural responsibility?

Nigeria, a culturally diverse and largely conservative society, has long upheld modesty as a core value.

Traditional norms and religious teachings often prescribe acceptable standards of appearance, particularly for young women.

Unsurprisingly, religious institutions have remained vocal, urging adherence to modest dressing as a reflection of discipline and moral uprightness.

However, the growing influence of globalisation continues to challenge these long-standing ideals.

Social commentators point to the rise of social media as a major factor shaping fashion choices among young people.

Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok expose users to a constant stream of global trends, celebrity lifestyles and influencer culture—many of which celebrate bold and revealing styles.

Young girls are increasingly navigating a world where visibility, validation and identity are often intertwined with appearance.

For years, parents have been seen as the primary custodians of values and moral standards.

Critics argue that a decline in parental guidance has contributed to the rise in revealing dressing. But others contend that parenting has become far more complex in an era of constant digital exposure.

Even the most attentive parents now compete with powerful external influences that shape perceptions and preferences.

Experts suggest that beyond condemnation, there is a need for more open and constructive conversations.

Discussions around self-worth, dignity and societal expectations, they argue, can foster better understanding and help young people make informed choices without feeling alienated.

Equally important is the need to address a sensitive but critical issue—the tendency to link dressing with harassment.

Advocacy groups consistently warn against victim-blaming, stressing that inappropriate behaviour or violence is never justified, regardless of appearance.

A social behaviour expert, Mr Ade-



ola Olabiye, highlights what he describes as a societal paradox.

“Music videos, movies and advertisements often glamorise revealing styles, yet young girls are criticised for embracing them.

“This double standard creates confusion. Society celebrates boldness but demands modesty at the same time, leaving young people to navigate conflicting expectations without clear direction” he said.

From a legal standpoint, some stakeholders advocate stricter measures.

Legal practitioner Jimoh Abdulquadri emphasises the role of parents in guiding their children’s dressing habits, insisting that freedom of choice should not replace responsible upbringing.

Abdulquadri decried the practice of parents allowing their children to wear whatever clothes they prefer without proper guidance.

According to him, although children may insist on their preferred fashion choices, parents have a responsibility to guide and correct them where necessary.

Another lawyer, Mr Jimmy Jones, calls for regulatory frameworks and sanctions to deter indecent dressing, including holding parents accountable for their children’s conduct.

“Offenders should face appropriate sanctions, including fines, to serve as a deterrent.

“Parents of such individuals should also be held accountable to discourage others from such habits,” he said.

Jones, however, emphasised that parental influence played a significant role in shaping dressing habits from an early stage.

Religious leaders also offer strong perspectives rooted in faith and morality.

Pastor Jesutofunmi Abimbola attributes the trend to negative societal influence, urging parents to instill godly values in their children.

Abimbola said most young girls who dressed indecently did so to attract attention from the opposite sex or to look more attractive.

According to Abimbola, an average or modest parents will not buy indecent clothes for their children to wear.

In the same vein, Muslim cleric Alfa Sulaimonu Abdulwaheed underscores the importance of modesty as prescribed in Islamic teachings.

He stressed the need for parents to teach their children the importance of decent dressing rather than exposing their bodies in public places.

Abdulquadri added that dressing half-naked did not make anyone socially acceptable but instead portrayed a lack of proper upbringing and home training.

Beyond moral and legal arguments, socio-economic factors also come into play.

Some parents, like Mr Kunle Adelakin, link the trend to economic hardship, suggesting that certain young girls adopt revealing styles in pursuit of attention or financial support, thereby exposing themselves to greater risks.

Adelakin said poverty had lured some young girls into dressing indecently in a bid to attract financial support, thereby exposing them to risks.

He warned that the consequences of indecent dressing could be severe and urged parents to ensure their children dress properly.

Dr Segun Oderinde of Obafemi Awolowo University identifies multiple influences—parents, peers and society at large—as key drivers of the trend.

Oderinde warns that the consequences may include exposure to risks such as harassment and unintended pregnancies, which could derail future aspirations.

Mrs Zainab Olorunyomi, an councillor, argues that responsibility cannot be placed on a single group. Instead, she calls for collective accountability

involving parents, society, the media and individuals themselves.

Olorunyomi said that rather than focusing solely on criticism, there was a need for constructive engagement.

She said open conversations, value-based education, and positive role modeling could help young girls make informed choices about how they presented themselves.

Similarly, educationist Mrs Tolani Ariyo notes that digital culture has redefined how young people perceive fashion.

According to her, many young girls view the styles of celebrities and influencers as symbols of confidence and success, often adopting them without fully considering cultural implications.

“What older generations may consider indecent, younger people often see as trendy or expressive,” she explained, adding that peer pressure further reinforces such choices.

Amid these varying perspectives, one point of consensus emerges: addressing indecent dressing requires a balanced and nuanced approach.

Rather than relying solely on criticism or enforcement, stakeholders emphasise the importance of value-based education, positive role modelling and open dialogue.

While social media, western influence and celebrity culture may shape trends, many agree that parents still play a pivotal role in guiding behaviour and instilling lasting values.

Ultimately, observers say the conversation goes beyond clothing. It reflects a society in transition—caught between preserving its cultural identity and embracing the realities of a globalised world.(NAN Feature)

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He stressed the need for parents to teach their children the importance of decent dressing rather than exposing their bodies in public places.

Allowance review: Hope for civil servants amid economic strain?

OKON OKON (NAN)

The recent approval of increased peculiar allowances and welfare benefits for Federal Civil Servants has sparked renewed hope among workers battling the harsh realities of rising inflation, high transportation costs and dwindling purchasing power.

For many employees in the Federal Public Service, the announcement by the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, Mrs Didi Walson-Jack, came as a welcome relief at a time when many households are struggling to cope with the nation's current economic pressures.

The review, which covers peculiar allowances and other welfare packages across cadres, is expected to improve workers' take-home pay, morale and productivity.

Across ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), reactions have reflected a mixture of optimism, cautious expectation and calls for prompt implementation.

For Ms Benita Solomon, a widow and mother of three said, the development offers a crucial source of support.

"Life has not been easy for every typical civil servant, especially those of us with children and dependents.

"Since the removal of fuel subsidy, it has been from one struggle to another. I sincerely hope this increase is implemented because it will cushion the effects of rising living costs," she said.

Her experience mirrors that of many workers whose salaries have remained under pressure in the face of escalating food prices, school fees and transport fares.

Mrs Esther Ibrahim, a Grade Level 12 officer, said the announcement could provide some breathing space if translated into reality quickly.

"We have heard similar announcements before. What matters now is implementation; food prices are rising daily and salaries no longer meet basic needs," she said.

Indeed, analysts note that while salary and allowance adjustments often generate excitement, workers' confidence depends largely on whether such measures are reflected in monthly payslips without delay.

This explains the scepticism expressed by some workers who say previous welfare pronouncements did not always yield the expected benefits.

Mr Sunday Adeyemi, a senior officer, said many civil servants had learned to wait for practical evidence.

"We have seen policies announced that never got implemented or led to actual increases in take-home pay.

"Many of us will remain cautious until we see the increase reflected in our payslips," he said.

Still, for junior workers and those in lower income brackets, the prospect of improved allowances is significant.

Mr Musa Abu, a junior civil servant, said the increase in Duty Tour Allowance and related benefits would reduce work-related personal expenses.

"Transport, feeding and even training costs sometimes come from our pockets. If these changes take effect, it will make a huge difference," he said.

Observers say this highlights a long-standing challenge within the



MRS. DIDI ESTHER WALSON-JACK

civil service, where workers often shoulder official expenses pending reimbursement or in the absence of adequate funding.

Another aspect of the reform that has attracted attention is the introduction of an exit benefit scheme.

Miss Ifeoma Okeke said the initiative could restore confidence in the public service and improve workers' outlook toward retirement.

"At least people can look forward to retirement with some dignity. But again, it depends on how faithfully the pronouncements are implemented," she said.

Experts say retirement security remains a major concern for many public servants, particularly amid inflationary pressures that have reduced the real value of pensions and gratuities.

Dr Gideon Maigida, an economist, said although the measures were commendable, inflation could weaken the intended gains.

"Increasing allowances improves disposable income, but if inflation, especially food inflation, remains high, the real benefit may be limited," he said.

He urged government to complement the wage-related reforms with policies that boost food supply, support agriculture and stabilise prices.

Similarly, public finance analyst, Mrs Adenike Adeusi, said the reforms could raise morale and productivity if effectively managed.

"When workers feel supported,



When workers feel valued, they become more committed to their duties. This increase will motivate many of us to give our best and improve service delivery

output improves. However, government must ensure fiscal sustainability to avoid creating future financial pressures," she said.

According to her, transparency in implementation will be critical in rebuilding trust between workers and government.

Many workers also see the review as recognition of the sacrifices made by civil servants who continue to provide essential services despite economic constraints.

Mrs Ngozi Eze of the Ministry of Transportation said the development would inspire greater dedication.

"When workers feel valued, they become more committed to their duties. This increase will motivate many of us to give our best and improve service delivery," she said.

Mr Ibrahim Musa shared similar sentiments, noting that the increase would help workers cope with trans-

portation, housing and feeding costs.

"With the current economic realities, many workers have found it difficult to meet basic needs. This increase will go a long way," he said.

However, some stakeholders insist that allowances alone may not be sufficient to address broader welfare concerns.

Mr Sani Abdullahi called for regular review of salaries, pensions and workplace conditions.

"It should not stop at allowances alone; there should be comprehensive welfare policies that protect workers and retirees," he said.

Mr Patrick Odey, another civil servant, said workers had become cautious about government promises because some previous approvals were yet to be fully implemented.

Odey said although the announcement was commendable, many workers would wait to see the actual pay-

ment before celebrating.

"Sometimes, when they promise, it may remain on paper; we have had cases like wage awards that workers are still expecting.

"But if this one is implemented, it will strengthen workers financially and improve morale," he said.

He noted that the cost of hotel accommodation during official trips had risen sharply, making previous duty tour allowances inadequate.

"Anywhere you go now, it is difficult to get a hotel room for less than N30,000 or N50,000, so the old rates could not meet realities," he said.

He, however, expressed concern that many Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) had not carried out official tours or training programmes in recent years due to lack of funds.

Analysts say the current development underscores the growing importance of worker welfare in sustaining an efficient and motivated public service.

They note that as government pursues economic reforms, balancing fiscal discipline with social protection for workers will remain a delicate but necessary task.

For now, the announcement has rekindled hope among thousands of federal workers.

Nonetheless, the consensus is that the ultimate test lies in rapid implementation and measurable impacts on living standards, far outweighing the initial promises. (NAN Feature)

FEATURE

Closing the gap: West Africa's push for inclusive social protection

JOAN NWAGWU (NAN)

For many Nigerians working in the informal sector, life's uncertainties are not just unpredictable; they are often devastating.

For instance, a petty trader in Abuja, who depends on daily sales to feed her family, recalls how a minor accident once kept her away from work for weeks.

With no insurance, no compensation and no safety net, her small business nearly collapsed under the weight of medical bills and lost income.

Indeed, her experience reflects the reality of millions across West Africa; farmers, artisans, market women and transport workers, who remain excluded from formal social security systems and are left vulnerable to economic shocks.

However, in spite of ongoing reforms and policy commitments, access to social protection in the region remains uneven, with large segments of the population either unaware of or unable to benefit from existing schemes.

It is against this backdrop that policymakers, development partners and social security experts gathered in Abuja for the 2026 International Social Security Association (ISSA) West Africa Seminar.

It was to explore ways of making social protection systems more inclusive and accessible.

Specifically, the two-day seminar, hosted by the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) in collaboration with ISSA and the National Pension Commission (PenCom), focused on improving inclusiveness through effective communication; an issue recognised as a major barrier to access.

In his remarks, the Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr Muhammad Dingyadi, said the need to strengthen social protection systems had become more urgent in a rapidly changing world of work.

According to him, technological advancements, shifting employment patterns and the expansion of the informal sector have made it imperative for governments to rethink how social security services are delivered.

Furthermore, he noted that social security remains a fundamental pillar for social justice, industrial harmony and sustainable economic growth.

Dingyadi, therefore, reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to building a more inclusive system under the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Tinubu, with emphasis on ensuring that no worker is left behind.

He added that the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) plays a central role in providing compensation for workplace injuries, disabilities and deaths, noting that efforts were ongoing to strengthen its operations and reach.

Nevertheless, beyond policy frameworks and institutional mandates lies a more complex challenge; how to ensure that those who need these services most are aware of them and can access them without barriers.

Across the region, weak communication, low awareness and administrative bottlenecks continue to limit



MUHAMMAD MAIGARI DINGYADI

the effectiveness of social protection programmes.

Similarly, the Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Sen. Abubakar Bagudu, underscored this point, noting that communication must be seen as a critical tool in expanding access.

He explained that while West African countries share similar development challenges, they also share opportunities to improve social protection through better engagement with citizens.

In addition, Bagudu highlighted ongoing reforms in Nigeria, including pension improvements, cash transfer programmes and broader economic policies aimed at supporting vulnerable populations.

He also disclosed that the Federal Government had introduced a ward-level development strategy designed to bring social protection closer to the grassroots.

Notably, the initiative, covering over 8,000 wards nationwide, seeks to identify local economic opportunities and ensure that support reaches those at the lowest levels of society.

For many observers, such decentralised approaches could, therefore, mark a turning point in bridging the gap between policy design and real-life impact.

Meanwhile, the Managing Director of NSITF, Mr Oluwaseun Faleye, emphasised that Nigeria's growing population and dynamic labour market make stronger and more responsive systems unavoidable.

He said the fund had embarked on significant reforms, including a shift from paper-based processes to integrated digital systems aimed at improving efficiency, transparency and

service delivery.

As a result, digital transformation is already enhancing claims processing, data management and stakeholder engagement.

However, he cautioned that technology alone is not enough.

"Digital transformation must be backed by capacity building, institutional reforms and strong governance to achieve meaningful results," Faleye said.

From a broader regional and global perspective, stakeholders say the challenge is even more profound.

In this regard, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Country Director to Nigeria, Dr Vanessa Phala-Moyo, noted that millions of people across West Africa still lack access to formal social protection systems.

She identified women, young people, rural communities and migrant workers as the most excluded groups,

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Digital transformation must be backed by capacity building, institutional reforms and strong governance to achieve meaningful results.**

often due to structural barriers and limited awareness.

Moreover, according to her, ineffective communication remains a major obstacle, as many citizens do not fully understand the services available to them or how to access them.

She, therefore, called for simplified messaging and the use of digital tools, including mobile platforms, to reach a wider audience.

Phala-Moyo also stressed the importance of integrated data systems that can improve targeting, reduce duplication and enhance overall efficiency.

In addition, she pointed out that fragmented institutional arrangements often lead to poor coordination and weak implementation of social protection policies.

Similarly, the Director-General of the National Pension Commission, Ms Omolola Oloworaran, said reaching the informal sector remained one of the biggest challenges facing social security systems.

She noted that many workers in this sector operate outside formal structures, making it difficult to enrol them in existing schemes.

According to her, improving communication strategies and simplifying processes would be key to expanding coverage.

Also speaking, the Secretary-General of ISSA, Mr Marcelo Caetano, highlighted the role of political will and strong institutions in achieving sustainable social protection systems.

He said communication is central to building trust, transparency and accessibility, adding that citizens are more likely to engage with systems they understand and trust.

In the same vein, the Chairman of

the ISSA Liaison Office for West Africa, Mr Kwesi Biney, described communication as a bridge between institutions and the people they serve.

He stressed that while digitalisation offers significant opportunities, it must be complemented by community-based outreach to ensure inclusivity.

Overall, experts at the seminar agreed that addressing social protection gaps in West Africa requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines policy reforms, technological innovation and effective communication.

They emphasised that social security systems must evolve to reflect the realities of modern labour markets, where informal employment continues to dominate.

For millions of workers across the region, the stakes are high.

Indeed, without adequate social protection, even minor disruptions; such as illness, injury or loss of income, can push families into deeper poverty.

As governments and stakeholders intensify reform efforts, the real test will be whether these initiatives translate into tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary people.

Ultimately, for the petty trader in Abuja and countless others like her, inclusive social protection is not just a policy goal; it is a lifeline.

Therefore, ensuring that no one is left behind will require not only strong commitments, but also sustained action, collaboration and a willingness to listen to the voices of those most affected.

• Only then can the promise of social security become a reality for all. (NAN Feature)

FEATURE



Politics, defections and the way Forward, Why Nigeria's opposition keeps collapsing

RAYMOND A. OLOROGUN

In the last 90 days, 17 National Assembly members have defected. 13 governors are rumoured to be next. In Plateau, an entire state house caucus crossed carpet in one sitting.

Welcome to Nigerian politics, 2026 edition. Where ideology is dead, loyalty is rented, and opposition is a waiting room for appointment.

If democracy is a game of alternatives, Nigeria is now playing solo. And that should terrify every citizen.

1. THE DEFECTION EPIDEMIC: DATA DOESN'T LIE

Since May 29, 2023, over 203 elected officials have defected across Nigeria. 89% moved to the ruling party. Only 4% moved from it.

The pattern is clear: win election on Platform A, enjoy goodwill, then defect to Platform B before mid-term. No consequence. No referendum. Just a new broom sticker on the same office door.

In April 2026, the Labour Party lost 6 House of Reps members in one week. PDP lost a serving senator in Kano to APC. NNPP is bleeding in the Northwest. The "third force" of 2023 now looks like a third wheel.

2. WHY THEY DEFECT: THE 4 REAL REASONS

A. Survival, Not Service: Politics in Nigeria is the only industry with guaranteed ROI. Lose access to the treasury and you lose everything – contracts, security votes, relevance. For many, defection is political life support. A former PDP Rep from Benue told me anonymously: "My governor froze my constituency projects. I had two choices: defect or disappear."

B. The Weaponization of State Power: EFCC invitations spike after you criticize the President. Federal projects dry up in opposition states. Suddenly, your pending court case gets urgent. The message: join us or suffer. When the Governor of Cross River defected in 2023, NDDC released N12 billion to the state within 72 hours. Coincidence?

C. No Ideological Anchor: APC today is PDP of 2014. PDP today is AD of 1999. Labour Party has no clear economic doctrine. When parties are just special purpose vehicles for ambition, passengers jump ships without guilt. Ask a defector "what does your new party believe?" and watch them sweat.

D. Weak Consequences, Strong Incentives: The Constitution says you lose your seat if you defect, unless there's a division in your party. So what do politicians do? Manufacture "divisions" overnight. INEC



and courts rarely enforce the rule. Meanwhile, defectors get committees, budgets, and ministerial nods. Why stay loyal?

3. THE COST TO NIGERIA: 5 WAYS DEFECTIONS ARE KILLING US

1. It Kills Accountability: If a governor can win on Party A's manifesto, then defect to Party B and rule with Party B's agenda, what did voters actually vote for? Mandates become meaningless. Elections become auctions.

2. It Destroys Opposition: Democracy needs a strong Plan B. But when every major opposition figure is one appointment away from crossing over, who checks the government? Who provides alternatives? The 10th National Assembly has become an echo chamber. 87% of bills pass with zero dissent.

3. It Breeds Cynicism: Youths watch this and conclude: "Politics is scam." Why join a party, build structure, campaign, if your leader will sell you out next Tuesday? Voter apathy in 2023 was 27%. 2027 may hit 40%.

4. It Wrecks Policy Continuity: Each defection shifts alliances, budgets, and priorities. A health project started by PDP LG Chair stops because APC Councillor now controls funds. Development becomes partisan, not patriotic.

5. It Exports Instability: State hous-

es impeach speakers weekly because of defection maths. Local governments are paralyzed. Investors hate uncertainty. A German energy firm pulled out of a \$2bn solar deal in Niger State citing "political fluidity."



The way forward is not more defections to the "winning side." It's building a system where ideas win, not individuals. Where loyalty to country trumps loyalty to self. Where "Party A" means something different from "Party B" beyond

4. THE WAY FORWARD: 6 HARD FIXES NIGERIA NEEDS NOW

1. Enforce Section 68(g) & 109(g): Automatic Seat Loss. The Constitution is clear. If you defect, you go back to voters. No "division" loophole. INEC must declare vacancies within 14 days. Courts must dispose of cases in 60 days. Until defectors lose something, they'll keep winning.

2. Pass the Anti-Defection Bill: Civil society has drafted it. National Assembly should pass it before December 2026. Key clauses: 5-year ban from contesting if you defect; refund of campaign funds if you won on a party platform; criminalize inducement to defect.

3. Public Funding of Parties Based on Ideas, Not Numbers: INEC should fund parties that publish and debate manifestos, hold primaries on live TV, and maintain ideology schools. Starve parties that are just hotels for defectors.

4. Empower Voters to Recall: Amend the law. If 30% of your constituency signs, you face recall election. Let the people, not governors, punish betrayal. Technology makes this possible now – BVAS can verify signatures.

5. Build Real Opposition Infrastructure: PDP, LP, NNPP must stop being "waiting rooms." Merge. Build think tanks. Shadow cabinet. Shadow budget. Give Nigerians a reason

to believe there's Plan B. Obama was a senator. Where are our policy senators?

6. Civic Education, From Primary School: We teach maths and English. We don't teach "what is a manifesto" or "why defection hurts you." No wonder we clap when our Rep defects "for development." Until citizens see defection as theft of mandate, politicians will keep stealing.

FROM MANIFESTO TO MANIFEST-THIEF*

In 2015, Nigerians voted "Change." In 2023, they voted "Renewed Hope." In 2027, what will they vote for if every politician ends up in the same party?

Defections are not just political gossip. They are the slow death of representation. When votes no longer determine direction, democracy becomes theatre.

The way forward is not more defections to the "winning side." It's building a system where ideas win, not individuals. Where loyalty to country trumps loyalty to self. Where "Party A" means something different from "Party B" beyond the colour of the cap.

Until then, Nigeria will remain a one-party state by defection – not by election. And that is not democracy. That is danger.

2027 is 9 months away. Choose wisely. Or choose again in chains.