

# FG commits over N1.3trn to strategic roads, bridge in South-East —Minister

**ENUGU**  
The Federal Government says it has committed over N1.3 trillion to strategic road and bridge infrastructure projects across the South-East region to drive economic growth and regional integration. Mr Taiwo Oyedele, Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, dis-

closed this on Tuesday during the Grand Finale of the South-East Venture Capital Programme (SEVCP) organised by the South East Development Commission (SEDC) in Enugu. Oyedele said the administration was investing heavily in critical infrastructure to unlock enterprise and attract investments to the region. He listed the projects to include

the Second Niger Bridge Access Road, Enugu-Onitsha Corridor, Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway, Enugu-Abakaliki Dualisation project, and the priority rail corridor linking Onitsha, Owerri, Aba and Ikot Ekpene. He said the SEVCP symbolised the Federal Government's commitment to innovation-driven economic development and entrepreneurship.

He noted that more than 1,200 applications were received from across the region, describing it as evidence of the enormous entrepreneurial potential in Nigeria. "They are designed to create a new development model, one that moves from grants to growth capital, from dependence to enterprise, and from consumption to value creation," he said.

The minister also highlighted ongoing federal interventions to improve access to finance for businesses and entrepreneurs in the South-East. According to him, the Development Bank of Nigeria has deployed over N130 billion to businesses across the region, supporting about 86,000 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

He said that CreditCorp had reached more than 35,000 beneficiaries in the South-East, mostly women and micro-entrepreneurs, while the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) was providing interest-free education financing for students. Oyedele stated that in spite of global economic uncertain-

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# O The Nigerian OBSERVER

That The People May Know

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## Sallah: Tinubu, Govs extol sacrifice, hope, love

**ABUJA**  
The President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has felicitated with Muslim faithful across Nigeria and worldwide as they celebrate Eid-el-Kabir, the Festival of Sacrifice. Tinubu, in a sallah message, said Eid-el-Kabir reminds

Muslims of the enduring virtues exemplified by Prophet Ibrahim—faith, obedience, and the willingness to sacrifice for a higher purpose. "This sacred festival calls on all Muslims, and indeed all Nigerians and the whole of humanity, to embrace sacrifice, selflessness, unity, and compassion for our fellow human

beings. "One central lesson of Eid-el-Kabir is the call to show mercy and compassion, regardless of race, ethnicity, or creed. There is no greater example of duty and devotion than Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to offer his only son, Ismail, as a sacrifice to Allah. "As a nation, we are on a journey of reconstruction and renewal. The reforms we have undertaken are challenging but necessary to build a stronger and more prosperous Nigeria

for future generations." Extolling the virtue of sacrifice, he expressed confidence that the sacrifices and efforts Nigerians have made over the past three years have yielded a more stable economy. This, he argued, is making the country a preferred investment destination that will drive job creation and economic growth. "The walk through the dark tunnel is over, and the light is here. "I am confident that, by the

Grace of God, the reforms we have diligently pursued will continue to yield improved security and greater opportunities for all. "I am aware that, despite the best efforts of our security and intelligence agencies-including the recent elimination of a wanted ISIS leader-heartless terrorists and bandits still attack some communities. I as-

sure you: you are neither abandoned nor forgotten. We will ultimately defeat all the forces of evil." To Muslim faithful, the President urged them to use this sacred occasion to pray for Nigeria, for peace in all communities, and for wisdom for those in leadership.

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**20TH ANNIVERSARY:** General Manager, *The Nigerian Observer* Newspaper, Mr. Peter Odiboh (middle) address participants at the 20th anniversary of the Bendel Newspapers Company Staff Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society, held on Tuesday, 26th May, 2026. He is flanked to his left by the President, Mrs Marvellous Imoisili, and to his right by Pastor Fredrick Amegor, Treasurer of the cooperative society.

## Gov Okpebholo Felicitates Muslims on Eid-al-Adha Celebration

**BENIN CITY**  
The Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has congratulated Muslims in Edo State and across Nigeria on the occasion of this year's Eid-al-Adha celebration, urging them to continue to uphold the virtues of sacrifice, obedience, love and peaceful coexistence as exemplified by Prophet Ibrahim. The Governor said Eid-al-Adha remains a significant period for reflection, devotion and commitment to the will of Almighty Allah, stressing that the lessons of the festival should inspire citizens to work together for the peace, unity and development of the state and the nation at large. Governor Okpebholo commended the Muslim faithful in Edo State for their continued prayers, support and contributions towards the growth and

stability of the state, assuring them of his administration's commitment to inclusive governance, infrastructural development and improved welfare for all residents. He called on citizens to use the festive period to promote harmony, show kindness to the less privileged and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood irrespective of religious or ethnic differences. The Governor also urged the people to continue to support government efforts aimed at building a prosperous and secure Edo State, while praying for Allah's guidance, mercy and abundant blessings upon the state and the nation. "On behalf of the Government and good people of Edo State, I warmly felicitate with our Muslim brothers and sisters on the celebration of Eid-al-Adha. May Allah accept our sacrifices and reward our acts of worship,"

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# MMA introduces tougher safety measures, cuts airside speed limit

## LAGOS

The management of Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMA) has introduced stringent safety measures, including reduction of airside speed limit, to strengthen operational discipline and enhance airside safety.

This is contained in a communique issued by the Airport Safety Committee at its May 2026 Meeting.

The communique was issued yesterday in Lagos.

According to the committee, it adopted a tougher approach against reckless driving and other safety rules violations.

The Airport Safety Committee is made up of safety managers from various airport stakeholder organisations.

The committee members meet regularly to deliberate on airport safety concerns and recommend solutions.

It said that airside speed limits within the International Terminal Zone 1 (ITZ 1) construction areas had been reduced from 15km per hour to 10km per hour.

It said the adjustment be-

came necessary due to ongoing rehabilitation works on the E-Wing and D-Wing, which significantly reduced available operational space.

The committee said that 15km-per-hour speed limit would, however, remain in force within ITZ 2, while adequate signage would be installed to ensure compliance.

It announced inauguration of an airside task force to oversee strict monitoring of vehicles, equipment and personnel operating within restricted airport areas.

The committee warned ground handling companies, fuel marketers and caterers to avoid rule violations, stressing that drinking, smoking and reckless driving within airside zones remained prohibited.

"Unserviceable vehicles will be removed, and any faulty equipment causing oil leaks or pavement damage will be impounded and fined," it said.

It identified Foreign Object Debris (FOD) as a critical safety concern, banning sale of sachet alcohol drinks within the airport environment.

"FOD poses a serious threat to aircraft safety.

"Improved housekeeping, proper waste disposal, and heightened environmental discipline are non-negotiable," it said.

The committee said that as part of the enhanced safety

measures, regular alcohol testing had been introduced.

It said that all operational airside communications must be conducted on designated frequencies, while certain handheld

radio usage restrictions remained in place to prevent interference with air traffic control operations and pilot communications.

Other concerns highlighted during the meeting include con-

gestion at arrival halls during peak periods, baggage handling delays, damaged taxiway infrastructure, deteriorating road conditions and access control challenges at ramp entrances.



**PRIMARY ELECTION COLLATION CENTRE:**

L-R: Vice President Kashim Shettima; President Bola Tinubu, and his wife, Remi, at the All Progressive Congress (APC) Presidential Primary Election Collation Centre at the Bola Ahmed Tinubu International Conference Centre, Abuja.

## Sallah: Tinubu, Govs extol sacrifice,...

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"Let us pray that those who commit crimes among us may rethink and abandon their evil ways, or face the full weight of the law.

"Let us also reach out to the less privileged, share with our neighbours, and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood that unite us as one people," he wrote.

Tinubu, who pledged his administration's commitment to building a Nigeria where all citizens can live in peace, worship freely, and pursue their dreams without fear, vowed to continue to invest in security, infrastructure, agriculture, and human capital to fulfil the great promise of the nation.

He also wished Muslims a peaceful, joyous, and blessed Eid al-Kabir.

## FG commits over N1.3trn to...

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ties, Nigeria recorded a 3.89 per cent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the first quarter of 2026.

He attributed the growth to ongoing economic reforms, improved fiscal sustainability, infrastructure renewal and deliberate efforts to unlock private capital.

"We are building an economy that is more diversified, more productive, more competitive and better positioned to absorb external shocks," he said.

He reiterated that Nigeria remained open to investment, assuring investors of policy consistency, investor protection, fiscal reforms and transparent governance.

Speaking, Gov. Peter Mbah of Enugu State, described the venture capital programme as a strategic economic intervention aimed at repositioning the South-East within the global innovation economy.

The governor was represented by the Secretary to the State Government, Prof. Chidiebere Onyia.

Mbah said the initiative aligned with the economic philosophy of the Enugu State Government, which prioritised private enterprise, innovation, industrialisation and strategic investment partnerships.

He noted that Enugu State was investing heavily in infrastructure, digital connectivity, security, healthcare, education reform and smart urban development to create an enabling environment for businesses.

"One of the greatest challenges confronting emerging businesses across Africa is not necessarily the absence of ideas or talent, but lack of access to patent capital, capable of helping those ideas scale into successful enterprises," he said.

Earlier, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of the SEDC, Mr Mark Okoye, said the venture capital initiative was conceived as part of the commission's broader roadmap for regional economic transformation.

Okoye said over 1,200 startups applied for the programme, while only about 30 successful startups emerged after a rigorous selection and boot camp process.

He explained that the initiative would evolve into a \$50 million dollar blended finance platform managed independently through the South-East Investment Company.

According to him, the fund is designed to provide equity financing rather than grants to young entrepreneurs and startups across the region.

## Edo Amirul Hajj commends Gov Okpebholo's support for Muslims during Arafat prayers

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

### BENIN CITY

The Edo State Amirul Hajj, HRH Mallam Ali D Suleyman, the Oghieaga of Ivbie, has commended the Governor of Edo State, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for what he described as the governor's tremendous goodwill and support towards Muslims in the state.

The Amirul Hajj gave the commendation during a special prayer session held by Edo pilgrims at the Arafat tent in Saudi Arabia as part of activities marking the peak of the 2026 Hajj rites.

Leading Edo pilgrims in prayers for the state, Nigeria

and its leaders, Mallam Ali D. Suleyman said the Muslim community in Edo State had continued to enjoy inclusiveness and religious support under the present administration.

He prayed, "O Allah, we have a state where we have been privileged to have a governor who has shown tremendous goodwill to Muslims, and we thank Allah for him. May Allah make him continue to progress."

The Amirul Hajj also offered special prayers for the Secretary to the Edo State Government, Umar Musa Ikhilor, noting that his emergence in government had strengthened the capacity of Muslims in the state to practice their religion freely.

He said, "O Allah, You have given us a son, the SSG, Umar Musa Ikhilor, whose emergence in Edo State Government has enhanced our capacity to practice our religion. He has been conscious and mindful of the challenges of office and, of course, the duties to Allah."

He further prayed for divine protection, wisdom and favour for the SSG in the discharge of his responsibilities.

He added, "O Allah, do not disgrace him. Protect him from the envy of the envious, the jealousy of the jealous and the wickedness of the wicked. Let him continue to find favour with the governor, his principal, and continue to rise among Muslims in Edo, Southern Ni-

geria and the country at large."

The prayer session, held on the Day of Arafat, regarded as the spiritual climax of Hajj, also featured supplications for peace, security and economic recovery in Nigeria.

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, while introducing the session, said the pilgrims considered it necessary to use the sacred occasion to pray for the governor, the SSG and the country.

He said, "We want to pray for our governor, the SSG, ourselves and the entire country in general."

The Edo pilgrims had earlier held a similar prayer session in Madinah shortly after arriving in Saudi Arabia for the 2026 Hajj exercise.

## Mina: Where kings and commoners become equal before God

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

Every year, millions of Muslims from different parts of the world gather in Mina during Hajj. It is a place where the realities of life, status and human pride disappear almost completely.

In Mina, the world's distinctions fade away, and humanity returns to its simplest and purest form.

One of the most striking sights in Mina is the uniformity of the pilgrims. Kings, presidents, governors, scholars, businessmen, farmers, labourers and ordinary citizens all put on the same white ihram. The rich and the poor appear exactly alike. There are no expensive suits, no royal garments, no symbols of power or wealth. Everyone looks equal before Allah.

In that sacred environment,

it becomes almost impossible to identify who is wealthy and who is poor, who is influential and who is unknown. The governor walks beside the trader. The billionaire stands beside the labourer. The president sleeps in the same tent environment as the ordinary citizen. It is one of the greatest practical demonstrations of equality known to mankind.

Life in Mina teaches humanity that worldly status is temporary. The titles people carry outside Mina lose their importance there. What matters most is humility, patience, obedience and devotion to Allah. A man may possess enormous wealth in his country, yet in Mina he cannot create a completely separate experience for himself. He must endure the same heat, walk the same paths, queue for the same toilets and eat the same meals like everyone else.

This experience reminds

mankind that no matter how powerful or wealthy a person becomes, there are moments in life where all human beings stand on the same level.

Mina silently teaches that human pride has limits. Wealth may buy comfort in many places, but it cannot buy superiority before Allah.

Another powerful lesson from Mina is patience and endurance. Millions of people move together, sleep together and share facilities together. Pilgrims learn to tolerate one another, help one another and control their tempers despite physical stress and exhaustion. The rich man experiences the inconvenience the poor man faces daily. The powerful man understands what it means to wait his turn. The privileged learn that life is not always about personal comfort and preference.

Mina also reflects the reality of

the Day of Judgment. Just as pilgrims gather in simple garments with no visible signs of worldly superiority, humanity will one day stand before Allah without wealth, titles or influence. On that day, only righteousness and good deeds will matter.

The lessons of Mina are therefore not only for pilgrims but for the entire world. If humanity embraced the spirit of Mina, there would be less arrogance, less discrimination and less oppression. People would learn to value one another based on character and righteousness rather than wealth, class or political power.

In a world deeply divided by status, race and economic differences, Mina remains a powerful symbol that mankind is equal before their creator. It teaches that dignity does not come from material possessions, but from humility, compassion and submission to Allah.

# TETFund, Army partner on education, defence technology

## ABUJA

The Executive Secretary of the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), Mr Sonny Echono, has reaffirmed the Fund's commitment to strengthening collaboration with the Nigerian Army to promote education, security and technological development in Nigeria.

Echono stated this during a courtesy visit to the Army Headquarters in Abuja on Tuesday.

He said the partnership was necessary to ensure a safer environment for educational institutions and promote national development.

According to him, the visit was also aimed at appreciating the military's strategic role in safeguarding the country and supporting the education sector.

Echono noted that beyond security operations, the military had become an important contributor to educational advancement and technological innovation in Nigeria.

The TETFund boss stressed the importance of emerging technologies and expressed the agency's readiness to explore innovations being driven by the Armed Forces.

"We also want to underscore

the role the military is playing in our education sector. We look forward to deepening our collaboration with the military.

"As technology advances, a lot of technological innovations are being carried out by the military and we are looking forward to exploring areas such as robotics, Artificial Intelligence and other advancements being pioneered by the military," he said.

Echono assured TETFund's continued support in areas aligned with national development priorities.

"We want to reiterate our assurance that we will continue to support the Armed Forces in every way possible," he said.

Responding, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt-Gen. Olufemi Oluyede, appreciated the TETFund boss for the visit and commended the agency for supporting the Nigerian Army School of Engineering, Makurdi, and the Nigerian Army University, Bui.

Oluyede welcomed the opportunity to deepen collaboration between both institutions.

The army chief disclosed that the Nigerian Army was intensifying efforts in modern warfare capabilities, especially in drone technology and armament development, but noted

that manpower shortages remained a challenge.

"I am most grateful for this opportunity to strengthen collaboration with TETFund.

"We are pushing more in the area of drone warfare and armament development.

"We are also looking at sponsoring children to become

pioneers in these areas, but the requisite manpower is lacking. So, we are seeking your help in that area," he said.

He said TETFund's support

in intellectual and human capital development would help build indigenous capacity in military technology and defence production.



## SEMINAR:

A cross-section of dignitaries and participants, during a seminar titled "Invest in Girls, Transform the Future," organized by the Center for Leadership and Gender Studies, Wellspring University, Benin City, on Tuesday, 26th May, 2026.

PHOTO BY FRANCIS ODUPUTE

## Group urges FG to intensify awareness on 1-9-3-4 education policy

### LAGOS

The Association of Early Childhood and Basic Education Instructors in Nigeria (AECBEIN) has called on the Federal Government to intensify nationwide sensitisation on the implementation of the 1-9-3-4 education policy.

The President of the association, Mr Sunday Fowowe, made the call in an interview with newsmen on Tuesday in Lagos.

He said the structure would protect parents from exploitation and strengthen Nigeria's education system.

Fowowe urged education stakeholders to fully recognise and comply with the education policy adopted by the National Council on Education in 2013.

Fowowe said that in spite of the adoption of the framework more than a decade ago, many parents, schools, employers and education stakeholders still lacked adequate understanding of the policy and its implications.

According to him, the lack of awareness has encouraged persistence of unnecessary examinations, unlawful charges and exploitative practices against parents and pupils.

He explained that the 1-9-3-4 education structure consisted of one year of early childhood care and development education.

He also said that it consisted of nine years of compulsory basic education, three years of senior secondary education and four years of university education.

Fowowe noted that the nine years of basic education covered lower basic, middle basic and upper basic education, describing it as a continuous and uninterrupted programme.

He said that under the arrangement, transition from primary six to Junior Secondary School (JSS) One should be based on continuous assessment and internal school processes rather than common entrance examinations.

## INEC intensifies preparations for Rivers South-East senatorial bye-election

### PORT HARCOURT

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) says it has intensified logistics and security arrangements ahead of the June 20 Rivers South-East senatorial bye-election.

The Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) in Rivers, Mr Johnson Sinikiem, disclosed this at a press briefing on Tuesday in Port Harcourt.

Sinikiem said that the com-

mission had commenced engagements with transport unions and service providers to guarantee smooth movement of personnel and election materials.

"Discussions are ongoing for provision of buses and boats to convey personnel and materials across the seven local government areas in the district.

"Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) devices for voter accreditation and result upload are being prepared for

configuration, power banks are also being charged," he said.

He further said that the printing of both colour and black-and-white voters' registers would soon commence.

The REC stated that all non-sensitive materials had been received from INEC headquarters and were being prepared for deployment to the affected local government areas.

According to him, sensitive materials are expected to arrive during the election week.

Sinikiem said that the commission would deploy 6,774 ad-

hoc personnel for the conduct of the bye-election.

He said that the personnel would be drawn from INEC, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and other approved federal ministries, departments and agencies.

The REC said that training for supervisory presiding officers would hold between June 5 and 7, while that of presiding and assistant presiding officers would hold between June 12 and 14.

He also disclosed that collaboration officers for the election would be trained between June 17 and 18.

## AfDB seeks urgent reforms to unlock Africa's \$4 trillion savings

### CALABAR

The President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Sidi Ould Tah, has called for urgent reforms to unlock Africa's estimated four trillion dollars in domestic savings.

Tah made the call at the official opening of the 2026 AfDB Annual Meetings in Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday.

While outlining Africa's financing challenges and devel-

opment priorities, he said Africa's ambitions had outgrown existing financial structures, in spite the continent holding vast domestic financial resources.

According to him, Africa's challenge is not a lack of capital, but the inability to channel available resources into productive investment.

Tah said that Africa continued to face a large development financing gap, in spite strong economic resilience and growth potential.

He said savings held in

banks, pension funds, insurance companies and sovereign wealth funds remain largely underutilised.

The AfDB president stressed that fragmented financial systems were limiting Africa's ability to mobilise long-term investment capital.

He called for stronger financial markets, better coordination among institutions and improved investment instruments.

Tah said Africa must strengthen risk-sharing mechanisms to

attract private investors and reduce the cost of capital.

He added that development finance institutions must play a catalytic role in mobilising private capital rather than relying on sovereign lending alone.

According to him, every dollar of public finance should be designed to crowd in multiple dollars of private investment.

Tah also emphasised the need for stronger project pipelines to ensure that investments were bankable and ready for financing.

## Environment: NESREA seeks partnership with Delta NUJ

### ASABA

The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) has called for stronger collaboration with media stakeholders in Delta to deepen environmental awareness and improve compliance with environmental laws across the state.

Mr Enoch Anyankpele, iState Coordinator of the agency said this in Asaba during an advocacy visit to the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) Delta State Council.

Anyankpele described journalists as critical partners in promoting environmental responsibility and driving behavioural change among the public.

He said that NESREA, an

agency under the Federal Ministry of Environment, is responsible for enforcing environmental laws, regulations, and international environmental agreements in Nigeria through its offices across the federation.

"The agency has developed several regulations guiding activities and industries that impact the environment and public enlightenment remains

a major part of its mandate alongside enforcement.

"Effective enforcement can only be achieved when citizens are adequately informed about environmental standards and their responsibilities," he said.

He said the visit to the NUJ was aimed at seeking partnership with the media in sensitising residents on environmental cleanliness, pollution control, and compliance

with environmental regulations.

"The agency often operates with limited budgetary provisions at the state level, making collaboration with stakeholders and public education essential in achieving its objectives."

He, however, assured members of the public that the agency remained open to receiving complaints on environmental violations, including pollution, excessive noise, and other infractions by individuals or companies.

He said there is need for a strong communication channel between NESREA and the public to enhance monitoring and enforcement of environmental standards across Delta.

He appealed to NUJ to support the agency in spreading environmental messages, adding that the partnership is driven by a shared commitment to public service and environmental protection rather than financial considerations.

**NEWS**

# Troops eliminate 2 terrorists, rescue 4 Kidnap Victims, foil pipeline attack

**ABUJA**

The Nigerian Army says troops have in the last 24 hours, eliminated two terrorists, rescued four kidnapped victims and foiled pipeline attacks in series of coordinated military operations across Taraba, Kogi and Rivers.

This is contained in operational updates made availa-

ble to reporter on Tuesday in Abuja.

According to the reports, troops of 93 Battalion deployed at Akate in Donga Local Government Area of Taraba engaged suspected terrorists in a forested area, killing two of them.

According to the report, items recovered from the scene include an AK-47 rifle, ammunition, magazines, mobile phones and other personal ef-

fects.

In Kogi, it said the troops of 21 Battalion, in collaboration with vigilantes, rescued four kidnapped passengers along the Anyigba-Itoke road in Ofu Local Government Area.

It added that the victims were reportedly abandoned by their captors while attempting to cross a seasonal stream due to sustained pressure from advancing troops.

According to the military, efforts are ongoing to rescue other victims still in captivity.

The report said that troops

of 12 Brigade successfully repelled an ambush along Kabba-Okene road while withdrawing from an earlier operation, forcing the assailants to flee with gunshot wounds.

“Meanwhile, in Rivers, troops of five Battalion acting on credible intelligence, foiled an attempt by suspected vandals to detonate a crude oil pipeline in Ahoada West Local Government Area.

“The swift response of the troops disrupted the operation before it could be executed, with the suspects fleeing the

scene,” it said.

The military said the operations highlighted ongoing

efforts to tackle insecurity and safeguard critical national infrastructure across the country.

## Police foil Lagos kidnap plot, kill 4 suspects

**ABUJA**

The Commissioner of Police, Lagos State Command, Mr Fatai Tijani, addressing journalists at the command headquarters in Ikeja on Tuesday

Lagos: The Police command in Lagos State says it foiled a planned kidnap attempt and neutralised four suspected kidnapers during a gun battle in Ejigbo.

The Commissioner of Police, Fatai Tijani, confirmed the operation on Tuesday at the command headquarters in Ikeja.

Tijani said operatives acted on credible intelligence received about a notorious kidnapping syndicate planning an attack in Lagos.

He said the operation occurred on Sunday around 9:30 p.m. near Jakande Estate Gate in Ejigbo.

According to him, the gang planned to abduct a prominent businessman before police operatives moved in and disrupted the operation.

He described the syndicate as a deadly network targeting wealthy businessmen and entering Lagos from other states and neighbouring countries.

“The gang was planning to strike at a popular businessman around Jakande Estate Gate in Ejigbo.

“Based on the information available to us, our operatives moved swiftly to the scene and confronted the suspects,” he added.

Tijani said the suspects opened fire immediately they sighted the police team, leading to a fierce gun battle.

He said police operatives responded with superior firepower, killing four gang members, while another escaped with gunshot wounds.

The commissioner said the fleeing suspect and other accomplices were being tracked by security operatives.

Tijani identified the gang leader as “Ifeko”, describing him as a notorious criminal figure with international connections.

He alleged that the suspect lived abroad and usually returned to Nigeria to coordinate kidnappings and other violent crimes.

According to Tijani, “Ifeko” trained one Henry, alleged leader of the billionaire kidnapers’ gang neutralised at Ladipo International Spare Parts Market in 2024.

**IN THEIR TENT:**

Edo pilgrims inside their tent in Mina, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where Kings and commoners become equal before God.

## Students urge expansion of CNG-powered transport in universities

**ABUJA**

Student leaders from tertiary institutions across Northern Nigeria have called for the expansion of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)-powered transport systems to universities to address mobility challenges and improve access to academic activities.

They made the call at a summit organised by the Northern Project Coordination Office (NPCO) for student union leaders drawn from tertiary institutions across the northern states.

Speaking at the summit, Mr Aliyu Idris, the Student Union President of the University of

Maiduguri, said NELFund had become a major relief for students struggling with school fees and living costs.

Idris noted that the intervention had prevented several students from dropping out of school.

“The NELFund has brought hope to many students who believe that higher education is beyond their reach.

“It has helped in reducing financial burden on parents, especially in a region where many families are recovering.”

Idris, however, expressed concern over inadequate transportation within the University of Maiduguri, saying many students miss lectures due to mobility challenges particularly in the morning.

“Our students are suffering because we do not have enough transportation within the university. A lot of students miss lectures, especially early morning lectures.

“We are pleading with the representatives of Pi-CNG+EV to please bring something to us in the Universities, We are in need of support especially in the transport aspect,” he said.

Also speaking, Mr Tasiu Aminu, the President of the Student’s Union Government of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, called for stronger inclusion of tertiary institutions in national interventions.

He stressed the need to address particularly affordability in education and transportation systems related to initiatives such

as the CNG and EV scheme.

“I feel like tertiary institutions should also be the target of this initiative, let this initiative also focus on how they are going to provide these kinds of opportunities for students.”

Responding, Mr Ismael Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer of the Presidential Initiative on Compressed Natural Gas and Electric Vehicles (Pi-CNG+EV), said the programme was already deploying CNG-powered transport solutions in federal tertiary institutions across the country.

Ahmed said the initiative, which began about three years ago, was currently active in about 20 universities with plans for expansion to other federal institutions.

## 17 officers complete NAFRC entrepreneurship training

**LAGOS**

Seventeen military officers drawn from the Defence Headquarters, Defence Intelligence Agency, and the Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Centre on Tuesday graduated from the Senior and Mid-Level Upside Entrepreneurship and Management Course 18 of 2026.

The graduation ceremony was held at the Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Centre (NAFRC) in Oshodi, Lagos.

The Special Guest of Honour, Rear Adm. Ibrahim Shehu, said the training programme was designed to prepare participants for self-reliance, effective leadership, and meaningful contributions to national development after active service.

Shehu, who is the Admiral Superintendent of Naval Dockyard Ltd., described the decision to conduct the Upside Entrepreneurship and Management Course on a quarterly basis as commendable.

He noted that NAFRC had continued to distinguish itself as a strategic institution for human capacity development, empowerment, and socio-economic transformation in Nigeria.

“Over the years, the Centre

has consistently equipped retiring and serving personnel of the Armed Forces with vocational, entrepreneurial and managerial skills necessary for successful transition into productive civilian life.

“Through these efforts, many former participants have become successful entrepreneurs, administrators, employers of labour, industrialists and community leaders, contributing meaningfully to national growth and stability,” he said.

He added that the course featured practical exposure in agriculture, food processing, packaging, entrepreneurship development and business management.

He also highlighted the importance of local and international development after active service.

“These experiences are essential in bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application,” he said.

Shehu emphasised that the rapidly changing global environment, driven by economic realities, technological advancement and competition, required creativity, adaptability, innovation and sound managerial competence.

## Hajj fraud: Kebbi Police nab 4 suspects over N8.6m seat scam

**BIRNIN KEBBI**

The Kebbi Police Command has arrested four suspects in connection with a Hajj seat scam.

The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the command, Usman Bashar, confirmed the arrests in a statement made available to newsmen in Birnin Kebbi on Tuesday.

According to him, the prime suspect, Aminu Hassan Zauro, was arrested alongside three others, Tabiu Abubakar, Usman

Attahiru, and Mustapha Sani Zauro.

Four other suspects, identified as Bello Jos, Atiku Store, Umar Gimba, and Usman Umar, were still at large.

Bashar said the arrests followed a complaint from the Kebbi Pilgrims Welfare Agency after discovering that the names of some intending pilgrims were missing from its official records.

Investigations revealed that Aminu Hassan Zauro, who had no legitimate access to Hajj

slots, fraudulently collected N8.6 million from a victim under the false promise of securing two seats for the 2026 Hajj.

The suspect also obtained an initial deposit of N690,000 from another victim under similar pretences.

In an attempt to conceal the fraud, he procured and presented unauthorised branded Hajj materials, including bags, hijabs, wrappers, and fake medical record cards, to the victims.

Bashar said all the items were recovered by the police,

along with one Tecno we Android phone.

He added that the Commissioner of Police, CP Umar Hadejia, cautioned intending pilgrims to deal only with the Kebbi Pilgrims Welfare Agency or its accredited officials.

The CP noted that many people fall victim to such fraudulent schemes annually and had directed that all persons found culpable in connection with the fraudulent Hajj transactions be prosecuted accordingly.

# Economic hardship, fuel hike impact Sallah travel

## ABUJA

Some residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have expressed concern over the sharp increase in transport fare ahead of Eid-el-Kabir celebration, saying it has disrupted their travel plans.

The residents spoke in interviews with newsmen on Tuesday in Abuja.

They said the rise in transportation costs, driven largely by increased fuel prices and economic hardship, had made inter-state travel difficult for many families.

Mr Shuaibu Umar said he

had planned to travel to Kano with his family for the celebration but was forced to reconsider because of the high transport fares.

"Last year, I spent about N50,000 for my family's trip, but now transport companies are charging more than N95,000.

"With the current economic situation, I may celebrate Sallah here in Abuja instead.

"It is becoming difficult for an average Nigerian to travel. Things are very hard now. Fuel price increase has affected everything, especially transportation.

"Even moving from one part of Abuja to another is now expensive. People now think

twice before embarking on any trip," Umar said.

Another resident, Mrs Amina Inusa, said the situation had affected the usual festive movement associated with Sallah celebrations.

"Normally, motor parks would be very busy at this time, but many people are staying back because of the cost of transportation.

"Everything is expensive now. Fuel price affects transportation, food and even ram prices. With the high cost of food and other necessities, travelling has become difficult.

"Many families cannot afford to travel this Sallah because transport fares are too high," she added.

Mrs Fatima Abubakar said she had to save money for several weeks to afford the journey.

Abubakar said that in spite of the financial difficulties, she insisted on travelling because festive periods provided opportunities for family bonding and emotional support.

"Sallah holidays are one of the few opportunities we have to reunite as a family.

"My children have been looking forward to visiting

their grandparents.

"The transport fare is very high, but family connection is important. We cannot completely abandon our traditions because of hardship," she said.

She added that being with loved ones during festive periods brought joy and comfort despite the economic challenges.

A driver at Zuba Motor Park, Mr Peter Okeke, said transport operators were also struggling to cope with rising operational costs.

"People are travelling less this year because of the high fares. Some passengers even negotiate

aggressively because they cannot afford the current prices.

"We are not happy increasing fares, but fuel prices, engine oil and vehicle parts are very expensive now. If we don't adjust fares, we cannot sustain the business," Okeke said.

He added that many residents had chosen to celebrate Sallah in Abuja instead of travelling to their hometowns.

Another driver in Dei-Dei, Mr Bello Musa, appealed to the government to introduce measures that would ease the burden on both transporters and commuters during festive periods.

## NANS commends DSS for peaceful conduct of 2026 national convention

### ABUJA

The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) has commended the Department of State Services (DSS) for its role in ensuring the peaceful and successful conduct of its 2026 national convention.

The President of NANS, Babatunde Akinteye, gave the commendation in a statement issued on Tuesday in Abuja.

Akinteye described the convention as historic, noting that the professionalism, vigilance and strategic coordination displayed by the DSS contributed significantly to the peaceful atmosphere that characterised the exercise.

He said the association, as the umbrella body for Nigerian students at home and in the diaspora, benefited from the robust security measures put in place by the agency throughout the convention.

According to him, the DSS played a vital role in maintaining order, safeguarding partic-

ipants and ensuring a credible and hitch-free process.

The NANS president also praised the Director-General of the DSS, Mr Adeola Ajayi, for his leadership and support towards the successful conduct of the convention.

"We appreciate the commitment of the DSS leadership and operatives whose professionalism and dedication helped guarantee a peaceful and credible convention.

"Their efforts contributed immensely to the successful outcome of the exercise and the smooth transition process within the association," he said.

Akinteye further expressed confidence in the capacity of the DSS to continue discharging its mandate of maintaining internal security and supporting democratic processes in the country.

He also acknowledged the sacrifices and contributions of DSS personnel deployed for the convention, describing their conduct as exemplary.

## Lagos intensifies efforts to bridge 3.3m housing deficit

### LAGOS

The Lagos State Government has intensified efforts to reduce the state's estimated 3.3 million housing deficit through the construction of thousands of housing units in different parts of the state.

The state Commissioner for Housing, Mr Moruf Akinderu-Fatai, disclosed this on Tuesday in Ikeja during the 2026 Ministerial Press Briefing to mark the third year of Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu's second-term.

Akinderu-Fatai said the state had continued to prioritise the welfare of low-income earners in its housing delivery programmes aimed at expanding access to affordable accommodation.

He said the governor recently approved two new joint venture housing projects to further boost the state's hous-

ing stock.

According to him, the projects include 202 housing units comprising one, two and three-bedroom apartments as well as four-bedroom duplexes at the Abraham Adesanya Housing Estate.

He added that 114 housing units, made up of two-bedroom apartments and four and five-bedroom duplexes, would be developed at Orange Island in Eti-Osa.

The commissioner said that other proposed schemes included 704 two-bedroom apartments at Odo-Nla in Ikorodu North council area and 500 two-bedroom apartments at Igbogbo-Baiyeku council area.

He listed 192 units under the Epe Housing Scheme Phase II and 512 units at the proposed Akinsanya Sunny Ajose Housing Estate Phase II in Badagry as part of the proposed schemes.



**CHILDREN'S DAY:**

A mass choir by the children ministry of Heritage Assembly, Evbuotubu branch, Benin City, to celebrate this year's children's day.

PHOTO BY FRANCIS ODUPUTE

## Lagos trains 7,116 public servants

### LAGOS

No fewer than 7,116 Lagos State public servants underwent training in the past one year as part of efforts to enhance their productivity and improve service delivery.

The state Commissioner for Establishments and Training, Mr Afolabi Ayantayo, disclosed this at the 2026 Lagos State Ministerial Press Briefing to commemorate the second year of second term of Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu.

The event held at Alausa, Ikeja on Monday.

Ayantayo said the training programmes comprised 26

generic courses and 28 specialised skill-gap trainings designed to strengthen capacities of the workers.

According to him, the ministry also processed 744 training sign-off requests for 148 ministries, departments and agencies within the period under review.

He said the state government remained committed to continuous manpower development and institutional efficiency through strategic capacity-building initiatives.

"The ministry has continued to prioritise human capital development to improve competence, productivity and effi-

ciency within the Lagos State Public Service.

"In the last one year, 7,116 officers participated in 54 different training programmes comprising generic and specialised courses aimed at bridging identified skill gaps," he said.

The commissioner added that the state government, in collaboration with private sector partners, trained 1,000 officers on accelerated digital training programmes to improve digital literacy, workplace productivity and global certification readiness.

Ayantayo said the initiative was in line with the government's digital transformation

agenda and efforts to equip public servants with modern technological skills.

He also said the state maintained industrial harmony through effective engagements with workers' unions and other stakeholders.

According to him, about 300 union leaders and stakeholders were trained locally to strengthen labour relations and sustain peaceful industrial practices across the state.

"Our administration has continued to enjoy industrial peace because disputes involving labour unions are resolved amicably through dialogue and continuous engagement," he said.

## Coy sues FG over OPL 245 split, demands ₦1trn in damages

### ABUJA

Malabu Oil & Gas Ltd has filed a N1 trillion suit against the Federal Government over the splitting of the Oil Prospecting Licence (OPL) 245.

Malabu Oil, in the suit filed by its lawyer, Reuben Atabo, SAN, before Justice Mohammed Umar of the Federal High Court in Abuja, sought an order quashing the conversion of OPL 245 to

OML 245 by the government.

Malabu, the applicant, had sued the president, the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and the Minister of Petroleum Resources as 1st to 3rd respondents respectively in the suit marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/871/2026.

In the notice of motion dated and filed on May 25 by Atabo, the company argued that the conversion of OPL 245 to OML 245 was done while a number of cases were pending

at the Federal High Court up to the Supreme Court.

It therefore sought a declaration that splitting OPL 245 into four assets to be managed by Shell Nigeria Ultra-Deep Limited, Shell Nigeria Exploration Production Company Ltd, Nigerian Agip Exploration Company Ltd, and NNPC Limited through the OPL 245 Resolution Agreement signed around March 5, was unlawful.

In addition, Malabu seeks an order awarding ₦1 trillion in

damages against the respondents jointly and severally.

The company said the fine was for unlawful interference with its interests in OPL 245 and for actions that exceed the limits of the Petroleum Industry Act 2021.

In an affidavit in support of the motion, a shareholder and director, Alhaji Mohammed Sani Abacha, detailed the company's history and its prolonged legal battle over OPL 245.

**NEWS****Sen. Umeh backs court ruling on INEC timetable****ABUJA**

Sen. Victor Umeh (NDC-Anambra), has backed the landmark Federal High Court ruling that nullified the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) revised timetable for the 2027 general elections.

Umeh, who represents Anambra Central Senatorial District, made the position while speaking with newsmen in Abuja on Tuesday.

He noted that INEC's compressed timetable was actively used by state executives to lock out lawmakers and rig consensus candidate selections.

He also faulted the "rush" of state governors to the Senate by imposing their preferred candidates.

He said that the National Assembly should not be treated as a "retirement ground" for former state executives.

Umeh said lawmakers who were committed to legislative du-

ties understand that lawmaking was demanding and should not be approached as a ceremonial position for political elites seeking relevance after serving as governors.

"The National Assembly is not a retirement ground. If they think they will come there to sleep, they are making a mistake," he said.

According to him, many outgoing governors are contesting Senate seats mainly to retain political influence and continue bearing the title of senator after

their tenure as governors.

"For those who are healthy, there is nothing wrong with it, but I think after serving as governor, one should take a break and allow other people to serve," he added.

The senator lamented that sitting governors often use their influence to secure party tickets, thereby shutting out other aspirants and even incumbent senators seeking re-election.

"A lot of my colleagues have become victims of this. Most

of them are not coming back, and it is painful because some of these things were done with huge disrespect to serving senators by governors interested in their seats," he said.

Umeh described the situation as unhealthy for democracy and hinted that the National Assembly may consider legislative measures after the 2027 elections to address the issue.

He also expressed optimism about the chances of the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) in the forthcoming general elections, saying the party would present the best candidates to Nigerians.

According to him, the entry of prominent political figures into the party has boosted its popularity and triggered increased interest among aspirants across the country.

"The party is in very strong contention in the forthcoming general elections, not just for president but for all positions," he stated.

On the recent Federal High Court judgment nullifying aspects of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) guidelines and extending timelines for party activities, Umeh described the ruling as "well considered."

However, he cautioned political parties against relaxing because the judgment could

still be overturned on appeal.

"It will be risky for any party to relax because if INEC appeals and the judgment is overturned, everything becomes uncertain again. Every sensible party should continue to work with the current INEC timetable," he said.

Umeh argued that INEC unnecessarily compressed political activities into a short period, thereby putting pressure on political parties, especially newly registered ones like the NDC.

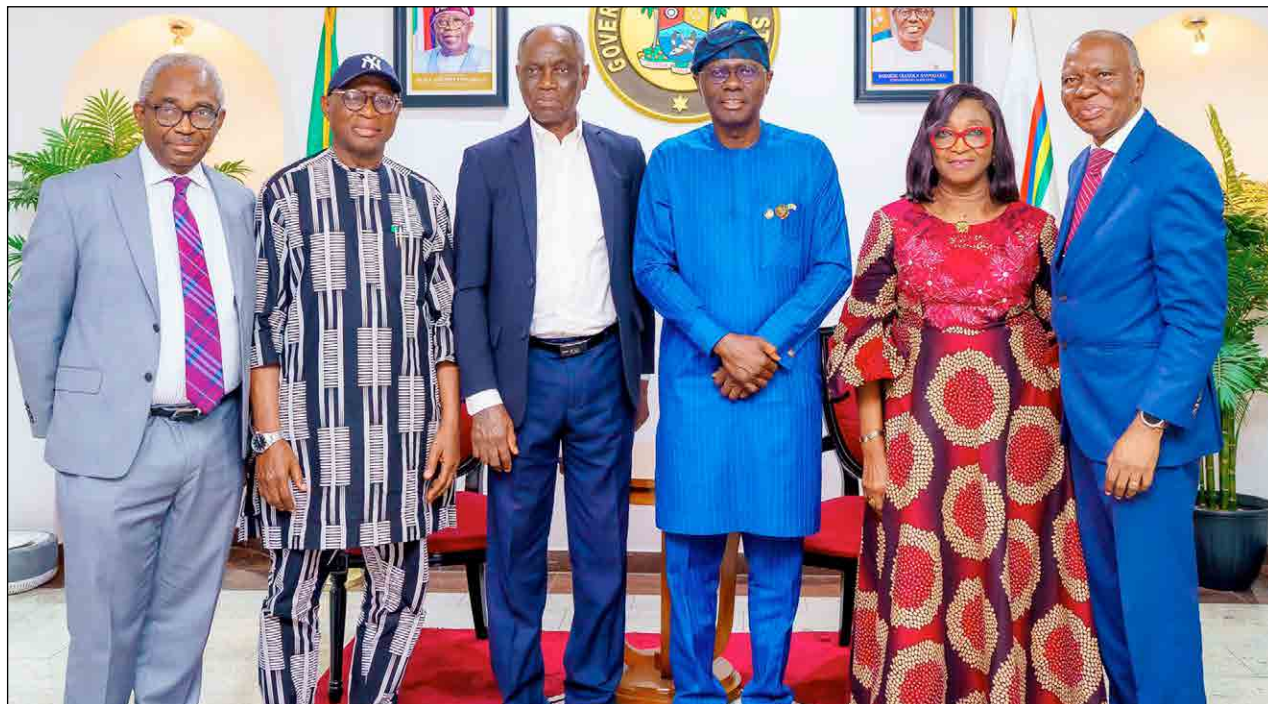
He maintained that the electoral body had sufficient constitutional room to schedule elections later in 2027 instead of fixing the presidential election for January.

"By bringing the election down to January 16, 2027, INEC threw all the political parties under pressure," he said.

The senator insisted that the court ruling should serve as a lesson to INEC to be more careful in issuing regulations and guidelines affecting political parties.

NAN reports that the Federal High Court, presided over by Justice Muhammad Umar, on Friday, voided INEC's shortened deadlines.

The judge declared that INEC lacks the statutory power to abridge explicit timelines for party primaries, candidate submissions, and campaign periods stipulated in the Electoral Act.

**A COURTESY VISIT:**

Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu (3rd right), receiving the Governing Council of Lagos State University of Science and Technology (LASUSTECH), led by the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, Prof. Rasheed Kola Ojikutu (3rd left), on a courtesy visit at Lagos House, Marina.

**Arbitration vital tool for commercial dispute resolution —Prof. Ufot****LAGOS**

Senior Advocate of Nigeria Prof. Dorothy Ufot, on Tuesday described arbitration as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism, vital for tackling commercial disputes globally.

She said that arbitration remains effective and trusted especially in a tech-driven dispensation.

Ufot, chairperson of the Arbitration and ADR Commission of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Africa, said this at a media parley on the 10th ICC Africa conference holding in Lagos.

The theme of the 10th conference is "A Decade of Excellence: Shaping the Future for International Arbitration"

According to her, International arbitration is a preferred mechanism for resolving disputes, noting that Nigeria now occupies a 'pride of place' in international arbitration.

She raised concerns that while foreigners come to do businesses in Nigeria, they are not afraid of societal vices like kidnapping, but when dispute arises from these commercial transactions, they are taken abroad for resolution.

"We are not chosen to participate in the resolution of same as they are taken elsewhere.

"So we say we want to be a part of the resolution, and we have stood up and fought for our rights and now, they realise that Nigerians are intelligent people and have something to offer," she said

She noted that there is the realisation that when you are involved in the process of arbitration, then you have a say.

"We trained ourselves, we attended international conferences and this has kept us ready," she said

Ufot noted that the ICC headquarters in Paris, said that Nigeria has been tried, tested and trusted and consequently, decided it should host the 10th ICC African edition.

Speaking on the importance of arbitration, co-chair of the conference, Mrs Chiazor Anish-

ere (SAN), noted that since disputes could occur in businesses, it is important to have trained arbitrators that could intervene and treat such disputes.

According to her, the court dockets are full with litigation, and so, many commercial disputes can easily be settled by the ADR technique.

"By the time the conference is over Nigeria will take its pride of place in dispute resolution in the country," she said

On her part, Secretary General of ICC Nigeria, Mrs Olubunmi Osuntuyi, said that following ongoing registration, over 30 countries of the world will be present at the conference.

The 10th edition of the ICC conference will run from June 3, until June 5 in Lagos.

**Businessman docked over alleged N17m vehicle fraud****IKEJA**

The police on Tuesday arraigned a 39-year-old businessman, Stephen Owolabi, before an Ikeja Chief Magistrates' Court for allegedly obtaining a Hyundai Elantra, valued at N17 million, under the pretence of selling it.

The defendant, who resides at 5, Akinwunmi St., Abule Egba, Lagos, is facing charges

of obtaining by false pretence and causing breach of peace.

The defendant, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges.

The Prosecutor, ASP Ademigboje Ademigboji, told the court that the offences were committed in January, at Akerele Close, Abule Egba, Lagos.

Ademigboji alleged that the defendant obtained a Hyundai Elantra SUV from the com-

plainant, Mr Akin Idowu, under the pretence of helping him to sell the vehicle and remitting N17 million afterwards.

He alleged that the defendant later failed to pick calls from the complainant and all efforts to recover the vehicle or the proceeds proved abortive.

The prosecutor further alleged that the complainant later discovered that the defendant had obtained a N5 million

loan from a loan company and used the vehicle as collateral.

He said the offences contravene Sections 168 and 314 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015.

The Chief Magistrate, Mrs Omolara Kushanu, granted the defendant bail in the sum of N1 million with two sureties each in like sum.

Kushanu adjourned the case until June 16, for mention.

**Alleged rape: Court orders remand of man pending DPP advice****ADO-EKITI**

An Ado-Ekiti Chief Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, ordered the remand of a 38-year-old man, Ayodele Babatola, at the Correctional Centre, for allegedly raping a 30-year-old woman.

The Chief Magistrate, Mr Abayomi Adeosun, who did not take the plea of the defendant, ordered that case file should be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for legal advice.

Adeosun adjourned the case until June 26, for mention.

The defendant, whose address was not provided, is

charged on one-count of rape.

The prosecutor, ASP Akinwale Oriyomi, told the court that the defendant committed the offence on May 24, in Ado-Ekiti.

He alleged that the defendant invited the woman to a hotel and forcefully had sexual intercourse with her.

He alleged that the defendant eventually, left the woman stranded in the hotel.

The prosecutor alleged that the woman reported the case to the police and the defendant was arrested.

The offence contravenes the provisions of section 265(1) of the Criminal Law of Ekiti State, 2021.

**Driver jailed 2 years for stealing a car in Abuja****ABUJA**

A Chief Magistrates' Court in Abuja on Tuesday sentenced a 35-year-old driver, Paul Tolulope, to 24 months imprisonment for stealing a car.

Magistrate Lami Sani, sentenced Tolulope after finding him guilty of criminal breach of trust and theft which contravened Sections 312 and 297 of the Penal Code Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The court also ordered the convict to pay N7 million as compensation to the complainant.

The Prosecution Counsel, Helen Ochie, told the court that on Aug. 12, 2024, Tolulope collected a Nissan Premiere wagon valued at N7 million from the complainant for commercial use, under an agreement to pay N8,000 daily.

Ochie said the convict failed to remit the agreed amount and later diverted the vehicle to an unknown destination.

She said that when he was apprehended by the police at Gosa community, Airport Road, he could not give a satisfactory account of the vehicle's whereabouts.

**Foreign****NEWS**

# Iran condemns US strikes as 'gross violation' of ceasefire

Iran said US strikes near the Strait of Hormuz had violated the fragile ceasefire, which started in April

Iran says the US has committed a "gross violation" of the ceasefire with new air strikes it launched on the country.

The US Central Command (Centcom) said Iranian missile sites and boats attempting to place mines had been targeted with what it called "self-defence strikes" in southern Iran on Monday.

Iran's foreign ministry said it held the US responsible for the consequences of its "aggressive and unjustified actions" in the Hormozgan region, which has a coast along the Strait of Hormuz - the crucial waterway Iran has blocked causing a spike in world energy prices.

It is unclear what impact the strikes will have on talks aimed to end the conflict.

"Without a doubt, the Islamic Republic of Iran will not leave any evil unanswered and will not hesitate to defend the Iranian nation," the Iranian statement said.

The US and Israel started the war with Iran on 28 February with a wave of deadly attacks, including one which killed the country's supreme leader.

After weeks of fighting, a ceasefire was agreed on 8 April and it has been largely observed ever since, barring one notable clash earlier in May.

In its statement, Centcom said US forces "conducted self-defence strikes in southern Iran today to protect our troops from threats posed by Iranian forces".

It did not give details about the location of the strikes, but an official cited by the New York Times said they had targeted an area near Bandar Abbas - a southern port city and home of an Iranian naval base that sits on the Strait of Hormuz.

Iranian state media had earlier reported that local officials in Bandar Abbas were investigating after explosions were heard.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) later said it had downed a US drone and fired a fighter jet that entered Iranian airspace, though it did not specify when this happened.

This takes place against the backdrop of talks aimed at extending the current ceasefire, with the eventual aim of bringing an end to the conflict.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said a deal from the

talks is still possible, but it will "take a few days".

At the weekend, President Donald Trump initially suggested a deal was close before later saying he had instructed negotiators "not to rush into" an agreement.

According to US media, the possible deal is not a final settlement, but a memorandum of understanding that reportedly involves a 60-day ceasefire extension, reopening the Strait of Hormuz, and a plan for further negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran said on Monday that some progress had been made, but a deal "is not imminent".

One of the stumbling blocks reportedly centres on Tehran's request for the release of frozen Iranian funds held abroad.

# Four killed as school minibus collides with train in Belgium

Two children, aged 12 and 15, and two adults have been killed in a collision between a train and a school minibus in Buggenhout, northern Belgium.

The bus was carrying seven boys, a driver, 49, and a chaperone, 27, at the time of the collision, which took place shortly after 08:00 local time (06:00 GMT).

Federal police spokeswoman An Berger said it had been on its way to a special education school.

Belgian mobility minister Jean-Luc Crucke confirmed reports that the barriers on a level crossing had been down when the crash happened.

The other five children who were on the bus were in a critical but stable condition in hospital, the public prosecutor's spokeswoman said.

It later emerged that the two boys who died were both from the town of Bornem, 12km (7.5 miles) north of Buggenhout.

Berger said the minibus had been travelling on a street parallel to the railway and then the driver turned left on to the level crossing while the barrier was already down.

At that point, a train was heading through the small town of Buggenhout and ran into the minibus.

The impact of the crash was extremely violent, as the train was travelling at about 90km/h. The minibus collided with a pole before being thrown some distance into the driveway of a nearby house.

Nobody on the train was hurt, although one person was being treated for shock, according to Berger.

The train remained stationary at the level crossing, as investigators carried out their work.

The minibus was carrying seven children and two adults when it collided with the train.

"What heartbreaking news," Flemish education minister Zuhal Demir posted on social media. "My thoughts are with all the victims, their families and everyone closely involved."

"Today, Europe grieves with Belgium," said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The train was slowing down at the time of the collision on its approach to Buggenhout station, Thomas Baeken, a spokesman for Belgian rail network Infrabel, told public broadcaster VRT.

He added that first indications from CCTV footage confirmed that the lights on the level crossing were red and the barrier was down. Other sources who saw the footage told Belgian media that the minibus could be seen striking the barrier before the crash.

"How this accident could have happened, we don't know. That is for the police and the public prosecutor's office to investigate," Baeken said.

Another Flemish minister, Annick De Ridder, told Belgian TV it was terrible news and too early to talk of responsibility at this stage.

**GROSS VIOLATION:**

Iran said US strikes near the Strait of Hormuz had violated the fragile ceasefire, which started in April.

# Russia threatens more Kyiv strikes and tells foreign nationals to leave

Russia has threatened to launch a fresh wave of "systematic strikes" against Kyiv, days after carrying out one of its largest attacks on the Ukrainian capital since the start of the war.

The new strikes will target "decision-making centres and command posts", alongside drone manufacturing facilities in the city, Russia's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Moscow has called for foreign nationals and diplomats to leave Kyiv "as soon as possible" and warned citizens to stay away from administrative and military buildings.

Ukraine said Russia's threats were "nothing short of shameless blackmail" and urged allies to increase pressure on Moscow.

With its warning to foreign nationals, Moscow is "effectively admitting that its shelling is aimed, among other things, at intimidating the foreign dip-

lomatic corps", the statement continued.

It said Russian strikes on Kyiv "have not ceased for virtually a single week" since the start of the war, and the overall security threat posed by Moscow "remains the same as in previous years or months".

Large-scale Russian strikes on Saturday night killed four and injured about 100 people in Kyiv and other areas, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

Moscow said that barrage and threatened further strikes were in response to what it claims was a deliberate Ukrainian attack on a student dormitory in the town of Starobilsk on Friday, in which Russian officials said 21 people were killed.

Ukraine's military said its forces had struck an elite Russian military drone unit in the area, in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, and had not tar-

geted civilians.

Russia has launched several waves of deadly missile and drone attacks on Kyiv since a brief ceasefire, that coincided with Moscow's annual Victory Day parade, expired earlier in May.

Shortly after that, Russian strikes on Kyiv killed 24 people, including three children, in a block of flats.

Days later, Russian officials said three people were killed in a large-scale Ukrainian drone attack on the Moscow region, with Zelensky saying the strikes were an "entirely justified" response to deadly Russian attacks.

Kyiv then suffered one of the biggest aerial assaults of the war overnight on Saturday.

Videos posted on social media showed explosions lighting up the sky throughout the night, and many Kyiv residents reported blasts rocking the city as numerous civilian targets were hit.

Russia employed dozens of

ballistic and cruise missiles and hundreds of drones to hit the capital, as well as firing a hypersonic, nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile on the area of Bila Tserkva, 90km south of Kyiv.

Non-military targets such as the Chernobyl Museum in Kyiv's historic district and the National Art Museum of Ukraine were damaged or destroyed. A shopping centre, a market and several residential buildings in the area of Lukanivka were also destroyed.

On Monday evening, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov urged US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to evacuate American diplomats from Kyiv in a phone call, Russia's foreign ministry said.

After that phone call, Rubio said major strikes from either Ukraine or Russia are a "reminder of why this is a terrible war" and "it needs to come to an end."

# Eleven killed in Lebanon village as Israel intensifies strikes

Israel has launched an intensive wave of strikes across swathes of southern and eastern Lebanon, after vowing to step up its military action against Hezbollah.

The Israeli military said it hit more than 100 Hezbollah infrastructure sites and fighters during what was one of the heaviest nights of bombardment since a US-brokered ceasefire began in mid-April.

Strikes in the Bekaa Valley village of Mashghara killed 11 people, including two children, Lebanon's health ministry said. The military said it hit sites where "terrorist activity" was identified.

It came after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had given the instruction to "press the pedal even harder" in targeting Hezbollah.

The ceasefire has been repeatedly violated by both sides, threatening to derail the complex ongoing talks to end the war between the US, Israel and Iran.

Israeli air and artillery strikes have continued daily, especially in the south of Lebanon, while Hezbollah has been launching rockets and drones at communities in northern Israel and Israeli troops occupying parts of southern Lebanon.

On Monday night, Netanyahu said in a video statement that Israel was going to increase the

number and intensity of its strikes targeting Hezbollah in response to the Iran-backed Shia Muslim group's attacks, including those involving fibre-optic drones that can evade Israeli defences.

"We will deal them a crushing blow," he vowed.

The announcement prompted scenes of panic in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hezbollah stronghold, where residents were seen fleeing the area following the remarks. Thousands of cars lined the streets with families trying to escape for safety.

Though the overnight strikes spared the capital, Israeli warplanes carried out wave after wave of strikes across Lebanon throughout the evening and into the early hours. The BBC counted dozens of attacks across nearly 50 locations.

A man and his wife were killed in a strike on their home in the southern town of Arab Salim on Monday evening, and two other people were killed in the village of Kauthariyet El Rez, according to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA).

Overnight, several homes in Mashghara were destroyed in Israeli strikes, according to NNA. Unverified video footage on social media appeared to show streets of destroyed and burning buildings, with fires raging.

## NEWS

## Foreign

## Senegal: Ousmane Sonko elected national assembly president

Senegal's National Assembly elected ousted prime minister Ousmane Sonko its speaker Tuesday in a vote boycotted by the opposition, following months of tension that culminated in the fire-brand's sacking.

Sonko's rise to the top of parliament comes four days after President Bassirou Diomaye Faye fired him and with opposition lawmakers deeming his reinstatement to the National Assembly "illegal".

Sonko remains the undisputed leader of Pastef, the party which controls 130 of the 165 seats in Senegal's only legislative body.

He received a long ovation after getting 132 votes, with no member voting against him and one abstaining, according to the session's presiding member Ismael Diallo. Sonko was the sole candidate for the position.

He replaces El Malick Ndiaye, a loyal supporter who resigned Sunday, paving the way for the ex-prime minister's rise.

The parliamentary session began shortly after 9:00 am (local and GMT), with Sonko in

attendance.

Aissata Tall Sall, who heads the main opposition, denounced an "institutional coup" which she said Monday was prepared under "pressure that the majority wants to impose."

Sall said she believed Sonko, in order to become a lawmaker again, should first have resigned as prime minister to sit even temporarily in parliament before returning to government.

Faye appointed Sonko prime minister in April 2024 after winning the presidential election the previous month.

Faye essentially owes his position to Sonko, his one-time mentor who would almost certainly have taken the top job had he not been barred from the presidential election due to a defamation conviction.

Faye faces the difficult task of governing and implementing reforms in a country troubled by serious economic difficulties.

On Monday, he named senior economist Ahmadou Al Aminou Mohamed Lo as prime minister, saying the new appointee had the expertise to steer Senegal out of crippling debt.



### SOUTH AFRICA PRESIDENT:

Cyril Ramaphosa heads a coalition government after his African National Congress (ANC) party failed to secure a parliamentary majority in 2024.

## Congo throws open its borders to Africa

From January 1, 2027, the Republic of Congo will abolish visa requirements for all African citizens, marking a major step toward continental integration. Announced in Brazzaville by President Denis Sassou Nguesso, the move positions Congo among Africa's champions of free movement.

The Republic of Congo has announced the end of visa requirements for all African nationals entering its territory, effective January 1, 2027.

President Denis Sassou Nguesso made the declaration on May 25 during the 2026 Annual Meetings of the African Development Bank in Brazzaville, held alongside celebrations marking Africa Day.

The announcement immediately drew attention across the continent, as Congo became the latest African nation to embrace visa-free travel for fellow Africans.

A growing continental movement

Congo follows the path already taken by countries such as Benin, Togo, Rwanda, Ghana, Seychelles and The Gambia, all of which have adopted policies allowing Africans to enter without visas.

Benin has offered visa-free access to citizens of all African countries since 2020 for stays of up to 90 days.

Togo introduced a similar policy on May 18, 2026, allowing 30-day stays subject to prior online declaration.

By joining this trend, Brazzaville is aligning itself with a

broader African ambition to ease mobility, strengthen trade and deepen regional cooperation.

"Beyond narrow nationalism"

Speaking before African leaders and delegates, Denis Sassou Nguesso defended the reform as a concrete contribution to African unity.

He urged governments across the continent to move beyond what he described as "selfishness and narrow nationalism" in order to collectively tackle development challenges.

The Congolese president also highlighted the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area as one of the key pillars for accelerating economic integration and intra-African exchange.

Economic and cultural opportunities ahead

The measure is expected to facilitate travel for entrepreneurs, students, researchers, artists and tourists across Africa.

Supporters believe easier access to Congo could stimulate investment, tourism and cultural exchange while reinforcing Brazzaville's role as a regional hub.

Authorities still have several months to define the practical framework of the reform.

Details regarding the maximum duration of stay, possible pre-arrival formalities, as well as health and security requirements, have not yet been officially released.

A new chapter for African mobility

## Ebola needs swift response to prevent catastrophe —DR Congo governor

The military governor of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Ituri province, the epicentre of the current Ebola outbreak, has likened the struggle to contain the spread of the virus to a "war" for which they are lacking resources to fight.

"People in affected areas are not receiving enough food," Johnny Luboya Nkashama told French broadcaster RFI, adding that "other diseases" and "overcrowding" are also issues.

He called for a "swift response", including strengthening the capacity of staff to prevent Ituri "from descending into catastrophe".

Officials say there are more than 900 suspected cases of Ebola, and 223 suspected deaths, since the outbreak was declared on 15 May.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said the disease may be spreading faster than originally thought and has

declared a public health emergency of international concern.

On Monday, WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is due to travel to DR Congo, has said the Ebola outbreak is outpacing urgent efforts to scale up a response adding that responders were "playing catch-up".

Ebola has also been reported in DR Congo's North and South Kivu provinces, as well as in neighbouring Uganda, where there have been seven confirmed cases.

Elaborating on what his province needs, Kashama explained "qualified personnel" should be deployed as soon as possible and "secure treatment centres" established.

Angry relatives trying to claim the bodies of loved ones who had reportedly died of Ebola have targeted two treatment centres.

"Our existing resources were dedicated to the war, and this

second war that is now upon us demands even more," he said on RFI.

Ituri has been under military rule since 2021, when the civilian authority was replaced by a military general in an attempt to neutralise dozens of armed groups which have operated in the area for many years. These include the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), affiliated to the Islamic State group.

"And lastly, we need to mobilise financial resources - they must be made available," the governor said. "The more time we lose, the closer we come to disaster."

On Saturday, the head of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), met with health ministers from DR Congo and Uganda and South Sudan to finalise their cross-border co-ordination in response to the outbreak.

Africa CDC director-general Dr Jean Kaseya said they also

agreed on a \$319m (£236m) budget to stop the outbreak from spreading.

He told BBC World Service's Newsday on Monday, that 10% of the money had been secured from the affected countries.

On the same day, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa pledged an initial \$5m to support the plan.

Kaseya added that African businessmen will be meeting later this week to "raise additional funds", while international partners were also "committing funds".

Africa CDC has warned that other countries on the continent - namely Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia - were at risk from an outbreak.

This outbreak is the 17th to have emerged in DR Congo since Ebola was discovered in 1976.

## South African president mounts legal challenge against report that could lead to impeachment

Cyril Ramaphosa heads a coalition government after his African National Congress (ANC) party failed to secure a parliamentary majority in 2024

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has started a legal challenge against a report commissioned by parliament that has paved the way for MPs to once again consider impeachment proceedings against him.

In 2022, an independent panel said Ramaphosa might have committed serious misconduct relating to the theft of large sums of cash hidden in a sofa at his private farm. The president denied any wrongdoing.

Earlier this month a Con-

stitutional Court ruling said parliament had acted unconstitutionally when four years ago it voted against establishing an impeachment inquiry following the report.

At that time Ramaphosa's African National Congress (ANC) party had a parliamentary majority.

But since the general election in 2024, it has governed as part of a coalition after losing its majority.

In Ramaphosa's legal challenge filed on Tuesday at the High Court in Cape Town, the president said the panel had "misconceived its mandate, misjudged the information placed before it and misinterpreted the four charges

advanced against me".

The charges included violating the constitution and serious misconduct.

"I do not make this application lightly," the president says in the court submission, arguing that the report should be set aside, thereby annulling the impeachment process.

The Speaker of parliament has already formed the impeachment committee, made up of 31 MPs from 16 political parties, including nine from the ANC, the leading member of the governing coalition.

The committee will decide whether there are grounds to start impeachment proceedings.

This saga - dubbed

"Farmgate" by local media - began in 2020, after \$580,000 (£430,000) had allegedly been stolen from Phala Phala, Ramaphosa's farm in the northern Limpopo province.

Two years later, the independent panel found evidence that the president may have violated his oath of office and concluded that he had "a case to answer".

South Africa has strict rules on holding foreign currency, which say that it must be deposited with an authorised dealer such as a bank within 30 days. At the time, Ramaphosa said the cash was from the legitimate sale of buffalo from his farming business.



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# Sports

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## Port Harcourt to host NWFL Premiership Super Six finals —Official

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ/ NAN

Rivers state capital, Port Harcourt has been chosen as the host city for the 2026 Nigeria Women Football League Premiership Super Six Finals.

The Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL) announced yesterday

In a statement released by Sam Ahmadu, the media Director of the league governing body.

According to the release, this will be the first time ever the six-team season-ending playoffs will be staged in Rivers. The Super Six playoffs have been scheduled to hold between June 5 and June 14, 2026.

Speaking on the choice of host city, NWFL Chief Operating Officer, Modupe Shabi, noted that the state government has always supported women's football in the country.

"The Rivers Government has consistently demonstrated strong support for women's football and successfully hosted our annual general assembly last October.

"We are excited to return with our flagship competition as part of our commitment to expanding elite women's football across Nigeria

"The Super Six remains the pinnacle of the NWFL Premiership season, and we are confident the fans in Rivers will create another memorable atmosphere for players, officials, partners, and supporters.

"We also urge all qualified clubs to adhere strictly to all competition regulations, schedules, and directives that will be communicated subsequently by the League.

"Once again, congratulations to the participating teams, and we wish them a successful outing at the Super Six,"

Shabi noted.

The country's top-flight women's football competition will feature the top three teams from Group A and Group B of the regular season competing in a round-robin format.

The qualified teams for the 2026 NWFL Premiership Super Six include title-holders Bayelsa Queens, Edo Queens, Rivers Angels, Robo Queens, Nasarawa Amazons, and debutants Abia Angels.

Meanwhile, the league has produced different champions across the last five editions – Rivers Angels (2021), title holders Bayelsa Queens (2022 and 2025), Delta Queens (2023), and Edo Queens (2024), setting the stage for another fiercely contested title race.

The tourney will once again determine Nigeria's league champions as well as the country's representative at the WA-FU-B qualifiers.



NWFL PREMIERSHIP



## NLO reschedules replay fixture over Eid El-Fitr

The Nationwide League One (NLO) has approved the rescheduling of a replay fixture involving Kano Ambassadors FC and Musa Musa FC following requests linked to the Eid El-Fitr celebration.

The decision was contained in a letter dated May 25, addressed to the Kano State Football Association, FCT Football Association, and Katsina State Football Association.

According to the letter, the affected clubs had earlier requested for the replay match initially scheduled for May 26 to be shifted because it coincided with the Eid El-Fitr festivities.

The league body stated that

it considered the request in recognition of the religious and cultural obligations of clubs, players, and officials participating in the competition.

"The Nationwide League One highly respects the religious and cultural commitments of our member clubs, players, and officials," the letter stated.

"In the spirit of fairness, inclusivity, and ensuring optimal performance on the pitch, management has reviewed and approved your request."

The NLO subsequently announced that the replay fixture would now hold on May 3, at the Bwari Stadium in Abuja, while the kickoff time remains 10 a.m.

## Dolphin Swimming League producing national team swimmers, targets olympians —Coordinator

The Dolphin Swimming League says it will continue to produce young swimmers for Nigeria's junior national team as it prepares to celebrate outstanding athletes and schools from Season Seven of the competition.

The league's annual award ceremony is scheduled to hold on May 30 at St. Saviour's School, Ikoyi, Lagos.

The Tournament Coordinator, Oluseyi Oyebo, said the competition had recorded remarkable growth since its inception, evolving from fewer than five participating schools to more than 20 schools in its seventh edition.

Oyebo said the league had become a major platform for discovering and developing swimming talents among schools in Lagos and Ogun states.

According to him, some swimmers discovered through the competition are now regular members of Nigeria's junior national team and have represented the country at competitions within and outside Africa.

"We are excited that what we started a few years ago has begun to yield positive results.

"Some of the league's products are now representing Nigeria internationally and our ultimate target has always been to produce Olympians.

"The steady growth of the league reflects increasing acceptance of swimming as a competitive sport among schools and young athletes," he said.

He said the competition was

sanctioned by the Nigeria Aquatic Federation, the Nigeria Olympic Committee and the Nigeria School Sport Federation.

The coordinator also said the event was organised by Dynaspro Sports Promotion in partnership with Advanta Interactive Ltd., with technical support from the Lagos State Swimming Association.

Oyebo noted that the league had continued to attract participation from schools across the country.



DOLPHIN SWIMMING

## Volleyball: Over 40 Nigerian players competing abroad —Nimrod

The President of the Nigeria Volleyball Federation (NVBF), Musa Nimrod, says the federation has produced more than 40 players currently competing professionally abroad.

Nimrod said this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria

(NAN) on yesterday in Abuja.

According to him, the federation's agenda is to secure better career opportunities for volleyball players in the country.

"I recently requested for the list of our foreign-based players and, to my surprise, we have

more than 40 players competing outside Nigeria," he said.

Nimrod said the development reflected the steady progress volleyball had recorded in recent years through grassroots programmes, school sports initiatives and improved administration within the federation.

He said the federation had continued to invest in grassroots development across the country.

The NVBF president recalled that the federation organised a female volleyball development camp three years ago, where more than 100 young girls were discovered and trained.

He cited the success story of Vincent Mathias, a Nigerian player based in France, who recently won the league title with Montpellier Volleyball Club after emerging through the grassroots volleyball system in Nigeria.



MUSA NIMROD

## Tinubu hails Rangers on record 9th NPFL title

President Bola Tinubu has congratulated Rangers International FC on winning the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) title for a record ninth time.

Tinubu commended the players, coaching crew, management and supporters of the Enugu-based club for finishing top of the league table with 68 points from 38 matches.

This is contained in a statement issued by Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Bayo Onanuga, on Monday in Abuja.

The President recalled Rangers' remarkable dom-

inance in Nigerian football during the 1970s and 1980s, when the club won several league and FA Cup titles.

He also referenced the club's appearance in the 1975 African Cup of Champions Clubs final and its triumph in the 1977 African Cup Winners' Cup competition.

"I must also congratulate Gov. Peter Mbah of Enugu State on the victory of Rangers International FC.

"This victory is an obvious fruit of his administration's investments in youth and sports in the state. I commend him," the President said.



PRESIDENT BOLA TINUBU

## President Federation Cup: Edo Queens humble Ghetto Tigers Queens 3-1, advance to round 16



EDO QUEENS VS GHETTO TIGERS QUEENS

KEHINDE OSAGIEDE

**E**do Queens Football Club of Benin on Monday afternoon at the Akure Township Stadium thrashed Ghetto Tigers Queens FC of Lagos 3-1 in the round of 32 of the President Federation Cup competition to advance to the round of 16.

Winger Chioma Moses, opened scoring for Edo Queens in the 9th minute of play and Esther Inyang increased the tally to two nil in the 27th minute, dominating the proceedings before halftime break.

On resumption of the second half of the game, the Benin girls continued to mount pressure on the Lagosians and their efforts paid off for the third goal as Nigeria Women Football League NWFL premiership top scorer Atume Doosuur, found the back of the net and sealed victory for the Benin Queens in the 58th minute.

Ghetto Tigers Queens FC got a consolation goal through a spot kick to bring the score line to 3-1 at full time.

Edo Queens have now moved to the round of 16 of the challenge Cup.

The President Federation Cup also served the Moses Aduku tutored side an opportunity to prepare for the NWFL Super 6 coming up next month in Port Harcourt.



VOLLEYBALL TEAM

## NVBF: Govt. support critical for volleyball growth —Azi

**B**en Azi, Head Coach of De Friends Spikers Volleyball Club of Abuja has called for increased government support and investment in volleyball development in the country.

Azi stated this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) yesterday in Abuja.

He expressed confidence that several emerging teams would make strong impressions in the ongoing Nigeria Volleyball Federation (NVBF) 2026 Phase One Division One National League in Abuja.

"De Friends Spikers are not participating in the Division One or Division Two leagues this season, preparations were ongoing to compete strongly in future editions.

"My main team is not in Division One or Two of the

ongoing league, but hopefully by next season we will be one of the teams to watch," he said.

Azi said some players from his club were currently featuring for other teams participating in the competition.

"For now, I am supporting a few teams, not because of anything, but because they are my people and because of the quality they are bringing to the tournament.

"I am particularly impressed with the level of preparation and quality displayed by some emerging Division One volleyball teams.

"Especially, Light Spikers Volleyball Club of Abuja, Rhino Volleyball Club of Jos in the men's category and NY Spikers, Queen Amina Team (QAT) Volleyball Club in the women's category.

## FG approves major sports infrastructure upgrades nationwide, as NSC drives new era of infrastructure development

**T**he Federal Government, through the National Sports Commission, has approved a series of landmark sports infrastructure projects and developmental initiatives aimed at repositioning Nigerian sports and restoring the nation's sporting facilities to world-class standards.

The approvals were part of resolutions reached at the National Sports Commission's Tenders Board Meeting, where key projects and contracts were ratified to rejuvenate critical sports infrastructure across the country.

Top on the list is the complete revamp and redevelopment of the pitch at the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja, whose poor condition has limited its usage by Nigeria's national teams in recent years.

The tartan tracks at the stadium will also be revamped to bring the main bowl to an appreciable level, serving other sports. Likewise other key infrastructures of the stadium such as dressing rooms, media centre, VIP seating and corporate suites, PA and security systems, cooling and heating systems, roof membrane would all receive relevant upgrades.

Chairman of the Commission, Mallam Shehu Dikko stated that "these projects represent a bold step towards restoring Nigeria's sporting glory and creating sustainable opportunities for future gen-

erations. Mr. President is deliberately repositioning sports as a catalyst for youth empowerment, infrastructure development and economic growth and adequate sporting infrastructure both at the grassroots and elite levels is key to this vision. Indeed, this massive and unprecedented sports infrastructure revamp is just the first phase as Mr.

President have already approved the establishment of the National Sports Infrastruc-



DIKKO SHEU AND PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED

## Team Nigeria diaspora invited to London Youth Games

**I**n an unprecedented move, organisers of the London Youth Games have officially invited Team Nigeria Diaspora to this year's London Youth Games. The London Youth Games is a staggered event that holds between April and July across different sports and Team Nigeria Diaspora is expected to feature in netball and athletics events slated for June

13 and June 21 respectively.

An elated Chairman of the Nigeria Diaspora Talents Development Committee Dr. Tunde Adelakun believes the invitation to the London Youth Games is an endorsement of the Committee's efforts at strengthening the nation's conveyor belt of talents taking advantage of the rich talent pool in the diaspora.

His words, "For the first time ever, in a move that seems to show the high level of engagement that we are having in communities globally, organisers of the London Youth Games have agreed to invite Team Nigeria Diaspora to this year's London Youth Games and we aim to be present at the athletics and netball events. This is a big one for us as it allows us the chance to showcase the talents we have already put together and track other prospects who we might be calling on to form Team Diaspora in the National Intermediate Games and the National Sports Festival."

He added, "We have our different scouts across the globe in specific sports and such events will encourage them to go the extra mile. It is not enough to spot these talents, there has to be platforms to access them as a team. The London Youth Games will afford us this opportunity.



TEAM NIGERIA

## Osun SWAN elects new executives for 3-year tenure

**T**he Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN), Osun State chapter, on Tuesday elected new executive members to pilot the affairs of the association for the next three years.

The positions contested for included chairman, vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer. And all the positions were contested unopposed.

Timothy Agbor, the immediate past chairman of the association, was returned for a second term.

Others elected were Omolola Oluwaseun as vice-chairman, Tunde Adeleke as secretary, and Akanni Oluwaseyi as treasurer.

Speaking after the election, the SWAN National Vice Chairman, South-West Zone B, Ayodeji Ogunsakin, who presided

over the exercise, inaugurated the newly elected executives after dissolving the caretaker committee overseeing the association's activities in the state.

Ogunsakin commended the Osun SWAN Electoral Committee (SWANECO) for conducting a peaceful election and administered the oath of office on the new executives.

He congratulated the elected officials and stressed the importance of meeting stipulated qualifications before contesting for SWAN executive positions.

Ogunsakin also urged the chairman to carry members along in all activities and ensure strict adherence to the constitution and regulations of the association in decision-making.



AYODEJI OGUNSAKIN

# FEATURE



## The role of Public Relations in strengthening Nigeria's democracy through strategic and Ethical Communication practice

OTONO MOMODU

Public relations in Nigeria has evolved from being seen as mere publicity management to a strategic function that shapes public opinion, builds trust, and mediates between government, institutions, and citizens. In a democracy, communication is not a luxury but the lifeblood of participation, accountability, and legitimacy. Strategic and ethical communication practice by public relations professionals therefore plays a decisive role in strengthening Nigeria's democratic process. By managing information flows, facilitating dialogue, and upholding truth, PR contributes to a political culture where citizens are informed, institutions are transparent, and governance is responsive.

At the core of democracy is the principle of informed citizenship. Citizens cannot meaningfully participate in elections, policy debates, or governance processes without access to accurate and timely information. Public relations professionals in government ministries, political parties, civil society organizations, and the media act as conduits of this information. Through strategic communication planning, they translate complex policies into accessible messages, anticipate public concerns, and provide platforms for feedback. In Nigeria, where misinformation and rumor often spread rapidly through informal channels, PR practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that official communication is credible, clear, and consistent. When citizens trust the information they receive, they are more likely to engage constructively in democratic processes such as voting, advocacy, and civic oversight.

Strategic communication also enables dialogue between government and the governed. Democracy is not merely about periodic elections; it is about continuous engagement between leaders and citizens. Public relations practice provides the tools for stakeholder mapping, audience analysis, and two-way communication. In Nigeria's diverse socio-political environment, where ethnic, religious, and regional identities influence political attitudes, PR helps identify common ground and frame messages that resonate across divides. Town hall meetings, social media engagement, press briefings, and community outreach programs are examples of how PR facilitates deliberative communication. By creating channels for listening as well as speaking, PR reduces the distance between rulers and citizens,



fostering a sense of inclusion and shared ownership of the democratic process.

Ethical communication is equally critical to the health of Nigeria's democracy. The credibility of democratic institutions depends on public trust, and trust is eroded when communication is manipulative, deceptive, or self-serving. Ethical PR practice is guided by principles of honesty, transparency, fairness, and respect for public interest. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Code of Ethics emphasizes accuracy, avoidance of false claims, and respect for the dignity of individuals and communities. When PR professionals adhere to these standards, they help check the spread of propaganda and disinformation that can undermine electoral integrity and social cohesion. Ethical communication ensures that political actors are held accountable not only for their actions but also for the truthfulness of their public statements.

Transparency and credibility are central to winning the people's trust in a democracy. Public officials who are given the mandate through the ballot to occupy public office and superintend the people's commonwealth hold a position of public trust. Citizens expect that decisions, budgets, and policies affecting the commonwealth will be communicated openly and truth-

fully. Public relations plays a crucial role in institutionalizing this transparency by ensuring that information on governance is accessible, verifiable, and timely. When public office holders communicate openly about challenges, achievements, and resource allocation, they demonstrate respect for citizens as stakeholders rather than subjects. Credibility is built when words align with actions, and when officials acknowledge mistakes and outline corrective measures. In Nigeria, where skepticism toward government is high, consistent transparency in communication can gradually restore confidence and reduce the perception of governance as opaque or self-serving. PR professionals therefore serve as guardians of credibility by advising leaders against selective disclosure, spin, and evasive messaging that damage long-term trust.

Moreover, public relations contributes to conflict prevention and management in Nigeria's often volatile political environment. Elections, policy reforms, and resource allocation frequently generate tensions that can escalate into violence if not properly managed. Strategic PR interventions involve early identification of grievances, framing issues in non-inflammatory language, and facilitating mediated dialogue among stakeholders. For example, during

electoral periods, PR teams can work with the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, and civil society to promote peaceful conduct and manage expectations. By focusing on interests rather than positions and by providing accurate information on electoral processes, PR reduces suspicion and the likelihood of conflict. In this way, communication becomes a tool for democratic stability rather than disruption.

Another vital role of public relations is in building institutional reputation and legitimacy. Democratic institutions such as the legislature, judiciary, and anti-corruption agencies rely on public confidence to function effectively. When these institutions are perceived as opaque, unresponsive, or corrupt, citizens withdraw cooperation and trust. Strategic PR helps institutions communicate their mandates, achievements, challenges, and reform efforts in a way that is open to scrutiny. Regular reporting, stakeholder engagement, and crisis communication protocols enable institutions to manage their reputation proactively rather than reactively. In Nigeria, where institutional distrust remains high, consistent and ethical communication can gradually rebuild legitimacy and encourage civic cooperation.

Public relations also strengthens

democracy by amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. A healthy democracy requires the inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities in public discourse. PR professionals working with civil society and development organizations design communication campaigns that bring these voices into national conversations on policy and governance. Through targeted messaging, community radio, and participatory communication methods, PR ensures that democracy is not dominated by elite interests alone. In Nigeria, initiatives that use PR to promote women's political participation or youth engagement in governance demonstrate how communication can broaden the democratic base and enhance representation.

However, the potential of public relations to strengthen democracy is contingent on professionalism and independence. When PR is reduced to propaganda, image laundering, or the suppression of dissent, it undermines democratic values. The challenge in Nigeria is to professionalize PR practice through education, certification, and enforcement of ethical standards. The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations has a critical role in regulating the profession, sanctioning unethical conduct, and promoting continuous training on strategic and ethical communication. Universities and polytechnics offering mass communication programs must also emphasize the democratic responsibilities of PR practitioners, not just their technical skills.

In conclusion, public relations is a democratic infrastructure. Through strategic and ethical communication practice, PR professionals in Nigeria can inform citizens, facilitate dialogue, prevent conflict, build institutional trust, and amplify marginalized voices. The emphasis on transparency and credibility is particularly vital, as it determines whether those entrusted with public office can maintain the trust of the people they serve. As Nigeria continues to consolidate its democratic experience, the quality of public communication will determine the depth of public engagement and the legitimacy of governance. Strengthening PR as a profession committed to truth, transparency, and public interest is therefore not just a professional imperative but a national necessity for democratic consolidation.

• Otono Momodu is a lecturer in the department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic Auchi.