

Okpebholo hails coronation of Alimikhena as Okumagbe of Wanno, urges unity in kingdom

AGENEBODE
RICHARD EWEKA

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has congratulated Senator Francis Asekhome Alimikhena on his coronation as the Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom, urg-

ing him to deploy his wealth of experience in public service to promote peace, unity and development in the kingdom. Governor Okpebholo, who spoke on Saturday at the coronation ceremony, described the event as a historic occasion, noting that the new monarch ascended the throne with decades of expe-

rience in public service, including two terms as a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. "Your Highness, you come to this throne with a wealth of experience gained from decades of distinguished public service, including two terms as a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. "You have served at the highest

levels of government, and your experience in leadership, governance and community development will surely be valuable in your new role," the governor said. Governor Okpebholo, however, reminded the new monarch that traditional leadership carries a unique and sacred responsibility, urging him to govern with

wisdom, humility and fairness. "However, traditional leadership carries a unique and sacred responsibility. As the Okumagbe, you are now the father of all," he said. "I therefore urge Your Highness to govern with wisdom, humility, fairness and an open heart. Please carry everyone along and ensure that no son or daughter of

Wanno feels left behind." The governor also called on the people of Wanno Kingdom to support and cooperate with the new monarch, urging them to set aside their differences and work collectively for the common good.

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The Nigerian OBSERVER That The People May Know

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Gov Okpebholo moves to end MOWAA ownership controversy

- Renames facility Benin Royal Museum • Clears Oba of Benin to manage museum
- Sets up white paper committee on Oshiomhole panel's report

RICHARD EWEKA
BENIN CITY

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, has moved to resolve the lingering controversy over the ownership and funding of the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA), following the submission of a report by a special committee headed by Senator Adams Oshiomhole. Receiving the report in Be-

nin City, Governor Okpebholo commended the committee for what he described as an excellent, comprehensive and fair assessment of the circumstances surrounding the establishment, funding and ownership of the facility. The governor said his administration would constitute a White Paper Drafting Committee to study the recom-

mendations and work with the Ministry of Justice to translate them into a White Paper. He said: "I thank the committee for an excellent job and a comprehensive report submitted today. The quality of the job shows the fairness and seriousness of the work. "At this point, I will set up another committee to enable us to have a White Paper on the issue,

and the committee will liaise with the Ministry of Justice so that the recommendations will be turned into a White Paper." Governor Okpebholo also recalled that the original intention of the project was to establish a Royal Museum to celebrate the Benin monarchy and preserve the kingdom's cultural heritage. "I watched a video clip where Obaseki promised to build a

Royal Museum to celebrate our Royal Father but dramatically changed to MOWAA. You have done a great job, and our ancestors will bless you all," he said. Edo Government Spent N3.8bn, Oshiomhole Says Earlier, Senator Oshiomhole, chairman of the special committee, said the investigation established that the Edo State Government under former

Governor Godwin Obaseki spent N3.8 billion in public funds on the museum project. He said the project was initially conceived as the Benin Royal Museum following sustained efforts by the Oba of Benin, Oba Ewuare II, to secure the return of Benin artefacts looted during the 1897 British

CONTINUES ON PG 2»



CORONATION:

Gov. Monday Okpebholo speaking during the coronation ceremony of Sen. Francis Asekhome Alimikhena as the new Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom in Etsako East Local Government Area, Edo State, on Saturday.

Edo Govt dissociates self from alleged ban on Davido, says singer welcome in the state

BENIN CITY

The Edo State Government has dissociated itself from reports alleging that popular Nigerian music star, David Adeleke, popularly known as Davido, has been banned from entering the state. The Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Prince Kasim Afegbua, in a statement on Sunday, described the purported ban as the handiwork of "an enemy of Edo State, an impostor and a fraud," stressing that the state government had no involvement in such a decision. Afegbua said the government welcomed Davido, like every other Nigerian, to Edo State, noting that the state remained home to all persons

irrespective of their beliefs, political persuasion, affiliations or legal associations. He said: "Our enemies are at it again; we did not ban Davido from entering Edo State. The proclaimer of that ban is an enemy of Edo State; an impostor and a fraud. "The Government of Edo State hereby dissociates itself from such spiteful behaviour and wishes to state further that Edo State is home to all, regardless of their belief, political persuasion, affinity and/or legal affiliation. "As a matter of fact, should Davido intend to perform in Edo State in future, the state will be willing to collaborate and partner with him."

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NEWS

Edo NUJ tasks FG on road rehabilitation

BENIN CITY

MUYIDEEN FUNMILAYO

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Edo State Council, rose from its August Congress on Thursday with a call on Federal Government to intensify efforts at rehabilitation federal roads in the state.

The congress, in a communique, also urged the state government to set up the rehabilitation of deteriorating of internal roads in Benin City, even as it commended the Governor Monday Okpebholo for the ongoing road and infrastructure projects across the state.

According to the communique jointly signed by the state chairman, Festus Alenke, and secretary, Andy Egbon,

expressed concern over epileptic power supply and estimated billing in parts of the state, while urging the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC) to improve its services and ensure that electricity bills reflect actual consumption and supply.

The journalists further applauded the procurement of farming equipment by the state government as they advocated transparent and equitable distribution of the farm inputs and extension services to enhance the agriculture sector.

On 2027 general elections, the union stressed the need for all political stakeholders to embrace peaceful, responsible and issue-based campaigns, while shunning violence, hate speech, intimidation and character assassination.

Tinubu unveils APC 2027 campaign council, names Yari DG, Oshiomhole mobilisation chief

FIDELIA FREEMAN

ABUJA

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has constituted the All Progressives Congress (APC) Presidential Campaign Council for the 2027 general elections, appointing former Zamfara State Governor, Senator Abdulaziz Yari, as Director-General.

The council, whose membership list was released on Saturday by the President's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, places President Tinubu and Vice President Kashim Shettima as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively. APC National Chairman, Professor Nentawe Yilwatda, will serve as another Vice Chairman.

Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodinma, was appointed Secretary of the campaign council, while APC National Secretary, Senator Ajibola Basiru, and Hadiza Bala-Usman will serve as Deputy Secretary and Assistant Secretary respectively.

Senator Adams Oshiomhole, former Edo State Governor, was named Deputy Director-General in charge of Mobilisation, while the President's Chief of Staff, Femi Gbajabiamila, will

oversee Administration as Deputy Director-General.

Also appointed as Deputy Directors-General are Senate President Godswill Akpabio, House of Representatives Speaker Tajudeen Abbas, Yobe State Governor Mai Mala Buni, Senator Bamidele Opeyemi and Deputy Senate President Jibril Barau.

James Abiodun Faleke, who played a prominent role in the APC's 2022/2023 presidential campaign, returns as Deputy Director-General for Election Planning, Coordination and Monitoring. He will coordinate the party's zonal election directors across the six geopolitical zones.

The campaign council also includes senior party figures such as former APC National Chairman Bisi Akande, former Ogun State Governor Segun Osoba, Senator Rochas Okorocha, former APC National Chairman Abdullahi Adamu and Senator Florence Ita-Giwa as advisers to the President.

For Media and Strategic Communication, the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris was appointed Coordinating Director, alongside Dele Alake, Bayo Onanuga and Lanre Issa-Onilu.

Okpebholo applauds diaspora nurses' contribution to Edo healthcare delivery

BENIN CITY

RICHARD EWEKA

Edo Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has applauded the commitment of the Nigerian-American Nurses and Nursing Association (NANNNA) to healthcare delivery in the state despite reports of insecurity in parts of Nigeria.

Governor Okpebholo expressed the commendation on Friday in Benin while receiving members of NANNNA, who travelled to Nigeria to support healthcare delivery in Edo.

The governor thanked the group for coming to the state despite security concerns that could discourage people living abroad from travelling to Nigeria.

"Thank God you are here and you can see for yourselves the security situation in our state. Nigeria is very safe, and we are also trying to make Edo safer for our people to do business. It will be safer in the next few months," he said.

He also assured the organisation of the state government's support whenever its members return to Edo for medical interventions.

The governor urged members

to notify the newly established Edo Diaspora Agency ahead of their visits so the government could help reduce some of the logistical challenges they might face.

"Now that we have the Edo Diaspora Agency, anytime you want to come, please notify us so that we can remove some of the burden from you in whatever way we can."

"We can support you as a government because you are using your money to work for the people, so we should also support you," he said.

The governor commended NANNNA for its contributions

to healthcare delivery in Edo and Nigeria, describing the association's intervention in the health sector as commendable.

Speaking on the group's activities, NANNNA Board Chairman Grace Ogiehor-Enoma said the association was committed to identifying and supporting struggling primary healthcare centres in members' communities.

Ogiehor-Enoma said the initiative, known as the "Take Me to Your Village" programme, was designed to provide practical solutions to healthcare challenges at the grassroots rather than merely criticising government.


MOWAA PROBE:

Edo State Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo (right) receiving the report of the Special Committee on MOWAA led by Sen. Adams Oshiomhole in Government House Benin City on Friday.

Tinubu sets 5-year goal to deliver power to 80% of Nigerians

LAGOS

OGBUNKWU EVELYN

The Federal Government says it will ensure that more than 80% of Nigerians have access to electricity within the next five years.

It also plans to end the gap between power plants installed and power actually delivered within three years as part of efforts to solve the energy problems affecting factories in Nigeria.

The pledge was made by the Minister of Power, Joseph Tegbe, at the just-ended Nigeria Economic Summit in Lagos.

● Plans to fix supply deficit in 3 years

He spoke on the topic 'Driving Industrial Growth and Regional Trade Through Electricity'.

He also said the ministry will work with NERC to bring down system losses, unpaid bills and revenue leakages to under 16.92% in three years.

The speech was delivered by his Senior Assistant, Martins Olajide. He explained that the government will focus on improving key power routes including Lagos, Enugu-Port Harcourt, and Abuja-Kaduna-Kano. The aim is to extend electricity to more people and

make supply more stable for homes and companies.

"Once we hit above 80% coverage, reduce losses to below 17%, and close the supply gap, Nigerian businesses will have steady and cheap energy to compete in AfCFTA's 1.4 billion market," he said.

He linked the plan to President Bola Tinubu's goal of building a \$1 trillion economy, saying electricity is key to achieving it.

"The President has been clear. Our target is a one trillion-dollar economy, and power is at the center of it," he stated.

Tegbe said work has already started on upgrading transmission lines in Lagos, Enugu-Port Harcourt and Abuja-Kaduna-Kano. The government is also distributing seven million meters and training 5,000 technicians.

"The project is underway: we are upgrading lines across Lagos, Enugu-Port Harcourt and Abuja-Kaduna-Kano, rolling out seven million meters, training 5,000 people, and connecting special industrial areas directly to power," he said.

25 years of waiting: Edo Ex-NEPA, PHCN pensioners protest over ₦350billion entitlements

BENIN CITY

 MARYAM SAIDU AND
OSEMUDIAMHEN FAITH

Pensioners of the defunct National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Benin branch, have protested the alleged non-payment of their pensions, gratuities and other retirement entitlements, some of which they

said have remained outstanding for about 25 years.

The retirees staged a peaceful protest in Benin City, Edo State, on Friday, demanding urgent intervention from the Federal Government and the Pension Transitional Arrangement Directorate (PTAD) over what they described as prolonged neglect of their financial entitlements.

The pensioners alleged that their cumulative outstanding benefits amounted to more than

₦350 billion, covering different categories of payments they said had accumulated over the years.

Speaking on behalf of the protesting retirees, Comrade Alile Osakioduwa alleged that the outstanding entitlements included arrears arising from pension harmonisation, monetisation and electricity rebates, as well as shortfalls in gratuities.

He said the retirees had repeatedly sought the intervention of the relevant authorities but had

continued to wait for payments they believed were due to them after decades of service in Nigeria's electricity sector.

According to him, some workers who retired in 2000 were allegedly short-paid their gratuities, leaving substantial balances yet to be settled.

Osakioduwa further alleged that the Federal Government had released funds to PTAD for the payment of some of the outstanding entitlements, but said the af-

fected retirees had not received the money.

"Putting everything together, it's over ₦350 billion that they are now owing us," he was quoted as saying in reports on the protest.

The retirees said the prolonged delay had placed many of their members under severe financial pressure, particularly as most of them are now advanced in age and depend largely on their pension and retirement benefits for their daily needs.

They also expressed concern over the health challenges associated with old age, saying delayed pension and gratuity payments had made it increasingly difficult for some retirees to meet medical expenses and other basic responsibilities.

The protesters appealed to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to intervene in the matter and direct the relevant government agencies to ensure that verified outstanding entitlements are paid.

NEWS

Benin Airport under spotlight as NSIB uncovers safety gaps after Enugu Air incident

SALIHU RUKAYYA, OSEMU-
DIAMHEN FAITH AND MUY-
IDEEN FUNMILAYO**BENIN CITY**

The Nigerian Safety Investigation Bureau (NSIB) has identified several safety deficiencies at Benin

Airport following the runway excursion involving an Enugu Air aircraft on July 23, 2026. The preliminary findings raised concerns over the runway-end environment, navigation facilities, weather information and the control tower's visibility of parts of the runway.

The incident involved an Embraer ERJ 170-100LR aircraft, registered 5N-ENR, which was operating Enugu Air Flight 4264 from Lagos to Oba Akenzua II Airport, Benin. The aircraft had 63 passengers and five crew members on board when it overran the end of Run-

way 05 during landing.

All 68 people on board were safely evacuated, with no fatalities reported. However, the aircraft sustained substantial damage after leaving the paved runway and entering the unpaved area beyond the runway end.

According to the preliminary

findings, the aircraft struck seven approach-lighting installations and two fixed concrete structures associated with a de-commissioned localiser installation. The impact reportedly caused significant damage, including the collapse and separation of the aircraft's landing gear.

The investigation also found that some navigational and meteorological facilities at the airport were not operational at the time of the incident. The BEN VOR/DME, aerodrome beacon and weather information display system were reported to be unserviceable, while the ILS/

DME remained serviceable.

Weather conditions were another factor highlighted by investigators. Visibility had reduced to about 1,500 metres in moderate rain, while the runway was wet. Although Air Traffic Control informed the crew that the approach to Runway 23 appeared better, the crew continued with the RNAV approach to Runway 05.

The NSIB further raised concerns about the control tower's line of sight, noting that an un-completed building beyond the end of Runway 05 obstructed the tower's view of part of the aerodrome. The bureau also expressed concerns about the availability and transmission of updated weather information to flight crews.

**IMPROVED HEALTHCARE DELIVERY:**

Governor Monday Okpebholo (4th left) receiving a delegation of the Nigerian - American Nurses and Nursing Association (NANNA) on a courtesy visit in Government House, Benin City, on Friday.

Imasuen denies Edo South 2027 senate bid, threatens legal action

BENIN CITY

TALBORT HOPE

Senator Neda Imasuen has distanced himself from a campaign poster circulating in connection with the 2027 Edo South Senatorial election, saying he neither authorised nor endorsed the material.

The poster, which recently surfaced in political circles, featured Imasuen's name and photograph alongside those of other personalities presented as possible contenders for the Edo South senatorial seat.

Reacting to the development, Imasuen said the use of his image and identity was done without his consent. He described the publication as misleading and warned members of the public against treating the poster as an indication of his political plans.

The senator further clarified that he is not the candidate of the Labour Party, or any other political party, for the 2027 Edo South senatorial election. He maintained that he had accepted the outcome of the relevant political process and had not given approval for any fresh campaign material promoting his candidacy.

Imasuen also issued a warning to Prince Omokhodion Okojie and others associated with the poster, demanding that they immediately stop using his name, photograph or identity for political purposes without his permission.

According to the senator, any further attempt to associate him with political campaigns or promotional materials without his authorisation could attract legal consequences.

He urged residents and voters in Edo South to be cautious about political posters and on-line publications ahead of the 2027 elections, stressing that materials bearing his name or

photograph should not automatically be regarded as representing his position.

The controversy has added another development to the early political activities surrounding the 2027 Edo South senatorial race. While several names may be circulating as potential contenders, Imasuen's latest statement makes it clear that the poster featuring him does not represent an authorised declaration of his candidacy.

The senator's warning also suggests that he may take formal legal steps if the unauthorised use of his identity continues, putting those behind the campaign material on notice.

2027: INEC unveils AI, cybersecurity measures, mock BVAS test to strengthen election

ABUJA

CAROLINE AMEH

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced plans to strengthen its institutional capacity, improve electoral technology and expand access for women, youths and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) ahead of the 2027 general election.

The INEC Chairman, Professor Joash Amupitan, disclosed this in Abuja when he received the Chargé d'Affaires of the Canadian High Commission in Nigeria, David

Sproule, and his delegation on a courtesy visit to the Commission's headquarters.

Amupitan said the Commission was prioritising electoral technology, cybersecurity, inclusion and the fight against misinformation and disinformation as preparations for the 2027 elections intensify.

He also disclosed that INEC would conduct a mock accreditation exercise later this year to test its electoral equipment, particularly the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), ahead of the general election.

According to him, the exercise would enable the Commission to identify and ad-

dress potential technical and operational challenges before the 2027 polls.

The INEC chairman said the Commission had continued to use off-cycle elections as opportunities to test and improve its electoral systems, citing recent elections in Anambra, the Federal Capital Territory, Ekiti and Osun states.

Amupitan further revealed that INEC had established a dedicated Artificial Intelligence Unit to examine responsible applications of AI in electoral processes.

He said the unit would explore the use of AI in areas including data management,

voter registration and results transmission.

At the same time, the Commission is developing safeguards against emerging technological threats, particularly deepfakes and AI-generated disinformation that could undermine public confidence in elections.

The INEC chairman stressed the importance of strengthening cybersecurity and protecting the integrity of electoral information as technology continues to play a greater role in the electoral process.

Amupitan also disclosed that public campaigns and political rallies for the 2027 general election officially commenced on August 19.

PENGASSAN: Nigeria must improve investment climate beyond oil reserves to attract foreign capital

MUYIDEEN FUNMILAYO

ABUJA

The Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) has warned that Nigeria can no longer depend on its vast oil and gas reserves alone to attract the foreign investment needed to develop the petroleum industry.

The association made this known in a communique issued at the end of its fifth Energy and Labour Summit held in Abuja from August 19 to 21, 2026. The communique was jointly signed by PENGASSAN President, Festus Osifo, and General Secretary, Jerry Amah.

The summit, themed "Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks as a Catalyst for Stability and Growth in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Industry," focused on investment, regulation, production, energy security and workers' welfare.

PENGASSAN said Nigeria's abundant hydrocarbon resources were no longer sufficient to guar-

antee the huge capital required to develop the country's oil and gas sector, stressing that investors were increasingly looking for predictable regulations, competitive fiscal terms, improved security and efficient project execution.

The association called on the Federal Government and regulatory agencies to provide a stable and transparent policy environment capable of restoring investor confidence and encouraging long-term investments in the industry.

According to PENGASSAN, the existence of laws and regulations alone cannot attract the level of capital required for oil and gas development unless such policies are implemented consistently and transparently.

It also urged the government to reduce abrupt policy changes and strengthen consultations with operators, investors, workers and other stakeholders in order to create a more predictable business environment.

State police now, Northern senators tell FG, govs amid fresh terror attacks

ABUJA

CAROLINE AMEH

The Northern Senators Forum has called for the immediate establishment and operationalisation of State Police, following fresh terrorist attacks in Adamawa and Sokoto States that reportedly claimed more than 36 lives.

In a statement signed by the Forum's Chairman, Senator Abdulaziz Musa Yar'Adua, representing Katsina Central, the senators urged the Federal Government, state governors and State Houses of Assembly to fast-track the process for the implementation of State Police.

The Forum specifically called on the Presidential Working Group, chaired by the Chief of Staff to the President, to give urgent attention to the State Police Bill current-

ly awaiting ratification.

The senators argued that decentralised policing would improve response time, intelligence gathering and security coordination at the grassroots.

"We cannot continue to lose innocent lives to insurgents while bureaucracy delays critical security reforms. The time to act is now," the Forum said.

The senators condemned the latest attacks in Gaya community in Hong Local Government Area of Adamawa State and Ungushi village in Kebbe Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

According to the Forum, the attacks resulted in the deaths of more than 36 Nigerians, including security personnel and innocent worshippers.

The lawmakers commiserated with the families of the victims and prayed for the repose of those killed, while wishing those injured a speedy recovery.

Okpebholo moves to end MOWAA...

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invasion.

According to Oshiomhole, the Edo State Government had agreed to provide funding for the construction of the Royal Museum on land provided by the Oba of Benin.

"The Edo State Government under Obaseki agreed to provide the funding to build the Benin Royal Museum at the space provided by the Oba of Benin. It was well announced to the delight of all Edo people," he said.

He, however, said the previous administration subsequently demolished the old Central Hospital and changed the name of the proposed museum from the Benin Royal Museum to the Edo Museum of West Africa Art (EMOWAA), before it was eventually renamed the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA).

Oshiomhole said the state government initially provided N800 million as seed funding, while other donations were received for the project.

He listed the German Government as having donated €4 million and Leventis \$1.5 million, among other contributions.

He further disclosed that five days before the expiration of the Obaseki administration, the former governor approved

and released another N1 billion for the project, bringing the total payment by the Edo State Government to N3.8 billion.

PANEL QUESTIONS PRIVATE OWNERSHIP CLAIM

The committee chairman said the repeated changes in the name and ownership status of the facility became a major focus of the investigation, particularly after the project was subsequently presented as a wholly privately owned enterprise.

Oshiomhole also said the committee examined claims by the management of the facility that more than \$18 million had been raised and expended on land acquisition and archaeological excavation.

He said the investigation raised serious questions about some of the claims made by the management.

FACILITY TO REMAIN, BE RENAMED

Rather than demolishing the existing structure, the committee recommended that the facility be retained and given a name that reflects its true ownership and historical purpose.

Oshiomhole recommended that the facility be renamed the Benin Royal Museum of African Art, saying the name would enhance its capacity to attract Benin artefacts from around the world.

Edo at 35: Residents speak on how the State has fared

BENIN CITY

BENEDICT OKATE

As Edo State prepares to mark 35 years of its creation on August 27, residents of Benin City, the state capital, have offered mixed assessments of the state's journey, with many acknowledging notable progress while questioning whether successive administrations have done enough to improve the living conditions of ordinary citizens.

Created on August 27, 1991, by the administration of the then military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida, Edo was carved out of the defunct Bendel State alongside

Delta State, with Benin City emerging as the capital. The creation was widely seen as an opportunity to bring government closer to the people and accelerate development across the new state.

Thirty-five years on, Edo has witnessed considerable political, economic and infrastructural transformation. Successive administrations have introduced various policies and programmes in education, healthcare, roads, agriculture, security and other sectors. Yet, for many residents, the central question remains whether these interventions have translated into sustainable improvements in their daily lives.

For some residents, the state

has made significant strides despite its challenges. They point to improvements in road infrastructure, especially the emergence of the first-ever flyover in Edo State under the administration of Senator Monday Okpebholo, the expansion of educational opportunities, increased investment in healthcare and efforts to promote agriculture and attract investment as evidence that Edo has not remained stagnant. "There is no doubt that Edo has moved forward in some areas, but the pace of development should be faster and more evenly distributed," one resident said.

Others, however, argue that the state's achievements should be measured not only by projects completed but by their impact on the average citizen. They cited unemployment, ris-

ing living costs, poor electricity supply and gaps in healthcare as persistent challenges. "The real measure of development is how easily an ordinary person can find a job, access quality healthcare and educate their children," another resident said.

The issue of development beyond Benin City also featured prominently in residents' assessments. Some said successive governments needed to pay greater attention to rural communities, where limited access to basic services and inadequate economic opportunities continue to constrain livelihoods. They stressed that a more balanced approach to development would help unlock the agricultural and economic potential of communities across the three senatorial districts.



INEC STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION:

L-R: Director of Voter Education and Publicity (VEP), Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Mrs. Victoria Eta-Messi, National Commissioner of INEC and Chairman, Information and Voter Education Committee (IVEC), Mallam Muhammad Haruna, Consultant, Strategic Management and Human Capital Development, Prof. Okey Ikechukwu and Former Director of VEP, Oluwale Osaze-Uzzi Esq., during the INEC Strategic Communication Workshop for HoDs VEP ahead of the 2027 general elections, held in Abuja.

PHOTO BY OMOYE AMINU

Okpebholo hails coronation of Alimikhena...

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"I also call on every son and daughter of Uwanno to give His Highness their support, cooperation and loyalty. Let us put aside our differences and unite around the common good of Uwanno Kingdom," Governor Okpebholo said.

He stressed that unity remained essential to the peace and development of the kingdom.

"The strength of any kingdom lies in the unity of its people. Where there is unity, there is peace, and where there is peace, there is progress," he added.

Earlier, the Senator representing Edo North Senatorial District, Senator Adams Oshiomhole, congratulated Alimikhena on his coronation and

commended him for the development strides he had attracted to his people and Edo State during his years in public service.

Oshiomhole prayed that God would continue to bless the new monarch and endow him with wisdom to successfully discharge his responsibilities as a traditional ruler.

In his speech, the new Okumagbe of Uwanno Kingdom, Senator Francis Asekhome Alimikhena, described the coronation as a new beginning and a turning point for the people of the kingdom.

"It is a new dawn, an era of peace, love and development," Alimikhena said, announcing plans to establish a Uwanno Development Fund (UDF) to mobilise resources for the overall development of Uwanno Kingdom.

Edo Govt dissociates self from...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

The commissioner said Governor Monday Okpebholo remained a balanced leader who was comfortable with the diverse demographic and political leanings in the state.

He described Davido as "one of our illustrious sons," noting that the singer's mother hails from Edo State.

According to him, the state government was pleased to associate with the music star and would be willing to host and celebrate him whenever he chose to visit Edo.

"Davido is a young man who has remained one of Nigeria's global ambassadors, doing us proud and building bridges of understanding across the socio-political divides," Afegbua said.

He further explained that whatever transpired between the singer and political actors in Osun State following last week's election was purely political and should not be interpreted as a personal dispute.

"There was nothing personal in the conversations that deepened the campaigns," he said.

The commissioner commended Davido for his achievements in the Nigerian and global music industry, describing his career as an example of determination and international success.

"As a government, we are pleased with his conduct, commitment and calculated conquest in the music industry. Indeed, we look forward to him being awarded a Grammy title," Afegbua added.

FG suspends three permanent secretaries over another fake agency

ABUJA

The Federal Government has suspended three permanent secretaries and ordered the arrest of George Buchi Nwabueze following the discovery of another fake agency operating within the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF).

The development was disclosed by the Chairman of the

Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Dr Musa Aliyu, after briefing President Bola Tinubu on the commission's findings.

The agency, known as the National Brands Development and Made-in-Nigeria Special Project Office, was found operating from office space within the OSGF premises without presidential authorisation and

contrary to existing laws.

The ICPC identified Nwabueze as the promoter of the agency and said he had suspected collaborators within the OSGF.

The three permanent secretaries suspended are M.S. Danjuma, Nadungu Gagare and Richard P. Pheolangwah.

Following the ICPC briefing, President Tinubu directed the immediate arrest of Nwabueze and the suspension of the three permanent secretaries.

The commission said the

discovery was made during its wider investigation into fictitious government agencies, which began with the exposure of the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council.

The latest discovery brings to four the number of fake agencies uncovered in the course of the investigation.

The ICPC said it would continue its investigation into the matter and provide further information as the investigation progresses.

Refinery expansion: Nigeria targets regional market

ABUJA

AYENOMOH ALUKHEI

Nigeria plans to expand its refining capacity and petroleum infrastructure as part of efforts to position the country as West Africa's energy and trading hub.

The Minister of state for Petroleum Resources (Oil), Sen. Heineken Lokpobiri, disclosed this at the second edition of the West Africa Refined Fuel Market Conference on Tuesday in Abuja.

Lokpobiri said Nigeria must

leverage its strategic position and resources to drive regional energy and security, noting that the Federal Government's deregulation of the petroleum sector had unlocked opportunities and created a more competitive environment for the industry.

According to him, Nigeria will not fully benefit from its petroleum resources without adequate investment in refining, midstream and downstream infrastructure.

"Refining is not enough, we need to increase our refining capacity to about four million barrels to service the entire Af-

rican continent" he said.

The Minister said Nigeria's strategic location, large resources and market size positioned it to supply refined products across Africa.

He urged investors to take advantage of ongoing reforms and invest in refining, storage, transportation and other critical petroleum infrastructure.

Lokpobiri said the government was committed to creating an environment that attracts both domestic and foreign investment into the petroleum sector. He stressed the need for market-driven pricing,

adding that a sustainable pricing mechanism was essential to attract investment and build a competitive industry.

The minister called for stronger regulatory collaboration among West African countries to facilitate cross-border investment and petroleum trade.

He underscored the need for harmonised standards and co-ordinated regulation, saying regional cooperation was critical to building a sustainable West African petroleum market. He added that Nigeria's success would have a multiplier effect across the region.

NEWS

Resist foreign scrutiny over allegations against Tinubu, Buratai urges Nigerians

ABUJA

Former Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai (retd.), has urged Nigerians to resist what he described as foreign interference in the country's affairs, following moves to release documents allegedly linked to drug-trafficking investigations involving President Bola Tinubu more than three decades ago.

Buratai made the call in a

position paper titled, "Nigeria First: A Case for Protecting National Sovereignty and Dignity – A Patriotic and Non-Partisan Perspective," which he posted on his verified Facebook page on Sunday.

The former Army chief argued that the controversy surrounding the President should not be allowed to damage Nigeria's international image or undermine the country's sovereignty.

A United States District Court for the District of Columbia had reportedly given Tinubu, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice until August 28, 2026, to oppose the release of documents relating to the alleged investigations.

Buratai said the development had gone beyond the personality of the President, insisting that the possible disclosure of the documents could have

wider implications for Nigeria and its citizens.

He stated, "This is not merely about Bola Tinubu— it is about 250 million Nigerians whose national pride, economic prospects, and global standing hang in the balance."

He argued that Nigerians should be concerned about the potential consequences of international media coverage of the allegations, saying the country's image could suffer if the documents were released.

He said, "When the world reads headlines about a 'Nige-

rian president' linked to drug allegations, they do not separate the man from the nation. They see Nigeria. They see Nigerians."

Buratai maintained that the allegations, dating back about 33 years, should be considered in the context of the time they allegedly occurred, rather than being used to define Tinubu's entire political career.

He asked, "Can any Nigerian honestly claim that they are the same person they were 33 years ago? Can any nation claim that its leaders should be judged ex-

clusively by the actions of their youth rather than by their decades of subsequent service?"

The retired general said Tinubu's political career, including his tenure as governor of Lagos State and subsequent role in national politics, should also be considered in assessing his character and contribution to Nigeria.

He argued that the country's reputation should not be allowed to suffer because of allegations concerning events that allegedly occurred decades ago.

**INTERACTIVE TOWN HALL MEETING:**

Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Mineral Resources, Mr Sabur Oluwa; Executive Director, Transmission Company of Nigeria, (TCN), Dr Oluwagbenga Ajiboye; Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Dr Obafemi Hamzat; Gov. Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State; Managing Director, Emtech Energy Service Limited, Mr Uzoma Achinanya; Director, Distribution Services, Federal Ministry of Power, Mr Baba-Umara Mustapha and Executive Director, System Planning, Nigerian Independent System Operator, Mr Shehu Abba-Aliyu, during an interactive town hall meeting on ending darkness in Lagos recently.

Hajj is not business as usual, Edo Pilgrims Chairman declares key deadlines sacrosanct

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH**LAGOS**

The Chairman of the Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board, Mallam Musa Muhammad Uduimoh, has declared the deadlines for the submission and uploading of international passports and final payment of the 2027 Hajj fare sacrosanct, warning intending pilgrims that the pilgrimage process is "not business

as usual" and urging them to comply without delay.

Uduimoh gave the warning during a radio programme on Qalam Radio on Friday while speaking on "2027 Hajj: What Edo Intending Pilgrims Need to Know as Key Deadlines Approach."

He said the deadlines were fixed by the Saudi Hajj authorities and not by the Edo State Government or the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), stress-

ing that intending pilgrims must treat them with the seriousness they deserve.

"It is not the Edo State nor the NAHCON that fixed the deadlines. It is the Saudi Hajj authority. This is to tell us that these deadlines are more serious than we see them. Let us comply without any excuse," he said.

The chairman disclosed that August 25, 2026, is the deadline for submission and uploading of international passports, while September 26, 2026, is the deadline for final payment of the Hajj fare and

final remittance to NAHCON.

He urged intending pilgrims who are yet to submit their international passports to do so immediately, explaining that the passport-upload process has become a crucial step in determining the number of pilgrims for whom the state will make payment.

According to him, the number of international passports uploaded will determine the number of intending pilgrims for whom the state is expected to remit funds.

Amala meal: Kogi probes deaths of four family members

LOKOJA

The Kogi State Government has ordered investigation into the deaths of four members of the same family after they reportedly consumed amala in Ihima, Okehi Local Government Area of the state.

The family's dog was also reported to have died after consuming the same food.

The state Commissioner for Information and Communications, Kingsley Fanwo, disclosed this in a statement at the weekend, saying the state governor, Ahmed Ododo, had directed the Commissioner for Health to commence a comprehensive investigation into the incident.

The Chief servant is deeply concerned by this tragic incident and has directed the Commissioner for Health to immediately investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths, with particular attention to the possibility of food poisoning or food

contamination.

"The investigation must establish the facts and determine whether the food consumed by the deceased was contaminated or whether any other medical or environmental factors contributed to the deaths.

"Relevant samples and available evidence should be properly examined in accordance with established public health procedures," the statement read partly.

Fanwo said the state government was also concerned by reports that the family's dog died after consuming the same food, adding that the development would form part of the investigation.

He said the governor had directed the Ministry of Health to work with relevant agencies and stakeholders to ensure that the investigation was thorough and that appropriate public health measures were taken based on its findings.

Police arrest 10 suspected cultists in Cross River, recover firearms

CALABAR

The Cross River State Police Command has arrested 10 suspected members of the Axe Men Confraternity and recovered a locally made pistol and other exhibits following sustained operational follow-up, tactical intelligence and detailed surveillance by operatives of the Violent Crime Response Unit (VCRU), Sector 2.

The arrests were carried out by operatives of the Violent Crime Response Unit, Sector 2, following sustained intelligence gathering, surveillance and operational follow-up.

Confirming the incident, the Cross River State Police Command's spokesperson, ASP Sunday Eitokpah, said in a statement in Calabar that the operation followed a petition submitted by the Abini community to the Commissioner of Police on July 29, 2026, over suspected cult activities.

The statement read, "The Cross River State Police

Command has arrested ten (10) suspected members of the Axe Men Confraternity and recovered a locally made pistol and other exhibits following sustained operational follow-up, tactical intelligence and detailed surveillance by operatives of the Violent Crime Response Unit (VCRU), Sector 2."

According to the statement, "The petition prompted the Command to commence detailed intelligence gathering and surveillance aimed at identifying individuals allegedly involved in cult-related activities in the community.

"At about 5:15 am on Saturday, August 22, VCRU operatives moved into the community and arrested 10 suspects identified as Jester Enyi, 25; Godwill Mansala, 22; Prosper Okey, 23; Emmanuel Uno, 26; Onyebuchi Eyong, 22; Elisha Emmanuel, 27; Christian Esu, 25; Daniel Uno, 23; Nelson Ibete, 23; and Roland Uno, 18."

Army dismantles IPOB/ESN camps, recovers IED materials in Anambra

AKWA

Troops of the Joint Task Force South East, Operation UDO KA, have dismantled identified IPOB/ESN strongholds in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, recovering weapons, motorcycles, and materials used in the production of improvised explosive devices.

The operation was conducted on Saturday, August 22, 2026, in collaboration with the Maritime Component, Department of State Services and

the Anambra Vigilante Group.

According to the Nigerian Army on its X handle, the joint force launched a coordinated dawn offensive on identified strongholds at Obene and Abator villages within Ochuche and Umunankwo communities.

The Army said the suspected IPOB/ESN elements opened fire after sighting the advancing troops before abandoning their positions and fleeing into the surrounding terrain.

"Troops responded with superior firepower and im-

mediately pursued the fleeing elements," the Army said.

It added that blood stains observed along the withdrawal route indicated that some of the fleeing elements may have sustained gunshot wounds.

During the pursuit, the Army said one suspected member was neutralised, while other fleeing members escaped with the body of another neutralised member.

A subsequent search of the abandoned strongholds led to the recovery of two pump-action guns, two mo-

torcycles, IED-making materials and other items.

The Army described the seizure of the explosive-making materials as a "significant operational gain," saying it would further degrade the group's capacity to manufacture explosive devices for attacks against security forces, critical infrastructure and civilians.

The troops subsequently consolidated their positions and intensified operations in surrounding areas to track fleeing members and prevent them from regrouping.

Governor Okpebholo tasks new Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom on peace, unity

LAMAI CASSIUS

AGENERODE

Delta State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo has appealed to the new Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom, senator Francis Alimikhen, to leverage his wealth of experience gained as a Senator and disciplined military officer in the governance of his kingdom.

The governor made the appeal over the weekend during the coronation ceremony of the 6th Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom saying the new monarch had served at the highest level of government, and his experience in leadership, governance and community de-

velopment will surely be valuable assets in his new role.

According to him, "traditional leadership carries a unique and sacred responsibility. As the Okumagbe, you are now the father of all. I therefore urge Your Highness to govern with wisdom, humility, fairness and an open heart".

The governor also called on every sons and daughters of the Kingdom to give the new king their support, cooperation and be loyal to him.

"Let us put aside our differences, and unite around the king for the common good of Wanno Kingdom".

He emphasized that the strength of any kingdom lies in

the unity of its people, adding that where there is unity, there is peace, and where there is peace, there is progress.

The governor expressed confidence that his reign will usher in a new era of peace, unity, progress and prosperity for Wanno Kingdom.

Welcoming guests to the occasion, the Chairman Central Planning Committee, Sir Kess Omiogbemi, commended the State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo for honouring the kingdom with his presence to formally present the staff of office to the Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom.

He said the governor's presence symbolized not only the authority of government, but

also the support and respect the state government accord the traditional institutions and the communities they serve.

While describing His Royal Majesty, Francis Alimikhen, the Okumagbe of Wanno Kingdom as a respected man of honor, who has served the nation with honor and distinction, Sir Omiogbemi said his call to ascend the throne comes

with great responsibility, expectations, wisdom in leadership, fairness in judgement, compassion for the people, courage in times of challenges and steadfast commitment to the costumes and values of their forefathers.

He however expressed confidence that under his reign, the Kingdom will witness greater unity, peace, progress and development.



COURTESY VISIT:

Governor of Bayelsa State, Senator Douye Diri (3rd left), Deputy Governor, Dr Peter Akpe (2nd left), Finance Commissioner and representative of the Director-General, National Pension Commission, Dr. Charles Emukowhate, and other members of his delegation, during a visit to Government House in Yenagoa recently.

Oborevwoiri inaugurates Ozoro Ultra-modern market

AJUWA VICTOR

OZORO

Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwoiri has said that his administration is irrevocably committed to providing facilities that support economic activities.

The Governor spoke while commissioning an ultra-modern market in Ozoro, Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State.

The Governor who was represented by his Deputy, Sir Monday Onyeme, said; "My administration had unwavering commitment to providing infrastructure that supports trade,

investment and economic prosperity.

"It is my firm belief that this facility will not only boost economic activities but also create jobs, stimulate innovation, improve internally generated revenue and enhance the overall well-being of our citizens.

"I urge the traders, buyers and entrepreneurs who will utilize this facility to take full advantage of the opportunities it presents.

"I also encourage all stakeholders to ensure the proper maintenance of this market so

that it remains functional, attractive and beneficial to present and future generations.

"Let us collectively safeguard this investment and use it to promote legitimate business, peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity.

"This market symbolizes the vibrant spirit of entrepreneurship, enterprise and community that has long defined the people of Ozoro and the wider Isoko Nation.

"The Isoko people have, over the years, distinguished themselves in commerce, agriculture and public service, among others, contributing immensely to the economic growth and development of Delta State.

It is therefore fitting that this modern market is being commissioned here in Ozoro, a town that has long been a centre of commerce and economic activity within the Isoko Nation.

"This facility will provide a conducive environment for trade and enterprise to flourish, enabling traders, artisans and business owners to expand their businesses, create wealth and contribute even more meaningfully to the prosperity of this community, its environs and our State.

DESOPADEC stipend beneficiaries undergo verification exercise in Agbor

AGBOR

AJUWA VICTOR

The member representing the Ika Ethnic Nationality on the Board of the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC), Hon. Cosmas Igbenije, led a verification exercise for beneficiaries receiving stipends from the commission, in an effort to ensure that the support reaches the intended recipients and continues to serve its purpose of improving livelihoods within the oil-producing communities.

The exercise, which was conducted at the APC Secretariat

in Boji-Boji, Owa, in Ika North East Local Government Area, brought together beneficiaries from across the Ika area who were required to present relevant documents for verification.

The exercise was conducted by Hon. Cosmas Igbenije in the presence of the APC Chairmen of Ika North East and Ika South Local Government Areas, Hon. Emeke Asiwe and Comrade Frank Izeke, respectively, who also participated in the verification process.

Speaking during the exercise, Igbenije explained that the verification was necessary to establish the authenticity of beneficiaries and ensure that

those listed under the stipend programme were genuinely receiving the assistance provided by the commission. He said the exercise was also part of efforts to strengthen accountability and ensure that DESOPADEC interventions achieve the desired impact at the grassroots.

According to him, the initiative reflects the commitment of the commission to making its programmes more responsive to the needs of the people, particularly members of communities within its area of intervention.

He said the stipend programme was not merely about providing financial assistance, but also about supporting beneficiaries in a manner that could contribute to their well-

fare and enable them to become more productive members of their communities.

Igbenije also linked the intervention to the broader development direction of the Delta State Government under Governor Sheriff Oborevwoiri, noting that the administration had continued to pursue programmes and projects aimed at improving the living conditions of residents across the state.

He maintained that the Oborevwoiri administration had, within the last three years, made significant investments in infrastructure and human capital development, stressing that the government's efforts were being felt in different sectors and communities.

Olu of Warri's reign restored glory, promotes peace, unity, says Oborevwoiri

WARRI

AJUWA VICTOR

Delta State Governor, Rt. Hon. Sheriff Oborevwoiri, described the five-year reign of His Majesty, Ogiame Atuwatse III, the Olu of Warri, as a period of renewed glory, uncommon leadership, peace-building and remarkable progress for the Itsekiri people, Warri and Delta State.

Speaking at the fifth coronation anniversary of the Olu of Warri, Oborevwoiri commended Atuwatse III for demon-

strating uncommon leadership, promoting peace and supporting initiatives aimed at advancing the development of Warri and the state.

He said; "the Olu is a cerebral monarch, a peace-builder and an exemplary leader—a man of grace who leads from the front. He has an undying passion for the progress of not just Warri but the entire Delta State.

"I want to place it on record that the Olu has taken more than a passing interest in my administration. You have shown your love and support for this administration".

The Governor recalled that when the Itsekiri nation hosted him, the Olu made a bold political endorsement of the President and himself, describing the decision as a courageous one, considering the monarch's responsibility as a father to all.

According to him, the Olu's leadership had also been demonstrated through his support for development projects, recalling his participation in the inspection of the construction of the Ode-Itsekiri Road, where he said the monarch was present to receive him even before his arrival

Sapele residents urge new DPO to embrace all, maintain people friendly policing

SAPELE

AJUWA VICTOR

Residents of Sapele Local Government Area have urged the newly deployed Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Sapele Division, CSP Nosakhare Omo Uwuigbe, to make the people the centre of his administration and maintain a friendly relationship with residents across the Local Government Area, irrespective of their social or economic status.

The residents, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said

the new DPO should ensure that his relationship with the people goes beyond political leaders, government officials and other influential personalities, stressing that ordinary residents and the less privileged also deserve to feel the presence and protection of the police.

CSP Omo Uwuigbe has officially assumed duty as the new DPO of Sapele Division and has already commenced engagements with key stakeholders in the area. As part of his early engagements, he paid a courtesy visit to the Chairman of Sapele Local Government

Council, Chief Bright Abeke, at the Executive Chambers of the council secretariat.

During the visit, the new DPO sought the council's partnership and support in maintaining peace and security across the Local Government Area, while stressing the importance of collaboration between the police, local government, community leaders, other security agencies and residents.

The DPO also assured the people of his commitment to professional policing, protection of lives and property and zero tolerance for criminal activities.

NEWS

Fake agency' boss fights back with appointment letter

ABUJA

The National Coordinator and Executive Director of the National Brands Development and Made in Nigeria Special Project Office, George Nwabueze, has denied the allegation of running a "fake agency" in the country.

Nwabueze, who spoke with newsmen at the weekend, noted that he oversaw an office which was under the supervision of the Office of the Secre-

tary to the Government of the Federation.

He noted that the office had been in existence for 16 years.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission had on Friday said the President had ordered Nwabueze's arrest for leading and promoting the outfit, which it tagged as a fake federal agency.

The ICPC said the accused was running it with the collaboration of senior public serv-

ants in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation.

But the embattled executive director said, "Made in Nigeria Special Project Office is a project office in the OSGF. We don't know where fake agency comes from. A programme that has been in the SGF's office since 16 July 2010 was just discovered yesterday (Friday). After 16 years; Nigeria is a funny country?"

Nwabueze spoke while re-

sponding to our correspondent's enquiries on LinkedIn, where he had earlier posted his appointment letter to rebuff ICPC's claim of illegality.

The letter, dated October 3, 2025, was purportedly issued by the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation.

It was referenced OSGF/MIN/59310/11/205 and signed by the Permanent Secretary, Political and Economic Affairs Office, Nadungu Gagare.

The letter, addressed to "Hon. George Buchi Nwabueze, National Coordinator, Made in Nigeria Project Office, OSGF, Three Arms Zone, Abuja," conveyed the approval of his appointment as National Coordinator/Executive Director of the Made in Nigeria Project Office under the OSGF.

According to the document, the appointment was for a five-year tenure beginning from July 2025 and was renewable.

"I am directed to formally convey the approval of your appointment as National Coordinator/Executive Director of the Made in Nigeria Project Office under the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation," the letter stated.

It added that the appointment followed "a careful evaluation of your commitment, contribution, and capacity in delivering on the mandate of the Special Project Office."

The document listed Nwabueze's responsibilities to include the supervision and development of programmes, projects and policies; supervision of regional and state coordinators across the 36 states; and organisation of exhibitions, trade expos, economic summits and other promotional initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous products and services.

It further stated that the project was to operate temporarily from Room B53, Ground Floor, within the OSGF complex.

**COURTESY VISIT:**

L-R...Canada Ambassador to Nigeria David Sproule and INEC Chairman Prof. Joash Amupitan exchanging gift during the Canada envoy courtesy visit to INEC Headquarters in Abuja over the weekend..photo by Omoye Aminu

APC wins all 13 LGAs, 171 wards in Ebonyi council poll

ABAKALIKI

MAXWELL OKECHUKWU

The Ebonyi State Independent Electoral Commission (EBSIEC) has declared the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC)

winner of the local government elections held across the state on Saturday.

The Chairman of EBSIEC, Enyi Patrick, announced the results on Sunday, disclosing that the APC won all 13 local government areas and 171 wards contested in the election.

Patrick said the election was conducted peacefully across the state.

Meanwhile, Governor Francis Nwifuru praised the peaceful conduct of the local government elections conducted by EBSIEC.

Stakeholders and key political figures across the state also commended the voter turnout and the smooth conduct of the

exercise.

The election recorded notable voter participation across the state's 13 local government areas and 171 political wards.

Nwifuru, who cast his vote at Edupfu Okemini Polling Unit 002 in Oferekpe Agbaja, Izzi Local Government Area, had commended EBSIEC for maintaining order and ensuring a smooth electoral process.

Fire guts sections of Spar Mall in Calabar, destroys goods

ABUJA

Fire on Saturday gutted parts of the SPAR Mall in Calabar, Cross River State, destroying shops, goods, and other valuable property.

The incident which occurred in the early hours of the day, threw traders, workers and residents into panic, as thick smoke and flames billowed from sections of the shopping complex.

Emergency responders were said to have arrived at approximately 12:54 a.m. to find the fire engulfing 17 shops in a row of about 30 containerised lock-up shops.

The fire reportedly affected several sections of the mall, in-

cluding areas housing a pharmacy, clothing outlet, perfumery and phone shop.

Eyewitnesses described the scene as chaotic, as traders and workers struggled to salvage goods and other valuables from the affected sections.

Some shop owners were seen in tears, lamenting the loss of their businesses and investments, with losses feared to run into billions of naira.

The incident also attracted residents and passersby, while security personnel were deployed to maintain order and secure the premises.

Government officials also arrived at the scene to assess the situation and coordinate with relevant agencies on

emergency response.

The State Environmental Director of the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency, Raymond Anunobi, was among officials who visited the scene.

Also present was the Cross River State Governor's Special Adviser on General Duties, Ekpennyong Akiba, who joined the assessment of the affected facility.

The officials inspected the affected sections of the mall and interacted with stakeholders as authorities sought to determine the extent of the damage and coordinate further response.

The immediate cause of the fire remains unknown, while authorities are expected to investigate the incident and establish

what triggered the outbreak.

For the affected traders, the immediate concern remains the loss of goods and businesses, as they await a full assessment of the damage and possible intervention.

In February, two separate midnight fire outbreaks destroyed shops and goods in Awka, the Anambra State capital.

The incidents occurred at Nwafor Plaza, off Oby Okoli Avenue by UNIZIK Junction, Okpuno Road, and at Igiligi Lane, off Godwill Junction, Okpuno — all in Awka South Local Government Area.

No casualties were recorded in either incident, but property and goods worth millions of naira were destroyed.

Why Civil Service failed to detect fake presidential agency – Former Perm Sec

ABUJA

A former Permanent Secretary of the Federation Civil Service Commission, Goke Adeboreye, has cited reasons why the commission failed to detect a fake presidential agency that allegedly penetrated government.

According to him, this exposes significant weaknesses in the country's bureaucratic system.WWW

His statement comes as the ICPC uncovered a fake government agency, the Presidential Foreign Intervention Promotion Council (PFIPC), which allegedly operated with forged appointment letters and other official documents.

The commission said that the agency had no legal basis and its purported Director-General, Adeniyi Adeyemi Matthew, was never appointed by the Federal Government.

Another phoney agency, known as the National Brands Development and Made in Nigeria Special Project Office, was allegedly also discovered on Friday and was said to be operating within the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation.

In reaction, Adeboreye said the incident raised serious questions about how an individual could allegedly gain entry into the government system, secure an appointment, access budgetary provisions and obtain office space without the relevant authorities detecting the irregularities.

"The exposure of that fake presidential agency is a major lapse to say that somebody can actually come into the system, get in on the budget, get offices, and all of that," he said during an interview with newsmen.

Speaking on the implications of the incident, Adeboreye identified weaknesses in the bureaucratic capacity of key offices within the Presidency and government, including the Office of the Secretary to

the Government of the Federation, the Office of the Chief of Staff to the President and the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation.

He said the bureaucracy supporting these offices must be sufficiently capable of helping the President implement his policies while also providing the necessary checks to prevent fraudulent or unlawful directives from gaining effect.

"The bureaucracy in those offices are not strong enough to be able to help the President drive the vision at the speed and with the efficiency that he wants," Adeboreye said.

According to him, the incident also highlights the delicate relationship between political office holders and career civil servants. While political appointees serve as principals to the bureaucracy and issue directives, he said civil servants must have the professional competence and personal integrity to question instructions that do not conform with established procedures.

"The political office holders are principals to the bureaucracy, and a lot of times, the bureaucracy takes directives from them," he said.

"You need a bureaucracy that is not just professional; that's, you know, the capacity, and the commitment to the system is also driven by his own or her own personal integrity."

Adeboreye also noted that civil servants working within government should be able to identify suspicious communications purportedly originating from the Presidency because they are familiar with the established channels through which presidential approvals are transmitted.

"Whether the person brings fake or whatever, you as the civil servant should be trained to be able to detect what should be a genuine communication from the State House. You work in that system," he said.

FOREIGN

NEWS

Zelensky has 'questions to answer' about corruption in his government, sacked minister says

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has "questions to answer" about corruption in his government, his sacked defence minister Mykhailo Fedorov has said.

Fedorov, a popular minister who modernised the armed forces and pioneered drone warfare, was fired last month after reportedly falling out with the head of Ukraine's armed forces.

He told the BBC a money laundering investigation announced last week raised questions about Zelensky's awareness of potential corruption in his inner circle.

Fedorov also reiterated that "democracy should not be the hostage of Putin" - but stopped short of declaring his own political ambitions days after he posted a video calling for elections in Ukraine.

Supporters have protested on Kyiv's streets weekly since he was sacked, calling on the president to reinstate him.

Asked whether he missed his old job, the 35-year-old replied "No", citing the relentless stress of managing Ukraine's war with Russia while transforming its defence ministry.

The protests ended on Wednesday, after Fedorov's replacement was confirmed, hours after he posted a video on YouTube calling for political reform.

Ukraine has been under martial law since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, meaning elections are suspended.

But Fedorov said it was his "moral right" to start the conversation about elections.

"We should not be afraid of discussing it. That's what democracy is all about. If I cannot share my ideas and be open about them with my own society, then what are we fighting for?"

If elections were never held, he said, "then we are no longer a democracy".

Fedorov has called for elections and declined to answer if he backs Zelensky.

In his earlier video statement Fedorov had argued that "people cannot endlessly live in a state where they do not understand why certain decisions are made".

He shied away from criticising the president directly and declined to answer whether he backs Zelensky to win any election.

Fedorov's video highlighting political corruption last week came on the same day a money laundering investigation was announced into lawmakers and bankers.

Ukraine's anti-corruption bureau said it had uncovered a scheme to misappropriate more than \$3m (£2.2m) in Ukrainian currency to pay bail for a former energy minister accused of money laundering.

A senior official in Zelensky's office, alleged to be involved, was sacked.

Fedorov said the case raised

questions about the president's awareness of potential corruption in his inner circle.

"Let him answer this question... I believe that he's ready for such questions. It's his responsibility to tell us all whether he was aware of all that or not... I don't want to make any assumptions."

A spokesperson for the president told BBC News: "Since the former minister was part of every government since 2019, it's strange that he phrases it as though these were somehow different governments without him. As everyone remembers, we didn't hear any strong statements from him back then."

Fedorov claimed he had rooted out elements of corruption from defence procurement but warned it was still affecting Ukraine's frontline capacity.

The former minister said he'd had no contact with the president for "a couple of weeks", and

had no evidence the president was personally corrupt.

"In all the time that I worked with him, not a single time have I received from him any task or assignment that would go against law or my sense of integrity. So that's my personal experience with him."

As defence minister and previously digital transformation minister, Fedorov is credited with innovating to replace soldiers with an "army of drones", saving lives on the battlefield and enabling long-range Ukrainian strikes on Russian military tar-

gets, oil refineries and distribution warehouses - thousands of kilometres over the border.

He said he would continue to promote new ways to fight the war and confirmed a visit to the United States in the coming weeks, where he hopes to meet Elon Musk.

The billionaire businessman's Starlink satellite communications system has been key in Ukraine's success. Fedorov aims to convince Musk to extend the technology into Russian airspace to assist Ukrainian strikes, without the Kremlin benefiting from access.

Girl, 17, killed in Swedish sword attack, police say

A 17-year-old girl was killed in the deadly sword attack at a high school in central Sweden on Friday, police have confirmed.

Two boys aged 12 and 17 were also seriously injured in the attack at Brinell School in Fagersta, according to local authorities, while another person sustained minor injuries.

An 18-year-old man was arrested but has not been identified. Police said they were treating the case as murder and attempted murder.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and opposition leader Magdalena Andersson visited the school, where flower tributes have been laid to honour the victims, on Saturday morning.

Students at the school had only just returned to the classroom following the summer break when the deadly attack unfolded on Friday afternoon.

The police later confirmed they fired shots after being called to the scene but did not

say whether the alleged attacker was hit before he was detained.

Sweden's public broadcaster reported that the suspect was wearing a helmet. Local media also said he was a former student.

The region went into a state of emergency on Friday, but it had ended by Saturday.

The school has just under 500 students on its roster, according to SVT, and is located 170km (105 miles) north-west of the capital, Stockholm.

Investigators have carried out two house searches in connection with the suspect, police said.

On Friday, Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson described the attack as a "serious incident," and said "we do not know what lies behind the act, but we know that police are working very intensively", in a post on X.

Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf said he received the news "with dismay and sadness".



NATO MEETING:

President Volodymyr Zelensky next to Mikhaïlo Fedorov during a Nato meeting in June.

Trump says Canada wants 'benefits' of being US state after trade talks collapse

US President Donald Trump has said Canada wants "the benefits of being a State, without being one" after trade talks between the two countries collapsed late on Friday.

In his first comments since negotiations broke down, triggering new 50% US tariffs on a range of Canadian goods, Trump also said American farmers had been charged "massive amounts of Tariffs" for years.

It comes after Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney called the fresh tariffs a "miscalculation" designed to "hurt and divide us".

Carney confirmed he would match Trump's tariffs "dollar-for-dollar" from 8 September, including levies on steel,

dairy, appliances and electronics. The US and Canada are now in a trade "war", he said.

"They asked too much and they offered too little," Carney said on Saturday. "You're at war when you get attacked. We got attacked," he added.

Trump's latest comments echo his repeated references to making Canada the "51st state" of America since returning to office, sparking frustration among its leaders and residents.

The collapse of the trade talks upended a deeply integrated trading relationship, with no clear path to resolution.

"We cannot accept what they've offered, and we will not give what they've asked," Carney said.

Both countries were optimistic of a deal earlier in the

week, but talks fell apart after both sides accused the other of making last-minute changes.

The new 50% US tariffs will apply to a range of Canadian goods, in addition to existing US tariffs on Canadian steel, aluminium, automobiles and lumber.

They are limited in scope, covering about \$20bn (£15bn; C\$28bn) of Canadian imports, or about 5% in total, including wine, dairy, cement, clothing and hockey equipment.

The prime minister said Canada was retaliating "reluctantly" to protect its interests. Details of the counter-measures will be released in the coming days, he said.

Leaders of other federal parties in Canada, including the Conservative opposition, voiced support for the prime

minister, as have the leaders of some Canadian provinces.

Tariffs - a tax placed on imports from other countries - have been a key component of Trump's trade policy, with the US president arguing they will boost American manufacturing and create jobs at home.

Critics, however, say tariffs have raised prices for American consumers and have disrupted and damaged the global economy.

Carney's speech on Saturday was his first address to Canadians after he announced late on Friday night that a deal would not be reached, accusing the Americans of making "last-minute changes" that were "unfair" and "uneconomic".

US negotiators, meanwhile, accused Canada of making "new demands and walk backs" on terms which had been previously agreed.

Fourteen killed in strike on Myanmar monastery

Fourteen people were killed in military air strikes at a monastery in Myanmar early on Friday, opposition fighters and a local rescue worker have said.

All of those killed were elderly and a number of monks were also injured, the rescue worker told BBC Burmese, adding that the site was struck twice.

The attack happened at around 09:00 local time (02:30 GMT) in Myaung township in the central Sagaing region, some 70km (47 miles) west of Mandalay, the news agency AFP reported.

Civilians had reportedly gathered at the site for a meditation retreat to mark Buddhist Lent. Myanmar's military has not commented.

Nway Oo Myaung, a pro-democracy rebel, told AFP that the victims included 11 men

and three women. Five of the victims were said to be from one village, while the remaining nine were from a neighbouring township.

"Older people had entered the meditation centres," Myaung added, saying the dead were aged between 50 and 70.

A second, unnamed opposition fighter said he had been among those searching for survivors of the attacks.

"While we were trying to rescue people, the aircraft came to bomb a second time," he said.

Myanmar has been locked in civil war since the military staged a 2021 coup ousting Aung San Suu Kyi, and has been under martial rule since. The military, which is frequently accused of carrying out strikes on public buildings, has previously said it only strikes legitimate targets.

NEWS**FOREIGN****US military newspaper editor voices censorship fears after being fired**

The editor-in-chief of US military newspaper Stars and Stripes has expressed his concern over censorship a day after being dismissed by the US Department of Defense (DoD) for "insubordination".

"This is a time when we really need to hear what's happening," Erik Slavin said, adding that Pentagon officials appeared to be "less and less inclined to speak on the record".

Slavin says he believes he was fired for having stated in an interview that "in a hypothetical situation, censorship would be a red line". A reporter and the paper's publisher were also sacked.

The Pentagon told the BBC it would not comment. But the sackings come amid tension between the Trump administration and the US media.

Even though partially funded by the Pentagon, Stars and Stripes has been editorially independent - through a congressional mandate and DoD rules.

The newspaper's Middle East reporter Lara Korte said she had also been told she was fired.

Both Slavin and Korte say their dismissals - both for insubordination - relate to an interview they gave to CBS's

Sunday Morning programme last month, according to the BBC's US partner CBS News.

Stars and Stripes reported that publisher Max Lederer was also fired.

He had announced his retirement on Tuesday, saying his understanding of the paper's value and mission differed in "fundamental ways" from the Pentagon's plans for the publication.

Slavin, who has worked for the paper for 21 years, told the PM programme that he had not been given an official explanation for his dismissal - and was considering his response even though he was not allowed to appeal.

He said he did not know if it had to do with his paper's original reporting of conditions aboard USS Abraham Lincoln - the warship which has been deployed in the Gulf for months as the US-Israeli war with Iran continues.

The vessel has spent a record-setting uninterrupted time at sea of more than 240 days and family members of sailors aboard have expressed concern about their mental health, with some sailors having reportedly attempted to jump overboard.

Ceuta authorities bury migrants who died in border rush from Morocco

Against the murmur of prayers, body bags were lowered into graves marked only with numbers.

Gravediggers placed the first four victims in cinderblock plots while a small group of locals watched at a cemetery on the tip of North Africa.

The dead, whose identities are unknown, were among the more than 90 migrants who lost their lives during Spain's deadliest border crisis three weeks ago.

Fueled by misinformation, poverty and a lack of opportunities, more than 72,000 people poured into Ceuta, a Spanish territory that neighbors Morocco.

At Ceuta's Muslim cemetery, 18 migrants were laid to rest on Friday.

An Islamic cleric read prayers and chants praising God while funeral workers worked quickly to lower the white body bags and cover them with soil. More migrants are expected to be buried soon.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights, a left-leaning non-governmental organization, called

for the burials in Ceuta to be halted until every effort had been made to identify the bodies and repatriate them to Morocco, the country of origin for most of the migrants who made the perilous journey.

Many of those who died drowned or were killed in a stampede to cross a breakwater barrier near a border checkpoint.

In a statement, the NGO asked Morocco's foreign ministry to ensure that "the bodies are returned to the families so they can be buried with dignity".

It called the burials in Ceuta a "new human tragedy," adding to the "disaster of displacement and missing persons."

A spokesperson for Ceuta's city government said last week the paperwork to repatriate the bodies of the deceased was complete, but that Morocco's government hadn't accepted it.

Morocco's foreign ministry didn't respond to questions from The Associated Press about the burials that started on Friday in Ceuta or suggestions that Morocco is blocking the repatriation of identified migrant bodies.



CHILDREN RECEIVE VACCINE:

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the DRC would receive a total of 70,000 doses of the Ervebo vaccine, produced in Germany

Ebola: DRC receives shipment of more than 16,000 vaccine doses

More than 16,000 doses of the Ervebo vaccine arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) late Friday, an AFP journalist saw, as the country faces the deadliest Ebola outbreak in its history.

The DRC's 17th Ebola outbreak, which has killed thousands of people, was declared on May 15 but is thought to have been spreading for several weeks prior.

It has hit regions in the north and east where the presence of the state is weak, health infrastructure is largely lacking and myriad armed groups have roamed for decades.

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Thursday that the DRC would receive a total of 70,000 doses of the Ervebo vaccine, produced in Germany.

The vaccine, developed by the pharmaceutical company Merck, is approved against the Zaire strain of the virus, but not against the Bundibugyo strain currently circulating in the country.

WHO experts still do not know whether Ervebo protects humans against the Bundibugyo strain, but early data, notably from animal trials, suggest it could offer some protection.

The Ervebo vaccine "has already been used several times, and in particular on a very large scale during the 2018-2020 outbreak", Samuel Roger

Kamba, the DRC's minister of health, told the press.

He was speaking on the tarmac of Kinshasa airport, where a batch of 16,250 doses was delivered by plane on Friday.

Of the 70,000 doses made available to the DRC, 20,000 are intended for a clinical trial, and 50,000 for "frontline and health workers" in the DRC, the WHO explained on Thursday.

The Ebola outbreak in the DRC has already caused 2,516 deaths among 5,290 con-

firmed cases, according to the latest data published by the Congolese authorities.

It "is growing exponentially", warned Julien Harneis, the UN's senior Ebola coordinator, on Friday.

This month, WHO vaccine experts recommended a full-scale human trial of Ervebo, the only existing approved Ebola vaccine, to see if it offered cross-protection against the Bundibugyo strain.

Two vaccines specifically targeting the Bundibugyo strain are in clinical trial phas-

es: one is being developed by the US-based group Moderna, which uses mRNA technology, and the other by Britain's University of Oxford.

In addition, an "rVSV Bundibugyo" vaccine, described by the WHO as "the most promising", is to be developed by Singapore-based Hilleman Laboratories.

Ebola, which is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids and causes fever, has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the past 50 years.

Syria says Israeli strike near Damascus violation of international law

Syria has condemned an Israeli attack on the village of Beit Jinn, southwest of the country's capital Damascus, which officials said hit a civilian vehicle and left several people injured.

The attack was the second known Israeli strike on Syria in the past week, with Syria branding it a "violation" of its sovereignty and international law.

In a post on X, the Israeli military said it had targeted a "terrorist" in the "final stages" of preparing attacks which posed an immediate threat to soldiers.

The latest incident comes days after reports emerged Israel had struck a military airbase close to the Turkish border, which Syria said

threatened to escalate tensions in the region.

After the earlier attack, Washington issued a rare rebuke of Israel, calling it an "unnecessary escalation that does not advance regional stability".

In an interview on Friday, the US ambassador to Turkey, Tom Barrack, suggested that the strike could be "the Israelis baiting the Turks" in an attempt to draw Turkey into a conflict ahead of upcoming Israeli elections.

Barrack's comments led Israel's far-right defence minister, Israel Katz, to describe his account as "full of inaccuracies".

Writing on X, Katz added Israeli forces were acting "in light of clear intelligence information about Turkey's intentions".

Following Tuesday's strikes on the Abu al-Duhur airbase, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu published a statement: "Israel and Syria agreed to a status quo in security matters, which Syria was on the verge of breaching by permitting Turkish troops to deploy at an

airbase near Aleppo."

After the strike Turkey did not confirm whether any of its troops moved to the Abu al-Duhur airbase, which sits 70km from the Turkish border. However, Ankara rejected Israel's suggestion that it posed a threat.

Abu al-Duhur airbase has been out of service as a dedicated military airfield since 2013. Rebel forces seized control of the base as they swept through the country in December 2024.

Israel occupies territory in southwest Syria it seized after the fall of Bashar al-Assad in 2024.

Syria has been trying to rebuild its military facilities that were damaged during the offensive that saw Bashar al-Assad's government overthrown.

The Turkish military has provided assistance to Syria since the overthrow of Assad, while Israel continues to view both countries with deep suspicion.

Al-Sharaa has forged closer ties with the West since coming to power, particularly the US and in November 2025 he became the first Syrian leader to visit the White House.

DRC: Ex-president Kabila challenges US sanctions in court

In a suit before a court in Washington, Joseph Kabila who led Congo from 2001 to 2019 wants his name removed from a US Treasury blacklist.

He contends that his sanctioning by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in

April was based on unsubstantiated allegations.

Washington accuses Kabila of financing and offering political support to Rwanda-backed M23 rebels who seized two Congolese provinces last year.

But Kabila counters that no

transfer of funds or political incentive to the rebels from him is specified by the US government.

After years in self-imposed exile, Kabila emerged in Goma last year only months after the city fell to the rebels.

A Congolese military court

has sentenced Kabila to death in absentia for treason and other charges over his role with M23.

Even after a peace deal between Kinshasa and Kigali, violence has persisted in eastern Congo with both sides accusing each other of violations.

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FEATURE

Will Nigeria overcome the HIV pandemic? the battle is far from over

TALBORT HOPE

There is something frightening about HIV that statistics alone cannot explain.

It is not simply the number of people living with the virus. It is the fear attached to a positive result, the silence that sometimes surrounds the disease and the possibility that a person may avoid testing because of what society might say if the result comes back positive.

In Nigeria, HIV has been part of the public-health conversation for decades. But in 2026, a different question deserves to be asked: Will Nigeria actually overcome the HIV epidemic, or will the country simply continue managing it from one year to another?

Nigeria has made important progress, but the country still carries one of the largest HIV burdens in the world. NACA's latest programme review reported that an estimated 2,002,624 people were living with HIV in Nigeria, while national prevalence remained at approximately 1.3 per cent.

Those numbers may not sound alarming when compared with countries where HIV prevalence is much higher. But Nigeria's enormous population means that even a relatively low national prevalence represents a very large number of people. And behind every number is a story.

THE HIV NIGERIA KNOWS TODAY IS DIFFERENT

There was a time when hearing that someone had HIV could immediately create an atmosphere of fear.

People associated the virus with death. Families sometimes hid diagnoses. Some patients were treated as though their condition made them dangerous to others. Medicine has changed that reality.

Today, antiretroviral therapy can suppress HIV and allow people living with the virus to live long and healthy lives. When treatment successfully suppresses the virus to an undetectable level and that level is maintained, HIV is not sexually transmitted.

That scientific breakthrough has changed the meaning of an HIV diagnosis. But science alone cannot defeat an epidemic.

A person must first know they have HIV. They must be willing and able to seek treatment. The treatment must be available. The person must continue taking it. And society must allow them to live without discrimination.

THE NUMBER BEHIND THE NUMBER

Nigeria's 1.3 per cent national prevalence can easily create the impression that HIV is no longer a major problem. IT IS.

NACA's current data show that the number of people living with HIV remains above two million. That means millions of Nigerians are either living with the virus themselves or are directly connected to someone who is. The epidemic is also not evenly distributed across the country.

Different states and population groups experience different levels of HIV risk. Earlier national survey data showed particularly high prevalence in parts of southern Nigeria, with the

South-South recording the highest regional prevalence in the 2018 NAHS results. This means Nigeria cannot rely on one national figure to tell the entire story.

What happens in a community in Rivers State may be different from what happens in Kano, Edo, Lagos or Enugu. The response must therefore be local as well as national.

PERHAPS THE BIGGEST ENEMY IS STIGMA

If there is one thing Nigeria must defeat alongside HIV, it is stigma.

Imagine discovering that you are HIV-positive and immediately wondering who you can tell.

Will your partner stay? Will your friends still associate with you? Will your family treat you differently? Will people at work find out? Will someone turn your private medical information into gossip?

These fears are not imaginary. Stigma can push people away from testing and treatment. Someone who is afraid of being recognised at an HIV clinic may decide not to go. Someone who receives a positive result may struggle to disclose their status or remain connected to care.

This is why Nigeria's decision to join the Global Partnership for Action to Eliminate All Forms of HIV Related Stigma and Discrimination in 2025 was important.

The country cannot claim victory over HIV while people living with the virus are still being judged for their status.

HIV is a medical condition. It is not a punishment. And it certainly does not make a person less deserving of dignity.

YOUNG NIGERIANS AND THE DANGER OF MISINFORMATION

The next generation will play a major role in determining whether Nigeria wins or loses this battle. Young Nigerians are surrounded by informa-

tion, but not all information is correct.

Social media has made it possible for health information to travel across the country within minutes. Unfortunately, false information can travel just as quickly.

There are still people who believe HIV can be transmitted through casual contact such as hugging, shaking hands or sharing ordinary household spaces. IT CANNOT.

There are also young people who may know very little about HIV testing, PrEP, condoms or the importance of early treatment.

NACA has identified adolescents and young people as an important focus of Nigeria's HIV prevention efforts. Its published figures estimate HIV prevalence at 2.9 per cent among adolescents aged 15–19 and 3.2 per cent among young people aged 20–24 in the cited programme data.

These figures make the message clear: young people cannot be left out of the national response. They need facts, not fear.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN MUST REMAIN AT THE CENTRE

Women represent a significant proportion of people living with HIV in the country. Their vulnerability can be influenced by factors such as unequal power in relationships, gender-based violence, difficulty negotiating safer sex and barriers to healthcare.

Pregnant women also require particular attention. A woman living with HIV who receives appropriate treatment during pregnancy and follows medical guidance can greatly reduce the risk of passing HIV to her baby.

That makes antenatal HIV testing more than a routine hospital procedure. It can protect two lives at once.

Nigeria therefore has to continue expanding HIV testing and treatment services for pregnant women, particu-

larly in communities where access to healthcare remains difficult.

CAN NIGERIA KEEP PAYING FOR THE FIGHT?

This may be one of the biggest questions facing the country in 2026.

HIV treatment is not something a person takes for a few weeks and forgets about. Effective treatment requires continuity.

Clinics need medicines. Patients need follow-up care. Laboratories need to function. Healthcare workers need support. Community organisations need resources. Testing programmes need funding.

This is why the sustainability of Nigeria's HIV response matters so much.

NACA's new National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2026–2030, officially launched in June 2026, is designed to provide the direction for the country's HIV response during the next five years.

The strategy comes at a crucial time as Nigeria seeks greater ownership and sustainability of its HIV programmes.

For Nigeria to truly overcome the epidemic, the country cannot depend indefinitely on external assistance to maintain essential services.

THERE IS REASON TO HOPE

Despite all these challenges, I do not believe Nigeria's HIV story is a hopeless one.

The country already has something previous generations did not have on the same scale: effective treatment, improved testing, prevention tools and years of accumulated knowledge about the epidemic.

NACA is also expanding approaches such as HIV self-testing, which can give people another way to know their status while addressing some of the barriers associated with visiting a testing facility.

The question is whether these tools

will reach the people who need them most.

A medical breakthrough sitting in a clinic is useless to someone who cannot afford transportation to get there. And treatment cannot help a patient if medication becomes unavailable.

SO, WILL NIGERIA DEFEAT HIV?

The country has already shown that progress is possible. HIV prevalence has remained relatively low at the national level, treatment has expanded and the government has now introduced a new five-year strategic plan.

But ending AIDS as a public-health threat will require more than statistics showing improvement.

Nigeria must make testing normal. Treatment must remain available. Prevention must reach young people. Pregnant women must have access to testing and care. People living with HIV must be protected from discrimination and funding for HIV services must remain stable.

Most importantly, Nigerians must stop treating HIV as a reason to shame another human being. Perhaps the biggest lesson from the HIV epidemic is that the virus itself is only one part of the battle. The other part is us.

It is our willingness to learn the facts, our courage to get tested, our commitment to protect one another and our ability to show compassion to people living with HIV.

Nigeria may not wake up one morning and discover that HIV has completely disappeared. But the country can reach a point where new infections become rare, treatment is accessible to everyone who needs it, mother-to-child transmission is drastically reduced and nobody is afraid to seek help because of stigma.

That, to me, is what victory should look like.



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CAF Women's Champions League Qualifiers: Edo Queens set to begin WAFU-B tourney against AS GNN tomorrow

KEHINDE OSAGIEDÉ

Edo Queens Football Club of Benin will begin 2026 Women's Champions League Qualifiers, WAFU-B tournament in Burkina Faso tomorrow as they face As Gar-



EDO QUEENS

de Nationale of Niger in the Group B opening match.

Kickoff time is 6 at the Stade 4 AOUT stadium Ouagadougou.

The NWFL reigning champions look confident ahead of tomorrow's cracker as the Assistant Coach Gabriel Ben-

son speaks on the readiness of the 2024 WAFU-B champions during their training session on Sunday evening.

Coach Gabriel Benson said that the team is well prepared for the tournament, assuring Edo people and Nigerians of good outings.

According to him, "Edo Queens have all it takes to make the country proud" as they begin the quest for glory tomorrow, Monday August 24th, 2026 in the CAF Women's Champions League Qualifying games (WAFU-B), holding in Burkina Faso.

"The girls are ready And good to go. They know the opportunity laid here before them, they also know that they are representing Edo State and Nigeria at large. I know they are ready to fight to the end to win our first

game and the WAFU-B trophy. We are here for real business. We are playing our first match tomorrow against AS Grade Nationale of Niger. We dream nothing but total victory."

"We came here on time and our players are acclimatizing well. Concerning the weather, there is a little difference. I find out that this place is hotter than Nigeria, We are doing all that is needed for them to ensure we have a smooth run in this WAFU-B play-off."

"We have come to play against anybody here, knowing that the group we are placed in have three former champions that we know. We are not scared. It is a tough group, no doubt, AS Grade Nationale is the only team new to us in group B. We are prepared and it is one game at a time." He said.



SEMI AJAYI

Ajayi 'Buzzing' after scoring against Manchester United

Nigeria's Super Eagles defender Semi Ajayi has expressed his delight after scoring for Hull City in their 2-0 victory over Manchester United.

Ajayi opened the scoring for the newly promoted side, putting Hull City ahead and setting them on their way to a memorable victory over the Premier League giants.

Speaking to TNT Sports after the game, the Nigerian international described the goal as the perfect way to cap Hull City's impressive start to the encounter.

"It was amazing. It kind of capped off the really good start that we had. We had a couple of chances before that which we didn't manage to put away, but obviously that one got us into the lead, and also gave us something to protect, but also build on," Ajayi said.

"I'm buzzing to get the goal to get us underway. I'm happy it left us getting three points."

The victory represents a major statement from Hull City, who stunned Manchester United on Saturday with an impressive performance.

Maikaba vows one-season mission as Bayelsa United chase immediate NPFL return

Bayelsa United technical adviser, Abdul Maikaba, says the club has a clear mandate which is return to the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL) at the end of the 2026/27 Nigeria National League (NNL) season.

Abdul Maikaba made the declaration after a preseason victory over De Go-Pro FC of Sapele, Maikaba said the Yenagoa-based Prosperity Boys are fully focused on the task ahead as the NNL gets set to kick off on Saturday, October 31.

The season opener will feature Heartland of Owerri taking on Crown FC of Ogbomoshos, the league announced during its AGM in Owerri.

"I am satisfied with the display and the way they played," Maikaba told journalists. "But the truth is, we are assessing the players because we are recruiting. We are looking to see who will add value to the team, and any player who will not add value, we will let him go."

The former Kano Pillars boss signed a one-year deal specifically to take Bayelsa United back to the elite division.

"We have more than sixty players in camp. We are gradually trimming down to our maximum of 35," he explained. "With quality games and proper train-

ing, we will pick the best. That is why I have a one-season contract — to do the job in one year."

Maikaba stressed that Bayelsa United will not shy away from any opponent in the abridged campaign.

"We are in the NNL to face any team. We are not here to hand-pick opponents. Any team we are drawn with, we are ready to face. The target is to qualify for the Premier League in one season."



ABDUL MAIKABA

Tinubu campaign council names Shehu Dikko, Philip Shaibu, Joseph Yobo in Sports mobilisation committee

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has named Chairman of the National Sports Commission (NSC), Mallam Shehu Dikko, as Director of the

Sports Sector Mobilisation Committee of the 2027 APC Presidential Campaign Council.

Dikko is joined in the sports mobilisation structure by the Di-

rector-General of the National Institute for Sports (NIS), Hon. Philip Shaibu, and former Super Eagles defender and captain, Joseph Yobo, who were appointed as Deputy Directors of the committee.

The appointments are contained in the membership list of the 2027 APC Presidential Campaign Council, which outlines the various directorates and responsibilities ahead of the 2027 presidential election.

The choice of Dikko to lead the Sports Sector Mobilisation Committee is significant, coming at a time when sports is increasingly being positioned as an important tool for youth engagement, empowerment, national development and political mobilisation.



SHEHU DIKKO

Kejelcha reclaims world half marathon record with 56:51 in Buenos Aires



YOMIF KEJELCHA

Ethiopia's Yomif Kejelcha regained the world half marathon record, running 56:51 at the Media Maratón Ciudad de Buenos Aires, a World Athletics Label road race, in the Argentinean capital on Sunday.

With that performance, Kejelcha took 29 seconds off the

world record of 57:20 set by Uganda's Jacob Kiplimo in Lisbon in March — a mark that is pending ratification — to regain a world record he set in Valencia in October 2024 with a 57:30 clocking.

Kiplimo had clocked 56:42 in Barcelona last year, but it

could not be ratified as a world record because the race conditions were not fully compliant with World Athletics rules.

The women's race in Buenos Aires was won by Ethiopia's Fotyen Tesfay who became an overwhelming victor thanks to a 1:03:57 performance

Semenya (right) with legal adviser already in Poland

Benfica Ladies recently signed striker Janet 'Semenya' Akekoromowei yesterday landed in Poland ahead of the U20 Women's World Cup.

Semenya flew directly from her base in Portugal and was accompanied to Poland by her legal adviser.

She is expected to be joined later by the rest of the Falconets

squad led by coach Moses Aduku.

Portuguese champions Benfica had initially blocked her from featuring for Nigeria at the World Cup, before they later reversed their decision.

The Falconets will open their World Cup campaign on September 7, before other first round group matches against New Caledonia and China.



JANET 'SEMENYA' AKEKOROMOWEI (RIGHT)

SPORTS



Falconets set up World Cup camp in South-west Poland

Nigeria's Falconets will today open their training camp for the U20 World Cup in the South-western town of Trzebnica.

The Nigeria U20 ladies are booked into Hotel Trzebnica and

will be there until September 3.

The team led by coach Moses Aduku are expected later today in Poland.

Already Benfica Ladies striker Janet 'Semenya' Akekoromwei has landed in Poland di-

rectly from her base in Portugal to join up with the rest of the squad.

It is a major boost for the Falconets as they will do well to have her goals after her Portuguese club previously tried to stop her from the World Cup.

The U20 Women's World Cup kicks off September 5 and Nigeria open their campaign two days later with a tough tie against Spain in Sosnowiec, Poland.

[8/23, 5:58 PM] Kenny: Enugu City Marathon: Sponsors Jostle For Place As Race Day Draws Near

The buzz in Enugu is mounting as the 2nd Enugu City International Marathon edges

closer, with just 6 days to go. The race has sparked a wave of sponsor interest, as major corporations, growing brands, and local enterprises rush to secure a spot at what has quickly become one of the region's most talked-about sporting events.

Set for Saturday, August 29, 2026, the marathon has grown beyond athletics to become a key platform for business, culture, and community.

The momentum will build further when the 5-day Marathon Expo opens on Monday, August 24 at the landmark Michael Okpara Square, offering brands and the public a first taste of the race-week experience.



FALCONETS IN TRAINING



Port Harcourt to host NBBL final 8 for fourth straight year

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, will host the Final 8 of the 2026 Nigeria Premier Basketball League for the fourth consecutive year following a slight adjustment to the competition schedule by the League Management Committee of the Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF).

The Phase 3 playoffs will now take place from August 29 to September 6, 2026, at the Indoor Basketball Stadium, 59 Niger Street, Port Harcourt Township.

The eight-team tournament will be played on a round-ro-

in basis, with four teams qualifying from the Atlantic Conference and four from the Savannah Conference.

Representing the Atlantic Conference are Rivers Hoopers, Maktown Flyers, Hoops & Read and Lagos Raptors, while Aso Sky Hawks, 313 Warriors, Gboko City Chiefs and Kano Pillars will represent the Savannah Conference.

Port Harcourt has established itself as a regular host of the league's decisive phase, with the Rivers State capital once again set to welcome the country's top basketball teams.

2026 African Beach Volleyball Nations Championship: Nigeria beat Egypt, hit quarter-final

Nigeria have qualified for the quarterfinals of the 2026 African Beach Volleyball Nations Championship in Alexandria, Egypt.

The 2024 African Games bronze medallists defeated hosts Egypt 2-0 (21-17, 21-16) in the Round of 16 on Friday, August 21.

Nigeria started the first set on a strong note, with the duo of Esther Mbah and Pamela Bawa putting the host nation under pressure. The Nigerian pair eventually secured the set 21-17.

The Nigerian side continued their impressive performance in the second set, maintaining their momentum to defeat the former champions 21-16 and seal their place in the quarterfinals.

Reacting to the victory, board member of the Nigeria Volleyball Federation, Chinedu Onikeku (OLY) said the players had put a smile on the faces of Nigerians back home.

Onikeku praised Mbah and Bawa for their impressive display against the host nation, Egypt.

She said the duo had shown that they are a force to reckon with in African beach volleyball.

Onikeku added that the players bounced back strongly from

their loss to Morocco in their third and final group-stage match, making a huge statement with their victory over the hosts.

Onikeku said: "Nigerians are excited with the performance of the girls against the host nation, Egypt, in the Round of 16.

"The girls have put a smile on the faces of Nigerians back home. Esther and Pamela gave a good account of themselves and proved that they are a force to reckon with in beach volleyball.

"They bounced back from their loss against Morocco in their third group-stage match, and this victory is a huge statement from the team."



Ameh slams Monimichelle, says contractor has no moral Justification to criticise NFF Leadership

The North-Central Coordinator of the Gusau 4+4 Solidarity Forum, Ochoga Ameh, has advised the Chief Executive Officer of Monimichelle Construction Company, Ebi Egbe, to refrain from commenting on issues concerning Nigerian football, accusing him of being part of the problems affecting sports

development in the country.

Ameh made the remarks while reacting to recent statements attributed to Egbe on developments in Nigerian football.

According to him, Egbe, popularly known as Monimichelle, lacks the moral justification to criticise factors responsible for the challenges confronting football develop-

ment, alleging that several projects handled by his company have remained uncompleted.

"Monimichelle is part of our problem in sports development in the country. It is a known fact that one of the major causes of the present downward trend facing the country is the lack of infrastructure," Ameh said.

Nigeria must return to the Grassroots to rebuild Women's Football — Omidiran

The Executive Chairman of the Federal Character Commission (FCC),

Honorable Hulyat Motunrayo Omidiran, has called for a wholesale rebuilding of wom-

en's football in Nigeria, beginning with renewed investment in grassroots development, following the Super Falcons' failure to qualify for Brazil 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup.

Hon. Omidiran made the call on Friday while attending the opening ceremony of the 2026 FCT FA Women's Inter-Area Council Football Tournament at the Area 3 Sports Complex, Abuja, where defending champions AMAC defeated Gwagwalada 7-0 in the opening fixture.

The FCC Chairman said Nigeria's shocking failure to secure a place at the next Women's World Cup should serve as a wake-up call for stakeholders to reassess the country's women's football development structure and return to the fundamentals of grassroots development.

"This is the time for us to rebuild women's football in Nigeria. We need to go back to the grassroots and invest properly in the development of our girls," Omidiran said.



Hon. Hulyat Motunrayo Omidiran addressing Edo Queens



BEACH VOLLEYBALL