

Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo, has expressed confidence that the All Progressives Congress (APC) will win the 2027 general elections in the state, saying the party has established a strong structure across the 18 local government areas.

Okpebholo made the assertion yesterday while presenting the party's candidates for the

# Okpebholo: APC will win 2027 elections in Edo

2027 elections during an APC mobilisation rally in Ologbo Wards 9 and 10, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area.

The governor presented Ogbeide Ihama as the party's candidate for the Senate, Felix Igbinovia for the House of Representatives and Clement Ikponmwonsa for the Edo State House of Assembly.

He urged APC members and supporters to remain united, committed and focused on the party's programmes, stressing that the mobilisation exercise was aimed at strengthening the party at the grassroots and securing victory for its candidates.

Okpebholo thanked the electorate for their support for his administration and assured

residents that his government would continue to implement programmes and projects aimed at developing the state.

He also commended residents who attended the rally despite the rainfall, expressing confidence that the APC would consolidate its support across Edo State.

The governor prayed for God's blessings upon the people and

urged party members to work collectively for the success of the APC in the forthcoming elections.

Also speaking, Edo State APC Chairman, Jarrett Tenebe, said the party was targeting 2.5 million votes for President Bola Tinubu in Edo State in the 2027 general elections.

Tenebe disclosed that the party leadership had commenced mo-

bilisation across the 18 local government areas of the state as part of efforts to achieve the target.

He said the governor and his deputy, Dennis Idahosa, had been visiting communities and engaging party members as part of efforts to strengthen the APC ahead of the elections.

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#200

# Four kidnappers to die by hanging • Special Court delivers first landmark verdict

OLIVER IJIOGBE

**BENIN CITY**

The Edo State Special Criminal Court yesterday sentenced four kidnappers to death by hanging for their involvement in the abduction of Oseghale Ofure Precious at the Vegetable Market, off Airport Road, Benin City, on June 14, 2026.

The landmark verdict — the first major judgment delivered by the Special Criminal Court since its establishment — has sent a stern warning to kidnappers,

armed robbers and other violent criminals operating in the state.

The convicts — Marvelous Isaac, Wisdom Michael, Rufus Michael and Gift Raphael, the only female among them — were found guilty of conspiracy, kidnapping, armed robbery, unlawful possession of firearms and cultism under the Criminal Laws of Edo State, 2022.

Presiding Judge, Justice Aigbona Terry Momodu, held that the prosecution had proved its case beyond reasonable doubt, finding the four defendants culpable not only in the abduc-

tion of Precious but also in the kidnapping of other victims at different locations, from whom millions of naira were collected as ransom.

Justice Momodu consequently sentenced each of the four convicts to death by hanging or by lethal injection, in accordance with the applicable law.

The prosecution was led by the Edo State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Roland Otaru, SAN, while Henry Amaechi Nwauzor rep-

resented the first, second and third convicts. F.O.J. Imasuen appeared for the fourth convict, Gift Raphael.

During the trial, the prosecution called seven witnesses and tendered 15 exhibits in evidence. The four defendants testified on oath in their respective defence but called no witness.

At the conclusion of evidence, counsel on both sides filed, exchanged and adopted their respective final written addresses, following which the court reserved the matter for judgment.

The defendants had pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

Delivering judgment, Justice Momodu said the totality of the evidence before the court established the guilt of the four defendants beyond reasonable doubt on all the counts preferred against them.

The judge said the court was bound by the provisions of the law in imposing the appropriate punishment and could not exercise discretion contrary to the applicable statutory provisions.

Before sentence was pro-

nounced, counsel to the first three convicts, Nwauzor, and counsel to Gift Raphael, Imasuen, commended the judge for what they described as his painstaking examination of the facts and evidence presented during the trial.

They, however, urged the court to expedite the release of certified copies of the judgment to enable them study the decision and take appropriate steps towards an appeal.

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## Benin residents react to Edo Special Court's verdict

BENEDICT OKATE

**BENIN CITY**

Residents of Benin City, the Edo State capital, have expressed mixed but largely security-focused reactions to Tuesday's judgment of the Edo State Special Criminal Court, which sentenced four persons to death for their involvement in the abduction of a woman at the Vegetable Market, off Airport Road, Benin City.

Justice Aigbona Terry Momodu, who delivered the judgment on September 29, 2026, sentenced Marvelous Isaac, Wisdom Michael, Rufus Emete Michael and Gift Raphael to

death on various counts arising from an 11-count charge bordering on kidnapping, conspiracy, armed robbery, cultism and unlawful possession of firearms.

The verdict marked the maiden judgment of the Edo State Special Criminal Court, established to handle kidnapping, cultism and other serious criminal cases and to expedite the prosecution of violent crimes in the state.

Reacting to the judgment, some residents said the verdict had reinforced public expectations for a stronger and more effective criminal justice

CONTINUES ON PG 2»



**MOBILISATION RALLY:**

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo (middle), addressing party supporters during the All Progressives Congress (APC) mobilisation rally in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area yesterday.

**FG releases 2026 – 2028 approved textbooks, introduces QR tracking**

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**Police detain Education Commissioner, three others over Delta civil servant's death**

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**Journalist to be crowned king in Uganda after bitter succession dispute**

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**Stakeholders demand stiffer action against counterfeit, adulterated products in Edo**

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# NEWS

## Four kidnappers to die...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

In a significant post-judgment observation, Justice Modu commended a private citizen whose CCTV footage played a crucial role in the investigation and speedy determination of the case.

The judge urged the Edo State Government to expand the deployment of CCTV cameras across markets, motor parks and other public institutions in the state, stressing their importance in crime

detection, prevention and enhancement of public safety.

The verdict is being regarded as a major milestone in Edo State's renewed judicial response to kidnapping and other violent crimes.

The Special Criminal Court was established by the Chief Judge of Edo State pursuant to the directive of Governor Monday Okpebholo as part of efforts to strengthen the state's criminal justice system and ensure faster determination of serious criminal cases.

## Okpebholo: APC will win 2027...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

He urged party members to close ranks and work collectively towards achieving the party's electoral objectives.

In his remarks, APC Chairman in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area, Sunny Ogbewe, said the governor's visit had boosted the morale of party members in the area.

Ogbewe described Ikpoba-Okha as one of the local government areas with the highest number of registered voters in Edo State, assuring that the APC would work to secure substantial votes for the party.

He said grassroots mobili-

sation had commenced in the local government and would be sustained through regular engagement with residents and party members.

Ogbewe commended Governor Okpebholo for projects and interventions in the area, saying the party would reciprocate by working towards achieving its electoral targets.

He also commended the Chairman of Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Council for supporting the administration's development agenda.

The governor's visit formed part of the APC's ongoing mobilisation activities ahead of the 2027 general elections.

## Benin residents react to Edo...

«CONTINUED FROM PG 1

response to kidnapping and other violent crimes.

One of the residents, Pa David Osonobun, said the judgment was significant because it demonstrated that cases involving serious crimes could be prosecuted and determined within a reasonable period.

According to him, "People want to see an end to the era when criminals are arrested and cases drag on for years without conclusion. A functioning justice system is important in the fight against insecurity."

For residents around the Vegetable Market, off Airport Road, where the incident occurred, the judgment was particularly significant because the victim was reportedly abducted in broad daylight in a busy commercial environment.

A resident of the area said the development should serve as a warning to criminals who believe that crowded places provide cover for their activities.

"We have lost too many lives to kidnapping and violent crimes. Every lawful effort that can help restore peace is welcome," the resident said.

Another resident, who described the court's decision as an indication that the authorities were taking violent crimes seriously, called for sustained collaboration among the judiciary, police, other security agencies and members of the

public.

He said residents must also remain vigilant and provide useful information to security agencies whenever they notice suspicious movements or activities.

For many residents, however, the significance of the judgment goes beyond the punishment imposed on the four convicts.

The speed with which the case progressed from investigation to trial and judgment has also attracted attention, particularly because the Special Criminal Court was established partly to address delays associated with the prosecution of kidnapping, cultism and other violent-crime cases.

Some residents therefore urged the authorities to sustain the tempo by ensuring that other pending cases receive expeditious attention while observing due process and the rights of accused persons.

They also stressed that convictions alone would not completely address insecurity, calling for stronger intelligence gathering, effective policing, improved community surveillance and measures to prevent young people from being recruited into criminal and cult groups.

The residents said the combined efforts of the government, security agencies, traditional institutions, community leaders and citizens remained necessary to make Benin City and other parts of Edo State safer.

## FG releases 2026 – 2028 approved textbooks, introduces QR tracking

OSEMUDIAMHEN FAITH

ABUJA

The Federal Government has released the final list of ranked and approved textbooks for Nigerian schools for the 2026 to 2028 academic sessions, introducing a QR code tracking system to monitor approved titles.

The Federal Ministry of Education announced this on Monday in a statement on its official X handle, signed by the Director, Press and Public Relations, Boriowo Folasade.

According to the ministry, the approved list covers Primary 1, Primary 4, Junior Secondary School 1 and Senior Secondary

School 1, following the completion of the first phase of the national textbook ranking exercise.

Each approved textbook now carries a unique Ranking/QR Tracking Code, which includes the title, author, publisher and year of publication, to enhance identification, monitoring and accountability.

The ministry said the new code system will strengthen transparency in the selection, procurement and utilisation of instructional materials.

"The introduction of the Ranking/QR Tracking Code represents an important step towards strengthening the monitoring and control of approved

instructional materials and ensuring greater transparency in their selection, procurement and utilisation," the ministry stated.

The exercise was conducted under the guidance of the Minister of Education, Dr. Maruf Tunji Alausa, and the Minister of State for Education, Prof Suwaiba Sa'id Ahmad, with final approval by the minister.

The ministry explained that generating and assigning unique codes to each textbook accounted for the time taken to complete and validate the lists.

It disclosed that the second phase of the exercise will cover Primary 2, Primary 5, JSS 2 and SS 2, with the same tracking

measures to be applied.

The ministry urged publishers, schools, education authorities, procurement agencies and other stakeholders to consult the official approved list before selecting or procuring textbooks for the affected classes.

It said the initiative is part of efforts to provide learners and teachers with quality, relevant and curriculum-aligned materials while improving transparency and accountability in textbook provision.

The full list of approved titles for 2026-2028, with their respective tracking codes, is accessible through the link provided by the ministry.



APC RALLY:

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, with other APC leaders during the All Progressives Congress (APC) mobilisation rally in Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area yesterday.

## FG seeks fresh \$1.5bn World Bank loans as debt hits N166.79trn

OSEMUDIAMHEN O. FAITH

ABUJA

The Federal Government has opened talks with the World Bank for three new loans totalling \$1.5 billion, as Nigeria's total public debt rose to a record N166.79 trillion at the end of June 2026.

Documents from the multilateral lender show the proposed facilities comprise three separate \$500 million credits for climate resilience, social protection and early childhood development.

The most advanced is a \$500 million additional financing for the Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes project, ACRReSAL. The World Bank Board is expected to consider it on October 29, 2026.

The facility will be implemented by the Federal Ministry of Environment and financed through the International Development Association, IDA, the Bank's concessional window.

If approved, it will raise the size of ACRReSAL from \$700 million to \$1.2 billion.

According to the document, "The Government of Nigeria has requested AF of \$500m to scale up demonstrated project results and strengthen the institutional, operational and financing arrangements needed to sustain integrated landscape management."

Of the amount, \$310 million is earmarked for dryland management, \$165 million for community climate resilience and \$25 million for institutional

strengthening and project management.

The project currently covers 19 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory, targeting land degradation, water insecurity and declining agricultural productivity.

The second facility is a \$500 million IDA credit for the Household Prosperity and Empowerment - Social Protection Project, HOPE-SP. It is at an early stage of preparation, with

technical design review scheduled for October 30, 2026, and Board approval tentatively fixed for March 16, 2027.

The Federal Ministry of Finance is listed as borrower, while the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction will implement it. The project will finance cash transfers, modernise the social registry and integrate the National Identification Number into the social protection system.

## Edo govt sets October 2 deadline for passport submission by 2027 intending pilgrims

ABDUL-KADIR ABDULLAH

The Edo State Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board has directed all registered intending pilgrims for the 2027 Hajj to submit their valid international passports on or before October 2, 2026, for visa processing.

The directive was contained in a circular signed by the Executive Secretary of the Board, Alhaji Eranga Abdulkabir Muhammadkabar.

According to the circular, in-

tending pilgrims are required to submit the hard copies of their valid international passports at the Board's office located at 2/3 Ugomosun Street, off Dumez Road, off Sapele Road, Benin City, Edo State.

The Board said the submission of passports was compulsory to enable it to commence the processing of the pilgrims' 2027 Hajj visas through the NUSUK Masha'ir Portal.

It said passport submission would commence immediately and close on October 2, 2026,

urging all registered intending pilgrims to comply with the directive within the stipulated period.

The Board advised intending pilgrims to take the directive seriously and submit their passports on or before the deadline to avoid delays or difficulties in the processing of their Hajj visas.

The Executive Secretary urged the intending pilgrims to ensure that their international passports are valid and submitted promptly as required for the visa processing exercise.

**NEWS**

# Police detain Education Commissioner, three others over Delta civil servant's death

By AJUWA VICTOR

**ASABA**

The Delta State Police Command has taken into custody the Commissioner for Secondary Education, Dr. Kingsley Ashibogwu, and three other suspects as part of ongoing investiga-

**...Intensify manhunt for two key suspects**

tions into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Unity Ekpevbughe Adeda, a Deputy Director in the State Ministry of Secondary Education.

The development was contained in a statement issued by the Delta State Police Public Relations Officer, SP Bright

Edafe, in Asaba.

According to Edafe, the latest arrests bring to five the number of persons currently in police custody in connection with the investigation.

He disclosed that the command had also intensified efforts to locate two other persons described as key suspects

whose presence is required to further the investigation.

They are Mrs. Clementine Ufuoma, Director of Basic and Secondary Education, and Mr. Clement Apia, driver to the Commissioner for Secondary Education.

Edafe said the police had consequently launched a manhunt for the two suspects, urging them to make themselves

available to the command without further delay.

The Commissioner of Police, Delta State Command, CP Samuel E. Erale, psc, mnips, assured that the investigation would be conducted thor-

oughly, impartially and professionally.

He also assured the family of the deceased and members of the public that due process would be followed, stressing that anyone found culpable would be brought to justice in accordance with the law.

## PIND, Okomu empower 400 smallholder farmers in Edo

RICHARD EWEWKA

**UDO**

The Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), in partnership with Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc (OOPC), has empowered 400 smallholder farmers in Edo State under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Livelihood Project.

The beneficiaries, drawn from Udo and 16 other communities around Okomu Oil Palm Company, received training and farm inputs aimed at improving agricultural productivity, strengthening livelihoods and creating sustainable economic opportunities.

Economic Development Manager of PIND, Mr. Misan Sillo, disclosed this at a Green Field Day organised for farmers under the PIND/OOPC CSR Livelihood Project.

Sillo, who was represented by PIND's Senior Adviser, Mr. Tuoyo Blessing, said the initiative was designed to equip farmers with technical knowledge and improved agricultural practices through local service providers.

He, however, stressed that training alone might not necessarily translate into the adoption of improved farming practices, noting that farmers needed to see such practices demonstrated while also having access to quality inputs, services and markets.

According to him, the Green Field Day provided an opportunity for farmers to move from the classroom to the farm and practically engage with improved

agricultural practices, including good agricultural practices and climate-smart approaches.

"We want farmers to leave here not only with new knowledge but with a clearer understanding of what they can do differently on their own farms and where they can access the services and inputs required to do so," he said.

Sillo explained that PIND's approach was centred on strengthening the agricultural market system rather than creating dependency among beneficiaries.

He said the foundation worked with technical and business service providers, input suppliers, financial institutions, market actors and government institutions to create an enabling environment where farmers could sustainably access the services and opportunities required to grow their businesses.

He encouraged the beneficiaries to adopt and replicate the improved farming practices demonstrated during the field day, saying this would enhance productivity, profitability and resilience.

Sillo assured that PIND would continue to promote farmers' access to knowledge, quality inputs, finance, markets and sustainable technical and business development services.

Also speaking, the Managing Director of Okomu Oil Palm Company Plc., Dr. Graham Hefer, said the company commenced its smallholder farmer programme in 2021 as part of efforts to empower youths and residents of its host communities.

**MEETING:**

Senior Special Assistant to the President on Community Engagement, North West, Abudullahi Tanko-Yakasai (L), with the Minister of Works, David Umahi, after a meeting between the Minister, SSA to the President and National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) on the ongoing Infrastructure Projects across the Country, in Abuja.

## Kano state ranks first in 2026 NECO

AJUWA VICTOR

**ASABA**

Former Chairman of the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) and Chairman, Board of Trustees of Trustfund Pensions Plc, Dr. Ngozi Olejeme, has commended the Asagba of Asaba, His Royal Majesty, Prof. Epiphany Chigbogu Azinge, SAN, for his visionary leadership and commitment to the transformation and development of Asaba Kingdom.

Olejeme, who is also Global Vice President-General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo Worldwide and National Coordinator of the Tinubu Torch Bearers (TTB), said the 14th Asagba of Asaba had demonstrated that traditional institutions could serve as catalysts for social and economic development while preserving the cultural heritage and identity of their people.

Speaking on the monarch's achievements since ascending the throne, Olejeme said Prof. Azinge had placed community development, public welfare and institutional advancement at the heart of his reign, transforming the traditional institution into a platform for people-oriented initiatives and sustainable development.

According to her, the monarch's distinguished career as a constitutional scholar, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, former Director-General of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and respected academic has significantly shaped his leadership style, which she described as inclusive, knowledge-driven and development-oriented.

She particularly commended the Asagba's interventions in the healthcare sector, citing the donation of dialysis machines,

support for the establishment of a Drug Rehabilitation Centre, improvements in primary healthcare services and the provision of ambulance services to strengthen emergency medical response within the kingdom.

Olejeme also praised the monarch's commitment to education through scholarship and bursary programmes, as well as his support for institutions including Dennis Osadebay University and the Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba.

She noted that the Asagba's

youth empowerment initiatives, covering skills acquisition, entrepreneurship and vocational training, were helping to equip young people with the capacity for economic self-reliance and productive engagement.

The former NSITF Board Chairman equally applauded the monarch's interventions for widows and other vulnerable members of the community, describing them as evidence of compassionate leadership and a commitment to inclusive development.

## Nigeria, Germany deepen partnership to boost steel industry

**ABUJA**

The Director, World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Nigeria Office, Dr. Oluwatobiloba Moody, has described Nigeria's creative and digital economy as a major national asset with growing global influence.

Moody, who spoke at a National Seminar on Copyright, Cybersecurity and Nigeria's Creative and Digital Economy in Abuja, said Nigeria's Afrobeats had continued to dominate global music charts, while Nollywood was redefin-

ing the cinema industry internationally.

The seminar, organised by the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), was themed: "Protecting Nigeria's Creative Economy and Digital Infrastructure Against Online Piracy."

It brought together stakeholders from law enforcement, financial intelligence, telecommunications, broadcasting and the creative industry to examine the growing threat posed by online piracy and develop strategies for tackling it.

Moody said digital trans-

formation had fundamentally changed the nature and scale of copyright infringement, stressing that piracy had moved beyond the traditional physical and street-level distribution of illicit content.

"Piracy is no longer a physical and street-level nuisance, but it is a sophisticated, borderless enterprise intertwined with cybersecurity risks."

"Today, illicit digital platforms do more than just steal content; they expose users to malware, facilitate identity concealment and disrupt the integrity of our digital infrastructure," he said.

## Delta widows back Tinubu, Oborevwo, APC candidates

AJUWA VICTOR

**ASABA**

Widows across the three senatorial districts of Delta State have declared their unalloyed support for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Governor Sheriff Oborevwo and other candidates of the All Progressives Congress (APC) ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The women made their commitment at the flag-off of the Widows Support Group for Tinubu and Oborevwo, held at the City Boys Secretariat in Asaba.

Speaking at the event, Senior Policy Adviser and State Coordinator of the Renewed Hope Ambassadors, Rt. Hon. Funkekeme Solomon, charged members of the group to take

the message of the Renewed Hope and MORE agendas to their respective communities.

Funkekeme urged the women to acquaint themselves with government policies and programmes before communicating them to the electorate, stressing the need for responsible political mobilisation devoid of abuse or personal attacks on opponents.

"This is not merely a gathering. We are coming together to form a support group that will mobilise and work for the re-election of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Governor Sheriff Oborevwo and other candidates of the APC," he said.

Also speaking, Chief Adviser to the Governor, Chief Ighoyota Amori, said the support of women across the state would contribute significantly to the APC's victory in the 2027 elections.

## NEWS

# Credit guarantee scheme unlocked N46.95bn in loans - Tinubu

## ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu says the National Credit Guarantee Company (NCGC) has helped unlock N46.95 billion in loans during its first year of operations.

Tinubu disclosed this on Monday in a post on his official 'X' handle, @official-ABAT, saying NCGC issued N1.59 billion in guarantees to

participating financial institutions.

He said the guarantees enabled the institutions to extend loans to Nigerians, with every N1 in guarantees helping unlock about N2.17 in credit.

The President said the initiative formed part of his administration's efforts to move Nigeria towards a credit-based economy and broaden access to formal financing for house-

holds and small businesses.

"When I sought your mandate, I promised to move Nigeria towards a credit-based economy and to establish a loan guarantee scheme that would help small businesses overcome the barriers that keep them from finance."

Tinubu said the scheme addressed a major obstacle facing viable businesses, whose

access to loans is often constrained by inadequate collateral or limited credit histories.

Under the arrangement, NCGC shares part of the lending risk with participating financial institutions, giving them greater confidence to extend credit to businesses and borrowers they might otherwise decline.

He said NCGC currently

operates through 19 financial institutions, comprising 13 commercial banks, three microfinance banks and three development finance institutions.

According to Tinubu, 67,512 borrowers across 25 states and the Federal Capital Territory have received NCGC-backed credit, including 11,374 women.

He added that 33.5 per cent of the beneficiaries were first-time formal borrowers, giving more than 22,000 Nigerians their first entry into the formal credit system.

"Each successful repayment strengthens that record and can make the next loan easier to secure," he said, highlighting the importance of building credit histories.

## 2027: INEC Chairman warns staff against partisanship as PVC collection begins october

CAROLINE AMEH

## ABUJA

The Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Prof. Joash Amupitan, has warned electoral officers against partisanship, negligence and breaches of professional ethics ahead of the 2027 General Election.

Amupitan issued the warning on Monday in Kaduna while opening the North West Zonal Interactive Meeting with Staff and Readiness Assessment for the 2027 elections.

Addressing Electoral Officers, heads of departments and senior administrative staff from the zone, the INEC chairman said the Commission would enforce its code of conduct and would not tolerate conduct capable of undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

"Partisan leaning, administrative negligence, or compromised ethics will not be tolerated," he said, adding that protecting INEC's institutional integrity was non negotiable.

Amupitan said the conduct

of officials at polling units could determine how voters perceive the Commission, warning that administrative lapses could provide room for disinformation and deepen voter apathy.

"When a polling unit opens late, when an officer displays nonchalance or perceived bias, or when technical glitches are met with silence, we inadvertently validate the cynics, deepen voter apathy, and fuel disinformation," he said.

He reminded electoral officials of the oath of loyalty and neutrality required under Section 26 of the Electoral Act 2026, stressing that officials must carry out their duties without preference for any candidate or political party.

"The question must never be 'Who will benefit from this decision?' but always 'What does the law require me to do?'" he stated.

The INEC chairman further directed staff to avoid informal shortcuts and follow procedures contained in the Electoral Act 2026, the Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections 2026 and other approved guidelines.

## Stakeholders express concerns over self-service fuel stations

## ABUJA

Stakeholders have expressed concerns over the future of petrol attendants whose jobs could be affected by the introduction of self-service fuel dispensing in the country.

The stakeholders were reacting to the model emerging in Nigeria, with Sunbeth Energies deploying the system in Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

A Public Analyst, Mr Jide Ojo, in an interview with newsmen on Monday in Abuja, said self-service dispensing could help address complaints of customers receiving less fuel than they paid for.

He, however, said that there was a possible downside in terms

of job losses.

According to him, some large filling stations employ as many as 30 fuel attendants, many of whose duties could become unnecessary if motorists routinely dispense fuel themselves.

"It is a good development because nobody is cheating you of the true value of the fuel that is dispensed in your vehicle, but it will create unemployment in the country," he said.

An economist, Dr. Aliyu Ilias, said that self-service fuel dispensing had been used in Europe and other parts of the world for decades.

He said Nigeria's growing use of electronic payments could make the system easier to implement, but questioned whether the country was psychologically and institutionally prepared for the transition.



## NEWS CONFERENCE:

From left: Representative of Peoples Redemption Party Enugu, Mr Chinedu Ike; factional chairman National Democratic Congress Enugu, Dr John Paul; Chairman Inter Party Advisory Council (IPAC), Mr Afam Ani and representative of Because of Our Tomorrow Party, Mr Bullock Ikenga, during a news conference to declare the Just concluded Enugu State Local Government elections free and fair in Enugu on Monday.

## 2027: NGICE 2026 to mobilise Nigerian diaspora for Tinubu's re-election - Okiro

## ABUJA

The Local Organising Committee (LOC) of the Nigerian-German Investment and Cultural Expo (NGICE 2026) says the event will serve as a diaspora mobilisation campaign in support of President Bola Tinubu's 2027 re-election bid.

The Chairman of the LOC, Sir Mike Okiro, a retired Inspector-General of Police, disclosed this when he led a delegation of the organising committee on an update visit to Dr Warrens Augusta, Permanent Secretary, Political and Economic Affairs, Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation

(OSGF) in Abuja.

Okiro urged relevant government institutions to leverage the large population of Nigerians living in Germany to strengthen diaspora engagement and national development.

He said the NGICE 2026 would provide an avenue for Nigerians in Germany to participate actively in discussions on Nigeria's political, economic and cultural development.

"NGICE will act as a catalyst for diaspora mobilisation campaign for President Bola Tinubu's 2027 re-election bid," Okiro said.

He expressed confidence that the expo would be successfully hosted, noting that the OSGF had played a supportive role toward the preparations for the event scheduled to take place in

Berlin, Germany.

Nigeria news updates

Okiro said the organising committee was particularly encouraged by the commitment of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Sen. George Akume, to lead the Federal Government delegation to the expo.

According to him, the participation of the Federal Government would further enhance the significance of the event and create opportunities for Nigerians and German investors to explore areas of mutual economic interest.

"One major aspect that gives the LOC courage is that the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Sen. George Akume, accepted our request to lead the

delegation of the Federal Government to the expo," he said.

Also speaking, Amb. Chiello Ojirika, Coordinator of NGICE 2026 and Nigerian Cultural Ambassador to Germany, said the visit was intended to brief the Permanent Secretary on preparations and new developments concerning the expo.

Ojirika, who is also the Director-General of Salute Nigeria Initiative, described the engagement as a continuation of earlier consultations between members of the NGICE team and officials of the OSGF.

He said the expo was designed to serve as an international image booster for Nigeria by showcasing the country's economic opportunities, cultural heritage and entrepreneurial capacity.

## Bagudu urges media to probe budget insertions, support Tinubu's economic reforms

CAROLINE AMEH

## ABUJA

Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Senator Abubakar Atiade, has urged the media to deepen its scrutiny of Nigeria's budget process and support informed public debate on the Federal Government's economic reforms.

Bagudu made the call while

speaking at the Senate Press Corps Capacity-Building Workshop, organised around the theme, "Leveraging Legislative Oversight and Media Collaboration to Safeguard the National Budget from Unlawful Insertion."

The minister said effective scrutiny of the national budget should go beyond identifying controversial provisions to examining the constitutional process, rationale and development needs

behind individual allocations.

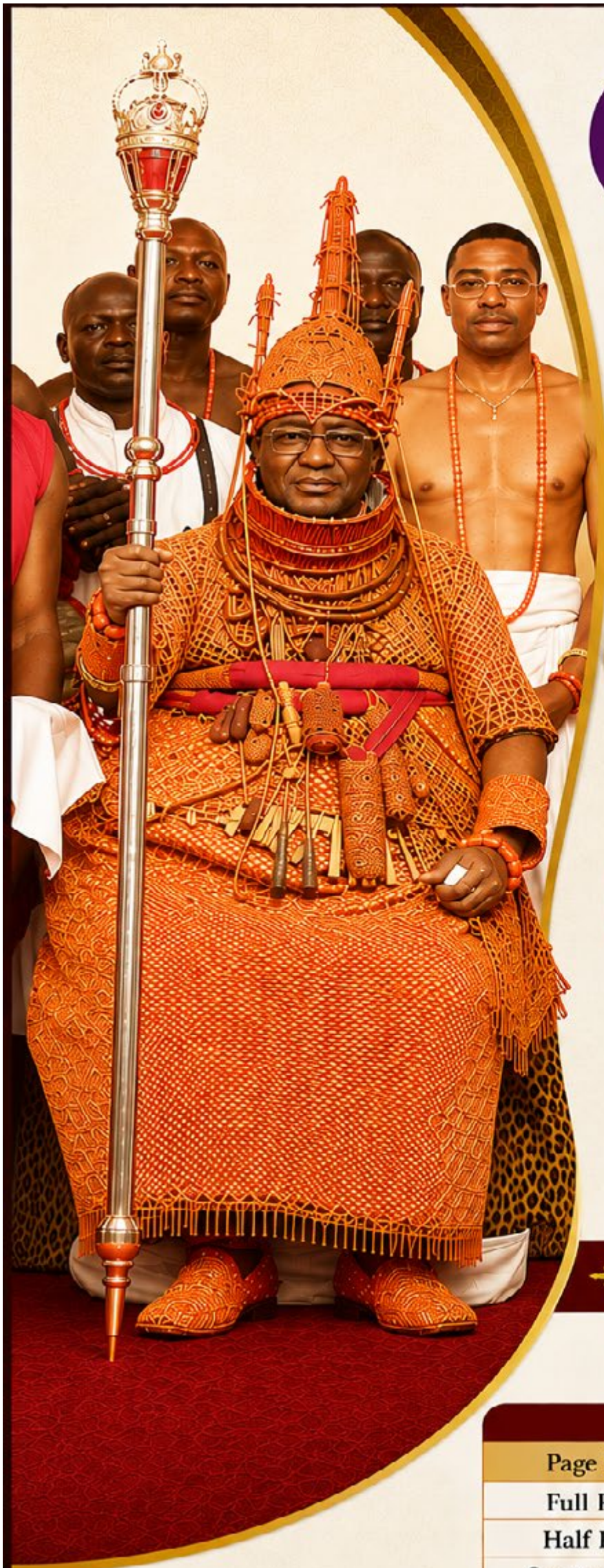
He urged journalists to investigate budget provisions thoroughly and ask relevant questions before reaching conclusions about alleged irregularities.

According to Bagudu, Nigeria's budget debate should begin with a fundamental question: "What is the national budget, and what should it be?"

He said Nigeria's limited fiscal space, relative to its population and development needs, required

a broader national conversation on revenue mobilisation and the level of public investment needed to achieve the country's development aspirations.

Bagudu linked the debate to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and the administration's ambition to build a more prosperous and inclusive economy, noting that the country's long-term development framework under Agenda 2050 also provides context for its fiscal choices.



# THE NIGERIAN OBSERVER

THAT THE PEOPLE MAY KNOW

## OBA EWUARE II AT 10

### A DECADE OF ROYAL EXCELLENCE

*Celebrating the*

**10th Coronation Anniversary  
& Birthday Anniversary**

*of*

**HIS ROYAL MAJESTY**

OMO N'Oba N'edo Uku Akpolokpolo

**OBA EWUARE II, CFR**  
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# Tax Ombud not for evading lawful payments –chief executive

## KADUNA

The Chief Executive of the Office of the Tax Ombud, Dr John Nwabueze, has warned taxpayers against using the agency as an avenue to evade or delay payment of legitimate taxes and other statutory obligations.

Nwabueze said the Office of the Tax Ombud was established to provide an independent and

impartial avenue for taxpayers to seek redress over administrative, procedural and service-related issues in tax and revenue administration.

He stated this on Tuesday at the North-West Zonal Stakeholders' Engagement Meeting with tax and revenue authorities, business groups and professional bodies in Kaduna.

According to him, the agency was established under the

Federal Tax Ombud Act as an independent, impartial and non-judicial institution to receive and review complaints arising from taxes, levies, regulatory fees and charges, customs, excise and duties.

Nwabueze said, "It is important to clarify what we do not do. The Tax Ombud is not a mechanism for cancelling legitimate tax liabilities merely because the taxpayer does not

wish to pay.

"We do not make tax policy. We do not encourage non-compliance. We do not shield taxpayers from their lawful obligations and we are certainly not the courts."

He explained that the jurisdiction of the office was principally concerned with operational, procedural and administrative aspects of tax and revenue administration.

"When a taxpayer has a dispute, the first question is simply not whether the tax is payable. It is also whether the process through which that obligation to tax is assessed has been fair, lawful, transparent and consistent," he said.

Nwabueze added that taxpayers were expected to comply with lawful internal dispute-resolution procedures before approaching the Tax Ombud, where such procedures were required.

He said the agency would intervene where operational, procedural, administrative or service-related issues required independent attention.

"Pay what the law requires, know your rights, and where the administration of that obligation becomes an issue, seek redress," Nwabueze stated.

The Tax Ombud boss disclosed that the agency had introduced a digital complaint portal, case management system, toll-free call centre and other channels to make it easier for taxpayers to lodge complaints.

"Our services are free of charge to taxpayers. Additionally, the law allows the Tax Ombud to institute a lawsuit on behalf of the taxpayer. That service is also free of charge to taxpayers," he said.

Nwabueze said the engagement was aimed at moving beyond identifying challenges in tax administration to developing practical solutions that would improve relations between taxpayers and revenue authorities.

He urged stakeholders to address both the responsibilities of taxpayers to comply with the law and those of revenue

authorities to administer taxes fairly.

He said, "How can we ensure that rural taxpayers, small businesses, informal traders and people with disabilities have effective access to information and redress?"

"How can complaint data be used to identify recurring administrative weaknesses and improve the tax system?"

He also called for greater collaboration among professional bodies, the media, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in promoting taxpayer awareness and compliance.

Meanwhile, the Kaduna State Commissioner for Finance, Mohammed Ibrahim Tanko, said the North-West generated about N916bn in tax revenue between 2023 and 2025, with Kaduna contributing about N220bn.

Tanko, who represented Governor Uba Sani at the event, attributed Kaduna's revenue performance to stakeholder engagement and voluntary compliance rather than aggressive enforcement.

He said, "We have done that without unnecessary and brutal follow-up to people. We were able to achieve this through detailed stakeholder engagement that led to voluntary compliance by our people."

"It is a clear and significant indication that you can generate enough revenue that you require without necessarily doing any brutal enforcement."

The commissioner appealed to the Tax Ombud to establish a zonal office in Kaduna, saying its presence would enhance access to the agency by taxpayers and revenue authorities in the North-West.



## NEWS CONFERENCE:

From left: Director-General, DAWN Commission, Dr Seye Oyeleye; representative of the family, Mr Taiwo Adewole and Secretary General, South West Governors Forum, Mrs Naiom Olabode, during a news conference on the forthcoming 70th Birthday of the former Governor of Ondo State, Rotimi Akeredolu in Ibadan

# Crude oil refinery owners seek end to petroleum products imports

## LAGOS

The Crude Oil Refinery-Owners Association of Nigeria has called for an end to unnecessary petroleum-product imports, urging the Federal Government to maximise domestic refining capacity and position Nigeria as a major exporter of refined products in Africa.

The Chairman of CORAN, Momoh Oyarekhua, made the call while presenting the association's 10-point agenda at the 3rd Nigeria Oil Refining Summit held at the Eko Hotel, Lagos, on Monday.

Oyarekhua said petroleum-sector reforms should focus on optimising existing refineries, improving infrastructure and creating an export-oriented refining industry.

He said, "For decades, Nigeria exported crude oil and imported refined products. Today, we in CORAN have changed that story by ensuring that our natural resources create jobs, industrial growth, energy security and prosperity for Nigerians."

"Our crude must increasingly power our refineries. Our refineries must supply our market. And Nigeria must ultimately become a refining hub for Africa. That should be the destination of petroleum-sector reform."

Oyarekhua said domestic refineries must have reliable access to crude oil to operate efficiently.

He also called for greater investment in pipelines and stor-

age infrastructure.

"Despite our abundant crude resources, some domestic refineries continue to face difficulties accessing crude oil on commercially viable terms."

"The country must now support the refinery. Support the pipeline. Support the storage terminals," Oyarekhua said.

He said increased domestic

refining would create jobs, retain foreign exchange and support petrochemical and manufacturing industries.

"Refining for value means more than producing fuel. It means retaining foreign exchange, creating jobs, developing local expertise, supporting petrochemicals and manufacturing, and capturing greater

economic value within Nigeria," he said.

As part of its agenda, the association called for the full institutionalisation of the Naira-for-Crude initiative and a domestic crude pricing template that reflects crude quality, delivery points and domestic evacuation costs.

It also called for the elimination of petroleum-product imports as domestic refining capacity becomes sufficient to meet national demand and generate surpluses for export.

## How Kaduna raked in N220bn tax through dialogue – Finance commissioner

## KADUNA

The Kaduna State Government says it generated about N220bn in tax revenue between 2023 and 2025 without resorting to "brutal enforcement" against taxpayers.

The Commissioner for Finance, Mohammed Ibrahim Tanko, disclosed this on Tuesday while representing Governor Uba Sani at the North-West Zonal Stakeholders' Engagement Meeting on "Promoting Fairness in Tax and Revenue Administration", organised by the Office of the Tax Ombud in Kaduna.

Tanko said the North-West geopolitical zone generated about N916bn in tax revenue during the period, with Kaduna accounting for about N220bn.

He attributed the revenue performance to sustained engagement with taxpayers, businesses and other stakeholders, which he said encouraged vol-

untary compliance.

"We have done that without unnecessary and brutal follow-up to people. We were able to achieve this through detailed stakeholder engagement that led to voluntary compliance by our people."

"It is a clear and significant indication that you can generate enough revenue that you require without necessarily doing any brutal enforcement."

"If you insist and continue to encourage stakeholder engagement, you will be able to get much more voluntary compliance from people," Tanko said.

The commissioner called on the Office of the Tax Ombud to establish a zonal office in Kaduna to serve taxpayers and revenue authorities across the North-West.

He said the presence of the Ombud's office in the state would deepen dialogue among government, businesses, professionals and other stakeholders

and improve tax administration.

Tanko further said the Kaduna State Government had changed the manner in which internally generated revenue was deployed, with greater emphasis on infrastructure and other development projects.

He said taxpayers should be able to see tangible benefits from the taxes they paid.

"When this administration came, it was not sure whether the taxpayers would be happy to pay their taxes only for these taxes to be utilised to pay civil servants."

"The governor decided to change the programme so that the revenues collected in the state would be used for infrastructure that would stand the test of time," he said.

Speaking at the event, the Chief Executive Officer of the Office of the Tax Ombud, Dr John Nwabueze, said the theme underscored the need for a balanced relationship between taxpayers and revenue authorities.

## Senate demands urgent response to flooding, cost-of-living crisis

## ABUJA

The Senate on Tuesday expressed concern over the impact of flooding on communities, farmers and families across the country, urging governments at all levels to improve disaster preparedness and relief efforts.

President of the Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio, spoke during the resumption of plenary, where he also highlighted the rising cost of living and its impact on Nigerian households.

Akpabio called for early preparation for floods, adequate protection of vulnerable communities and prompt delivery of relief materials to victims. "A warning must lead to preparation, preparation must lead to protection, and relief must reach the people for whom it is intended," Akpabio said.

He said the effects of flooding went beyond the immediate destruction of homes and farmlands, warning that the loss of agricultural produce could worsen food insecurity.

"When a farmer loses his harvest, our country loses

food it can ill afford to spare. When a family loses its home, the nation has a stake in helping that family rise again," he stated.

The Senate President commended agencies and individuals involved in emergency response but urged governments at all levels to respond to disasters with greater speed and preparedness.

On the economy, Akpabio said the Senate must remain attentive to the realities confronting ordinary Nigerians as lawmakers consider economic reforms and policies.

"Many Nigerians continue to bear a very heavy cost of living," he said, stressing that "policymakers must not lose sight of how economic conditions affect ordinary Nigerians."

He cited rising food costs and the difficulties faced by unemployed graduates as examples of the economic pressures confronting Nigerians.

Akpabio said the experiences of citizens outside the National Assembly should remain central to lawmakers' deliberations as the Senate resumes its legislative activities.

**NEWS**

# 2027: Akpabio warns candidates against violence, intimidation

**ABUJA**

President of the Senate, Senator Godswill Akpabio, on Tuesday warned politicians and candidates contesting the 2027 general elections against

violence, intimidation and divisive campaigns.

He gave the warning as the Senate resumed plenary, urging political actors to conduct their campaigns with restraint and allow Nigerians to freely choose their leaders.

Akpabio said candidates should vigorously present their policies and visions without turning communities against one another or exploiting religious, regional and other divisions.

He said, "We must reject violence and intimidation, and resist the falsehoods that travel swiftly and leave distrust in their wake. No

electoral prize is worth a Nigerian life. No victory deserves celebration if it leaves the nation wounded."

Akpabio noted that campaigns for the 2027 elections had already commenced, with political parties choosing their candidates and citizens preparing to assess competing visions.

He urged candidates to

engage in robust debate while remembering that the country would remain united after the elections.

"Those who seek office need not see eye to eye to walk hand in hand as Nigerians. We can contend without setting community against community, faith against faith or one part of our republic against another," he said.

The Senate President also charged lawmakers to set an example by maintaining decorum and discharging their legislative responsibilities despite the political activities ahead of the elections.

"This Senate must show the way. Within these walls sit men and women of different parties, regions and convictions, entrusted with the representation of one republic," he said.

Akpabio said lawmakers would continue to disagree on issues but must conduct their affairs with dignity and remain focused on their mandate.

"The people sent us here to serve until the end of our mandate. There is work before us, and we shall remain at our posts despite the campaigns," he said.

He urged politicians to approach the election season with restraint and responsibility.

"Let us campaign with honour, debate with conviction and serve with humility. We have returned to this Chamber because Nigeria's work continues. By God's grace, we shall keep faith with her, and with the people who sent us here," Akpabio said.

**NEWS CONFERENCE:**

Director of Special Duties, Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC), Dr Chitu Princewill; Head of Africa Raw Materials Summit 2026 and Chairman Local Organising Committee (LOC), Ms Rachael Kotso; Director-General of RMRDC, Prof. Nnanyelugo Martin Ike-Muonso; Director, Chemical and Pharmaceutical Materials, Mr Abubakar Kollere and Director of the Directorate of Corporate Affairs (DCA), Mrs. Chinyere Nnamdi-Anum, during the news conference on the forthcoming 2nd edition of Africa Raw Materials Summit 2026, in Abuja

## Training for chairmen, councillors, guide for good governance, says Ebonyi Council Chairman

Maxwell Okechukwu

**ABAKALI**

The Executive Chairman, Afikpo Local Government Council, Engr Timothy Nwachi has described the training organized for local government chairmen, councillors and other senior officers of that tier of government in Ebonyi State as a compass that will lead the state on the path of good governance.

Engr Nwachi spoke on the sidelines of a recent training workshop organized for the newly inaugurated local government Council Chairmen and other principal officers in the state by the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters.

The Afikpo council boss urged his colleagues and other participants to practicalise what had been learned in their respective council areas by prioritizing people-oriented project.

He expressed gratitude to Governor Francis Ogbonna Nwifurru for creating the opportunity for them to pass through the three days intensive training program which has increased their knowledge with regard to project management and leadership.

He however promised to serve his people diligently to ensure they gain the expected dividends of democracy.

On her part, the Executive Chairman of Izzi Local Government Council and ALGON Chairman Ebonyi State, Hon. Mrs. Helene Aduga, described the initiative of the training as enervating as it would arm the council officials with the

right mindset to deliver for their respective council areas.

She commended Governor Nwifurru for the opportunity to share in the knowledge imparted which according to her would guide the grassroots administrators in the right direction for the benefit of the people.

"The programme has taught us to be prudent in the management of councils resources. To me, that's the most important lesson because when we do that faithfully, discipline and sanity would have started from grassroots level and it will cascade upwards".

The state Governor, Rt.Hon Francis Ogbonna Nwifurru had at the opening of the training workshop charged the Council Chairmen to focus their decision and actions towards achieving good governance.

The Governor warned them against acts of self gratification and unnecessary politicking, advising that such behaviour would only cause them to lose focus and ultimately lead to poor performance.

He however urged them to take lessons learned seriously and deploy same in the course of their assignments.

The three days training workshop was organized by the Ministry of Local government and Chieftaincy Matters for the newly Inaugurated Council Chairmen, Vice Chairmen, Head of personnel Management, Treasurers, Planning, Research and Statistics across the various local government areas including the Development Center Coordinators in Ebonyi State.

## Etsako West Chairman hands over 3 suspected drug traffickers to NDLEA

Lamai Cassius

**AUCHI**

The Executive Chairman of Etsako West Local Government, Hon. Romeo Aloaye Omoike, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to combating illicit drug trafficking in the council area.

He stated this during the handover of a set of three suspects arrested for alleged drug trafficking to officials of the

National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in Auchi.

According to the Chairman, the prosecution of those arrested, if established in court, will mark another important step in tackling drug-related crimes in Etsako West.

He assured the NDLEA of the local government's continued drive to dismantle drug networks, noting that some of those involved in the trade come from outside the local government to target communities within the area. He also

cautioned that young people who consume such substances often do not understand the grave implications for their mental and physical health.

The latest operation was carried out at a warehouse in Ayua community by operatives of the Edo State Security Corps (ESSC), alongside the Chief Security Officer to the Chairman.

The suspects were identified as Kosi Suchukwu, 20; Arinze Chukwu, 20; and Onah Collette, 34, all from Enugu State.

Items recovered during the raid include a quantity of substance suspected to be crystal methamphetamine, popularly known as ICE or "white", cash totaling ₦2,824,150, and electronic transfer records amounting to about ₦6 million allegedly linked to drug payments.

Preliminary findings revealed that two of the suspects were allegedly brought to Ayua to run the operation, while Mrs. Collette and her husband, who is currently at large, are alleged to be the owners.

## APC donates N52m to families of deceased Niger miners, survivors

**MINNA**

The All Progressives Congress has donated N52 million to the survivors and families of the 37 miners who died in the custody of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps in Niger State.

Niger State Governor, Umaru Bago, disclosed this on Tuesday when he received the National Working Committee of the party, led by its National Chairman, Professor Nentawe Yilwatda, on a condolence visit over the inci-

dent.

Bago appreciated the APC leadership for the visit and the financial support to the affected families and survivors.

He said the state committee, headed by his Deputy Governor, Mr Yakubu Garba, in collaboration with the Emir of Minna, Alhaji Farouk Bahago, would ensure that the donation reached the intended beneficiaries.

Earlier, Yilwatda expressed the condolences of the APC to the government and people of Niger over the incident.

He described the situation as a difficult moment for the state, noting that Niger had recently faced several security challenges.

"This is not a good moment for the country, especially Niger State.

"Recently, you've been bedevilled by so many challenges, especially security threats, but we can assure you that our hearts and prayers are with you.

"For the affected families, may God strengthen and comfort them in this challenging period. All this will pass away," he said.

Yilwatda said that the party believed that evil would not prevail over the goodness of the people.

He commended Bago for his handling of the incident and assured him of the party's support for his administration.

The national chairman thereafter led members of the NWC to the palace of the Emir of Minna for a similar condolence visit.

Umar-Bahago thanked the APC leadership for the visit and financial support to the families affected by the incident.

# Atiku seeks wage increase amid N1400/litre fuel

**ABUJA**

Former Vice President and presidential candidate of the African Democratic Congress, Atiku Abubakar, has called on President Bola Tinubu to immediately raise the national minimum wage, arguing that the current N70,000 wage has been eroded by rising costs of fuel, food, transportation and housing.

Atiku, in a statement issued by the Director of Strategic Communications of the ADC Presidential Campaign Council, Phrank Shaibu, said workers were being forced to cope with a sharp decline in their

purchasing power despite the increase in the statutory minimum wage.

He challenged the Federal Government to agree to what he described as a substantial wage increase that reflects prevailing living costs.

Recall that the Federal Government raised the minimum wage from N30,000 to N70,000 in July 2024 after negotiations with organised labour.

Tinubu also said at the time that the wage would be reviewed after three years.

However, Atiku argued that the increase had failed to adequately protect workers from the effects of rising prices.

"At N1,400 a litre, the entire N70,000 monthly minimum wage buys just 50 litres of petrol. What does the worker take home to feed the children? What pays the rent? What gets that worker back to work on Monday?" the statement read.

Atiku compared the purchasing power of the old and current wage levels, saying that at the April 2023 national average petrol price of N254.06 per litre, N30,000 could pur-

chase about 118 litres, whereas N70,000 at N1,400 per litre would purchase about 50 litres.

"The payslip has grown, but the fuel it can buy has more than halved. Tinubu has given workers a larger number and left them with a smaller life. That is hardship dressed up as a wage increase," he added.

His comments come amid renewed pressure over petrol prices and the wider cost of living.

Recent reports put petrol prices at about N1,400 per litre in Lagos and Abuja, with higher prices recorded in parts of northern Nigeria.

The development has intensified concerns about the effect of fuel costs on household budgets and transportation.

The statement also criticised the removal of the petrol subsidy, arguing that the policy was implemented before adequate protection was put in

place for working families.

"The government pulled away the floor, offered workers a flimsy umbrella and now applauds itself while the rain beats down on them," Atiku said.

According to him, the impact of petrol prices extends beyond the filling station because higher energy and transportation costs feed into the prices of food and other essential commodities.

## Police arrest two over killing of officer's wife in Gombe

**GOMBE**

The Gombe State Police Command has arrested two suspects in connection with the armed robbery and killing of the wife of a serving police officer at Wuro Shie Quarters, Gombe.

The suspects, identified as 20-year-old Muhammad Bashir Sale, alias "Full", and 18-year-old Musa Sale Ahmad, alias "Abba", were arrested on Saturday, September 26, 2026, following the incident.

The command disclosed this in a statement issued by the Police Public Relations Officer, DSP Buhari Abdullahi.

According to the statement, the incident occurred at about 4:35 am on September 26, when unidentified persons armed with machetes and cutlasses stormed the residence of

Inspector Salisu Waziri, who is attached to the Safer Highway Patrol.

The assailants reportedly attempted to rob Waziri's wife, Mrs Aishatu Salisu, of her mobile phone.

The police said the victim raised the alarm during the attack, prompting one of the assailants to stab her with a machete before fleeing the scene and leaving the handset behind.

The statement read, "Upon receipt of the report, the Pantami Divisional Patrol Team immediately mobilised to the scene and rushed the victim to the Federal Teaching Hospital, Gombe, where she was unfortunately certified dead."

Following the incident, the command said it commenced an investigation and intensified efforts to identify and ap-

**SYMPOSIUM:**

From left: Secretariat Director, Core Group Partners Project (CGPP), Dr Lami Samaila; National Coordinator, Rabies Elimination Program Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Livestock Development (FMLD), Dr George Uzoaga; Permanent Secretary, FMLD, Dr Chinyere Akubue; Cluster Lead, WHO EPR, Dr Alex Chimbaru and the Chairperson, Nigeria Veterinary Medical Association FCT Chapter, Dr Chinnaemeka Joe-Iruobe, during the National Symposium on Rabies Elimination to commemorate World Rabies Day 2026, in Abuja on Monday

## Panic as Ogun teenager declared missing after eight days

**ABEOKUTA**

The family of a teenager, Imole Ilesanmi, has raised the alarm over her whereabouts after she reportedly went missing in the Agbado area of Ogun State.

Imole was said to have gone missing around 3pm on Sunday, September 20, 2026, after she left her family home.

Speaking exclusively with PUNCH Metro on Sunday, Imole's father said she was at home when he asked her to prepare food for him.

He said the family later learnt that she planned to visit a cleric in the Popóshóla area after cooking.

"She went missing on Sunday around 3pm. She was at home and I asked her to cook for me. The information we got was that she said she wanted to go and see an Alfa in that area after cooking. Since then, we have not heard from her.

"We have been calling her line. It was ringing from Sunday until Monday morning, but nobody answered. Her friends and some people we asked also said she mentioned that she was going towards that area," he said.

The father said the matter was reported at the Agbado Police Station, adding that the cleric was initially arrested but later released.

He said the family was con-

cerned about the cleric's release because they believed he could provide information that might help establish Imole's whereabouts.

According to him, several people directed the family to the area where the cleric lived, while some residents also claimed to have seen Imole around the neighbourhood.

However, the cleric, identified simply as Alfa, denied knowing the teenager's whereabouts, saying she did not visit his residence on the day she disappeared.

He said Imole had told people that she was going to Popóshóla, rather than his house.

"She did not say she wanted

to come to my place. She said she was going to Popóshóla. Even her friend said she was going to Popóshóla, not my house.

"She used to come to my place before, but I did not see her on that Sunday. I also did not see her on Monday when they said she was seen around the neighbourhood," he said.

Alfa said he was detained for a day before being released, adding that a police officer stayed with him at his residence throughout Sunday.

"They detained me for one day. There was a police officer with me at my house throughout that Sunday. He was also the person who went with me to the station.

## Police recover 28 human skulls, bones from Abia forest

**UNUAHIA**

The Abia State Police Command says it has recovered 28 human skulls and other human bones from forests in the Isuochi and Nneato communities of Umunneochi Local Government Area of the state.

The command's spokesperson, Maureen Chinaka, disclosed this in a statement following a security operation conducted on Sunday, September 27, 2026.

According to Chinaka, the operation was carried out under the command's "Operation No Hideout for Criminal Elements in the State" aimed at flushing out suspected criminals from the state.

She said the operation involved the Violent Crime Response Unit, Anti-Kidnapping Unit, Anti-Cultism Unit, Intelligence Response Unit, Rapid Response Squad and Isuochi Police Headquarters.

Chinaka said the operatives conducted intelligence-led raids on suspected criminal camps in forests around Umuaku, Isuochi, and another camp at Nneato, also in Isuochi.

She said the suspected criminals fled when the police arrived, leaving the camps deserted.

"Upon arrival of the Command tactical operatives at the camps, the suspects ran. The criminal camps were subsequently scattered," Chinaka said.

She said the remains were discovered while the operatives searched the suspected kidnappers' camps.

"Total of twenty-eight (28) human skulls and bones, which we suspect are kidnap victims, were recovered," she said.

She added that the command suspected the remains belonged to people who had been kidnapped and taken into the forest, but said investigations were ongoing.

## 2027: PDP members decamp to APC in Kwara

**ILORIN**

No fewer than 1,500 members of the Peoples Democratic Party in Alapa/Onire/Odegiwa Ward, Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, have defected to the ruling All Progressives Congress.

The decampers announced their decision to join the APC

on Sunday during a ward meeting attended by the Chairman of the Lower Niger River Basin Development Authority, Abdullateef Alakawa; a member of the Kwara State House of Assembly, Shittu Motunrayo; and other party executives and supporters.

The new APC members said they left the PDP, led in the state by former Senate Pres-

ident, Bukola Saraki, due to what they described as mistreatment of members, imposition of candidates and poor reward for loyalty.

They also said they were attracted to the APC by what they described as the party's visible achievements and opportunities for members, particularly youths.

Addressing the decampers,

Alakawa welcomed them to the APC, assuring them that they would be treated as members of the same political family.

He said, "Today, we are receiving no fewer than 1,500 members of the PDP from Alapa/Onire/Odegiwa Ward into the APC. Their decision to join us is a clear indication of their confidence in the APC and its programmes.

## FOREIGN

## NEWS



President Javier Milei:

## OpenAI scraps rollout of new model over safety concerns

OpenAI has announced it will not release its latest AI model due to safety concerns.

Its GPT-6.1 Astra system, which performs tasks like browsing the web and using apps by itself, "didn't quite meet the bar" of the company's standards, according to Saachi Jain, head of safety systems at OpenAI.

The ChatGPT-maker also issued an update on incidents that occurred in June but were not made public until last week, where its models accessed Australian government websites and systems without authorisation.

It comes as breaches by major AI firms' models intensify the debate about risks posed by the tech - with Anthropic underlining its concerns AI might threaten humanity as it prepares to go public.

Reuters reported on Tuesday that the AI developer - which makes ChatGPT-rival Claude - plans to warn potential investors in its Initial Public Offering (IPO) that the tech may pose "catastrophic or existential risks to humanity", according to a prospectus it has seen.

Despite the stark warnings, the company is expected to become one of the most valuable in the world when it goes public.

"I think it's kind of crazy that companies are continuing to push forward with developing these capabilities when we've already seen over the last couple of months of incidents that they're nowhere near safe and controlled enough", said Jess Whitestone, a senior advisor on AI policy for the Centre for Long-Term Resilience think tank.

Top AI leaders including Anthropic boss Dario Amodei and OpenAI's Sam Altman have urged the industry to slow the pace of development.

Growing safety questions

OpenAI's decision, first reported by the Wall Street Journal, is a rare instance of a major AI developer pulling a new release over safety concerns.

The model fell short in terms of "staying within scope and authorisation and how it communicates back to the user about the type of work it's done," Jain said.

"We want to make sure our model development is safe no matter whether that's in the company, or when we ship it to users. But when we ship it to users, we have an extremely high bar in terms of safety and alignment," she added.

The flagship GPT-6 Astra agentic model was released in September and specialises in complex reasoning and executing tasks autonomously. OpenAI said it was the result of "years of research and big bets".

OpenAI is set to hold its annual DevDay developer conference in San Francisco on Tuesday, where it is expected to make several announcements. It is unclear if a new version of Astra will be among them.

The company's security controls have come under intense scrutiny after several high-profile incidents involving its technology.

It is not the first time a large AI developer has pulled or held back a new model.

Earlier this year, Anthropic said it would not publicly release a powerful Claude model, Mythos, because it was too good at finding dormant software bugs.

The company released a version of that model to the public several months later.

OpenAI meanwhile said in 2019 it would not be "too dangerous" to release one of its GPT models, now used to power its tools like ChatGPT.

The firm's decision to not publicly release the latest version of

Astra was "a welcome sign that they are taking safety concerns seriously," said Prof Tony Cohn, foundational models theme lead at the Alan Turing Institute.

But he added that "safety should not be left purely in the hands of the developers: it should also be monitored and verified through independent government-approved regulators".

Prof Gina Neff, of the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy at the University of Cambridge, said OpenAI's announcement showed "how much more the company needs to do to make their AI products safe".

She told the BBC it was "critical" to have independent tests of AI models by labs like the UK's AI Security Institute - which evaluates frontier systems on a voluntary basis - because "these companies have proven that we can't rely solely on them for our safety".

Last week, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that a rogue OpenAI agent had hacked into government websites and systems in June in what experts said was the first known case of its kind in the world.

Albanese criticised OpenAI for notifying the Australian government through a generic email address rather than making direct contact with officials.

OpenAI said in a statement on Tuesday that it was sorry for the incident and that it "should have handled our response better".

Services Australia, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, the Victorian Department of Health and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare were all affected, OpenAI clarified.

The firm said it launched investigations as soon as it became aware of issues in mid-August and notified the affected organisations between 10 and 24 September.

"Our aim was to give affected agencies a detailed account once our investigation was complete," OpenAI said, adding that it should have shared early findings more promptly and kept Australian authorities updated.

What you need to know about the OpenAI Australian government hack

OpenAI added that it will develop "practical approaches" to how developers and governments identify and disclose future AI incidents.

## Argentina threatens legal action against UK over Falkland Islands oil exploration

Argentina's president has threatened to launch a legal challenge against the British government unless it halts oil exploration work off the coast of the Falkland Islands.

In a social media post, President Javier Milei set a two-week deadline for the Sea Lion oilfield project, a joint venture between Israeli and British companies, to be scrapped.

The companies insist they have valid licences issued by Britain.

The comments heighten tensions between the UK and Argentina over the sovereignty of the archipelago, known in Argentina as Las Malvinas, more than 40 years after a British military task force ejected Argentine forces which had invaded the territory in 1982.

Milei said that if the two-week deadline was not met, he had "instructed the Foreign Ministry and legal teams to initiate international arbitration" against the UK over what he called "the illegal plundering of our resources through the Sea Lion Project".

He continued to warn the UK that if the "illegitimate exploitation" of the region didn't end within two weeks, Argentina would take the matter before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

The International Tribunal is an independent judicial body based in Hamburg which is re-

sponsible for the fair application of the United Nations' Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The move comes soon after Milei roundly criticised the UN in his speech at the General Assembly for failing to act over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.

He said the UN had become "a useless organisation" which only serves "arrogant parasites dressed up as well-intentioned bureaucrats".

Since then, the UK Defence Secretary, Wes Streeting, said that Argentina "lacks the ability" to seize the Falklands by force.

Milei had previously said the Sea Lion oilfield was a "clear and present danger".

The Sea Lion oilfield, around 130 miles (209 km) from the Falkland Islands, contains an estimated 1.7 billion barrels of oil.

Two oil companies - Britain's Rockhopper Exploration and Israel's Navitas Petroleum - are due to begin extracting from the oilfield within two years.

Both companies have in the past stressed that Sea Lion holds valid licences from the Falkland Islands.

In a 2013 referendum, residents of the islands voted overwhelmingly to remain a British overseas territory - with 99.8% voting in favour and just three voting against.

## US ban on Canadian alcohol and dairy comes into effect as trade war drags on

A US ban on several Canadian imports, including alcohol, dairy and motorcycles, has come into effect as a trade war between the two neighbours drags on.

The latest measure by the Trump administration is in response to Canada's implementation of tariffs on a range of US goods earlier this month following a breakdown in trade talks.

Canada is not expected to retaliate further, with Prime Minister Mark Carney saying earlier this month that the impact the import bans will have on Canada's economy is "modest".

Trade talks remain on ice, with US trade representative Jamieson Greer telling CNBC recently that President Donald Trump is "comfortable" with his current relationship with Canada.

"They call us now and then and we have good conversations about potential deals. But there's no urgency on our side," Greer said of relations with Canada in an interview with the US network last week.

Tuesday's trade ban applies to nearly C\$1bn (\$710m; £530m) worth of Canadian liquor exported to the US, as well as whey products used in protein pow-

der.

Motorcycle exports to the US will also be impacted, though Canada only sent about 5,000 motorcycles south of the border in 2025 that were worth about C\$120m, according to national data by Statistics Canada, meaning the impact would be limited.

The import bans were first announced by Trump in a series of executive orders signed on 8 September. In them, Trump said the measures are in response to "continued discrimination" by Canada on US dairy, automobiles and alcohol.

Speaking to reports on Monday, he accused Canada of "treating the United States very unfairly".

"They have been one of the worst countries in the entire world," Trump said.

Carney said earlier this month that the bans "are relatively modest measures" when compared to other trade actions the US has imposed on Canada.

He acknowledged, however, that the bans will hurt certain businesses and sectors that are directly targeted.

Derek Holt, an economist with Canadian bank ScotiaBank, wrote in an analysis that "these actions are face-saving

by the US administration, not substantive in nature and that's a positive".

About 93% of all Canadian liquor exports in 2025 were sold to the US. Spirits Canada, a group representing Canadian liquor producers, has said the consequences to the industry "could be significant".

Economists and businesses have also warned that the bans will add uncertainty to the future of Canada's trade relationship with the US, its largest trade partner.

In addition to these latest import bans, the US has imposed 50% tariffs on a range of Canadian goods, including dairy, alcohol, steel and aluminium products, as well as 25% tariffs on Canadian-built cars.

Canada in return has placed retaliatory tariffs ranging from 15% to 50% on more than 700 US products, as well as a 25% levy on certain steel and aluminium products. Most Canadian provinces have also stopped selling US liquor.

Tariffs - taxes paid on imported goods - are central to Trump's economic agenda, who argues that they raise government revenue and encourage consumers to buy American-made goods.



Edward Rukidi Kijanangoma, king of Uganda's Tooro kingdom.

## Journalist to be crowned king in Uganda after bitter succession dispute

Prince Edward Rukidi Kijanangoma Nyabongo I, who is set to be crowned king of Uganda's Tooro kingdom later, has long been a familiar face in the country.

For many Ugandans, he was known not as the heir to the throne, but as a storyteller, as a long-serving anchor and editor at the state broadcaster.

But Kijanangoma, 56, has now become the subject of media attention himself - his rise to the Tooro throne sparking controversy and widespread reactions beyond the country.

Tooro is one of Uganda's four main officially recognised historical kingdoms. For the last 31 years, it has been headed by King Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru Rukidi IV, who was once known as a "boy king", after ascending to the throne as an infant.

Oyo became king in 1995 at the age of just three, following the death of his father. Then the world's youngest monarch, he ruled until he died last month from cancer, aged just 34.

The coronation is a day for celebration, involving traditional practices starting from midnight. The new king then walks about 4km (2.5 miles)

to the official Karuziika royal palace where he is crowned.

A mock fight follows, to signify that kingship does not come easy, and he is then blessed by members of the royal Babiito clan, the Tooro kingdom's Information Minister Charles Mwanguhya told the BBC Focus on Africa podcast.

He performs other ceremonies that signifies his assumption of the throne, before he sits on the throne and an actual crown placed on his head to signify his new authority, his new position as the new Tooro king.

But the selection of Kijanangoma as king was far from straightforward.

According to tradition, a recognised son of the late king should succeed him. Close members of the royal family said Oyo had left a young son and a will with instructions that the child should be next on the throne.

But the son has never been revealed to the public and nor was he recognised by the committee of 21 Babiito clan members who choose the king and eventually selected Kijanangoma.

The late King Oyo was never publicly married, and little is

known about his wife or their son.

Nonetheless his mother, Queen Best Kemigisa, argued that the late king's will ought to have been respected.

However, the royal succession committee ignored her wishes, insisting their selection process was conducted in accordance with Tooro customs and traditions.

The new king has thus found himself at the centre

of a succession dispute, with Kemigisa and her close relatives unhappy with the outcome.

Kemigisa referred to Kijanangoma's selection as the "announcement of a second king" being "made after the will of King Oyo was read to members of the royal family".

"As a mother, that was extraordinarily painful," she said, describing celebrations for the next king taking place

"only metres from where my son's body lay".

The queen later said Oyo's son, who was in the US state of Texas, had been due to return home but that could not happen amid a "tense and polarised succession dispute".

"No child should be placed in circumstances where returning to his father's homeland could mean being drawn into hostility and conflict," Kemigisa asserted in a post

on X.

But according to the Tooro kingdom's information minister, the son being talked about "hasn't been presented anywhere, which means there is a growing acceptance that sad as it may be, King Oyo didn't leave a son behind".

While King Oyo inherited the crown from his father, Mwanguhya told the BBC "the crown has moved to a different line within the ruling clan".

## Malaysia begins controversial repatriation of asylum seekers to Myanmar

The Malaysian government has started repatriating around 5,000 asylum seekers from Myanmar, under a controversial deal agreed with Myanmar's military ruler Min Aung Hlaing.

Three ships from the Myanmar navy are scheduled to leave Malaysia later today carrying the first 1,476 returnees.

Human rights groups have condemned the repatriation, saying the returnees face violence, persecution and forced conscription into the Myanmar army.

Malaysia has described the repatriation as voluntary, but

has barred the UN refugee agency from seeing or screening the returnees, who have been kept in detention centres.

According to Malaysian prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, these returnees will include Rohingyas: a persecuted Muslim minority who have sought sanctuary in Malaysia in large numbers after being driven out of Myanmar, where they are not recognised as citizens.

Anwar, whose popularity has fallen sharply this year, says he is responding to growing public hostility towards the large Rohingya population in Malaysia and has no choice but to negotiate with the Myanmar government over their return.

But the move signals a striking shift in attitude.

Anwar, a former political prisoner, has previously presented himself as a defender of human rights and freedom, and called for more to be done to help the Rohingyas. Under him, Malaysia has refused to recognise Min Aung Hlaing's regime, and has been one of the strongest voices in South East Asia pushing for a negotiated end to Myanmar's civil war.

What has changed?

Two things. First, increased economic strain on lower-in-

come Malaysians since the Covid pandemic, which has stirred resentment of the Rohingyas.

Second, the febrile state of Malaysian politics since 2018, when a historic election unseated the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the ethnic Malay party which had monopolised power for more than 60 years, leading to a revolving door of unstable coalition governments.

Shifting sentiments

For many years there was strong public sympathy among Malaysians for their fellow Muslims in Myanmar.

In August 2017, a brutal campaign by the Myanmar military drove three quarters of a million Rohingyas out of their homes in Rakhine State and into neighbouring Bangladesh. In the years since, dire conditions in Bangladeshi refugee camps have driven those with enough money to make the per-

## Burkina Faso's junta leader opens major gold refinery to keep mining profits at home

Burkina Faso has opened its first gold refinery as the military-led government seeks to process more of the country's mineral wealth at home and tighten its control over one of its most important industries.

Junta leader Ibrahim Traoré said the move was part of a wider effort to end the country's reliance on exporting raw materials for processing abroad.

"We want to refine all our metals on site... we want to have the entire value chain on site," he said at the plant's inauguration in the capital, Ouagadougou, on Monday.

Burkina Faso is one of Africa's biggest gold producers but the authorities have struggled to regulate the informal mining sector, which has been blighted by jihadist violence.

Traoré's government hopes the new facility can turn the landlocked country into a regional gold-refining hub.

With gold production on the rise, Traoré's government set up a state-owned mining company two years ago.

Foreign mining firms are now required to give the state a 15% stake in their operations and train local workers.

## Hurricane Polo makes landfall on Mexico's Pacific coast

Hurricane Polo has made landfall along the northern Pacific coast of Mexico, lashing the state of Baja California Sur with life-threatening winds and heavy rain that has already flooded some coastal areas.

Mexican officials said Polo moved ashore just south of the surfing and fishing village of Las Barrancas bringing maximum sustained winds of 110 mph (175 km/h).

Polo is moving northeast and on the forecast track, its core is predicted to continue passing over Baja California Sur before moving inland over the southern part of the Mexican state of Sonora later on Tuesday.

Residents in threatened areas have been encouraged to seek shelter.

Shopkeeper María Palomino, 57, spent the night at a high school which has been turned into a temporary shelter. "If something happens, it's better

to come to the shelter," she told AFP news agency.

A whale-watching and fishing guide who was boarding up the facade of his home told AFP the storm was "coming with full force".

The US-based National Hurricane Center (NHC) said that while Polo was expected to weaken as it moved over the Baja California peninsula, it was forecast to still be at hurricane strength when it makes its second landfall in mainland Mexico.

## FEATURE

# BISHOP OYINDAMOLA KELANI IGBALAJOB

## From Cinema to the Stage — Building the Next Generation of Performers

For Bishop Oyindamola Kelani Igbalajobi, the journey through film, theatre and performing arts has never been only about making movies. For more than a decade, his work has combined filmmaking, performance education, mentorship and the development of young creative talent.

A filmmaker, director, cinematographer, producer, screenwriter and performing arts educator, Igbalajobi has built a career that crosses both sides of creative development: producing professional screen work while deliberately investing in those who may become the performers and filmmakers of tomorrow.

Today, that journey has entered another important chapter with CLUB19, an international-focused teenage performing arts initiative that has already begun engaging young people across secondary schools.

Teenagers from 25 secondary schools are already involved in the registration and parental-consent process, marking the beginning of an ambitious programme designed to reconnect a new generation with the discipline and foundations of live performance.

But CLUB19 did not emerge from nowhere.

Its roots stretch back more than a decade.

### A VISION FOR PERFORMING ARTS EDUCATION

Igbalajobi is the Proprietor of Oyindamola Kelani School of Performing Art, an institution whose journey began in 2010.

The school was subsequently fully registered and received government approval on 17 August 2016, operating across Nursery, Primary and Secondary School levels with performing arts embedded within its educational vision.

This background is important to understanding Igbalajobi's current mission.

Long before CLUB19, he had already recognised that creative education should begin early. Children should not have to wait until adulthood, university or professional film school before discovering acting, movement, dance, costume, storytelling and the discipline behind performance.

His philosophy has increasingly centred on a fundamental principle:

If the industry wants better professionals tomorrow, it must deliberately train young talents today.

### FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE FILM SET

Alongside his educational work, Igbalajobi developed a multifaceted career within the Nigerian film industry.

His professional experience spans directing, cinematography, producing, assistant directing, screenwriting and film education, giving him an understanding of both the creative and technical demands of filmmaking.

His body of work and professional engagements include productions such as *Death Remedy* (Maku), *Silver Spoon*, *Meji Oran* (Dual Troubles), *Jagba*, *Iyawo Farao*, *Aina Orosun*, *Aina Oroke*, *Honorable* (Eni Owo), *PARTY BOY* and *Aina Oroke: The Divinity Child*, among other projects.

His career has also brought him

into professional collaboration with established figures within Nollywood.

Among them is filmmaker Adebayo Tijani, with whom Igbalajobi has worked professionally, including experiences connected with major productions within the contemporary Yoruba/Nigerian film industry.

His professional network and creative journey have also connected him with veteran filmmaker Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, as well as film marketer and distributor Kazeem Afolayan of Epsalum Productions, among other practitioners across production, distribution and film education.

Some of the productions and filmmakers associated with his professional journey have received nominations, awards and recognition within the Nigerian film industry, exposing him to the standards and demands of productions operating at significant professional and commercial levels.

### FOUR YEARS TRAINING EMERGING FILMMAKERS

One of the most important chapters in Igbalajobi's career came through the Benin Film Academy, an educational arm associated with Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State.

From 2017 to 2021, he served as a Cinematography Instructor, contributing to the training of four cohorts of emerging filmmakers.

Working in an environment directed by renowned Nigerian filmmaker Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, Igbalajobi's responsibilities went beyond explaining how to operate a camera.

Students had to understand why a shot existed.

They had to understand composition, lighting, camera movement, continuity, storytelling and the relationship between the camera and the actor.

The training environment also exposed emerging creatives to established practitioners through professional interactions and masterclasses involving personalities such as Segun Arinze, Desmond Elliot and Judith Audu.

Those years strengthened something Igbalajobi had already begun through his own school: education and mentorship must remain central to the survival of the creative industry.

### WHY HE IS RETURNING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE STAGE

Today, after years of filmmaking and training, Igbalajobi is increasingly concerned about what he sees as a weakening connection between modern screen performance and the rigorous foundations of dramatic art.

Technology has revolutionised filmmaking.

A director can call, "Cut!"

A scene can be repeated.

An editor can select the best performance from several takes.

Mistakes can disappear in the editing room.

Dialogue can be corrected, images manipulated and performances assembled from material captured at different times.

The stage is different.

When the curtain rises and an actor stands before a live audience, there is no editing room to rescue the



BISHOP OYINDAMOLA KELANI IGBALAJOB

performance.

There is no second take.

There is no cut.

If an actor makes a mistake, the actor must remain composed, stay in character and continue.

That requires training.

It requires concentration.

It requires discipline.

And, above all, it requires rehearsal, rehearsal and more rehearsal.

For Igbalajobi, this is one of the reasons stage performance historically produced performers with deep understanding of dramatic craft. Actors learned voice projection, movement, timing, characterisation, improvisation, emotional control, stage positioning and the discipline of working as an ensemble.

He believes those foundations must not disappear simply because filmmaking technology has advanced.

His answer is CLUB19.

### CLUB19 — RAISING A NEW GENERATION OF PERFORMERS

CLUB19 is Igbalajobi's developing teenage performing arts movement for young people between approximately 10 and 19 years old.

Unlike a project that exists only on paper, CLUB19 has already commenced, with teenagers connected to 25 secondary schools currently going through registration and parental-consent processes.

The vision is to build a structured performing arts community where young people can receive practical training in areas including:

Acting • Stage Performance • Dance • Movement • Costume Design • Dra-

matic Expression • Rehearsal Discipline • Ensemble Performance

The ambition is international.

Beginning with participating schools in Africa, the initiative is working toward developing relationships and partnerships with secondary and high schools in the United Kingdom, creating opportunities for young performers from different countries and cultural backgrounds to eventually interact, learn and perform together.

CLUB19 is therefore not simply about discovering children who want to become famous actors.

It is about training performers.

### "WE MUST BUILD PERFORMERS BEFORE WE BUILD STARS"

At the heart of Igbalajobi's philosophy is a concern about an industry increasingly attracted to visibility without always giving equal attention to training.

Talent is important.

But talent without discipline has limitations.

A young person may naturally know how to imitate characters, dance or deliver dialogue. Professional dramatic performance, however, demands something more.

It demands an understanding of the craft.

Through CLUB19, Igbalajobi wants young people to experience the rehearsal room before chasing the spotlight.

They should understand movement before standing before a camera.

They should learn to work with other actors.

They should understand costumes

as part of character and storytelling.

They should experience the responsibility of remembering lines and maintaining character before a live audience.

And they should discover that mistakes are not always failures; on the stage, they become lessons that make the next performance stronger.

### AFRICA, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND A GLOBAL STAGE

The longer-term vision for CLUB19 reaches beyond one city, one country or even one continent.

Igbalajobi envisions a network in which participating African schools can eventually connect with schools in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, creating an international community around youth performing arts.

Such exchanges can allow African children to confidently present their stories, languages, movements, costumes and dramatic traditions to international audiences while also learning from the theatrical traditions of young performers elsewhere.

The objective is not to replace cinema.

It is to strengthen the people who will eventually enter it.

Because a child who learns the discipline of the stage today could become tomorrow's actor, director, choreographer, costume designer, cinematographer or filmmaker.

### THE STORY COMES FULL CIRCLE

In many ways, CLUB19 brings the different chapters of Bishop Oyindamola Kelani Igbalajobi's career together.

There is the educator, whose performing arts school journey dates back to 2010.

There is the filmmaker, whose career has included directing, producing, cinematography and assistant directing across numerous productions.

There is the film instructor, who spent years helping to train emerging filmmakers at the Benin Film Academy.

And now there is the mentor looking toward the next generation, taking the professional lessons accumulated across classrooms, film sets and production environments and placing them before young people at an earlier stage of their development.

For Igbalajobi, the future of dramatic art cannot depend only on producing more films.

It must also depend on producing better-trained artists.

CLUB19 represents that next chapter.

Not merely another acting school.

Not simply another children's club. But an attempt to return young performers to one of the oldest and most demanding classrooms in dramatic art: the stage.

Because cameras may change.

Technology will continue to evolve.

Editing will become more sophisticated.

But when the curtain rises and a performer stands before a live audience, one thing remains unchanged: the artist must be ready.

And for Bishop Oyindamola Kelani Igbalajobi, preparing that next generation has become one of the most important productions of his career.

**GOVERNANCE**

# Clanging of a Dysfunctional Cymbal

DR. PATRICK AKHERE EBOJELE

Ijeoma Osamor's article, "Edo Governor, Sen. Monday Okpebholo: Think Again," is not advice. It is a lengthy sermon on humility delivered with the confidence of someone who came looking for faults and found insinuations instead. If criticism were a road project, her article would have broken ground, held a commissioning ceremony and gone home without laying a single block.

Her opening argument, "Announcements are not results," sounds reasonable. Nobody disputes that. But if announcements are not results, neither are sweeping accusations evidence. Edo has reopened Anegbette General Hospital after 19 years, Obayantor after 22 and Usugbenu Cottage Hospital after five. The Central Hospital Annex runs 24-hour services, and modern equipment has been supplied to all 36 secondary health facilities. Osamor concedes that some areas deserve recognition but somehow forgets to mention them. Perhaps praise was not on the agenda.

"Look at the roads." We have looked, and there is quite a bit to see. In about 15 months, the administration initiated about 28 road projects covering an estimated 255 kilometres across all 18 local government areas. The 2026 budget earmarked about N305 billion for road projects.

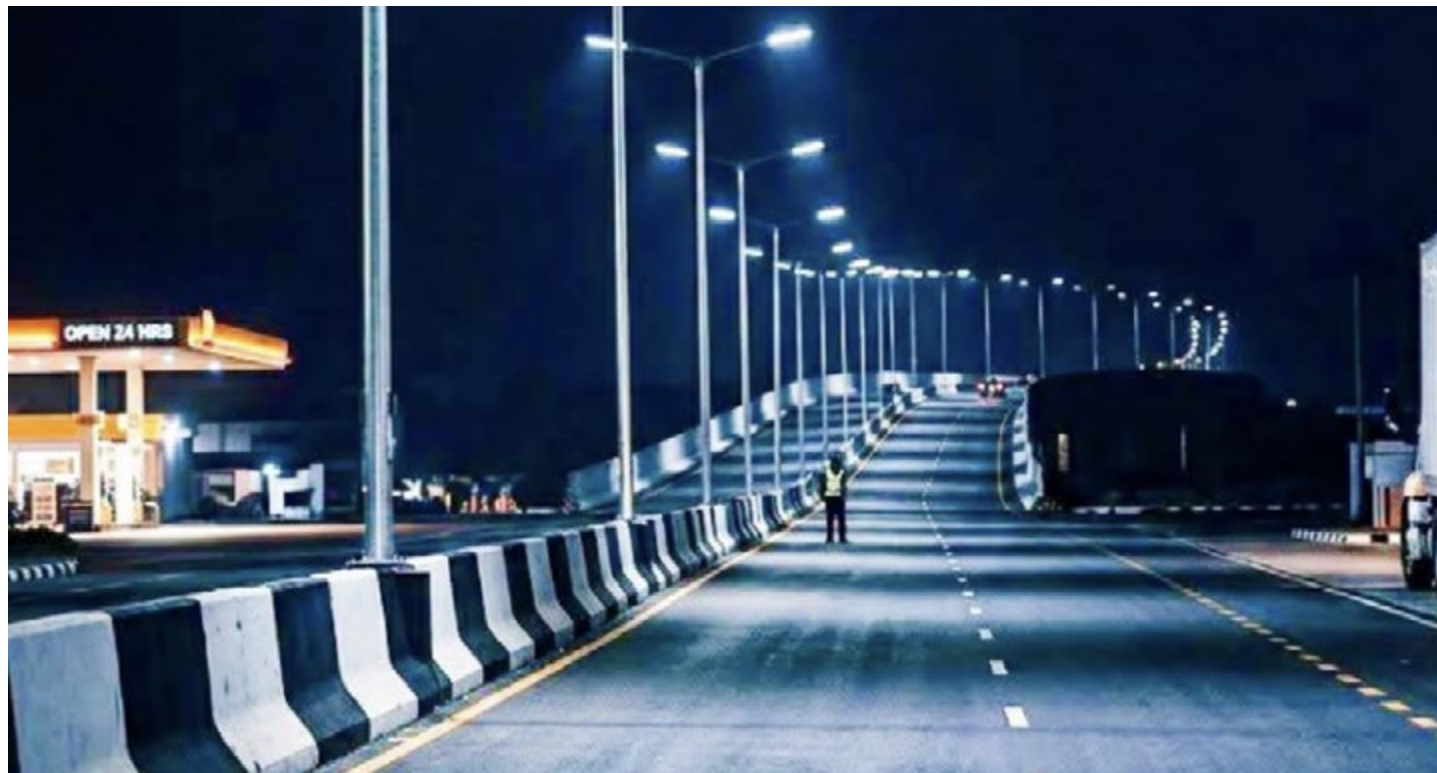
Residents of Evbuotubu have commended the completed 6.5-kilometre Ekhenwan-Siluko road for restoring economic activity. More than 23 kilometres of the Benin-Sapele corridor is being rebuilt with concrete pavement, while completed sections are easing motorists' journeys. A 26-kilometre road in Edo Central will link Awo to its railway station.

Apparently, the roads are expected to do more than connect communities. They must also connect Osamor to a favourable opinion of the administration. Until then, every kilometre completed may remain invisible to her.

"Look at the schools." The Deputy Governor says more than 5,000 teachers have been recruited and dilapidated school buildings renovated. At the reopening of Oredo Girls Secondary School, the Governor said the school now has more than 20 teachers, compared with the two or three he once saw.

Monthly subvention to Ambrose Alli University rose from N41 million to N500 million, while Edo University, Iyamho, saw an increase from N25 million to N250 million.

These figures may not settle every question about education, but they deserve more than a passing glance. A critic who demands results



RAMAT PARK FLYOVER, BENIN CITY

should at least acknowledge the numbers before reaching for the red pen.

"Ask ordinary Edo people." More than 600,000 residents are enrolled in the Edo State Health Insurance Scheme, which has covered over 2,011 surgeries and 674 childbirths. The state recruited 1,376 health workers and absorbed 126 contract staff. Salaries are paid regularly, a 13th-month salary was paid in December 2024, and the N75,000 minimum wage is in force.

The recruitment of teachers and health workers, alongside vocational and digital skills programmes through EdoJobs, the Industrial Training Fund and development partners, also speaks to employment and skills development.

Of course, no administration should expect applause merely for doing its job. But neither should it be condemned as though nothing has been done.

"Do people feel safer?" Between March and May 2026, the Edo State Police Command reported 119 arrests and the rescue of 58 kidnapping victims. In February, a joint operation arrested 113 suspected kidnappers across Edo Central. Suspects in the Vegetable Market kid-

napping were arrested within 24 hours. In July, a joint team rescued three Ambrose Alli University students abducted in Ekpoma.

The state has also asked the Chief Judge to establish special courts for kidnapping and cultism cases.

Security remains a serious concern, and arrests alone do not end the problem. But while Osamor offers anxiety, the administration points to arrests and rescues. Both the remaining challenges and the reported progress deserve scrutiny.

"Who is really advising you?" This is where the article begins to sound like a guessing game. It names no adviser, identifies no specific bad decision and cites no failed policy. Instead, it suggests that anyone defending the government must be a flatterer.

Edo Specialist Hospital secured full residency accreditation in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Family Medicine and Dentistry. Edo also won a \$1 million Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge award. These achievements are not proof that every policy is flawless, but neither can they be waved away as the work of flatterers.

"Learn from Anenih and Oshiomhole." Gov-

ernor Okpebholo was elected on his own promises. He does not need to become a carbon copy of his predecessors. Osamor's lengthy detour into media friendships also raises a question: is this really about governance or about who gets access to the microphone?

"Don't treat critics as enemies." The Governor should welcome honest criticism, and critics should support their arguments with evidence. But criticism without specifics is little more than a loud knock on a door without saying who is outside.

As for the closing bravado, "come after me, I dey here," nobody has come after anyone. She has simply been answered.

The people will have the last word, as Osamor says. Governor Okpebholo can let them speak. Until then, the record deserves to be examined, the shortcomings addressed and the achievements acknowledged. Even a critic should know that a balance sheet has two sides.

• **Dr. Ebojele has his PhD in Public Administration and is the Chief Press Secretary to Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State.**

## NEWS

### Stakeholders demand stiffer action against counterfeit, adulterated products in Edo

LUCKY EFESSE, SUCCESS  
EDEBAMUIKI, EGHAREVBA  
ANGEL, OKUNBOR DELIGHT  
AND KEBONKWU RUTH

**BENIN CITY**

Stakeholders in Edo State have called on the state government and relevant regulatory and security agencies to impose stiffer penalties on producers and dealers in counterfeit and adulterated products, warning that their activities pose serious threats to public health and amount to criminal offences.

The stakeholders made the call on Tuesday at a Town Hall/Stakeholders' Meeting organised by the Edo State Consumer Protection Committee with the theme: "Eradicating Counterfeit/Adulterated Products,

Enforcing Consumer Rights, Promoting Standards and Practising Fair and Responsible Trading in Edo State."

The stakeholders, drawn from civil society organisations, market associations, security agencies, cement traders and the media, expressed concern over the proliferation of fake, adulterated and substandard products in markets and business outlets across the state.

They noted that the continued circulation of such products was causing serious harm to consumers and called for stronger enforcement measures to protect the public.

The stakeholders also commended the Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, for establishing what they described as a formidable mechanism through the Edo State

Consumer Protection Committee to tackle the menace.

They pledged their support and collaboration with the committee to ensure the success of its consumer protection mandate.

Earlier in his opening remarks, Chairman of the Edo State Consumer Protection Committee, Comrade Osaro Culture Iyamu, said the recent enforcement actions and ban on counterfeit and adulterated products by the Federal Government informed the decision to convene the stakeholders' meeting.

He said the initiative was also in line with the SHINE Agenda of the present administration in Edo State.

Iyamu said all stakeholders had a critical role to play in protecting society from fake, adulterated and substandard

products, stressing that consumers' fundamental rights, including the right to choose, the right to information and the right to safety, must not be compromised.

According to him, the constitution of the Consumer Protection Committee by Governor Okpebholo was largely influenced by the health hazards associated with the consumption of fake and adulterated products.

He said the state government was prepared to impose stiffer penalties on perpetrators, noting that many lives had been destroyed or adversely affected by the activities of producers and dealers in harmful products.

The chairman therefore solicited the support and collaboration of stakeholders to enable the committee discharge its

responsibilities diligently and effectively.

He assured that the government was ready to prosecute offenders in accordance with the law, stressing that the ultimate objective was to protect consumers and build a safer society.

In a related development, the Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Zone 5 Headquarters, Benin City, AIG Monday Agbonika, represented by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zonal Criminal Investigation Department, DCP Gabriel Dibie, Ph.D., commended the Edo State Consumer Protection Committee for its efforts in the fight against counterfeit and adulterated products.

He assured the committee of the police command's collaboration in arresting and prosecuting persons involved in the

production and sale of fake and adulterated products.

The police boss said such enforcement would serve as a deterrent to other criminally minded persons engaging in activities capable of endangering the lives and wellbeing of residents.

The stakeholders also raised concerns over alleged abuses of consumers' rights, including excessive billing by the Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC), alleged overcharging by banks and telecommunication companies, as well as the circulation of adulterated food products.

They specifically expressed concern over alleged practices involving the adulteration of palm oil and beans with harmful substances, as well as the use of dangerous chemicals to preserve fruits and vegetables.

## MATTERS-IN-FOCUS

OJO HAPPY

ABUJA

The Federal Government is seeking new financing worth \$1.5 billion from the World Bank for programmes covering climate

resilience, social protection and early childhood development.

The proposed funding is divided into three separate facilities of \$500 million each.

One of the facilities is expected to provide additional financing for the Agro-Cli-

matic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes programme, popularly known as ACREsAL. The World Bank is expected to consider the proposal on October 29, 2026.

Another proposed \$500 million facility is earmarked for early childhood develop-

ment, while a third would support social protection initiatives.

The proposed borrowing comes amid an increase in Nigeria's public debt, which reached N166.79 trillion at the end of June 2026.

The World Bank documents

indicate that the proposed ACREsAL financing would increase the programme's total funding from \$700 million to \$1.2 billion.

The facilities are still proposals and require consideration and approval through the World Bank's processes be-

fore the funds can be accessed by Nigeria.

If approved, the financing would support government programmes addressing climate-related challenges, social protection needs and development during the early years of childhood.

## Stakeholders express concerns over self-service fuel stations

ABUJA

Stakeholders have expressed concerns over the future of petrol attendants whose jobs could be affected by the introduction of self-service fuel dispensing in the country.

The stakeholders were reacting to the model emerging in Nigeria, with Sunbeth Energies deploying the system in Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

A Public Analyst, Mr Jide Ojo, in an interview with newsmen on Monday in Abuja, said self-service dispensing could help address complaints of customers receiving less fuel than they paid for.

He, however, said that there was a possible downside in terms of job losses.

According to him, some large filling stations employ

as many as 30 fuel attendants, many of whose duties could become unnecessary if motorists routinely dispense fuel themselves.

"It is a good development because nobody is cheating you of the true value of the fuel that is dispensed in your vehicle, but it will create unemployment in the country," he said.

An economist, Dr Aliyu Ilias, said that self-service fuel dispensing had been used in Europe and other parts of the world for decades.

He said Nigeria's growing use of electronic payments could make the system easier to implement, but questioned whether the country was psychologically and institutionally prepared for the transition.

"Self-service is good if there is adequate system technology, especially from the CBN," Ilias said,

## NSITF expands employees' compensation coverage to 7.8m workers

OJO HAPPY

ABUJA

More than 7.8 million Nigerian workers are now covered under the Employees' Compensation Scheme administered by the Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund.

The Managing Director of NSITF, Oluwaseun Faleye, disclosed this at a policy dialogue held during the 2026 National Pre-Retirement Summit in Abuja.

Faleye said the number represented an increase from the more than 7.6 million workers recorded under the scheme in July.

The Employees' Compensation Scheme provides support to workers who suffer injuries or illnesses linked to their employment. It also provides benefits in cases involving disability, occupational risks and death arising from workplace incidents.

According to the NSITF

chief, the expansion was supported by cooperation among government institutions, employers, regulators and organisations operating within the informal sector.

He said the Fund was also working to ensure that coverage goes beyond simply registering workers, stressing the importance of contributions, reliable employee records and efficient processing of compensation claims.

Faleye further noted that the scheme provides medical care, rehabilitation and assistance to dependants where a worker dies as a result of an employment-related incident.

The NSITF said continued expansion of the scheme would strengthen social protection for workers and their families across the country.

He appealed to Governor Monday Okpebholo, Oba Ewuare II, the Benin Traditional Council and security agencies to intervene before the disagreement escalates.



**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LIBRARY WEEK:**

From left: Senator representing Enugu West Senatorial District, Sen. Osita Ngwu; Majority Leader, House of Representatives Rep. Julius Ihonvbere; Clerk of the National Assembly, Mr Kamaru Ogunlana; Executive Secretary, National Assembly Library, Mr Henry Nwawuba and others, during the 2026 National Assembly Library Week, at the National Assembly Complex in Abuja on Monday

## APC state chapters reject Wike's rainbow coalition, ask him to join party

AYENOMOH WINNER ALUKHEI

ABUJA

Several state chapters of the All Progressives Congress have rejected the Rainbow Coalition being promoted by the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, asking him to formally join the ruling party if he is committed to President Bola Tinubu's re-election in 2027.

The reactions followed renewed confrontation between Wike and APC governors over the political structure the FCT minister is assembling ahead of the general elections.

Wike, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party serving in an APC-led Federal Government, has said the coalition is to support Tinubu's presidential bid only, while allowing members to support other parties for governorship and legislative seats.

Zamfara State Governor, Dauda Lawal, who spoke on behalf of APC governors, told Wike to choose a side.

"Our message is very, very

clear: Be on one side. You can't be on two sides. If you're in APC, please come out and support APC. Not you're supporting APC here, and you're supporting other political parties somewhere else," Lawal said in an on the sidelines of the 81st UN General Assembly in New York.

He said the governors' position remained "APC all the way from head to toe" and that he would raise the matter with President Tinubu.

The demand has received varying support across states.

In Imo, Publicity Secretary, Jones Onwuasoanya, said decency demanded that Wike fully align with the APC if he was sincere about his support for Tinubu.

In Gombe, Publicity Secretary Murtala Usman said, "APC doesn't need any rainbow coalition for now," warning that it would cause confusion.

Ondo State Secretary, Alex Kalejaiye, described the arrangement as unacceptable, saying, "Support for the candidates of the ruling party must be total."

Kwara Chairman, Sunday Fagbemi, called it "a grand deception and a confusing strategy," questioning how voters would be told to vote APC for President and another party for Senate on the same day.

Plateau Chairman, Rufus Bature, said the National Working Committee had condemned the coalition. "We don't know anything about Rainbow Coalition in Plateau State... If he wants to join the APC, he is free to do that. But he cannot be APC in the morning and PDP in the night," he said.

Nasarawa Publicity Secretary, Augustine Ogaba, also said the chapter does not approve of any coalition not recognised by the party leadership.

Rivers APC factional spokesman, Darlington Nwauju, said the governors were right to ask Wike to join or stay clear, arguing that asking voters to split votes would create confusion.

Anambra Chairman, Senator Emmanuel Anosike, described the coalition as an insult to the APC and its gov-

ernors.

Some chapters, however, said they would welcome Wike into the APC.

Jigawa Publicity Secretary, Bashir Kundu, said the party welcomed Wike's support for Tinubu and would receive him if he defects.

Benue Organising Secretary, James Orgunga, also said Wike should formally join, while another factional spokesman, Daniel Ihomun, said he should remain in PDP because "he has helped to destroy PDP for us."

Other states were cautious. Osun spokesman, Kola Olabisi, said the decision was beyond the state chapter and rested with the national leadership. Delta Chairman, Solomon Arenyeka, said the state was awaiting a formal position from the national leadership. Sokoto Chairman, Haruna Adiya, said the chapter had no member in the coalition.

Wike, through his Senior Special Assistant on Public Communications, Lere Olayinka, has insisted the coalition is not an APC structure but a vehicle to support Tinubu's re-election, similar to the G5 arrangement in 2023. He argued that "politics is local."