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WEEKEND®

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President Tinubu and Vice President Shettima.

Nollywood actor linked to 2025 coup and assassination plot

- The actor was hired to play the role of a propagandist
- The officers allegedly planned a violent takeover

By Abdullahi Haruna

The officers allegedly planned a violent takeover. The actor was hired to play the role of a propagandist. Nollywood actor linked to 2025 coup and assassination

plot against Tinubu, Shettima. Nollywood filmmaker and actor Stanley Amandi was arrested alongside military officers accused of planning a violent coup to overthrow of President Bola Tinubu's

administration. Mr Amandi, a director and former chairperson of the This is the first time the actor's alleged role in the alleged coup plot is being made public. According to reports, the actor was hired

to play the role of a propagandist by the alleged coupists who planned to assassinate top government officials last year. The officers allegedly planned a violent takeover in which many top government officials

were marked for elimination. The Plot to Assassinate Tinubu and Shettima. Government sources revealed that last year, the alleged

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THE MAFA PEOPLE: A LEGACY OF
ANCESTRAL REVERENCE, UNITY,
AND HARD WORK IN NORTHEAST
NIGERIA



LIFE >>16

"HOW I FOUND DIGNITY IN LABOUR
SELLING FIREWOOD"— BUSINESSWOMAN
HAJIA ZULAI



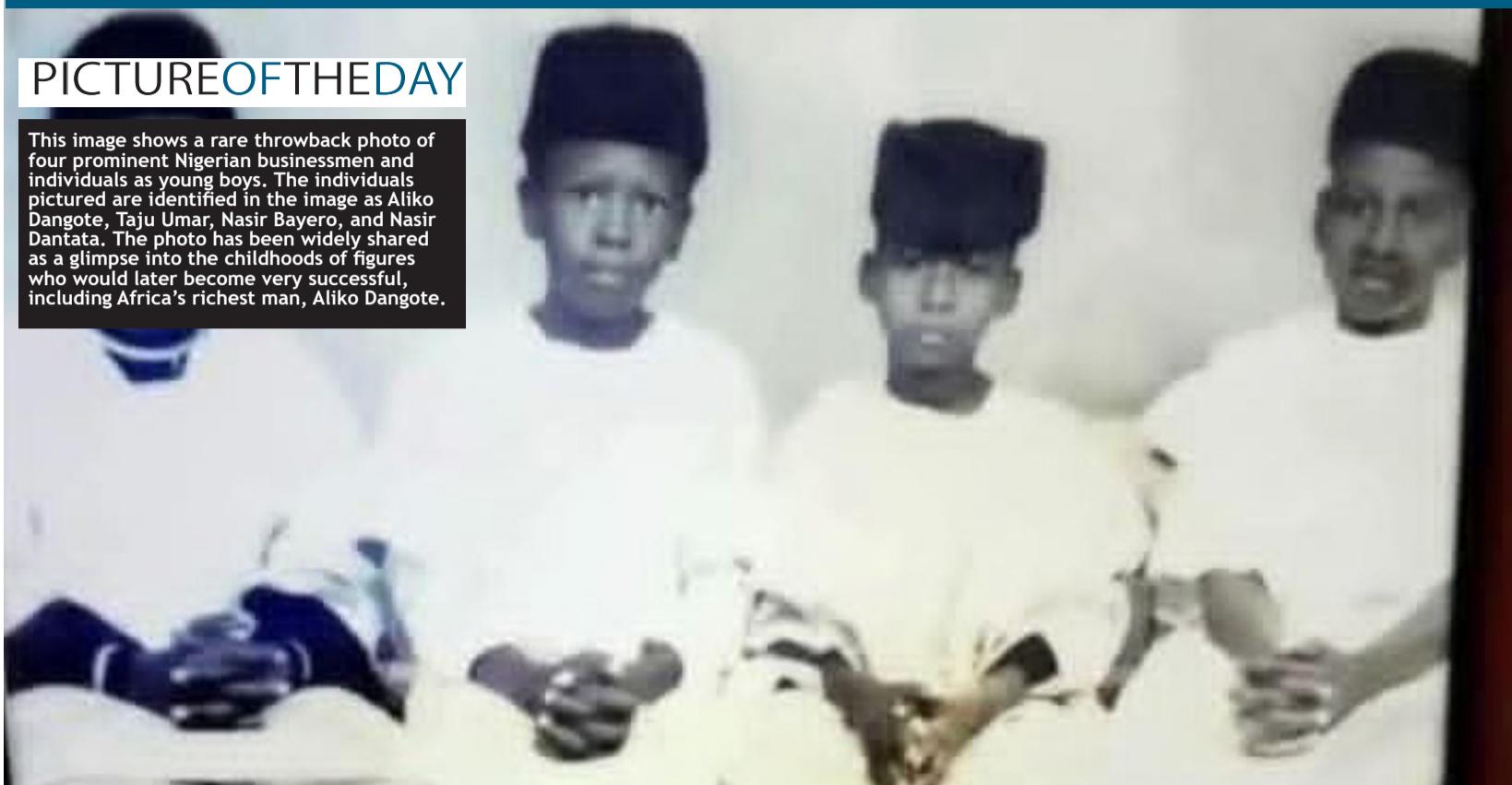
Patients and a medical staff.

Neptune World

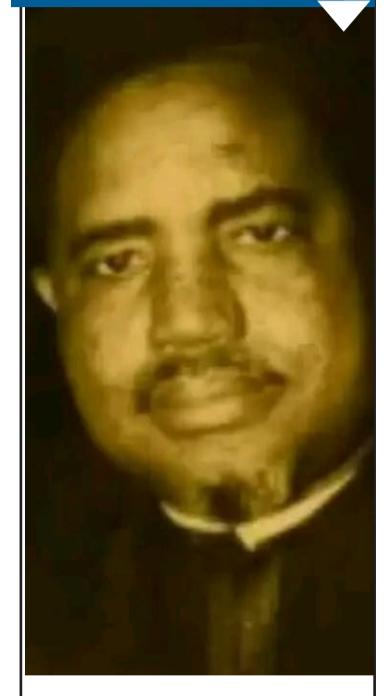


PICTURE OF THE DAY

This image shows a rare throwback photo of four prominent Nigerian businessmen and individuals as young boys. The individuals pictured are identified in the image as Aliko Dangote, Taju Umar, Nasir Bayero, and Nasir Dantata. The photo has been widely shared as a glimpse into the childhoods of figures who would later become very successful, including Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote.



UP & DOWN



RANDOM FACTS

Some mind-blowing technology facts

The first website (1991) is still online today.

More devices connect to the internet than there are people on Earth. A modern smartphone is more powerful than NASA's computers that sent humans to the Moon. Artificial Intelligence can now detect some diseases earlier than doctors, especially in medical imaging. Voice assistants understand dozens of languages and accents in real time. AI can compose music, write stories, and even help design

new medicines. Satellites help save lives by predicting storms, tracking wildfires, and guiding rescue missions. The International Space Station is visible from Earth with the naked eye. Mars rovers can send photos millions of kilometres away with extreme precision. 3D printers can print prosthetic limbs and even human tissue. Tiny robots (nanobots) are being developed to target cancer cells. One QR code can store thousands of characters of data.



How Benue government arrested, dethroned Ali Obaje, the then Atta of Igala (2)

Continued from last week

Of course, some persons, even within the Atta dynasty, were happy with the development. A son of a previous Atta Atabo Ijomi was one of those who welcomed the development. He quickly but tacitly declared himself as next Atta. That evening, he moved from Ogbogbo to Idah in full royal regalia amidst cheers of supporters. Eyewitnesses say he wore a brown robe and white turban with several well-wishers trooping to his Opata home to "congratulate" him. Royal Odechi drummers were also present at his home, chanting praises of the "new king".

However, the firework to reinstate Ali Obaje geared up with several protest letters sent from different relevant institutions. The most inspiring of the protests was that from the Igala Students Association, penned from Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru Zaria. In their swift letter dated 9th August, 1977, signed by Paul S. Emeje as president, Victor N. Enape, Abdul Okai, Paul I. Idachaba and Momoh Okpanachi as members, addressed to the Head of State, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, at Dodan Barracks in Lagos.

They did not mince words in demanding the immediate release and reinstatement of Ali Obaje in that letter. Parts of it read, "...it is no gainsaying that the Attah of Igala has attained a long, clean reputation in this country,



which he would never like to tarnish, or run away for anything, any time. That is why it would have been more honourable, if he were restricted or confined to the royal palace at Idah rather than the unknown destination in Makurdi. We regard the action of the Benue state government as a dirty slap in the face of Igala, and as people and law-abiding citizens, we demand an apology from the Benue state government.

"We, therefore, call on the Head of State to use his good offices to intervene before the situation goes out of hand.

"We also call on the Sultan of Sokoto and all traditional rulers in this country to intervene in this issue, which we regard not only as an insult to the Igala but to the African traditional stools." In a few days, the federal government intervened, the Sultan of Sokoto was also at the forefront and in the end, Ali Obaje was not just released, he was reinstated, and several accords were

reached.

After the whole crisis, Atta and Abdullahi Shelleng visited each other without further rancour. But, Paul Odi, the legendary Igala musician will not leave them in peace.

He went to the studio to wax a song titled "Ule mi Makurudi", meaning my (ill-fated) Makurdi trip. In the song, Odi reechoed that "when you see your old enemy, you remember your old fight" and this was to warn Ali Obaje against feeling relaxed with the government of Shelleng.

This was not the first time Ali Obaje had suffered a similar fate at the hands of state executives. You will recall that in the build-up to the 2003 general election, Abubakar Audu, as governor of Kogi State, detained Ali Obaje in Lokoja for two days, while the latter was on his way to Abuja to attend the National Council of Traditional Rulers of Nigeria. The End

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If the grass is greener on the other side, start watering your own

Matshona Dhliwayo

Abdulkadir Ahmed:
The longest-serving CBN governor across military, civilian administrations

Born in Jama'are, Bauchi State, in 1940, Abdulkadir Ahmed remains the longest-serving Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), holding office for 11 years, 3 months and 3 days, from 27 June 1982 to 30 September 1993. His historic tenure spanned multiple political eras. Ahmed presided over the nation's apex bank during the civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari, the military governments of Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida, and the Interim National Government of Chief Ernest Shonekan—a rare continuity of leadership in Nigeria's turbulent economic history. Ahmed studied at Barewa College, Zaria, which he entered in 1955. In 1961, he proceeded to the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and later earned further qualifications from South West London College in 1972. He served as Commissioner of Finance for Bauchi State between March 1976 and June 1977, after which he was appointed Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria in 1977. Five years later, he rose to become Governor, a position he would hold longer than any of his successors. Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed passed away in Bauchi in 1997 at the age of 57, leaving behind a legacy defined by institutional stability and service across both civilian and military administrations.

NEWS

Nollywood actor linked to 2025 coup and assassination plot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

plotters planned to assassinate President Tinubu, Vice President Kashim Shettima, Senate President Godswill Akpabio, and Speaker of the House of Representatives Tajudeen Abbas, among others.

The Coup Plot of October 2025

In October 2025, at least 16 Nigerian military officers were arrested in connection with an alleged coup plot aimed at overthrowing Tinubu's government. Some reports connected the cancellation of Nigeria's 65th Independence Day parade (October 1) to this alleged plot, which heightened public concern.

Initial Denial

Nigeria's Defence Headquarters (DHQ) initially denied that a coup attempt was underway, calling reports false, misleading, and intended to create panic. Officials said the detained officers were being held for "indiscipline and breach of service regulations," not treason. Around the same time, top military leadership was reshuffled, with



Tinubu and Amadi.

service chiefs replaced. Some analysts saw this as a move to strengthen military discipline amid rumours, though the government maintained it was routine.

Later Confirmation and Investigation

By late January 2026, the Nigerian military reversed its earlier stance and confirmed that a coup plot had indeed been identified

during internal investigations. Defence officials said some officers were found to have been involved in planning to undermine the government, which violated military ethics and values. Investigations were completed and the findings submitted to President Tinubu for further action.

Legal Actions and Ongoing Process

Several of the implicated officers are now facing military trials before judicial panels under Nigeria's Armed Forces Act. The exact number of officers directly involved hasn't been publicly confirmed, and names have largely been withheld.

What Was the Plot

Allegedly About?

Intelligence sources and reporting suggest the group's aim was to destabilise the government and potentially remove President Tinubu from office. Some coverage also mentions planned action against top political figures, though details remain based largely on leaked or

investigative reporting, not full official disclosure.

Nigeria has a history of coups in the 20th century but has maintained democratic rule since 1999, making any successful coup especially significant. Rumours of this plot emerged amid broader concerns about security, military morale, and political tensions.

Dying at Home: Why Many Nigerians Choose Alternative Care Over Hospitals

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

hygiene, outdated equipment and indifferent attitudes by some health workers are widely shared in communities and on social media. Over time, these accounts have eroded public trust in the healthcare system.

For many patients, especially in rural areas and low-income urban communities, the fear is not only of medical errors but of being treated without compassion or taken seriously.

The Burden of Cost

Beyond fear and mistrust, the rising cost of healthcare has become a major deterrent. Many Nigerians are required to pay out of pocket for consultations, drugs, laboratory tests and surgeries. Hospital admission often comes with demands for deposits before treatment can

begin, even in emergencies. For families living on daily earnings, the prospect of hospital bills running into hundreds of thousands of naira is frightening. As a result, people delay seeking professional care, resort to self-medication, unregulated drug vendors or traditional remedies, hoping their condition will improve. In many cases, it does not.

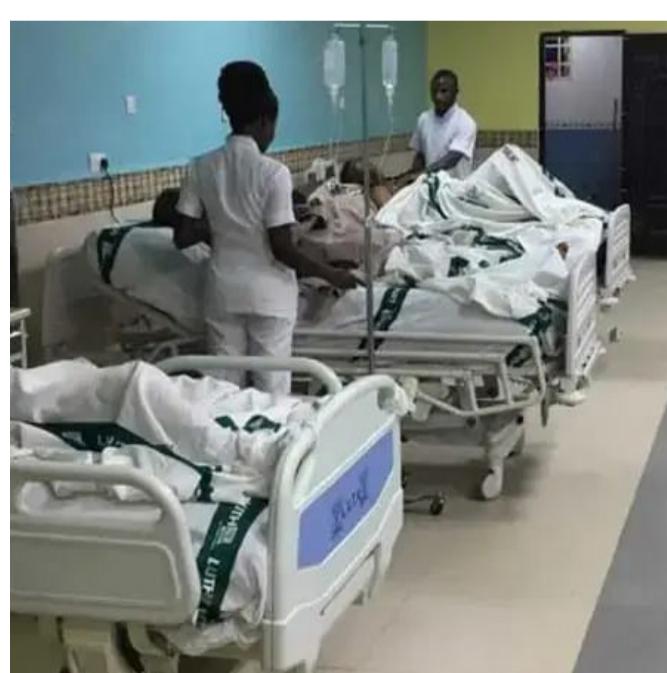
Health experts warn that delayed treatment not only increases the risk of death but ultimately makes care more expensive when patients finally present with advanced complications.

When Delay Turns Deadly
The consequences of avoiding hospitals are severe. Illnesses that could have been treated early become critical, childbirth complications turn fatal and minor infections

spiral into life-threatening conditions. Many deaths now occur at home, not because care was unavailable, but because it was seen as unaffordable or unsafe.

Ironically, the Kano woman did seek hospital care. Her death highlights another dimension of the crisis: even when patients overcome fear and cost to access treatment, systemic failures can still cost them their lives. This reality further discourages others from seeking help.

A System in Need of Reform
Medical professionals and public health advocates agree that restoring confidence in hospitals requires urgent reforms. These include stricter safety protocols, proper monitoring during surgeries, improved working conditions for health workers and clear accountability fine



Hospital

National Health Insurance Authority scheme and reducing out-of-pocket payments would make hospitals more accessible and less intimidating to ordinary citizens.

Rebuilding Trust, Saving Lives

Until hospitals are affordable, safe and compassionate, many Nigerians will continue to weigh the risks of treatment against the certainty of high costs. For too many families, the decision to stay at home is not a choice but a forced response to a broken system. Unless trust is rebuilt and healthcare made truly accessible, the country will continue to witness preventable deaths, quiet tragedies that unfold behind closed doors, far from the hospital wards meant to save lives.

Equally important is addressing the cost of care. Expanding health insurance coverage, strengthening the

NEWS

BY ABDULLAHI HARUNA

African leaders champion education, media collaboration at International Peace Forum



Queen Irene Onwuka and Ambassador Ayanda Ngwane.

African diplomats and envoys delivered powerful calls for strengthened continental cooperation, positioning media access, quality education, and women's leadership as cornerstones of Africa's development trajectory and global peace efforts. Ambassador Ayanda Ngwane, Managing Director of Neptune Prime and African Union Press Ambassador, made headlines with her pledge to mobilise comprehensive media support across the continent.

In a passionate address, she emphasised her commitment to amplifying African narratives through international platforms.

"I'm here to assist any time, whether it's Forbes partnership, Neptune Prime, BRICS TV, SABC, or any international media platforms, I've got them," Ambassador Ngwane declared.

"As an AU Press Ambassador, it's such a pleasure to meet you all, and I'm here all the way. I'm a servant to humanity and Africa."

Her remarks highlighted the critical importance of media representation in reshaping global perceptions of African peace and development initiatives, while showcasing existing partnerships with major international outlets.

Special Envoy for Education Irene Onwuka delivered a compelling statement on education's transformative power in addressing the continent's most pressing challenges, emphasising that educational investment extends far beyond classroom learning.

"Across the continent, quality and inclusive education remains essential to empowering young people,

reducing inequality, strengthening governance, and fostering innovation," Special Envoy Onwuka stated.

"Education is not only a social necessity but a strategic investment in Africa's future leadership and workforce."

Her presentation outlined concrete proposals for international cooperation to bridge educational disparities, with particular emphasis on inclusive education that resonates with delegates working on youth empowerment and gender equality initiatives.

The Special Envoy called for increased investment in teacher training, digital infrastructure, and curriculum development that reflects African contexts while preparing young people for global opportunities.

Regional Challenges Require Continental Solutions

Professor Hilary I. Inyang provided critical insights into the need for pan-African

diplomatic engagement, drawing from personal experience to illustrate how language barriers and diplomatic fragmentation can undermine continental solidarity.

Recalling his 2007 campaign for a UN position, Professor Inyang explained how West Africa's linguistic divide—five anglophone countries versus nine francophone countries—created voting blocs that transcended regional identity.

"I lost 64-62 in Geneva because of that," he revealed. "This is why we need to engage diplomatically now."

His remarks underscored that many of Africa's challenges originate in one country but create impacts across borders. "If anything happens to Nigeria, the whole of West Africa is in peril," he noted, emphasising the urgency of continental cooperation on issues ranging from climate change to economic competition in the fourth industrial revolution.

Professor Inyang challenged the forum:

"Who is monitoring to ensure that institutional and organisational targets are met in a very transparent way?" His call for accountability mechanisms and cross-border cooperation frameworks resonated

throughout the conference hall.

Honourable Jemilah Shuaibu, Director of Women Affairs for the West Africa region, contributed vital perspectives on women's roles in peacebuilding and regional stability. Her participation underscored the forum's commitment to ensuring women's voices shape diplomatic and development agendas.

Continental Solidarity in Action

The leaders' statements reflected a unified vision for African development rooted in education, media transparency, and women's empowerment. Their collective message emphasised that Africa's challenges require African-led solutions supported by genuine international partnerships.

Ambassador Ngwane's participation, prompted by Special Envoy Onwuka whom she described as "my sister, my girl, that I've always believed in," demonstrated the strong networks of solidarity among African women leaders working across different sectors.

"Anything for you, no problem," Ambassador Ngwane remarked, highlighting the collaborative spirit driving pan-African initiatives. "I'm here to assist."

Private university expels 15 female students for indecent videos

The Achievers University, Owo, Ondo State, has disclosed that at least 15 female students have been expelled for engaging in acts of indiscipline.

The affected students were reportedly involved in making sex videos, an offence that contravenes the rules and regulations of the institution.

The Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council, Prof. Bode Ayorinde, disclosed this at the university's matriculation ceremony on Friday, where a total of 936 students took the matriculation oath.

He urged students to avoid behaviour that could lead to the loss of their studentship, emphasising that the university has zero tolerance for indiscipline. He said, "You put your phone before you and you're dancing naked and they put Achievers

University, I will dismiss you. Use social media for positive things.

"One of them, who would have graduated, was caught threatening that if Boko Haram came to Achievers University, he would deal with them, essentially inviting Boko Haram. We refunded his N2.3 million and dismissed him.

"Use the money you're paying here wisely, not to make sex videos or take drugs. We have dismissed more than 15 female students for sex video offences.

"If you want to be a graduate and rule the world, you won't engage in such acts. Women are not meant for entertainment; they can rule the world.

"We also frown at bullying. You are all equal before us. It cannot happen here. If you're caught, you are gone."



Students.

Ayorinde recalled that in 2025, the university dismissed 17 students for fraudulent acts to obtain examination clearance

without paying school fees.

He also narrated how three students were expelled for dealing

in hard drugs, urging students not to suffer in silence but to report anyone involved in drug abuse.

He blamed some parents and guardians for indulging their children in wrongdoing, advising them to remind their wards to take their studies seriously.

According to him, students are prohibited from fighting or drinking alcohol, as such acts attract expulsion.

He added that any staff or student found sexually molesting anyone would also be sanctioned.

In his remarks, the Acting Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Amos Aremu, said the university places a premium on quality assurance, discipline, and academic integrity.

Advising the matriculating students, he said their admission was not just a ticket to higher education but "an invitation to embark on a journey of self-discovery, intellectual growth, and societal impact."

OUR HEART

Rhythms of the latest mass uprising in Iran

Starting effectively on the 28th of December, 2025, the ongoing Iranian mass uprising, is, in terms of intensity and spread, only comparable to the nation's experience of 1979. That year, a sustained nationwide mass action culminated in the termination of the monarchical reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi and the emergence of the Islamic Republic.

While the 1979 uprising reflected the people's anger against the repressive regime of the Shah and the then prevailing economic difficulties, the ongoing riots were triggered, essentially, by the raging record-high inflation, reaching up to 42%, the depreciation of the national currency, the Ria, with the attendant high cost of living. Like in the 1979 episodes, millions of Iranians are involved in the present riots.

Beginning with the closures of bazaars, the coterie of shops in the capital city of Tehran, the protests soon escalated to hundreds of cities in all the thirty-one provinces. Also, what started out as peaceful protests soon became acts of unbridled violence such as the burning and wanton destruction of public buildings, looting and assaults on security agents.

After a week of unrelenting violence, the failures of entreaties or other peaceful approaches, the authorities responded by using counter force against the rioters. In the process, an estimated 2000 people including security agents, were reportedly killed, with several others injured or arrested.

Expectedly, the Iranian protests have generated a number of issues, opinions and responses in different parts of the world that needs to be thoroughly interrogated. First is the question of economic difficulties and the consequential effects on the mass of the Iranian people.

Without doubt, Iranians have been going through very hard times due to what is unarguably, an unprecedented downturn of the country's economy. With a spiralling inflation reaching the unbearable degree of over 42%, rising costs of food and other basic essentials and the depreciation of the country's currency exchange rate to the dollar, it is indeed, an understatement to say that the Iranians were getting to breaking points.

While admitting that Iranians had, understandably, been pushed to the wall as a result of the economic crunch, it is only logical to address the opinion that the situation was the result of mismanagement by the government. Besides blaming Iran's huge spending on defence budgets as a wasteful drain on its resources, proponents of this view, however, further contend that the prevailing Iranian economic peril was, largely, due to its self-imposed burdens of funding to Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Hutes in Yemen, the Hamas and Syria, before the fall of Bashar Al-Assad.

Occupying the third position in world's proven oil reserves and stupendously endowed with several other natural resources, Iran should not, ideally, be going through its present economic

challenges. Critically however, the situation goes beyond the rather simplistic and cavalier explanations usually spurned by hostile analysts in the USA, Israel and their allies in the west. From 1979 to date, the raft of sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union and the United Nations Security Council have had very crippling impacts on the Iranian economy. The sanctions, mainly targeted at the country's oil and energy sector, has meant serious dislocation to the \$480 billion oil dominated economy. Described as, "tough and brutal", Iran loses as much as \$60 billion dollars annually. Rather than blaming the Iranian economic challenges on mismanagement, the country's political leadership should be commended for the monumental records of achievements achieved in spite of the debilitating sanctions, international conspiracy and sabotage in the last forty years.

Iran has since made giant strides in educational advancement such that today, the country has a literacy level of 98%, against the figure of 28% of the USA; it is a global leader in medicine and other scientific fields; it produces high calibre military hardwares such as long-range missiles and drones.

It is as well, empirically inaccurate to ascribe the raging riots in Iran to the people's quest

for democracy and representative governance. This is in view of the fact that, apart from Israel, Iran is the only other country in the Middle East where regular and popular elections are held. Iran has the additional distinction of being the only country where special allocations are constitutionally provided for representation of minority communities in the national parliament.

The current uprising in Iran is evidently, the outcome of the machinations of external forces with interest in seeing to a "regime change" or, even outright disintegration of the country. With a vibrant population of ninety-five million people, Iran's potential and actual advancement is a source of discomfort to the nations with an interest of dominance in the Middle East. With its vast oil and other natural resources, Iran is being coveted and targeted for conquest by those with cravings for the country's wealth.

After publicly threatening the fifteen million residents of Tehran to relocate in order to escape imminent US bombardments of the city, President Donald Trump was also reported at another forum of urging Iranians to keep, "protesting, take over your institutions ...help is on the way."

Mike Pompeo, former US Secretary of State in his so-called New Year message to Iranians stated: "Happy New Year to every Iranian in the streets. Also to MOSSAD agents walking beside them". Ex-Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant was similarly unabashed: "The regime in Iran must fall and we need to exercise strategic patience.

"At the moment, when what matters most is the mass action on the ground, we need to stay at the background and steer things with an invisible hand."

To the world, especially the segments of it that cherish global peace, security and love of humanity, it is an exciting piece of news that the Iranian protests have begun to thaw and calm is fast returning to the embattled nation. It is gratifying to know that, after all, the authorities in Tehran will not be executing those arrested and found guilty of participating in the protests. However, lasting, enduring peace in the Middle East lies on a decision by Israel and Iran to take the pragmatic and rational path. Israel and allies in the West must acknowledge the fact that Iran is not as such, a "theocracy" or, one that is being ruled by a regime the likes that existed in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Venezuela. It is a government and a system that is entrenched in the history, culture and traditions of the Iranians. Externally induced "regime change" does not appear to be feasible in the foreseeable future.

Iran on the other hand, must come to terms with the reality of the existence of the state of Israel. Tehran must come away from the dreams and hallucinations of obliterating Israel from surface of the Earth. Ideological posturing does not at the end of the day, meet the existential requirements of the people.

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NORTH-EAST

BY GIFT LUCKSON
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Gov. Buni unveils multi-billion-naira research centre, awards N30 million to Yobe teen champions



Buni

In a landmark event celebrating both academic excellence and scientific ambition, Governor Mai Mala Buni has on Thursday officially inaugurated the permanent site of the Yobe State University (YSU) Biomedical Research and Training Centre (BioRTC). The inauguration ceremony doubled as a celebration for three Yobe indigenes Nafisa Abdullahi, Hadiza Kashim Kalli, and Rukaiya Mohamed Fema who recently defeated

20,000 contestants from 69 countries to win the prestigious TeenEagle 2025 World Championship in London.

In a surprise announcement, Governor Buni awarded each of the three champions a full government scholarship to cover their education up to the tertiary level, coupled with a personal donation of N10 million each.

"You have made Yobe and Nigeria proud on the global stage. This is our investment

in your future and a signal to every young person in our state that excellence is recognised and rewarded," Governor Buni stated. Governor Buni hailed the research centre as a landmark investment designed to pivot Africa towards solving its own health challenges.

"The BioRTC is conceived to address Africa's unique health burdens by developing home grown solutions, moving us away from dependency on foreign research models that often do not align with our realities," the governor explained.

He revealed the state government's investment of over N800 million in constructing the centre's permanent site.

This infrastructure received a monumental boost from a N10 billion equipment donation by renowned neurobiologist, Professor Mahmoud Bukar Maina. Looking beyond the state, Governor Buni made two significant appeals to the Federal Government for the establishment of a National Kidney Disease Centre in Yobe State to combat a prevalent scourge in the

region. Furthermore, he urged the Federal Ministry of Health to formally partner with the BioRTC to adopt and deploy its low-cost diagnostic innovations for nationwide use.

Linking the events, Governor Buni reiterated his administration's sweeping commitment to education. He cited an annual expenditure exceeding ₦13.5 billion on scholarships, examination fees, and school feeding programmes, while reaffirming that basic and secondary education remain free for all children in the state.

"From rewarding our brilliant young minds today to building this centre of excellence, our mission is clear: to cultivate knowledge, solve our pressing problems, and place Yobe and Nigeria on the global map of innovation and research," Governor Buni concluded. The BioRTC is now positioned as Yobe State's flagship research institution, aiming to bridge the gap between local health issues and globally significant scientific breakthroughs.

Troops recover bodies of officers executed by Boko Haram



Troops

Troops of the Nigerian Army have recovered the bodies of a commanding officer, a major and other soldiers killed by Boko Haram insurgents in the Damasak area of Borno State.

Earlier reports had indicated that the militants killed seven soldiers and captured the commanding officer along with 12 others during an attack on

Monday. However, top security sources said that the commanding officer, seven soldiers and two members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) were later executed by the terrorists.

One of the sources said the bodies were recovered on Wednesday following a fierce ground battle, supported by air operations, between

troops and the insurgents. "Initially, we believed the commanding officer was captured alive, but it was later discovered that he was killed alongside the others. Their hands were tied and they were executed, while some bodies were dumped in the water," the source said. He added that the insurgents hid in surrounding bushes,

waiting for troops to recover the bodies, but reinforcements arrived and engaged them before fighter jets eventually dislodged the terrorists. The corpses were subsequently airlifted to Maiduguri.

Narrating how the incident occurred, the source said troops were approaching a major terrorist camp between Damasak and Geidam when they were ambushed.

"They must have had prior knowledge of our operation. They encircled us midway and opened fire," he said.

The Nigerian military has intensified its offensive against Boko Haram in the Timbuktu Triangle, Sambisa Forest, Mandara Mountains and the Lake Chad area.

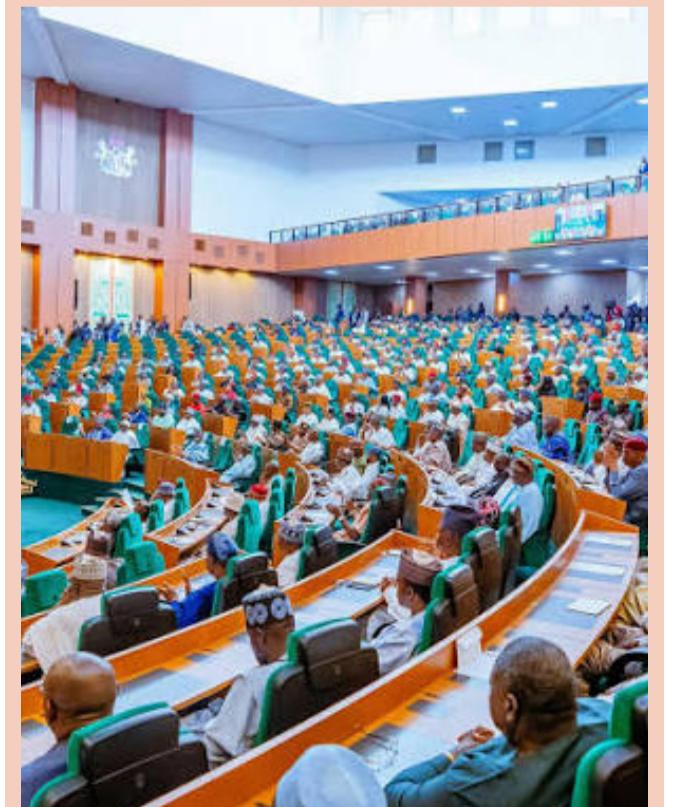
In recent operations, troops have recorded successes, dislodged camps and killed top Boko Haram and ISWAP commanders in difficult terrains and previously inaccessible areas.

Reps calls for intensified security operations to curb banditry in Gombe

The House of Representatives has within Akko Local Government Arca. While moving the motion, Kumo informed the House of the recent attacks by armed bandits on Garin Galadima, Pindiga, Garin Jaji, and Laro and other communities in Akko Local Government Area of Gombe State, that resulted in the killing of 6 innocent people, abduction of 20 persons currently being held hostage by the kidnappers, and destruction of properties, thereby causing widespread fear and displacement of citizens from their homes.

According to him, these attacks have caused fear and uncertainty within the communities.

He said these incidents are a stark reminder of the overwhelming threat to national security, and a call to all security agencies to double their efforts in ensuring that they provide adequate protection to citizens and their properties.



Representatives

NORTH-EAST

BY IBRAHEEM EL-TAFSEER

Police arrest 40-year-old man for killing brother in Adamawa

The Adamawa State Police Command has arrested a 40-year-old man, Abubakar Sadiq, for the alleged killing of his elder brother, Alhaji Sadiq Kawu, in the Gombi Local Government Area of the state.

The command's spokesperson, SP Suleiman Nguroje, disclosed this in a statement on Wednesday in Yola, the state capital, noting that the suspect confessed to committing the crime, which occurred last week.

According to the statement, operatives attached to the Gombi Divisional Police Headquarters, in collaboration with professional hunters, arrested the suspect following credible intelligence.

"Following credible intelligence, operatives of the command attached to the Gombi Divisional Police Headquarters, in collaboration with professional hunters, swung into action and arrested one Abubakar Sadiq, 40 years, of Boga Village, Gombi LGA, in



Police

connection with the killing

of his elder brother, Alhaji Sadiq Kawu Boga, which occurred on January 20, 2026," the statement read. Nguroje said the suspect, during interrogation, confessed to committing the crime with the assistance of five others and led police operatives to the recovery of the

weapon used. "The suspect led the police to the recovery of one AK-47 rifle used in committing the crime, as well as 24 rounds of live ammunition," he added. The suspect also mentioned two of his alleged accomplices—Jalo Hamiyu, 35, and Umar Baba, 41—both residents of Fotta Village, Gombi LGA. "Consequently, a joint team of

police operatives, hunters and members of the Civilian Joint Task Force proceeded to the suspects' hideouts to effect their arrest," the statement said.

However, Nguroje disclosed that the two suspects were neutralised after opening fire on the operatives in an attempt to escape arrest.

"Upon sighting the operatives, the suspects opened fire to scare the team and flee. This resulted in a gun duel, during which the two suspects were neutralised," he stated.

Exhibits recovered from the scene include one locally made single-barrel rifle and one Dane gun.

Nguroje added that efforts were ongoing to arrest other fleeing members of the gang.

Commending the operation, the Commissioner of Police, Dankombo Morris, praised the gallantry and professionalism of the Divisional Police Officer and his men, reassuring residents of the command's commitment to safeguarding lives and property across the state.

He also urged members of the public to continue supporting the police with timely and credible information to enhance security operations.

Nguroje said the suspect would be charged in court upon the conclusion of investigations.

Bauchi gov't increases health budget to combat malnutrition, hepatitis



Hospital

The Bauchi State Government has disclosed plans to release N500m in 2026 as counterpart funding for nutrition, with the United Nations Children's Fund expected to match the amount, bringing the total intervention to N1bn.

The Executive Chairman of the Bauchi State Primary Health Care Board, Dr. Dilwanu Mohammed, made

this known while speaking with journalists in Bauchi. Mohammed said the partnership with UNICEF is based on a matching-grant arrangement, noting that in 2025, both the state government and the international agency provided N300m each for nutrition programmes. According to him, the state initially contributed N100m

in the first phase of the scheme before Governor Bala Mohammed increased the funding to N300m and has now approved an increment to N500m in 2026.

"UNICEF always matches whatever the state pays, one-for-one. With the N500m approved by His Excellency, UNICEF will also provide an equivalent amount, making it N1bn for nutrition intervention," he said.

The chairman explained that part of the funds would be used to procure essential commodities, including specialised nutrition supplements and drugs aimed at preventing and treating malnutrition.

He revealed that about 15 million doses of a nutrition-related drug, including Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food and other supplements, had already been delivered to the state and were in stock for distribution, especially to communities with the highest burden of malnutrition.

Mohammed noted that Bauchi is among the seven states in the country with a

high prevalence of malnutrition, adding that the intervention would be targeted at the most affected local government areas. He further disclosed that the state government is considering the establishment of a nutrition endowment fund to ensure sustainable financing for the sector.

Speaking on health financing, the chairman said the Bauchi State Government had increased its health budget significantly in line with the Abuja Declaration of allocating at least 15 per cent of annual budgets to the health sector.

"Our initial proposal was about N22bn, but it was increased to about N40bn to ensure that the 15 per cent benchmark for health is achieved," he said.

Mohammed also raised concerns over the outbreak of vaccine-preventable diseases and cases of Hepatitis B in some communities, attributing many deaths to refusal or failure to complete routine immunisation.

He said investigations had been launched in affected areas, with plans to conduct community-wide testing and vaccination in collaboration with development partners and relevant agencies.

He urged residents to embrace routine immunisation and proper nutrition practices, warning that ignorance and unhealthy feeding habits, including excessive consumption of junk food, were contributing to both malnutrition and obesity in children.

Troops rescue kidnapped victim in Taraba

Troops of the Nigerian Army's 6 Brigade, under Sector 3 of Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), have rescued a kidnapped man in Dogon Gawa, Takum LGA of Taraba State.

The development was disclosed in a statement issued by the Acting Assistant Director of Army Public Relations, Umar Muhammad.

According to the statement, soldiers deployed at Dogon Gawa in Taraba State rescued the victim on Tuesday after sighting him in the bush during operations.

The man was later identified as Ghali.

Mr Muhammad said preliminary investigations showed that the man and another man, Simon Oluchukwu, were abducted on 11 January at Gbise village, Mbayonga, in Benue State.

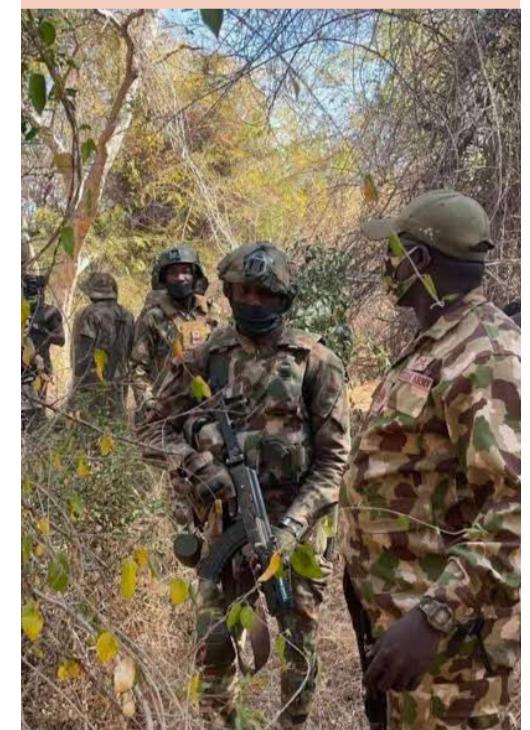
Their driver was reportedly killed by the kidnappers during the attack. He added that Mr Ghali was abandoned by his captors before he was found by the troops.

"Following his rescue, the victim was immediately debriefed, provided with necessary medical care and later reunited with his family," the statement said.

Reacting to the operation, the Commander of 6 Brigade Nigerian Army and Sector 3 OPWS, Brigadier Kingsley Uwa, commended the troops for their courage, professionalism and persistence.

Mr Uwa assured that military operations in the area would be intensified to secure the release of the remaining victim and apprehend those responsible for the abduction. He also called on residents to support security agencies with timely and credible information to aid ongoing operations.

The army said the rescue highlights the commitment of troops of 6 Brigade to protecting lives and property, and reaffirmed their resolve to rid the area of criminal elements and restore lasting peace.



Troops

CUSTOMS & NEMA

BY ABDULLAHI HARUNA

World Customs Day: CGC Adeniyi reaffirms NCS commitment, launches time release study



Participants

The Comptroller-General of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Bashir Adewale Adeniyi, has reaffirmed the Service's commitment to protecting society while facilitating legitimate trade, as Nigeria marked the 2026 International Customs Day. During the event, Adeniyi officially launched the Nigeria Time Release Study (TRS), describing it as a critical tool for improving cargo clearance efficiency, transparency, and trade competitiveness. He noted that the initiative aligns with the World

Customs Organisation's 2026 theme, "Customs Protecting Society Through Vigilance and Commitment."

The CGC highlighted major seizures recorded nationwide in 2024, including narcotics, counterfeit medicines, arms, and wildlife products, stressing that such interventions prevented serious harm to public health, security, and the environment.

Adeniyi explained that findings from the TRS revealed that delays in cargo clearance were largely caused by fragmented processes

and poor inter-agency coordination, rather than customs examination itself. He said the Service would institutionalise the study to drive evidence-based reforms and improve collaboration among port stakeholders.

He also disclosed that the NCS generated ₦7.28 trillion in revenue in 2024, exceeding its target by over ₦697 billion, attributing the performance to improved compliance, digital tools, and stronger partnerships with the private sector.

The CGC reaffirmed NCS's

resolve to deepen technology-driven enforcement, streamline procedures, and strengthen partnerships to balance border security with trade facilitation.

In his remarks, the Chairman, House Committee on Customs Hons. Leke Abijide says the Nigeria Customs Service plays a critical preventive role in national security, stressing that stopping illegal goods at the borders is better than dealing with their consequences.

He called for stronger coordination among key ministries to reduce port

delays, cut costs for essential goods, and boost government revenue.

Minister of State for Finance, Dr Doris Uzoka Anite, during her speech, said:

"The Time Release Study reflects the professionalism of the Nigeria Customs Service and aligns with global standards and Nigeria's economic priorities. As the Federal Government implements key economic reforms, the TRS serves as a strategic tool to reduce trade bottlenecks, improve transparency, strengthen ease

of doing business, and boost competitiveness under the AfCFTA."

"Beyond trade facilitation, Customs continues to play a vital role in revenue generation, national security, and societal protection."

"The Federal Government remains committed to supporting reforms that modernise border management, and I commend the officers and men of the Service on the successful launch of the TRS and the 2026 International Customs Day celebration."

Customs begins manhunt for smugglers following attack on officers

The Nigeria Customs Service, Ogun I Area Command, has vowed to bring to book the smugglers who launched a violent attack on its officers during an anti-smuggling operation at the Akokoro area of Iwoye, Imeko-Afon Local Government Area of Ogun State.

The command's spokesperson, Zakari Chado, disclosed this in a statement, saying the attack occurred while officers of the command, acting on credible intelligence, intercepted a 12-tyre truck suspected to be conveying a large consignment of illicit drugs and other prohibited items. According to him, before reinforcement teams could arrive, the suspects mobilised a large number of armed hoodlums and launched a coordinated attack on the patrol team. "In a deliberate effort to

obstruct law enforcement, the attackers mounted heavy barricades at about nine strategic points to block access routes, thereby preventing timely reinforcement," he said.

"They opened fire on the officers and disabled a Customs patrol vehicle by shooting out its tyres, creating a volatile and dangerous operational environment.

"During the exchange, two officers of the Nigeria Customs Service sustained gunshot injuries and are currently in critical condition, receiving intensive medical care.

"Exploiting the multiple barricades they mounted, the smugglers fled the scene with the intercepted truck."

Chado added that the command has commenced an investigation into the attack and has begun efforts to identify, track

and apprehend all those involved.

Reacting to the incident, the Acting Customs Area Controller of the command, Deputy Comptroller Olukayode Afeni, condemned the attack, describing it as barbaric and unacceptable. Afeni reaffirmed that such violent resistance would not deter the command or the service from discharging its statutory mandate of combating smuggling and protecting national security.

He also called on traditional rulers and community leaders within the command's area of responsibility to caution their subjects against smuggling and attacks on security personnel, warning that offenders would face the full weight of the law. The controller assured law-abiding members of the public of their safety and



Customs officers

reiterated the command's unwavering commitment to border security, public health and the enforcement of the Nigeria Customs

Service Act, 2023. It will be recalled that the command had recently made significant seizures of narcotics around border

communities in the state, which were subsequently handed over to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency.

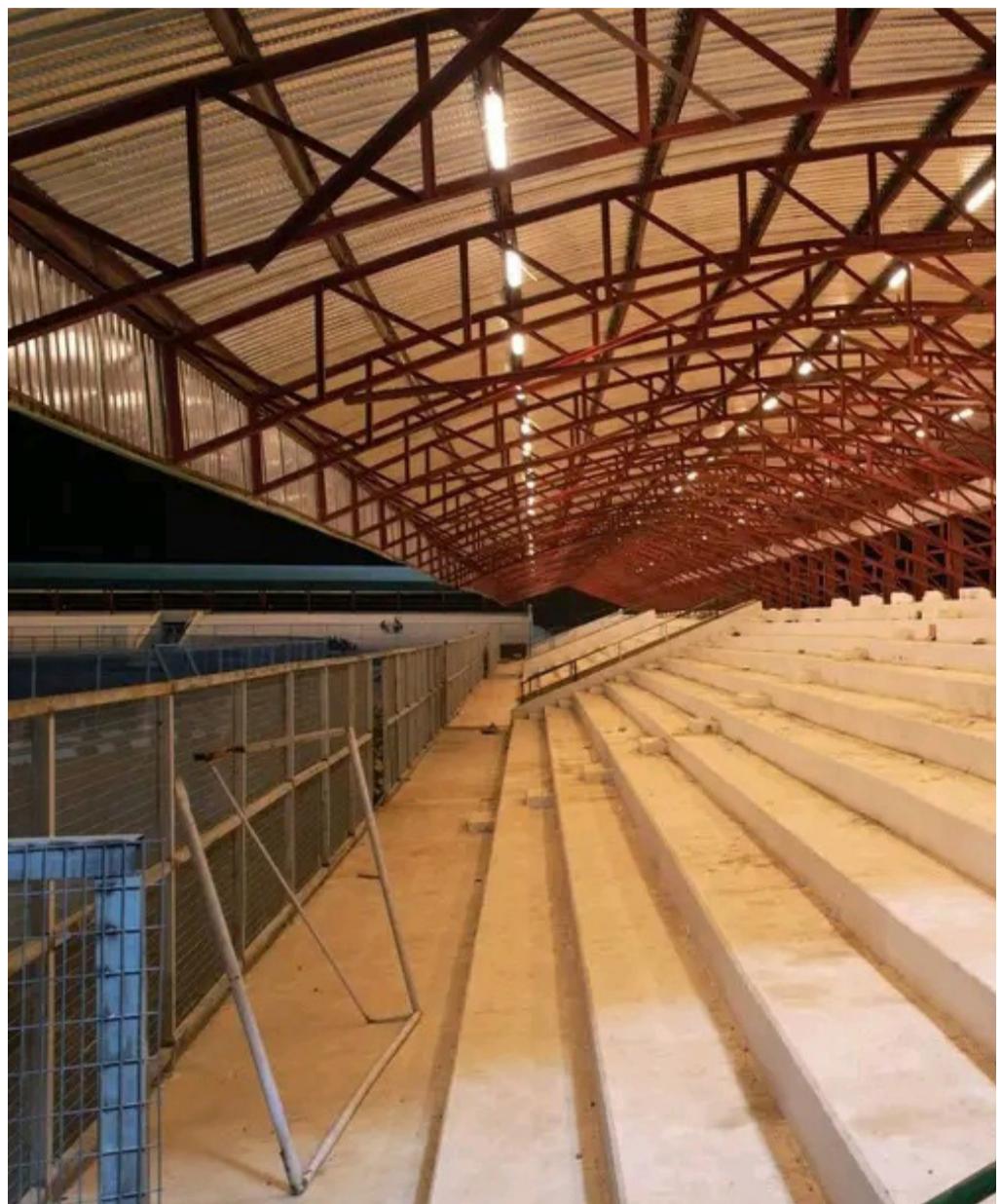
PRIME PHOTOS

BY MERCY ADAJE
Mercy Ajibade@neptuneprime.com.ng

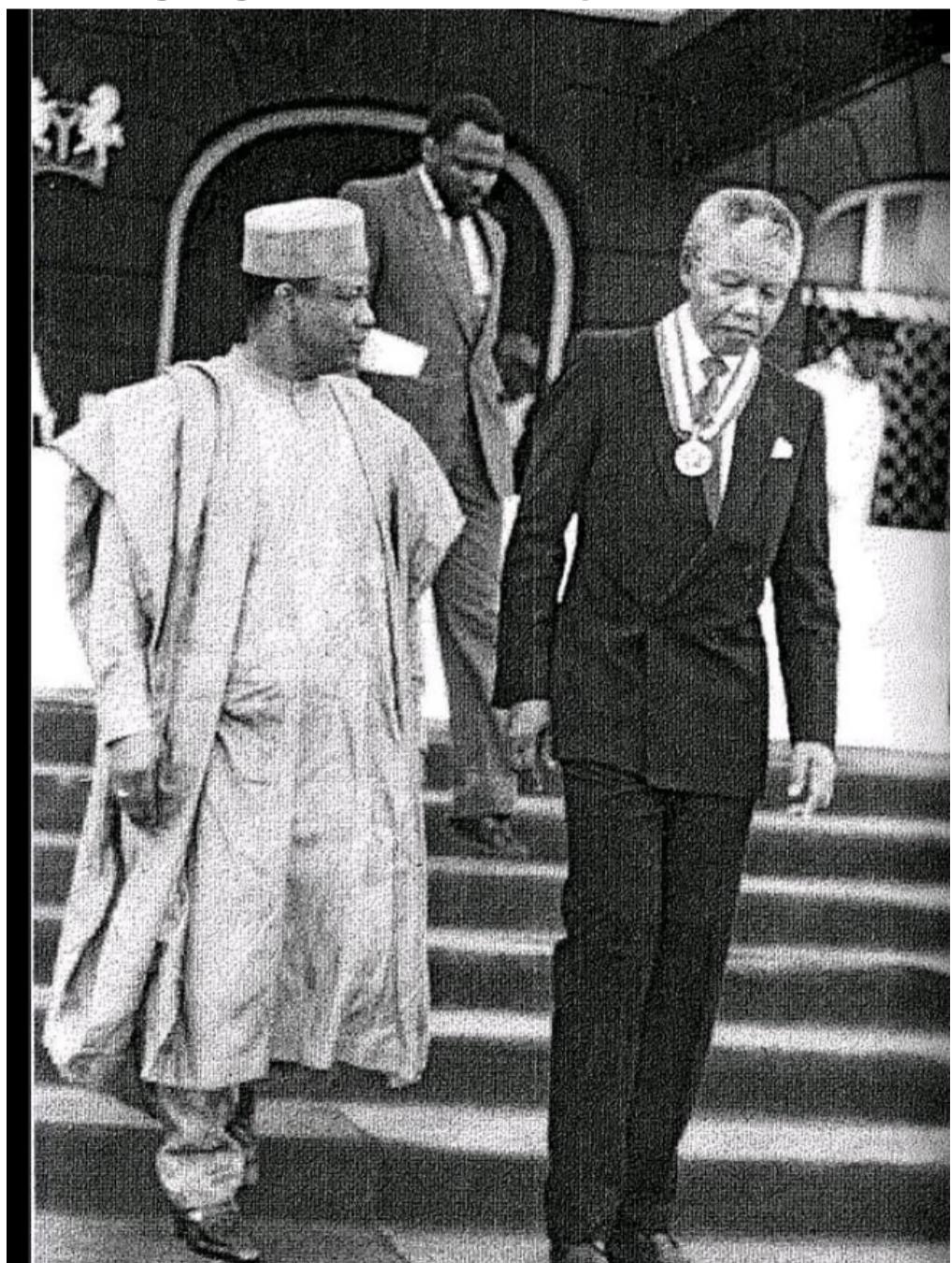


Mr Gholamreza Mahdavi Raja, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met with Professor Ibrahim Ahmed Makari, the Chief Imam of the National Mosque in Abuja, on Wednesday, January 28, 2026.

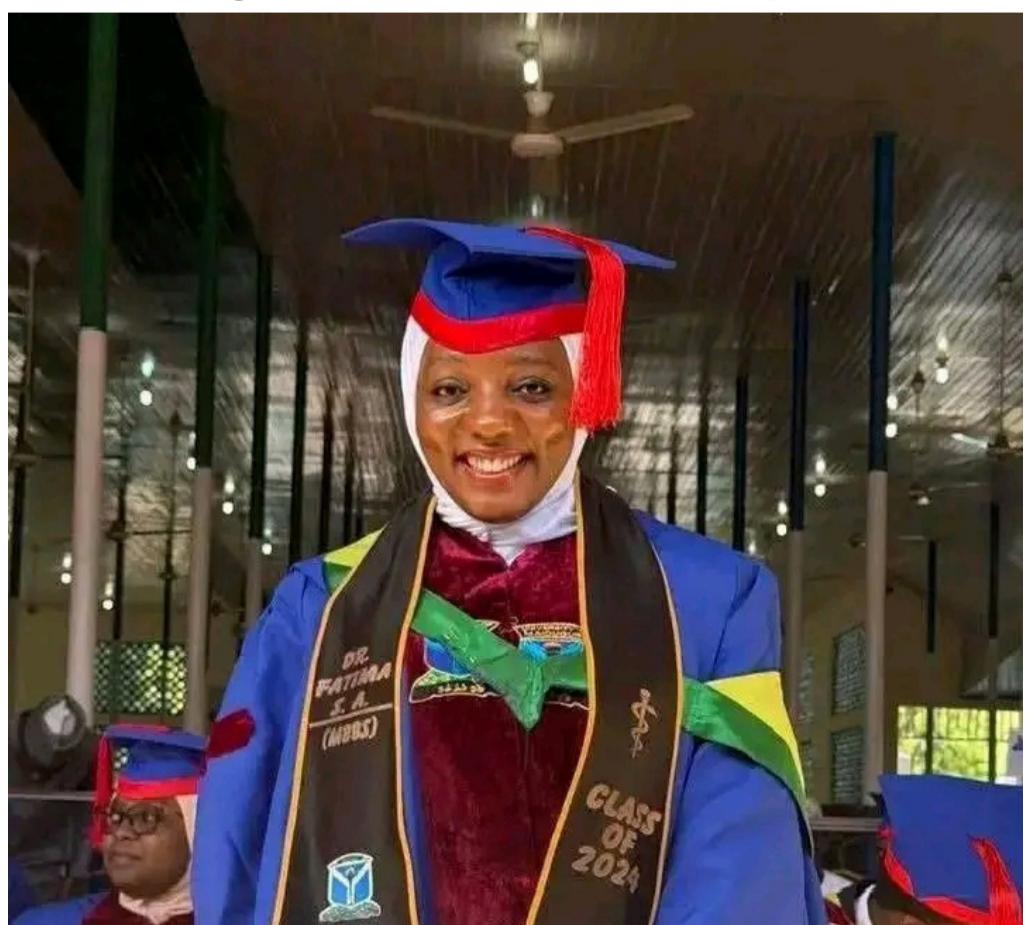
During the meeting, they discussed and exchanged views on enhancing religious and cultural cooperation.



Yobe State Governor Mai Mala Buni intensifies efforts to reposition sport through the massive remodelling of the Damaturu Township Stadium.



A photo of Nelson Mandela in Lagos, May 1990, three months after release from prison. On his neck is Nigeria's highest National Honour, the GCFR, awarded by former President Ibrahim Babangida.



Fatima Sadiq from Taraba State has graduated with distinction in MBBS from the University of Maiduguri and emerged as the best graduating female student. She was recognised formally and publicly for her excellence during the Attestation and Oath-Taking Ceremony into the medical profession.

PRIME10MENT

BY MERCY ADAJE
Mercy Ajibade@neptuneprime.com.ng

Nollywood actress Angela Okorie arrested over alleged defamation of Mercy Johnson

Popular Nollywood actress Angela Okorie was reportedly arrested at her Lagos residence on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, by operatives of the Nigeria Police Force Cybercrime Centre, Abuja, over allegations of cyberbullying.

The arrest was disclosed on Wednesday by entertainment journalist and BON Awards founder, Seun Oloketyl, who shared details of the development via his Instagram page.

According to Oloketyl, Angela Okorie was initially detained at the Yaba, Panti Police Station, where she spent the night before being flown to Abuja in the early hours of Wednesday for further legal proceedings.

He wrote:

"Angela Okorie was arrested yesterday at her Lagos residence by the Nigeria Police Force Cybercrime Centre, Abuja. She was put on a 6am flight to Abuja this morning to face court proceedings connected to a cybercrime matter involving Mercy Johnson."

The arrest comes exactly one week after Mercy Johnson publicly stated that cyberbullying targeted at her and her family would no longer be tolerated in 2026, a statement many now see as a strong warning ahead of the legal action.

As of the time of filing this report, neither Angela Okorie nor Mercy Johnson has released an official statement addressing the matter.



Okorie and Johnson

AGN unveils Nollywood City in Enugu to honour Junior Pope



Late Junior Pope

The Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) has inaugurated the Junior Pope Nollywood City in Enugu, a project aimed at immortalising the late actor and celebrating his contributions to the industry.

According to NAN, the project, which includes 150 plots of land, was unveiled during a ceremony on Tuesday. Emeka Rollas, the guild's national president, said the project is both a tribute to the late actor and a landmark step for

the guild. Rollas said Pope's legacy continues to inspire initiatives aimed at building structures that will endure for future generations.

"Today, we say clearly that the welfare of our members is not a slogan – it is a responsibility.

"Through this project, Nollywood practitioners will have access to affordable land ownership," he added.

"The Guild will establish the Junior Pope Creative Hub and permanent

AGN Zonal and Enugu State Secretariat.

"This means training, administration, and creativity will now have a physical home in Enugu State."

He lauded the AGN Enugu chapter for the initiative, while appreciating the Enugu governor for the support of Nollywood and the creative industry.

"We are particularly grateful to the Enugu State Government for embracing Nollywood and recognising the creative industry as a vital pillar of economic growth and youth employment," he added.

"I thank our partners, Cool Brains Real Estate, and the people of Ako Nike Community for their trust and cooperation."

Brown Ene, chairman of AGN's Enugu chapter and initiator of the project, said the land was acquired to promote the image of Nollywood and improve the welfare of its members.

He revealed that Pope's three sons have been allocated one plot of land each.

"So this is part of our progress in making sure that members of our guild have an affordable home in Enugu and we are naming it after our brother who died in a

boat mishap to further immortalise him," he said.

"It is also to give encouragement to the younger actors showing them that the more you keep projecting the image of the organisation and being responsible enough, the guild will definitely do things to remember you. "Junior Pope's three sons will have a plot of land each, and the allocation has already been done and will be presented to their mother on their behalf."

Jennifer Odonwodo, Junior Pope's widow, expressed gratitude for the honour.

"It's indeed a great day, even though it's a day filled with mixed feelings and emotions. I wish he were here and still being honoured, but nevertheless I'm happy it's happening," she said. "It's proof to show that indeed he truly lives on because while he was here, he worked so hard for the industry."

Pope, born John Paul Odonwodo, died on April 10, 2024, in a boat accident on the River Niger in Asaba, Delta state.

He was on his way to a movie location when the incident occurred. The accident also claimed the lives of four other crew

"I am homeless and need N25 million for surgery," Nollywood actress, Halima Abubakar, cries out

Nigerian actress Halima Abubakar has made a public financial appeal to fund brain tumour surgery.

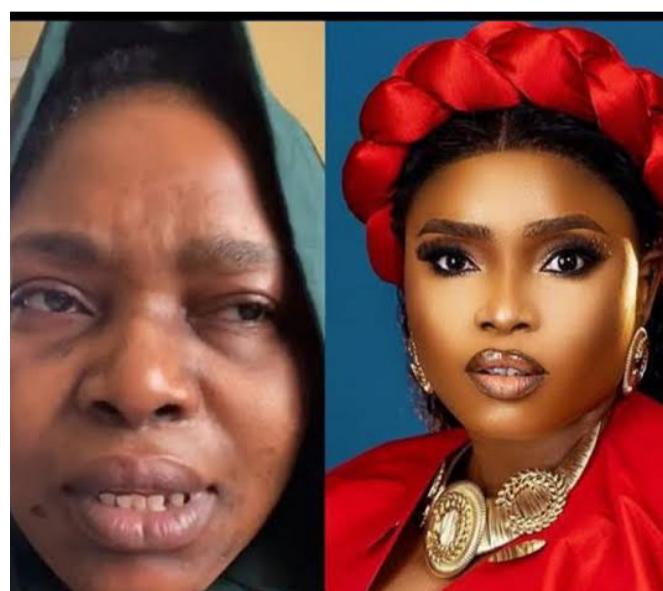
In a recent live session, Halima opened up about her brain tumour diagnosis and subsequent eviction that has left her "homeless and desperate".

The film star revealed that she depleted her resources to cover her mother's 9 million hernia surgery in October last year.

She said she is currently facing accommodation challenges and attempted to use funds raised for her medical treatment to pay her rent, but her landlady reportedly declined to accept the payment, leaving her without a place to stay. Halima also made a direct appeal to influential figures, begging Yahaya Bello, former Kogi governor; activist VeryDarkMan, and Seyi Tinubu, the president's son, saying "I need your help".

"I have just been evicted from my house. I have been diagnosed with a brain tumour. Yesterday, my caretaker came to tell me to leave the house. The money contributed for my health, which I wanted to use to pay my rent, was rejected by my landlady," she said.

"Do they want me to kill myself? From one situation to another, I have packed all my belongings and I have nowhere to go. I do not want



Halima Abubakar

to kill myself.

"Yahaya Bello, VDM, Seyi Tinubu, everyone, I need your help. I have nobody. I cannot even reach any celebrities; none of them is answering my calls. I called Don Jazzy, but there was no response. What did I do?"

"I have a brain tumour. Nigerians, please help me. What have I done that everyone is turning their back on me? I withdrew my surgery

money to pay my rent, but my landlady refused to accept it. I need help from Nigerians for money to handle many things."

"I would not have come out to seek help if not for my mother's hospital bill, which I paid in October. It was 9 million for her hernia surgery, and I am still owing."

The actress also dismissed claims she is putting up a performance to attract sympathy or financial

support, saying "only a mad person would lie of being sick". The actress detailed her urgent financial needs, estimating the total cost for her surgery, aftercare, and living expenses at approximately N25 million.

"It is embarrassing and heartbreaking that people think I am lying. I am coming out publicly to seek help because I have asked people around me and received none. I am ashamed to do this, but it is my only option," she added.

"I have nothing to my name anymore except the money contributed for my surgery. I have suffered too much."

"I need the help of my state governor. I need enough money for my surgery. My spleen needs to be removed. I need accommodation and feeding. I relocated to Abuja to be close to the hospital, Turkish Hospital. I have been on medication for a year now. I need N25 million for my health."

This is not her first call for aid. Halima had called out to the Kogi government for assistance in February 2025, though she did not disclose the nature of her medical condition.

In 2022, Abubakar announced her retirement from acting over health concerns.

NEPTUNE PRIME BUSINESS

By Zainab Suleiman Sabo

(Student at the College of Agriculture, Science and Technology, Gujba, Yobe State)

MARKET SURVEY



Prices of staple grains fall across Northern markets

Consumers across Northern Nigeria are heaving a sigh of relief as the prices of staple food items show a steady decline in key markets. Recent surveys indicate that the cost of grains such as maize, rice, millet, and beans has dropped compared to earlier

months, bringing some respite to households struggling with rising living expenses. Many customers expressed optimism over the reductions. "It's a relief to finally buy rice and maize at reasonable prices," said one trader in Gombe. "We can now

feed our families without cutting corners." Similarly, citizens in Kaduna and Maiduguri reported that the price drop has helped stretch their budgets and reduce daily financial stress. Market analysts attribute the trend to recent harvests and increased



supply, which have helped stabilise prices in most northern markets. While prices are still higher than early 2025 levels, the current reductions are seen as a positive step toward easing the cost of living. Economists also warn that sustaining lower prices will require continued agricultural productivity and improved supply chain management.

Grain Prices Across Northern Markets,

Gombe Central
Maize (100 kg): N53,000 (down from N62,000)

Beans (100 kg): N105,000 (was N120,000)

Groundnut (100 kg): N160,000 (was N175,000)

Economists also warn that sustaining lower prices will require continued agricultural productivity and improved supply chain management.

Suleja & Kaduna Markets
White Rice (100 kg): N175,000

Optimum Rice (bag): N85,000

Maize (White): N65,000

Yellow Corn: N70,000

Millet: N75,000

Sorghum: N48,000

Soybeans: N74,000

Beans: N91,000–N100,000

Ma id u g u r i , Damaturu & Other North East Markets

Rice (50 kg): N64,000–N65,000 (previously N80,000)

Maize (100 kg): N40,000–N46,000 (down from N60,000+)

Beans (100 kg): N85,000

Millet (100 kg): N46,000

Sorghum (100 kg): N38,000



MILESTONE

BY ASMA'U YAHAYA MUSTAPHA

student at Al Qalam University Katsina State

BoldBrick, YCIH strengthen strategic partnership ahead of Abuja housing project

BoldBrick Constructions & Works Ltd has announced a deepening of its strategic partnership with YCIH, a Chinese state-owned construction company, as both firms intensify preparations to commence of a landmark housing project in Abuja.

The partnership traces its origin to 2025, when YCIH entered Nigeria at the invitation of BoldBrick, following a series of technical engagements aimed at leveraging Chinese infrastructure expertise for high-end residential development in Nigeria. Since then, YCIH has completed full registration and regulatory compliance in Nigeria and is now fully operational in the country. Building on this foundation, both companies have executed a formal cooperation agreement mandating an exclusive working relationship in Nigeria.

Under the agreement, BoldBrick and YCIH are to collaborate solely with each other on Nigerian projects, combining BoldBrick's deep understanding of the local market with YCIH's technical capacity, engineering systems, and

delivery experience. At a recent high-level meeting between both teams, the companies ramped up preparations for mobilisation to site, with construction expected to commence by the end of February or early March. The flagship project under the partnership is Unreal Mansion, a modern, futuristic estate in Karsana, Abuja, where the joint team plans to deliver 560 high-end, fully smart-home-optimised residential units. Unreal Mansion is designed as a premium residential community that integrates advanced smart-home technology, modern urban planning, and sustainable infrastructure, reflecting the partners' shared vision of redefining luxury housing in Nigeria.

Speaking after the meeting, representatives of both companies, Mr Yang Weifeng and Suleiman Hassan Gimba, Esq, reaffirmed their commitment to delivering projects that meet international standards while responding to Nigeria's evolving urban housing needs.

The partnership, they noted, represents a long-

term strategic alignment rather than a transactional arrangement. With regulatory

groundwork completed and mobilisation timelines now defined, the BoldBrick-YCIH collaboration marks a

significant step in expanding structured China-Nigeria cooperation within the real estate and construction

sector, positioning Unreal Mansion as one of Abuja's most anticipated residential developments.



Gimba, Esq, and Mr Weifeng.

Al-Qalam Varsity graduates 1,109 students at 17th convocation, honours Aminu Masari, others

Al-Qalam University, Katsina, on Saturday, 24th January 2026, held its 17th convocation ceremony, marking another milestone in the institution's commitment to academic excellence, moral training, and community development. A total of 1,109 students were awarded first degrees across 28 academic programmes.

The graduating students completed their studies in various disciplines offered by the university.

A breakdown of the results showed that 18 students graduated with First Class honours, 230 earned Second Class Upper Division, 507 graduated with Second Class Lower Division, 336 received Third Class degrees, while 80 students graduated with pass degrees. The university also

awarded 17 Master's degrees (MSc/MA) and 11 Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees, reflecting the institution's expanding postgraduate programmes and growing research capacity.

The ceremony witnessed the award of degrees to graduating students, the recognition of outstanding academic performance, the crowning of the best reciters (Gwani and Gwana) in the annual Qur'anic Recitation Competition, as well as the presentation of prizes to the overall best graduating students and other top performers.

The winners of the Qur'anic Recitation Competition were each awarded N1 million, alongside other special prizes for excellence.

The ceremony was attended by several



VC of Al-Qalam University Katsina, Professor Nasiru Yauri.

dignitaries from within and outside Katsina State, including the Executive Governor of Katsina State, Dr Dikko Umar Radda; the Emir of Katsina, His Royal Highness Dr

Yahaya Daura, and his Deputy, Hon. Abduljalal Haruna Runka, as well as traditional rulers, senior government officials, heads of tertiary institutions, security personnel, lecturers, parents, and students.

A major highlight of the event was the conferment of honorary doctorate degrees on two distinguished personalities in recognition of their contributions to public service and religious leadership.

Former Governor of Katsina State and former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Rt. Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, CFR, was awarded a Doctor of Public Administration (Honoris Causa). Also honoured was His Royal Highness Eze Abul-Fattah Chima Eze Emetumadito, an Islamic

scholar, community leader, and Chief Imam of the Owerri Central Mosque, who received a Doctor of Islamic Studies (Honoris Causa) in recognition of his contributions to Islamic propagation and leadership in South-East Nigeria.

The Special Guest of Honour, the Governor of Katsina State, Malam Dikko Umar Radda, PhD, commended the university for its consistent academic progress and contribution to human capital development.

He congratulated the graduating students and encouraged them to apply their knowledge and values in contributing positively to society.

The 17th convocation reaffirmed the university's commitment to academic excellence and the holistic development of its students.

HERITAGE

BY TAWHEED YAKUB

The Mafa People: A legacy of ancestral reverence, unity, and hard work in Northeast Nigeria

The Mafa people of Northeastern Nigeria are a resilient and close-knit community, celebrated for their rich cultural heritage, agricultural expertise, and unwavering communal values.

Known for their industriousness and strong social cohesion, the Mafa have preserved their identity despite centuries of migration, inter-ethnic interaction, colonial disruptions, and the pressures of modern life.

Predominantly residing in Borno State, especially in Mafa, Monguno, Biu, and surrounding areas, their ancestral lands stretch across rugged hills, fertile valleys, and rocky terrains, landscapes that have shaped their farming practices, settlements, and defensive strategies.

Over generations, the Mafa have played a vital role in shaping the socio-cultural and economic fabric of Northeastern Nigeria, holding fast to traditions that emphasise respect for elders, loyalty to kin, and the importance of collective responsibility.

Historical Background and Origin

Mafa history is kept alive through oral traditions, folktales, rituals, and the wisdom of elders. Linguistically, the Mafa language belongs to the Biu-Mandara branch of Chadic languages, connecting them to other Northeastern Nigerian and Cameroonian groups.



Traditionally, the Mafa lived in fortified hilltop and valley communities, structured around clans and extended families. These settlements offered protection and supported subsistence agriculture.

Interactions with neighbouring groups like the Kanuri, Mandara, and Higi allowed cultural exchange while maintaining a distinct Mafa identity.

Leadership was guided by village heads, clan elders, and ritual authorities, respected for wisdom, bravery, and moral standing.

These leaders oversaw land use, marriage negotiations, conflict resolution, farming cycles, and communal duties. While colonial



rule altered governance, traditional structures remain influential to this day.

Culture and Tradition

Mafa culture is communal, disciplined, and deeply rooted in shared values. Life revolves around family, clan, and village,

proverbs, storytelling, songs, and rituals. Oral literature preserves history, ethics, and social norms, while traditional beliefs emphasise ancestral respect, honesty, courage, hospitality, and harmony with nature.

Today, Islam predominates, complemented by Christianity and traditional practices. A local saying captures their philosophy: "A Mafa man's strength lies in his people."

Cultural expressions include drumming, string and flute music, communal dances, ceremonial attire, and storytelling, all reinforcing discipline, unity, and moral values.

Marriage Customs

For the Mafa, marriage is more than a union of individuals—it is a bond between families and clans, symbolising continuity, alliance, and honour.

Customs involve family introductions, elder-led negotiations, bride price (often livestock or farm produce), blessings, moral counsel, and communal celebrations with music and dance. Polygamy was traditionally practiced but has declined due to economic and social changes. Today, marriages often blend traditional customs with Islamic rites and civil ceremonies.

Socio-Economic Life

Agriculture forms the backbone of Mafa livelihoods. Skilled farmers cultivate millet, sorghum, maize, beans, groundnuts, and vegetables, thriving on Borno's fertile soils and seasonal rains.

Other traditional trades include livestock rearing, local crafts, pottery, and weaving.

Modern Mafa people actively participate in education, civil service, healthcare, business, politics, and religious leadership, contributing to the region's development while staying grounded in their heritage.

Modern Times

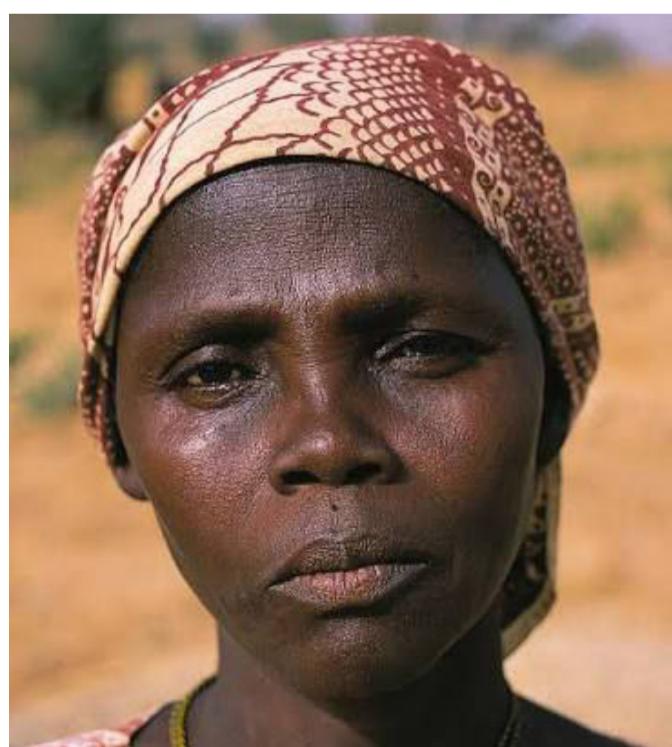
The Mafa, like many indigenous communities, face challenges: language decline among urban youth, economic pressures on farmers, land disputes, migration, population growth, and cultural erosion. Yet they continue to safeguard their identity through festivals, traditional leadership, mosques, community unions, and youth associations, ensuring their heritage endures.

Ceremonies and Cultural Practices

Mafa ceremonies reflect faith, communal cooperation, and reverence for ancestry.

Events such as harvest festivals, naming ceremonies, marriages, funerals, communal labour, music and dance gatherings, and council-led conflict resolution uphold values of respect, hard work, courage, unity, and social responsibility.

From the hills and valleys of Borno to modern towns and institutions, the Mafa demonstrate that tradition and modernity can coexist, preserving a legacy built on community, discipline, and resilience.



HISTORICITI

BY FALMATA MA'AJI MUHAMMAD
(Student at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt)



Angkor Wat: Where ancient monuments tell the story of Cambodia's past

Angkor Wat is considered the largest religious monument in the world. It is more than a temple and is Cambodia's national symbol, proudly displayed on the country's flag. Built in the 12th century under King Suryavarman II, the temple complex embodies the Khmer Empire's grandeur and continues to shape global understanding of civilisation, religion, education, and architectural innovation.

Civilisation and Urban Scale
Centuries ago, Angkor was the beating heart of the Khmer Empire, sustaining nearly one million people. Its vast reservoirs and canals turned Cambodia into an agricultural powerhouse, proving how urban planning and water management could shape the destiny of a civilisation.

Architectural Innovation
Constructed between 1113 and 1150 CE, Angkor Wat remains the largest religious monument in the world. Its towers mirror Mount Meru, the cosmic axis of Hindu and Buddhist

belief, while its bas-reliefs narrate epic tales. The temple's alignment with celestial movements shows the Khmer mastery of engineering and astronomy.

UNESCO World Heritage
In 1992, Angkor was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, ensuring protection of its temples and monuments.

The recognition highlights Angkor's universal value as a cultural and historical treasure, while preservation efforts guard against tourism pressure and climate threats.

Economic Power and Trade

Angkor's wealth was built on rice cultivation, supported by its irrigation system. Surplus harvests fuelled regional trade, linking Cambodia to China, India, and neighbouring states.

This economic strength financed monumental construction and reinforced the divine authority of Khmer kings.

Religion and Education

Originally dedicated to Vishnu, Angkor Wat later became

a Buddhist sanctuary, reflecting Cambodia's religious transformation. Temples doubled as centres of learning, where monks taught literacy, philosophy, and sacred texts. This fusion of Hindu and Buddhist traditions shaped both spiritual life and civic education across Southeast Asia.

Tourism and Modern Role

Today, Angkor Wat draws millions of tourists each year to Siem Reap. Visitors marvel at its scale, carvings, and spiritual atmosphere, making tourism a cornerstone of Cambodia's modern economy. While this global attention brings prosperity, it also poses challenges of preservation, as heavy foot traffic and climate change threaten the fragile stonework.

Enduring Legacy

Angkor Wat stands as Cambodia's living symbol—a monument of stone that embodies civilisation, faith, education, and power. Its corridors echo with both ancient grandeur and modern footsteps, reminding the world how one city's legacy can continue to shape history.



ROOTS

Harriet Jacobs: A voice of courage against slavery



Harriet Jacobs (1813 or 1815[b] – March 7, 1897) was an African-American abolitionist and writer whose autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent, is now considered an "American classic".

Born into Slavery
Born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina, she was sexually harassed by her enslaver. When he threatened to sell her children if she did not submit to his desire, she hid in a tiny crawl space under the roof of her grandmother's house, so low she could not stand up in it. After staying there for seven years, she finally managed to escape to the free North, where

she was reunited with her children Joseph and Louisa Matilda and her brother John S. Jacobs.

Human Advocate
She found work as a nanny and got into contact with abolitionist and feminist reformers. Even in New York City, her freedom was in danger until her employer was able to pay off her legal owner.

During and immediately after the American Civil War, she travelled to Union-occupied parts of the Confederate South together with her daughter, organising help and founding two schools for fugitive and freed slaves.

Escape
In 1842, Jacobs finally got a chance

to escape by boat to Philadelphia, where she was aided by anti-slavery activists of the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee.

After a short stay, she continued to New York City. Although she had no references, Mary Stace Willis, the wife of the then extremely popular author Nathaniel Parker Willis, hired Jacobs as a nanny for her baby daughter Imogen.

The two women agreed on a trial period of one week, not suspecting that the relationship between the two families would last into the next generation, until the death of Louisa Matilda Jacobs at the home of Edith Willis Grinnell, the daughter of Nathaniel Willis and his second wife, in 1917.

In 1850, Jacobs paid a visit to Nathaniel Parker Willis in New York, wanting to see the now eight-years old Imogen again. Willis's second wife, Cornelia Grinnell Willis, who had not recovered well after the birth of her second child, prevailed upon Jacobs once again to become the nanny of the Willis children. Knowing that this involved a considerable risk for Jacobs, especially since the

Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 had made it much easier for slaveholders to reclaim their fugitive "chattels", she gave her word to John S. Jacobs that she would not let his sister fall into the hands of her persecutors.

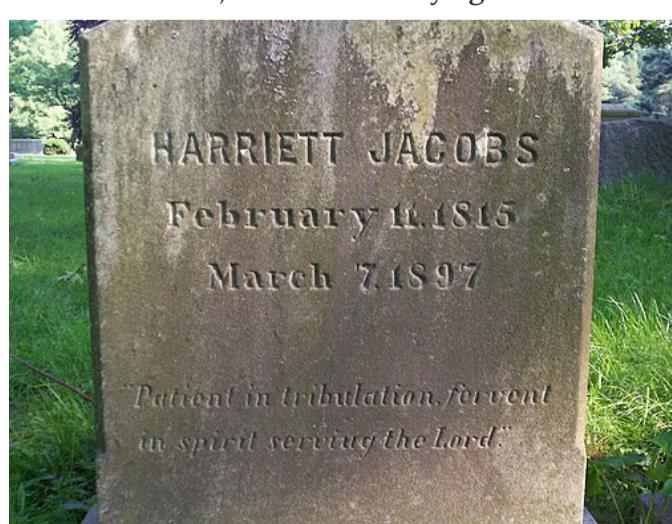
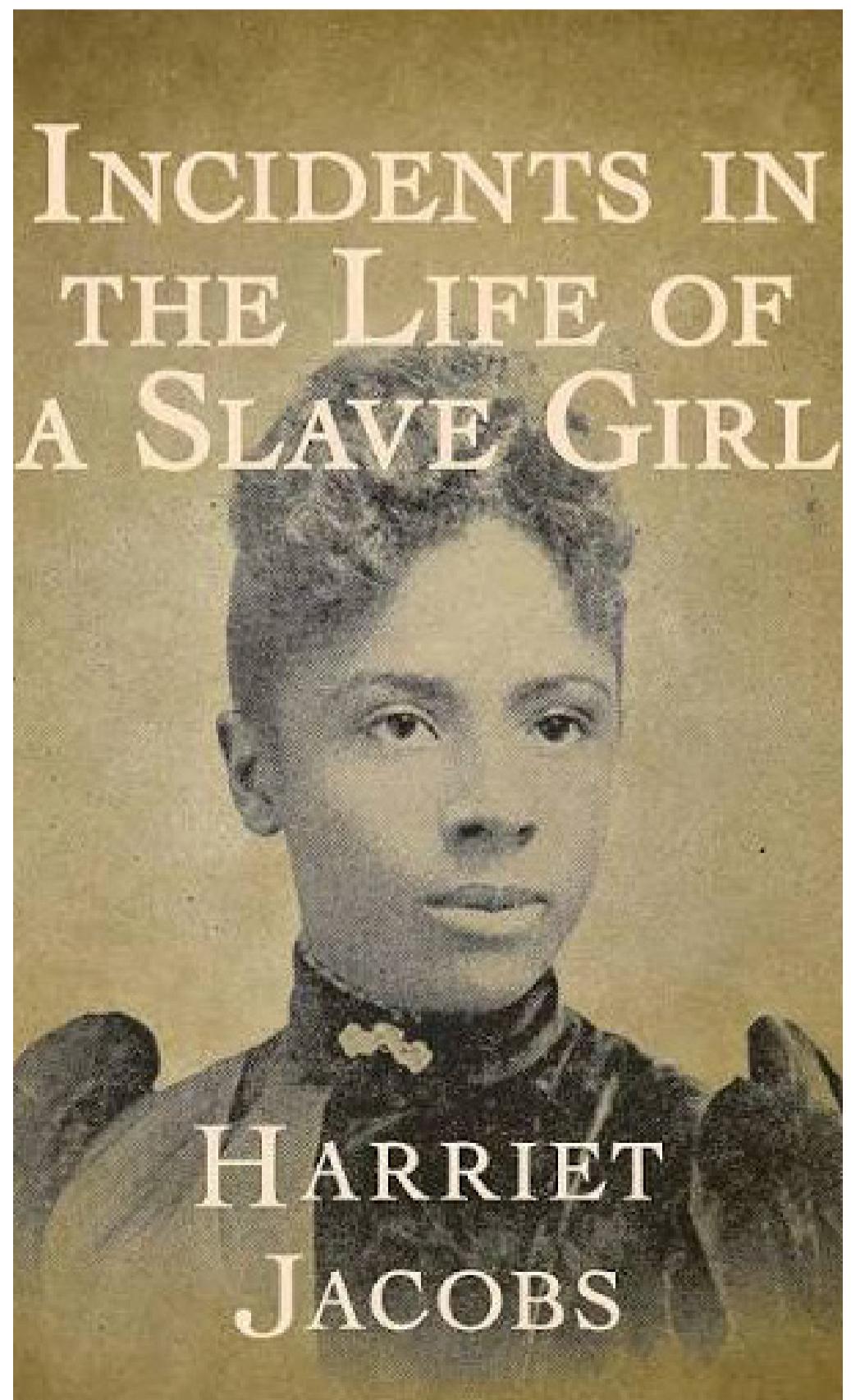
Later Years and Death

After her return from England, Jacobs retired to private life. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, she kept a boarding house together with her daughter. Among her boarders were faculty members of nearby

Harvard University. In 1873, her brother John S. returned to the U.S. together with his English wife, their son Joseph and two stepchildren to live close to his sister in Cambridge. He died in December of the same year, 1873. In 1877 Harriet and Louisa Jacobs moved to Washington, D.C., where Louisa hoped to get work as a teacher. However, she found work only for short periods. Mother and daughter again took to keeping a boarding house, until in 1887/88

Harriet Jacobs became too sick to continue with the boarding house.

Mother and daughter took on odd jobs and were supported by friends, among them Cornelia Willis. Harriet Jacobs died on March 7, 1897, in Washington, D.C., and was buried at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge next to her brother. Her tombstone reads, "Patient in tribulation, fervent in spirit serving the Lord". (Cf. Epistle to the Romans, 12:11–12).



LIFE!

BY MARYAM SALEH ISA
(Student at Yobe State University Damaturu)

"How I found dignity in labour selling firewood"—Businesswoman Hajia Zulai

In Potiskum, Yobe State, where commerce thrives in markets and roadside stalls, a quieter yet equally powerful form of business exists, one that operates from the heart of the home. One such enterprise belongs to 55-year-old Hajia Zulai, a woman who has successfully blended her passion for trade with the comfort of home-based operations. Growing up in a well-to-do family, she enjoyed the privilege of quality education and exposure, but instead of following the more conventional career paths, she chose to build her own business from within her household. Today, she is widely known in her community for her firewood trade, food processing ventures, and the array of goods she sells without ever needing a shop in the market. Neptune Prime sat down with her to discuss her journey, challenges, hobbies, and personal tastes.

Neptune Prime: Hajia Zulai, many people in Potiskum know you as a successful businesswoman, but how would you describe yourself to someone meeting you for the first time?

Zulai: I would say I am a determined and contented woman who loves to work with her own hands. I believe in dignity through labour. I have been in business for many years, but I prefer to run my operations from home because it allows me to manage my time, look after my household, and still contribute financially. I am also someone who values honesty in trade. My customers trust me, and that is something I work hard to maintain.

Neptune Prime: Could you walk us through the kinds of businesses you operate from your home?

Zulai: My main business is selling firewood in bulk and retail to households and small food vendors. Aside from that, I process and sell local food items like millet flour, groundnut oil, and dried vegetables. I also stock basic provisions such as rice, beans, and spices for neighbours who prefer to buy close to home. Running everything from home means I do not pay shop rent, and customers come directly to me.

Neptune Prime: Why did you choose to make your business home-based instead of renting a space in the market?

Zulai: I realised early

on that shop rent eats into profit, and you also have to spend extra on transportation and daily upkeep. At home, I can use the space I already have without extra costs. I also noticed that many women, especially those cooking for their families, prefer buying from someone nearby rather than going all the way to the market. So, I decided to build my business around convenience for both myself and my customers.

Neptune Prime: Did growing up in a rich family influence your decision to go into business?

Zulai: Yes, in a way. My parents taught me that wealth is not just about inheritance, but about creating something of your own. Even though I grew up without financial struggles, I never wanted to rely entirely on family resources. My upbringing gave me confidence and a sense of responsibility to work hard.

Neptune Prime: How do you source your goods, especially the firewood?

Zulai: For firewood, I work with suppliers from surrounding villages. They bring it to me in large quantities, and I pay them immediately. For food items, I buy directly from farmers during harvest seasons. This ensures I get fresh products and better prices compared to buying from middlemen.

Neptune Prime: Running a business from home must come with its own challenges. What are some of the difficulties you face?

Zulai: The biggest challenge is space. Sometimes, when I stock too much, it becomes hard to store everything neatly. Another challenge is that because it is a home, some customers think they can come at any hour, even late in the evening, which can be tiring. Also, when there is flooding or heavy rainfall, it affects delivery and supply.

Neptune Prime: How do you keep track of your income and expenses?

Zulai: I keep a notebook for daily sales, expenses, and debts. It is not as complicated as an accountant's system, but it works for me. Every week, I check the balance and see which items sell faster and which ones I need to restock.

Neptune Prime: Do you



Hajia Zulai

employ anyone to help you?

Zulai: I have two young women who assist me, especially in packaging goods and helping with customers when I am busy. They also learn the trade, which I consider part of giving back to the community.

Neptune Prime: Outside of business, what do you enjoy doing in your free time?

Zulai: I enjoy cooking, especially traditional dishes like tuwo with miyan kuka. I also like gardening. I grow vegetables like spinach and okra in my backyard.

Neptune Prime: What is your favourite food?

Zulai: My favourite food is masa with miyan taushe. I can eat it any time of the day.

Neptune Prime: And your

favourite colour?

Zulai: Blue. I love the calmness and beauty of the colour. You will notice that many of my clothes are different shades of blue.

Neptune Prime: What role has your family played in your success?

Zulai: My family has been very supportive. My husband helps with transportation when I need to bring in bulk supplies, and my children assist with errands. Without their encouragement, it would have been harder.

Neptune Prime: How do you keep your customers loyal?

Zulai: I am always honest about prices and quality. If something is not good, I will tell the customer. Also, I sometimes give small bonuses, like adding

extra firewood or giving a small bag of spices for free.

Neptune Prime: What advice would you give to young women who want to start a home-based business?

Zulai: Start small but start now. Do not wait for a perfect time or huge capital. Use what you have and grow it step by step. Also, always keep your business separate from

household expenses so you can track your profit.

Neptune Prime: Finally, what are your future plans for your business?

Zulai: I want to expand my storage space and also buy a small delivery tricycle so I can supply customers who live farther away. I am also considering adding a section for selling poultry feed because many people in my area rear chickens.

I would say I am a determined and contented woman who loves to work with her own hands. I believe in dignity through labour

HUMANIST

BY IBRAHEEM EL TAFSEER

Advocacy group urges provision of assistive devices, ramps for blind corps members

The Centre for Infrastructure and Technological Advancement for the Blind is calling for the immediate implementation of "digital ramps" to ensure blind corps members have equal access to essential technology, following the National Youth Service Corps' new disability protocols.

In a press statement signed by its Executive Chairman, Jolomi Fenemigho, in Lagos, CITAB commended the NYSC for its recent announcement of a standardised protocol for corps members with disabilities.

"The adoption of an inclusion protocol by the NYSC is a major leap forward for disability rights in Nigeria. We commend the Director General, Brigadier General Olakunle Nafiu, for reaffirming the NYSC's commitment to dignity, fairness, and the principle of leaving no one behind.

"It is heartening to see that the NYSC is not content with paying mere lip service to inclusion, but is finally putting its words into meaningful action," the statement read.

However, the group noted that physical infrastructure is only

one part of the solution. "True inclusion goes far beyond ramps and accessible restrooms. For blind and visually impaired corps members, the journey to full participation requires digital ramps, which means systemic provisions of assistive technologies and accessible digital environments.

"Assigning a blind graduate to a modern office without screen-reading software or digital aids is no different from handing them a key to a locked door, and then turning out the lights," the group said.

Addressing the need for genuine access, Fenemigho emphasised, "It is crucial that the NYSC immediately undertakes a thorough digital accessibility audit of its Mobilisation Portal and all ICT systems.

"This step will ensure that blind and visually impaired users are no longer wandering blindfolded through a digital maze, but can instead independently complete registration and access vital programme information just like their sighted counterparts."

He also stressed the importance of equipping all orientation camps nationwide with



assistive technologies. Fenemigho said, "Provision of essential assistive devices, including laptops with screen readers such as JAWS or NVDA and Refreshable Braille Displays, must be prioritised across every single camp. No one should be left groping in the dark for basic tools when these technologies already exist and can

level the playing field." Beyond orientation, the group argued that vocational training must evolve to reflect the modern economy. "The Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme should not confine visually impaired corps members to trades that offer little more than a modest living.

Instead, this programme must be reformed to include high demand fields like data analytics and digital marketing using accessible learning tools. "We cannot afford to box these talented graduates into limited vocational tracks when the digital economy offers so much more." Fenemigho concluded by calling for financial

support mechanisms to make true inclusion possible.

"A dedicated grant in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy would ensure that visually impaired corps members can keep pace with their sighted peers and do not find themselves running a race with their shoelaces tied. Equal access to essential tools is the only way to support meaningful and sustainable participation."

"As we celebrate this historic shift toward inclusion, it is essential for NYSC and its partners to remember that half measures will only leave gaps for people to fall through. Lasting inclusion means every corps member, regardless of ability, has the resources, support, and opportunities needed to serve, learn, and contribute; otherwise, we risk building a bridge to the future with more holes than planks.

"With genuine technological investment and unwavering commitment, Nigeria can make national service a level playing field and truly light the way for all," Fenemigho stated.

1,000 widows benefit from free health insurance, food support

The Jennifer Etuh Foundation (JEF) in collaboration with the Kaduna State Contributory Health Management Authority (KADCHMA) has flagged off a health insurance programme for 1,000 widows from the 11 districts of Kagoro chiefdom, in the Southern part of Kaduna State.

The foundation also began a free medical outreach to the people of Kagoro and their environs.

Speaking during the ceremony at Fadan Kagoro, the foundation programme manager, Mr Joe Otu, said the initiative was designed to remove one of the most persistent barriers to healthcare. Otu stated that the



Beneficiaries

foundation was aware that for many widows, the loss of a spouse often comes with economic hardship, social vulnerability, and health challenges that go unaddressed.

The foundation added that each widow was also given a gift pack containing clothing and food items. "We are aware that for

many widows, the loss of a spouse often comes with economic hardship, social vulnerability, and health challenges that go unaddressed. "To mitigate this,

Jennifer Etuh Foundation in collaboration with the Kaduna State Contributory Health Management Authority (KADCHMA) flagged off the health insurance programme for 1,000 widows.

"The women were drawn from the eleven districts of the Kagoro chiefdom: Gida, Fada, Fadan Daji, Tafan, Agban, Garaje, Kadarko, Kpak, Tum, Kukum Daji, and Mallagum.

"This initiative is designed to remove one of the most persistent barriers to healthcare: cost. Through this state health insurance coverage, beneficiaries will be able to access essential medical services, preventive care, and timely treatment without the burden of

out-of-pocket expenses. This intervention is our way of saying: you are seen, you are valued, and your wellbeing is a priority," Otu posited. Also speaking, the team lead for the informal sector at the Kaduna State Contributory Health Management Agency (KADCHMA), Shehu Abubakar Sadiq, described the enrolment as the largest single health insurance intervention of its kind in the state. In his remarks, the Chief of Kagoro, Mr Ufuwai Boney, represented by Rev. Stephen Nathan Sambo, described the programme as life-saving, noting that it would significantly reduce healthcare-related financial burdens on vulnerable households.

FEATURES

Imam Abdullahi Abubakar: From aspiring soldier to community saviour

By Abba Abubakar Yakubu

The 15th of January every year marks Armed Forces Remembrance Day in Nigeria, honouring the sacrifices of our gallant soldiers on various battlefields. For the people of Plateau State, this day in 2026 became especially poignant. It was when Imam Abdullahi Abubakar, the renowned Muslim cleric of Yelwa village in the Gindin Akwati, Ngar area, of the Barkin Ladi Local Government Area, bid farewell to the world. Imam Abubakar passed away at Plateau State Specialist Hospital from respiratory failure after a prolonged illness. Despite battling the condition for months, he had repeatedly refused admission, sources close to his family said, because he disliked hospitals. He died on Thursday evening around 10 p.m., as announced by his family. Even in his final moments, he urged the community to live in peace, the guiding purpose of his life.

More than 50 years ago, after completing Qur'anic education in Maiduguri (where his father, Malam Abubakar Tsoho, had sent him), the young Abdullahi returned to Yelwa. He told his father he wanted to enlist in the Nigerian Army during the civil war against Biafran rebels. His father refused, arranging his marriage and sending him to the farm instead.

This early heroism was no accident. The Imam had long harboured a passion to serve and protect his country and community, a drive that shone during the horrific terrorist attack on June 23, 2018. Those who knew him described him as brave, strong, and fearless, though few knew of his youthful military aspirations. Ironically, he died on the day honouring fallen heroes of the Civil War and other battles. Though he never wore a uniform, he sacrificed with a soldier's courage to save his community.

Imam Abubakar's humility, lack of arrogance, and gentle conduct won him universal respect. Soft-spoken with a cool temperament, he left a lasting impression. In every encounter, his wisdom and passion made hearts yearn for



Imam Abdullahi

more. Our first meeting was in 2019, a year after ethnic clashes between farmers and herders in Riyom and Barkin Ladi. He had led a major rescue operation during the June 23, 2018 attack, sheltering hundreds fleeing terrorists. When I asked what gave him courage, especially after attackers killed his brother that day, he replied simply, "I did what Islam taught me. This is the life the Prophet of Allah (SAW) taught his companions."

Just a cleric, not a traditional leader or any title holder, he taught Qur'an and mined tin, like most in the community. Plateau State's mineral-rich lands sustain locals, yet the government neglects the area, leaving them vulnerable: no good roads, no functional security outposts, poor network coverage, and only distant military checkpoints. The Imam repeatedly appealed to authorities not for personal gain, but for security, schools, and basic amenities for the community.

Dr Isyaku Yelwa, a resident of Yelwa and in-law to the Imam, disclosed that during an encounter with the

late former President Muhammadu Buhari, he solicited on behalf of the community, and the late President drew the then-Governor Simon Lalong's attention, who promised to take care of the problem, but none of it was fulfilled.

In 2019, he received national awards from Buhari and the U.S. government, plus honours from several international organisations in and outside the country for his heroism. Most were certificates or plaques, offering no financial or community support. Visitors to Yelwa would be shocked: the Imam lived in abject poverty with his family, his modest home a far cry from his renown. A brave farmer, he shared food freely, but conditions were pitiable. It was said the government once gave him one million naira and sponsored two Hajj pilgrimages. His youngest son, Saleh Abdullahi, said the Imam distributed the money to relatives and neighbours before returning home.

Greed and fame held no appeal for him. He never compromised his dignity for politicians, staying rooted in Yelwa except for Jos or Barkin

Ladi engagements. A community leader, Irmiya Magit, recalled fundraising for the town mosque, unaware it would later shelter them during attacks: "Malam was a good man—a different kind of person."

A Christian neighbour, Ajuji Hamidu, raised alongside the family, called him a father figure who embraced all without discrimination. Resident Davou Gyang mourned, "Every morning, he would walk around the neighbourhood, greeting neighbours and checking on them. We'll never forget him."

The question is, who will replace him? Or will unity endure in the community? His deputy, Malam Abdullahi Umar, vowed they would carry on his discipline and peace-building spirit. They urged authorities and organisations not to neglect his family, Yelwa village, or the Ngar community, demanding fulfilled promises for security and development from the government and relevant authorities.

Imam Abdullahi's life brims with lessons: selfless service, interfaith harmony, and quiet courage amid neglect.

New ECOWAS Headquarters: China continues sharing unique diplomacy with Africa

By Charles Onunaiju

China's Belt and Road Initiative has expanded significantly over the last several years in Africa, and has cut across different sectors. Beijing has a strategy to project influence through gifting prestigious presidential palaces and parliamentary buildings that have been labelled 'unique' in its history with Africa.

Reports show that since 2000, Beijing has bankrolled the construction or renovation of nearly 200 government complexes. Several of such projects were funded through various streams including loans and donations. Classical examples include the African Union (AU) building estimated at \$200 million in 2012, and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In December 2022, China signed an agreement with the regional economic bloc, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to build its office headquarters. The project costs approximately \$32 million, and the new centralised building will enhance productivity among staff and reduce operational costs as the ECOWAS Commission currently operates from three locations in Abuja.

Throughout its diplomacy with Africa, China always keep its words, delivering promptly on its bilateral promises and agreements with African partners.

As expected, China will handover the new ECOWAS building, its new secretariat with modern facilities, completely as a gift which is arguably described as an additional to its weighty infrastructure footprints and grandiose achievements to the continent.

While a number of Africa's external partner show high symbolism and offer diplomacy with rhetoric, China has indeed taken up the challenges and unique opportunities to strengthen its position, especially its trade, investment and noticeably flex economic muscles.

In practical terms, China has displayed exceptionalism in its collaborative relations with Africa. In sharing Africa's future, it is consistently addressing all kinds of its sustainable development issues, appreciably winning friends and supporting the continent's growing population.

The new building centralised complex, for the 15-member bloc estimated at \$32 million in Abuja, is set for handover by the end of January 2026, and this aims to

boost staff productivity and cut operational costs. On December 4, Chinese Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Yu Dunhai, visited the site to review progress and met with the president of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr Omar Touray. Yu hailed the building as a "landmark project of bilateral cooperation" and a strong example of South-South cooperation.

In an interview with South China Morning Post, David Shinn, a China-Africa expert and Professor at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, said China's gifting of the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja or the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa was a clear case of "buying influence with African governments."

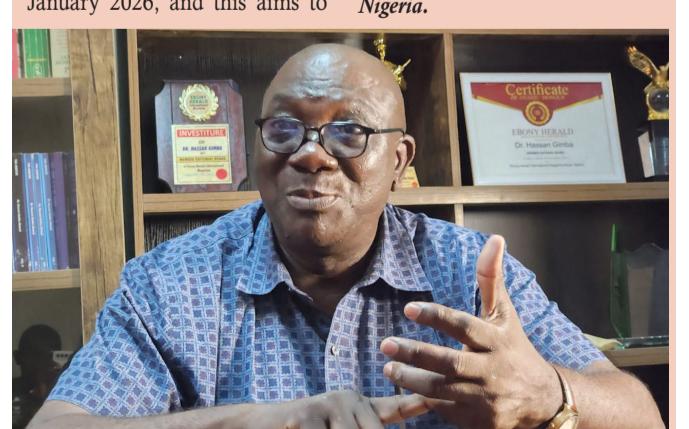
He said the only difference between these gifts and providing a football stadium or parliament building was the fact that China had built influence with many governments and not just one capital.

"While China is not the only country to engage in influence buying by gifting highly visible projects, Beijing does more of it than any other donor government," Shinn said.

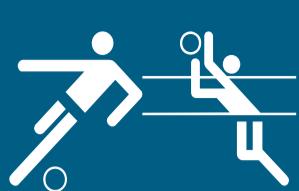
He said these projects were also inherently different from those based on loans or even grants that focused on capacity building in health and education or improving food security. "Once the structures have become functional, it is up to individual African governments to put their national interests first, which may be hard to do if Beijing presses them to pursue a pro-China position," emphasised Shinn.

In an official statement, African leaders welcomed the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja with appreciation and commitment to support the realisation of the project. The statement further noted its strategic value, and showed a powerful form of influence in that region of Africa. In accordance with the agreement concluded between the ECOWAS and the Government of China, the building by the Shanghai Construction Group is expected to become one of the best-equipped new headquarters—accommodating the ECOWAS Commission, Community Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Parliament in Abuja. The organisation was set up to foster regional unity among its member states, under the ECOWAS Treaty signed on 28th May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria.

Charles Onunaiju is the Director, Centre for China Studies, Abuja, Nigeria.



Onunaiju


SPORS

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Brave Newcastle fall short as Willock's late equaliser sends PSG into playoffs



Newcastle

On a chilly, fun, boisterous night in Paris, with the Champions League mega-table scrolling away in the background, Newcastle produced a fine performance at the home of the European champions that left both teams outside the automatic qualification slots.

A 1-1 draw means Eddie Howe's team finished 12th overall.

They will now enter the knockout phase in the last two weeks of February, as had always seemed likely, to face either Qarabag or Monaco.

More surprisingly, Paris Saint-Germain will join them there after some late score-ticker malarkey nudged them out of the top eight.

Howe will take great heart

from this performance, as a weakened team recovered from a start that suggested the ceiling might be about to fall in.

As for PSG, the rest of Europe will look at the reigning champions with a little less fear.

Vitinha remains a wonderful midfield controller, but the furious full-court press that marked last season's post-Christmas run was absent here.

Newcastle were compact, quick in the transitions, and could have won this game in the second half.

Paris had been a lovely deep languid grey all afternoon, the only city that looks better in drab, sad January light.

By kick-off, the Parc des Princes was the usual inferno of choreographed noise. But

this was a confusingly poised final group phase game at the start, neither fully alive nor fully dead.

A draw could have taken both teams through automatically, albeit pending a vast number of variables elsewhere.

There are so many referred problems when you mess with the robustness of a format, and once again this rejigged first phase had been a meander towards a wildly convoluted final night.

Straight-line jeopardy is too much to expect. But it should at least be possible to understand what's going on before the whole thing falls on your head in the final wash-up like the contents of an overstuffed cupboard. Howe made five changes here from Sunday's defeat against Aston Villa, the net effect of

which was a switch to a back three. And PSG swarmed all over Newcastle from the start. With 45 seconds gone they were awarded a penalty. Lewis Miley chased Bradley Barcola back towards goal. The ball bobbed up and hit Barcola's elbow before brushing Miley's hand. This was deemed a penalty after a screen check. Ousmane Dembélé's kick was well saved by Nick Pope. It felt right. The penalty was a very soft call.

With seven minutes gone, it was 1-0 all the same. The goal was made by a thrust down the right from Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who danced Dan Burn around a little before easing a pass inside to Vitinha, who had time to ease to his left, gently sit Lewis Hall down, then curl a shot into the corner.

Dembélé might have added a second four minutes later as Newcastle's backline was repeatedly picked apart by some fine-point passing.

For a while they looked horribly porous on the right, where Barcola and the roving Dembélé presented a nightmarish prospect for Miley in a try-it-and-see wing-back role.

With 20 minutes gone, Newcastle had settled. Nick Woltemade had a first real chance on 40 minutes but failed to make contact with a header after a long throw. And it was a similar aerial route that led to Newcastle's equaliser just before half-time. The ball was pumped into the box by Sandro Tonali, headed up in the air awkwardly by Marquinhos, flicked back by Burn and nodded in neatly by Joe Willock.

Benfica defeat Real Madrid 4–2 to secure Champions League spot

Goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin scored an astonishing 98th-minute header as Benfica beat Real Madrid 4-2 to keep themselves in the Champions League and deny their illustrious opponents an automatic spot in the last 16.

In an extraordinary finale on Wednesday, the Portuguese side were heading out despite leading 3-2 with seconds of stoppage time remaining before Trubin came forward for a free kick to score the goal needed to sneak into the playoff round on goal difference. That sparked wild celebrations from Benfica players, fans and their charismatic coach Jose Mourinho – a former manager of Real Madrid – at the Stadium of Light in Lisbon.

The Spaniards had hoped to finish in the top eight and go straight into the last 16, but their 15 points from eight games were not enough, and they finished the match with nine men as Raul Asencio and Rodrygo were sent off.

Andreas Schjelderup scored two goals for Benfica and Vangelis Pavlidis netted from the penalty spot, while Kylian Mbappe netted twice for Real in a hugely entertaining, end-to-end contest. Benfica advance at the expense of Marseille, who lost 3-0 at Club Brugge.

The giant screen in the stadium in Belgium congratulated both teams for advancing to the next stage, but that proved premature as Trubin turned the tables.

Both Benfica and Real needed a goal for different reasons going into the final minutes, and it is a vindication of the competition's format that a single goal could have such a dramatic effect on the table.

Benfica were denied two strong early penalty shots, and Real took the lead on 30 minutes against the run of play when Asencio's cross to the back post was headed in by Mbappe.

The home side drew level six minutes later when Asencio's slip in the wet conditions allowed Pavlidis to provide a perfect cross for Schjelderup to head into the net.

Benfica were awarded a penalty in first-half added time when Aurelien Tchouameni was adjudged to have hauled Nicolas Otamendi to the floor, and Pavlidis buried his spot-kick.

Schjelderup scored his second of the game from Pavlidis's perfect pass to make it 3-1, before Mbappe swept home his second, too – his 36th goal of the season in all competitions.

Benfica were still outside the top 24 when they were awarded a free kick with virtually the final play, and Fredrik Aursnes's delivery was headed in by Trubin to complete a night of high drama in Lisbon.



Benfica

CAF confirms Senegal's 2025 AFCON victory, imposes sanctions on Morocco, Senegal

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has officially dismissed Morocco's petition to strip Senegal of the 2025 AFCON title, confirming the Teranga Lions as champions following the controversial final in Morocco.

While Senegal kept the trophy, CAF imposed heavy fines and suspensions on both nations for misconduct during and after the match.

CAF's Disciplinary Board ruled that Senegal will remain the winners of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, rejecting claims by host nation Morocco that the match should be

overturned due to unrest involving Senegalese players and officials.

The ruling follows scenes of tension during the dramatic final, which briefly saw Senegalese players and officials boycott play after disputed refereeing decisions.

In its decision, CAF stated that while Senegal's actions breached disciplinary rules, they were not sufficient to invalidate the match result. "The Disciplinary Board finds no legal grounds to annul the final or withdraw the title," CAF noted in its official ruling.

However, CAF handed Senegal a total fine of \$615,000, broken down as



Senegal

follows:

- \$300,000 for supporters' improper conduct

- \$15,000 for misconduct resulting from five yellow cards in the final.
- \$100,000 for players and staff invading the Referees' Restricted Area.
- \$15,000 for fans using laser pointers.
- \$300,000 for unsporting behaviour by players and officials
- \$15,000 for inappropriate conduct by stadium ball boys
- \$100,000 for players and staff invading the Referees' Restricted Area.
- \$15,000 for fans using laser pointers.
- \$300,000 for unsporting behaviour by players and officials
- \$200,000 for

SALUTE TO SERVICE

BY MERCY ADAJE

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Lieutenant General Joshua Nimyel Dogonyaro: Celebrating 30 years of distinguished military service

Lieutenant General Joshua Nimyel Dogonyaro (12 September 1940 – 14 May 2021) was a distinguished Nigerian military officer whose career spanned nearly three decades of service to the nation.

Renowned for his professionalism, discipline, and strategic leadership, Dogonyaro rose to the highest echelons of the Nigerian Army and played key roles in both national defence and regional peacekeeping efforts in West Africa.

Joshua Nimyel Dogonyaro was born on 12 September 1940 in Vom, Plateau State, though he hailed originally from the Tarok ethnic group of Langtang North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Growing up in Nigeria's Middle Belt, he was shaped by a multicultural environment that would later influence his inclusive leadership style.

He received his early education at Boys' Secondary School, Gindiri, one of the prominent educational institutions in the region.

Demonstrating an early interest in service and leadership, Dogonyaro joined the Nigerian Army in 1964, at a time when the country was still in its early post-independence years.

In furtherance of his professional development, he attended the prestigious National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, where he obtained the National Institute (ni) qualification—an elite training reserved for senior military officers and top public servants, aimed at strategic policy formulation and national development.

Dogonyaro's military career was marked by steady advancement, operational competence, and command excellence.

He was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1967 into the Nigerian Army Armoured Corps, coinciding with the period of the Nigerian Civil War, during which many officers of his generation were forged.

He was the officer commanding, 1 Reconnaissance Squadron (1967–1969)

Quartermaster General, 1 Infantry Division (1969–1970).

These early roles exposed him to both combat operations and logistics management—an important foundation for his later senior commands.

From 1970 to 1972, he served as Chief Instructor and Adjutant at the Recce Training School, where he was instrumental in training and mentoring younger armoured corps officers.

He subsequently became Commanding Officer, 1 Recce Regiment (1972–1976), a position that further solidified his reputation as a capable field commander.

Between 1976 and 1979, Dogonyaro held several high-level staff and command positions, including:

Principal Staff Officer, Headquarters Nigerian Army Armoured Corps (1976–1977)

Commanding Officer, 24 Armoured Brigade (1977–1979).

These roles placed him at the heart of armoured warfare planning and execution within the Nigerian Army.

From 1984 to 1985, Dogonyaro served as Task Force Commanding Officer, 203 Armoured Battalion as part of Nigeria's



peacekeeping mission in Chad, reflecting Nigeria's growing regional security responsibilities. His performance in Chad earned him further strategic appointments, including:

Director of Manning (Army), Army Headquarters

Director of Armoury (1985).

He later became General Officer Commanding (GOC), 3 Armoured Division, Jos, from 1985 to 1987, and a member of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) during the military administration of

General Ibrahim Babangida. In 1987, he was appointed GOC, 2nd Mechanised Division, Ibadan, one of the Nigerian Army's most important operational divisions. His leadership during this period was widely respected, culminating in his promotion to Major General in 1988, and subsequently to Lieutenant General. One of the most significant highlights of Dogonyaro's career was his appointment as Commander of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring

Group (ECOMOG) from September 1990 to February 1991. In this role, he led multinational forces during the Liberian Civil War, overseeing complex peace enforcement operations aimed at restoring stability in Liberia. His tenure as ECOMOG Commander demonstrated Nigeria's central role in regional security and showcased Dogonyaro's ability to manage multinational troops under challenging political and military conditions.

Lieutenant General Joshua

Nimyel Dogonyaro retired from the Nigerian Army in 1993, after nearly 30 years of meritorious service. In retirement, he remained a respected elder statesman within military and national circles. He passed away on 14 May 2021, leaving behind a legacy of discipline, courage, and dedication to national and regional peace. Dogonyaro is remembered as one of Nigeria's most accomplished armoured corps officers and a key figure in West Africa's peacekeeping history.

Brigadier General Muhammadu Lawal Abubakar: A model of discipline and loyalty in service



Brigadier General Muhammadu Lawal Abubakar is a prominent Nigerian Army officer best known as the longest-serving Aide-De-Camp (ADC) to a civilian president in Nigeria's history. He was born on March 28, 1973, in Wusasa, Zaria. His father is from Kano State, and his mother is from Edo State. He attended the Nigerian Military School (NMS), Zaria, from 1985 to 1990, where he served as the Boy Regimental Sergeant Major (Head Boy). He studied at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, as a science undergraduate before joining the military. Abubakar has held var-

ious command, staff, and instructional roles throughout his career: Aide-De-Camp (ADC) to President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2021), he served in this role for nearly six years, making him the second longest-serving ADC in Nigerian military history after Colonel Walbe. Camp Commandant, Giwa Barracks (2013–2014): Led the detention facility during Operation Zaman Lafiya, managing over 1,500 suspected Boko Haram detainees and facilitating the first visit by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Battalion Training Coordinator: Coordinated counter-terrorism train-

SOCIALS/FASHION

BY FARIDA ABBA

QUICK

99%

Of Women are not aware of underskirt or patroning such!

45%

of Women avoid bras due to advanced methods of sewing blouses

23%

Nigerians women replaces panties with tight!

78%

of Nigerians patronise native attires

78%

patronise native attires

79%

of Nigerians can't live without jeans

84%

of Nigerians still patronise fairly used cloths, bags and shoes

79%

of Nigerians patronise can't dress without jeans



Aso Oke is a traditional hand-woven fabric that's a big deal in Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba people.

Origin

The name "Aso Oke" literally means "top cloth" in Yoruba, indicating its value and prestige.

This fabric is known for its intricate designs, vibrant colours, and durability.

Artisans weave Aso Oke on narrow looms, typically using cotton or silk threads.

The process is labour-intensive, requiring great skill and patience. Each piece is unique, reflecting the weaver's creativity and craftsmanship.

Cultural Significance

Aso Oke isn't just a fabric; it's a symbol of cultural heritage and tradition. It's often worn on special occasions like weddings, festivals, and coronations.

The fabric is usually paired with traditional attire like agbada (for men) or iro and buba (for women).

Worldwide Popularity

In recent years, Aso Oke has gained popularity beyond Nigeria, with designers incorporating it into modern fashion.

Despite this, it remains deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, representing tradition, craftsmanship, and community.

Modern Aso Oke fashion beautifully merges traditional Nigerian hand-woven fabric with contemporary silhouettes, creating sophisticated and culturally rich outfits for various events, from weddings to casual wear.

Modern Styles

The modern trend has expanded beyond traditional iro and buba to include gowns, suits, jumpsuits, and even modern separates like wide-leg pants and blazers, often incorporating elements like lace-cut designs, unique colour combinations, and patchwork.

Design Techniques

The choice of the colour used in the making of the design for different Aso-Oke is a reflection of aspects of the beliefs and life of the Yoruba people and is usually passed down from one generation to another within family lines.

The patterns represent forms of non-verbal communication with each design telling a story. Traditionally, the materials used in the past were locally sourced and included native cotton, silk from caterpillar cocoons, and threads dyed with indigo.

Aso Oke: Weaving tradition into global fashion excellence

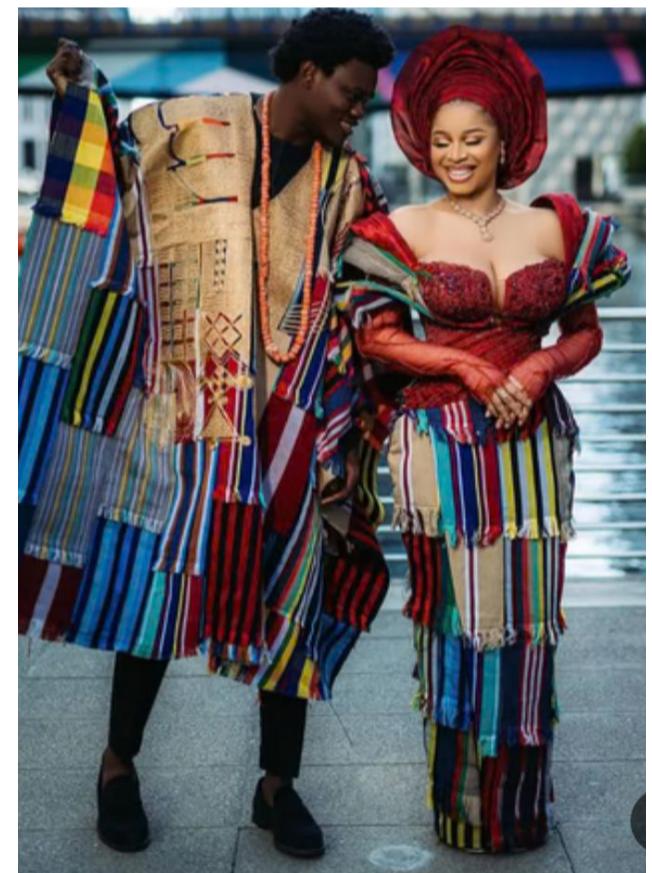


The fabric design tools for the weaving include the Akata (propeller), Iye (the long wheel), Akawo (short wheel), Gowu and Kikgun (rollers), Aasa (strikers), Omu (extender used in holding the reel), and Sanrin (metallic peg).

The technique involves several steps, which include preparing the yarn, which in most cases is made from dyed cotton or silk, setting the loom, and then weaving the fabric. After the yarn is made, the loom is set into two frames consisting of two vertical posts and a horizontal beam. The thread from the warp, which runs vertically, is wound on the beam and threaded through small metal or wooden frames called heddles, which help control the warp thread.

The threads that run horizontally (called the weft) are then woven into the fabric with the control use of a shuttle through a technique known as pick and pick, which involves alternating between the two weft threads, thereby making a pattern on the fabric.

The yarn is made from natural materials such as onion skin and bark, after which it would be made into threads and rolled onto bobbins.



TECH WORLD

BY MUHAMMAD KUKURI
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GAME SCIENCE

Dubbed the 'sickest ever' video game because players only have one aim - to massacre as many people as possible in a 'genocide crusade', Hatred is the second game in history to get adults only rating.

GADGET ADDICT

Obviously inspired by the iPhone's glass touchscreen display, the Iconoclock, which is a wall clock that points out each hour with approximations of familiar app icons. Its crystal face delivers a similar jet black yet glossy background as the ubiquitous smartphone.

web update

Africa records lowest AI adoption globally - World Bank report

The adoption of artificial intelligence among businesses remains the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, highlighting a widening digital divide across emerging regions, according to a new World Bank survey.

The survey, conducted in June 2025, covered more than 2,200 companies across over 85 countries backed by the World Bank Group's private-sector arm or by private equity and venture capital funds in its portfolio.

The findings indicate that while AI is starting to transform business operations in some emerging economies, its adoption remains uneven and is at an early stage in many regions.

Overall, about 40 per cent of firms in emerging markets reported some form of AI adoption, either for internal operations such as back-office processes or for customer-facing products and services.

This level remains below adoption rates typically cited in developed markets. Regional disparities are pronounced. Firms in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East recorded the lowest AI adoption levels, followed by South and East Asia.

By contrast, companies in emerging Europe and Central Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, reported adoption rates closest to global frontrunners, with roughly half of firms indicating some level of AI integration.

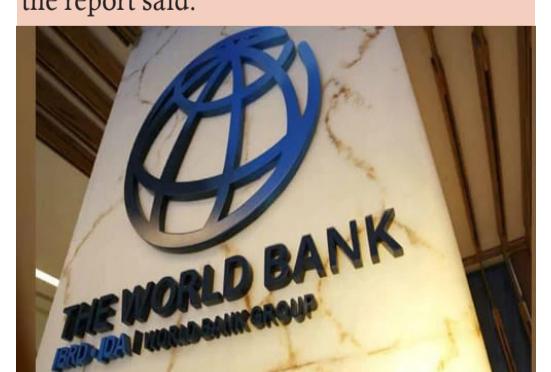
According to the World Bank, these gaps reflect differences in digital infrastructure, firm capabilities, access to skills and the maturity of local technology ecosystems. Businesses, the report notes, are a primary channel through which new technologies are deployed, making firm-level adoption critical for productivity growth and economic development.

Among firms that have adopted AI, usage intensity varies. About 9 per cent deploy AI only for internal operations, while seven per cent apply it exclusively to external products or services.

Nearly a quarter use AI for both internal and external purposes, indicating deeper integration across business functions.

The World Bank said firms that embed AI across multiple functions are better positioned to achieve cumulative productivity gains, while those using it only for isolated tasks are likely to see limited benefits.

The survey also highlights a sharp divide between digital-first firms and traditional businesses. Sixty-four per cent of technology-based firms reported using AI, compared with just 16 per cent of non-digital firms. Many AI tools, particularly those based on large language models, are easier to integrate into businesses that already operate largely online, the report said.



World Bank

Google unveils AI tool to explore mysteries of human DNA

Google unveiled an artificial intelligence tool that its scientists said would help unravel the mysteries of the human genome — and could one day lead to new treatments for diseases.

The deep learning model AlphaGenome was hailed by outside researchers as a "breakthrough" that would let scientists study and even simulate the roots of difficult-to-treat genetic diseases.

While the first complete map of the human genome in 2003 "gave us the book of life, reading it remained a challenge", Pushmeet Kohli, vice president of research at Google DeepMind, told journalists.

"We have the text," he said, which is a sequence of three billion nucleotide pairs represented by the letters A, T, C and G that make up DNA.

However, "Understanding the grammar of this genome — what is encoded in our DNA and how it governs life — is the next critical frontier for research," said Kohli, co-author of a new study in the

journal *Nature*.

Only around two per cent of our DNA contains instructions for making proteins, which are the molecules that build and run the body.

The other 98 per cent was long dismissed as "junk DNA" as scientists struggled to understand what it was for.

However, this "non-coding DNA" is now believed to act like a conductor, directing how genetic information works in each of our cells. These sequences also contain many variants that have been associated with diseases. It is these sequences that AlphaGenome is aiming to understand.

The project is just one part of Google's AI-powered scientific work, which also includes AlphaFold, the winner of 2024's chemistry Nobel.

AlphaGenome's model was trained on data from public projects that measured non-coding DNA across hundreds of different cell and tissue types in humans and mice.

The tool can analyse long

DNA sequences and then predict how each nucleotide pair will influence different biological processes within the cell. This includes whether genes start and stop, and how many RNA molecules, which transmit genetic instructions inside cells, are produced.

Other models already exist that have a similar aim. However, they have to compromise, either by analysing far shorter DNA sequences or decreasing how detailed their predictions are, known as resolution.

DeepMind scientist and lead study author Ziga Avsec said that long sequences — up to a million DNA letters long — were "required to understand the full regulatory environment of a single gene". The high resolution of the model allows scientists to study the impact of genetic variants by comparing the differences between mutated and non-mutated sequences. "AlphaGenome can accelerate our understanding of the genome by helping to map where the functional elements are and what their



Human DNA

roles are on a molecular level," study co-author Natasha Latysheva said. The model has already been tested by 3,000 scientists across 160 countries and is open for anyone to use for non-commercial reasons, Google said. "We hope researchers will extend it with more data," Kohli added.

72% of Nigerian businesses turn to AI to reshape workforce operations

About 72 per cent of businesses in Nigeria are exploring artificial Intelligence (AI) to overhaul their workforce strategies, underpinning the depth of disruption the new technology is already causing in the country.

Also, chief executive officers of leading global companies are increasingly regarding AI as a dependable enabler of productivity, revenue growth, customer experience and efficiency.

These are the positions of the EY-Parthenon 2026 CEO Outlook report just released. The report said sustained transformation would separate leaders from laggards in an uncertain global environment.

EY conducted a survey of 1,200 CEOs from large companies around the world between November and December 2025.

In Nigeria, about 93 per cent of companies are adopting



AI to drive efficiency, while 72 per cent are expecting it to overhaul their workforce strategies.

The survey was to provide valuable insights into the main trends and developments impacting the world's leading companies, as well as business leaders'

expectations for future growth and long-term value creation.

The survey report further states that even though CEOs face continued geopolitical uncertainty and cost pressure, they remain confident in driving growth through AI, talent and operational

efficiency.

The report said geopolitics and technology are reshaping the global economy and business environment faster than ever.

"Those who invest intentionally, rethink their operating models and use AI and mergers and acquisitions (M&A) to accelerate change will create their own tailwinds and outpace competitors long before the environment stabilises," the report said.

The 2025 global economy was characterised by several uncertainties, including escalating tariffs, protectionism and trade wars that are disrupting global supply chains and investment decisions.

To navigate the uncertainty, according to the report, CEOs should focus on three priorities: sharper cost discipline through productivity-driving investments such as AI, more precise pricing grounded in customer insight to protect margins and a faster shift to skills-powered organisations, with teams equipped to scale new technologies and manage geopolitical and macro volatility.

WORLD NEWS

BY ABDULLAH HARUNA

Araghchi warns Europe's IRGC designation undermines regional de-escalation efforts

Iran's senior diplomat, Abbas Araghchi, has reiterated Tehran's readiness for diplomacy while sharply criticising the United States for what he described as a long-standing pattern of bad faith and disloyalty in past engagements.

Speaking during his visit to Turkey, Araghchi said Iran's historical experience with Washington leaves little room for trust. "Our past experiences have consistently shown that the United States has never been loyal and has not acted in good faith," he stated.

Despite this, he stressed that Iran has not closed the door to dialogue.

According to Araghchi, Tehran remains open to "all diplomatic processes," noting that the United States has repeatedly sought negotiations through various intermediaries and continues to renew such requests.

However, he drew a clear red line, insisting that coercive rhetoric undermines any prospect of meaningful talks.

"Threats must end for negotiations to begin," Araghchi said, signalling that Iran will not engage under pressure or intimidation.

His remarks come amid heightened regional tensions, with growing concern over the risk of a wider conflict in the Middle East.

In a related statement, Iran's Foreign Minister disclosed that several countries are actively working to prevent an escalation into full-scale war in the region.

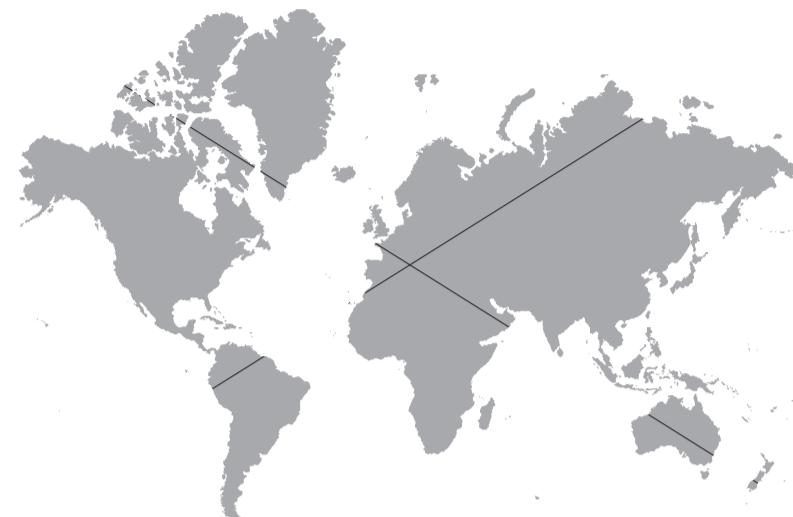
Notably, he added, none of these mediating efforts are being led by European states.

"Several countries are presently attempting to avert the eruption of all-out war in our region," the foreign minister said. "None of them are European."

The comments underscore Iran's scepticism toward Western-led diplomatic initiatives while highlighting the role of non-European actors in current de-escalation efforts. They also reflect Tehran's position that any future engagement with Washington must be based on mutual respect, an end to threats, and demonstrable good faith.



Araghchi



Arab, Muslim nations intensify diplomatic push to prevent U.S.-Iran war as tensions soar



Donald Trump, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

Arab and Muslim powers are urgently stepping up diplomatic efforts to avert a potential military confrontation between the United States and Iran, as regional tensions escalate over nuclear, military and political disputes.

Officials from countries including Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey have been engaged in intense back-channel diplomacy, seeking to persuade both Washington and Tehran to return to the negotiating table and defuse mounting threats of conflict. These efforts come amid heightened rhetoric, large military deployments in the Middle East and deep mistrust between the U.S. and Iranian leadership.

With tensions rising after recent U.S. warnings to Iran and reports of potential military action, regional states have intensified diplomatic outreach. Qatar and Oman have taken a lead role, holding direct talks with Iranian officials and urging both sides to pursue de-escalation and dialogue rather than force.

Saudi Arabia — traditionally a strategic partner of the United States — has also engaged diplomatically, seeking to reduce the risk of a wider regional war that could severely disrupt economic and security stability across the Gulf. Despite these mediation efforts, neither Washington nor Tehran has agreed to new bilateral negotiations, and both sides remain entrenched in their positions. U.S. demands have included strict limits on Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities, which Tehran

views as unacceptable without reciprocal concessions.

Iran's Foreign Minister has travelled to Ankara, Turkey for talks, where Turkish leaders have proposed a trilateral virtual conference between President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in hopes of launching direct dialogue.

However, Iran has expressed caution about negotiating from a perceived position of weakness.

Meanwhile, Washington has reinforced U.S. forces in the region — including the deployment of aircraft carriers and warships — signalling readiness for military action if diplomacy fails.

The diplomatic push reflects broader wariness among Arab and Muslim governments about being drawn into a direct U.S.-Iran confrontation. Gulf states have emphasised that they will not allow their territories or airspace to be used for military strikes against Iran, a stance that has complicated U.S. operational planning.

Leaders in Riyadh, Doha, Cairo and elsewhere are also keen to avoid the devastating humanitarian and economic fallout a wider conflict could trigger — including threats to oil supplies, regional security, and the stability of fragile economies.

Despite active mediation, the situation remains volatile. Both Washington and Tehran have signalled determination to defend their core interests, and without a breakthrough in talks, the risk of miscalculation — or a wider clash — persists.



Traore

Burkina Faso dissolves over 100 political parties

Burkina Faso has dissolved all political parties and formations and repealed laws governing their operation.

The presidency's communications directorate announced the decision on Thursday in a statement, after Ibrahim Traore, junta leader, presided over the council of ministers meeting.

Émile Zerbo, Minister of Territorial Administration and Mobility, said the "great and important decision is part of the re-founding of the state". According to the statement from the presidency, the numerous political parties have led to drifting, favouring the division of citizens and weakening the social fabric.

The statement said the measure is aimed at preserving national unity, strengthening the coherence of governmental action, and opening the way for a reform of political governance.

The adopted decree states that the property of the dissolved parties should be handed over to the state.

"The draft laws will be passed to the Transitional Legislative Assembly as soon as possible," Zerbo said.

Before the coup, the country had more than 100 registered political parties, with 15 represented in parliament after the 2020 general election.

After Traore seized power in a September 2022 coup, the parties were forced to suspend activities.

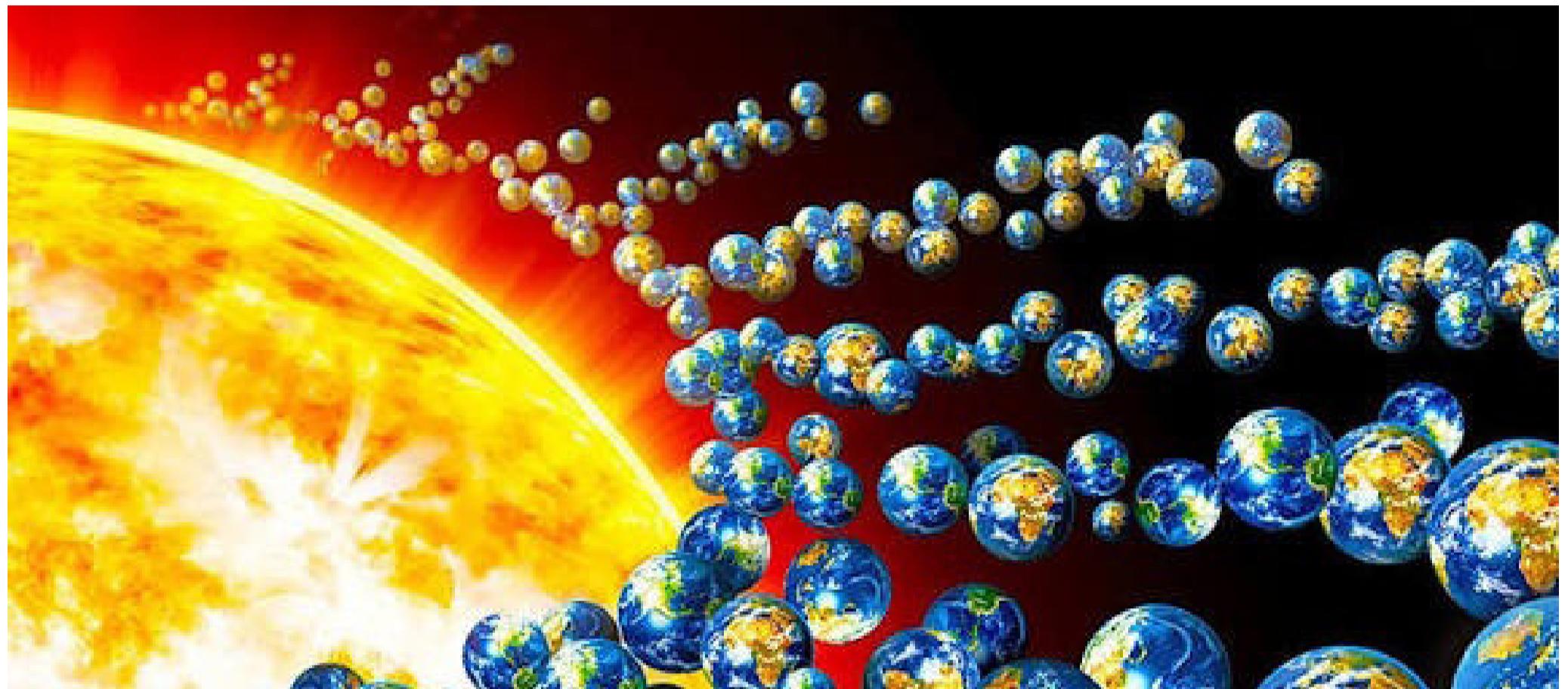
At the council of ministers meeting, a state development roadmap tagged the "Reliance plan" was also adopted.

The plan is valued at FCFA 36 trillion (around \$65 billion) and stretches from 2026 to 2030.

DID YOU KNOW?

BY VIVIAN OKAFOR

The Sun is so massive that about 1.3 million Earths could fit inside



The Sun is so massive that you could fit about 1.3 a million Earths inside it. Thanks to its immense volume and gravitational pull, it's the powerhouse at the centre of our solar system. The Sun formed approximately 4.6 billion years ago from the gravitational col-

lapse of matter within a region of a large molecular cloud.

Most of this matter gathered in the centre; the rest flattened into an orbiting disk that became the Solar System.

The central mass became so hot and dense that it eventu-

ally initiated nuclear fusion in its core. It is now classified as a G-type main-sequence star (G2V).

Every second, the Sun's core fuses about 600 billion kilograms (kg) of hydrogen into helium and converts 4 billion kilograms of matter into energy.

Approximately 1.3 million Earths could fit inside the Sun based on a comparison of their volumes.

The Sun is massive, with a diameter about 109 times greater than Earth's, and it accounts for 99.86% of the total mass in the solar system.

If Earths were packed efficiently without gaps, roughly 960,000 to 1 million could fill the Sun, but by simple volume calculation, it is 1.3 million. The Sun's diameter is 864,400 miles (1,391,000 km), which is roughly 109 times the diameter of Earth.

The Sun is 333,000 times more massive than Earth. If the Sun were a basketball, Earth would be a tiny $\sqrt[3]{\text{mm}}^3$ bead. While 1.3 million Earths could fit inside, the Sun is only considered a medium-sized star compared to others, such as the red giant Betelgeuse.

Peregrine falcon is the fastest animal alive



The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is officially recognised as the fastest bird—and fastest animal—in the world, capable of reaching hunting dives (stoops) exceeding 300-320 km/h (190-200

mph).

It utilises these incredible speeds to strike prey mid-air, primarily feeding on other birds.

While their normal flight speed is around 40-60 mph,

the peregrine falcon's specialised hunting dive (or "stoop") allows it to reach, and sometimes exceed, 320 km/h (200 mph).

To achieve these speeds, the falcon folds its wings into a

teardrop shape to reduce drag. During high-speed dives, it specialised nostrils (tubercles) regulate airflow and protect the bird's lungs from extreme air pressure.

Rather than just using talons,

the impact force of the dive is often enough to instantly kill prey, such as ducks, pigeons, and shorebirds.

Peregrine falcons are widely distributed, inhabiting rocky open country, coastal cliffs,

and even urban environments on every continent except Antarctica.

Often referred to as the "duck hawk" in North America, this bird represents the pinnacle of aerial hunting speed.

LIVING LEGENDS

BY AISHA AUYO

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Queen Irene Onwuka appointed special envoy for education by International Forum for Peace and Diplomacy

The International Forum for Peace and Diplomacy (IFPD) has appointed Queen Irene Onwuka as Special Envoy for Education, marking a significant milestone in continental efforts to advance educational access and quality across Africa.

The appointment, announced by Dr Tony Ajikpu, Nigeria's head of IFPD, recognises Onwuka's transformative work in education, disability inclusion, and peacebuilding through her Queen Irene Onwuka Peace Foundation.

"Across the continent, quality and inclusive education remains essential to empowering young people, reducing inequality, strengthening governance, and fostering innovation," the release stated.

"Education is not only a social necessity but a strategic investment in Africa's future leadership and workforce."

Queen Irene brings exceptional credentials to her new role. As Executive Director of her foundation, she has overseen large-scale humanitarian programmes that have directly benefited more than 50,000 vulnerable children and internally displaced persons (IDP), students through essential support initiatives focused on education, healthcare, and child protection.

Her mission-driven approach combines strategic leadership with grassroots community engagement, creating hope-centered, child-focused interventions that align with the World Health Organisation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Onwuka's academic journey reflects her deep commitment to understanding the roots of conflict and pathways to peace. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in History and International Relations from

Imo State University (2008-2012) and a Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Resolution (2022-2023) from the same institution.

She is currently pursuing a PhD in Diplomatic History and International Relations, further strengthening her intellectual foundation for diplomatic and educational advocacy.

Her work has earned numerous accolades, including the African Iconic Young Humanitarian Award (2023), recognition among 100 African Change Makers by the African Women Achievers Award (2025), and the Royal title "Gimbinya Gamji" from the Arewa Gamji Emirate Royal Council (2024) for selfless service and community development.

The IFPD appointment positions Queen Irene to amplify her advocacy on a continental scale, championing education as the



Onwuka

foundation for Africa's long-term peace, economic transformation, and sustainable development.

As Special Envoy, she is expected to work with governments, international organisations, and civil

ment will be instrumental in advancing educational equity across the continent.

society to strengthen educational infrastructure, promote inclusive learning environments, and ensure that education serves as a powerful tool for peacebuilding and social cohesion across Africa.

Jay-Jay Okocha, Former Professional Footballer

Augustine Azuka "Jay-Jay" Okocha is a retired Nigerian professional footballer who is widely regarded as one of the greatest African players and most talented dribblers in the history of the sport. Okocha is from Ogorashi Ukwu in Aniocha local government of Delta State, a sub-group of the Igbo people. His older brother Emmanuel is also a former footballer who played for the Nigerian national team. He has a nephew, Alex Iwobi, who plays for Fulham and Nigeria. He primarily played as an attacking midfielder and was celebrated for his flair, creativity, and technical skill. Okocha's career spanned several top European leagues:

- Eintracht Frankfurt (Germany): He rose to prominence in the Bundesliga, famously scoring a goal against Karlsruher SC in 1993 where he dribbled past several defenders and goalkeeper Oliver Kahn.
- Fenerbahçe (Turkey): He scored 30 goals in



Okocha

62 appearances and became a fan favourite for his set-piece expertise.

- Paris Saint-Germain (France): In 1998, he moved to PSG for a fee that made him the most expensive African player at the time. During his tenure, he served as a mentor

to a young Ronaldinho.

- Bolton Wanderers (England): He moved to the Premier League in 2002, where he captained the side and became a club legend. His impact was so significant that fans famously wore shirts saying, "Jay-Jay – so good

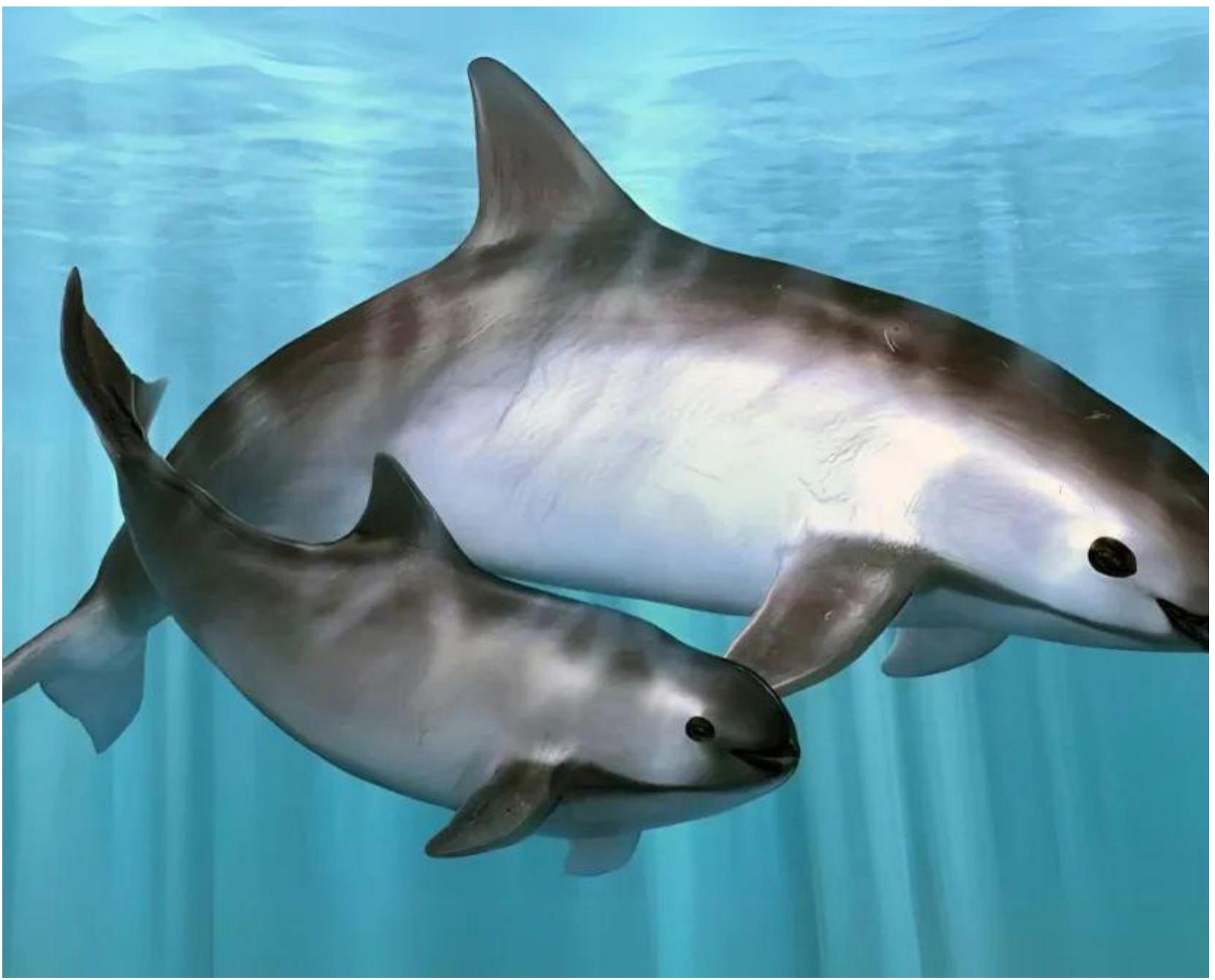
they named him twice."

- Later Career: He also had stints with Qatar SC and Hull City before retiring in 2008. Okocha earned 73 caps for the Nigerian national team, the Super Eagles, between 1993 and 2006. He was a key member

of the team that won the 1994 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) and the 1996 Olympic Gold Medal in Atlanta. He represented Nigeria in three FIFA World Cups (1994, 1998, and 2002). BBC African Footballer of the Year: 2003,

2004 (the first player to win it twice). FIFA 100: Named by Pelé as one of the top 125 greatest living footballers in 2004. Individual Honours: Voted AFCON Player of the Tournament and Top Scorer in 2004.

ANIMAL WORLD

By Fatima Ma'aji Muhammad
(student at Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt)

Vanquita on the Brink: World's smallest and gentlest porpoise nears extinction

Hidden in the shallow waters of the northern Gulf of California lives the vaquita, the world's rarest marine mammal. Small, shy, and rarely seen, this porpoise has become a powerful symbol of how human activity can drive a species toward extinction.

The vaquita, meaning "little cow" in Spanish, is the smallest cetacean, measuring just over five feet long.

It is easily recognised by the dark rings around its eyes and mouth and is sometimes mistaken for a dolphin though unlike dolphins, the vaquita avoids attention and prefers a quiet life beneath the surface.

Vaquitas are generalists, foraging on a variety of

demersal fish species and squids; however, benthic fish, such as grunts and croakers, make up the majority of their diet.

Vaquita habitat is restricted to a small portion of the upper Gulf of California, making this the smallest range of any cetacean species. They live in shallow, turbid waters of less than 150 m (490 ft) depth.

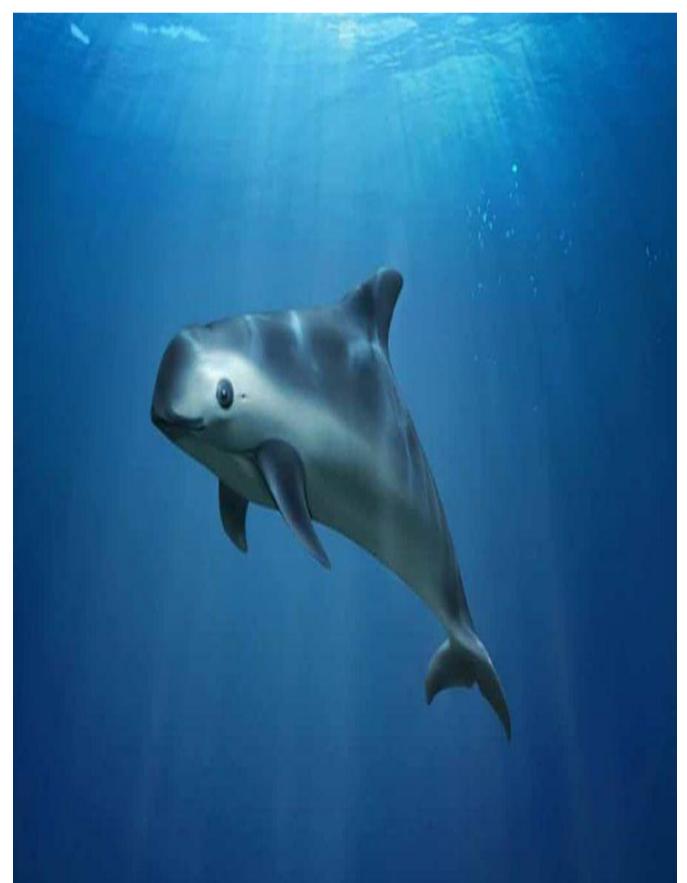
Despite its gentle appearance, the species faces a serious threat from gillnets used in fishing. These nearly invisible nets trap vaquitas underwater, causing them to drown. Illegal fishing for the totoaba fish has worsened the situation, bringing more gillnets

into vaquita habitat. With fewer than a dozen believed to remain and a range limited to a small part of the Gulf, the species has little chance to escape danger.

Conservation efforts are ongoing. Gillnet bans, increased patrols, and safer fishing alternatives aim to

protect the vaquita while supporting local communities. Saving the vaquita also means preserving the balance of the Gulf's marine ecosystem.

The vaquita's future now depends on human action. Whether it survives or disappears will reflect the choices made today.



JOKES AND PUZZLES

BY ABDULLAHI HARUNA

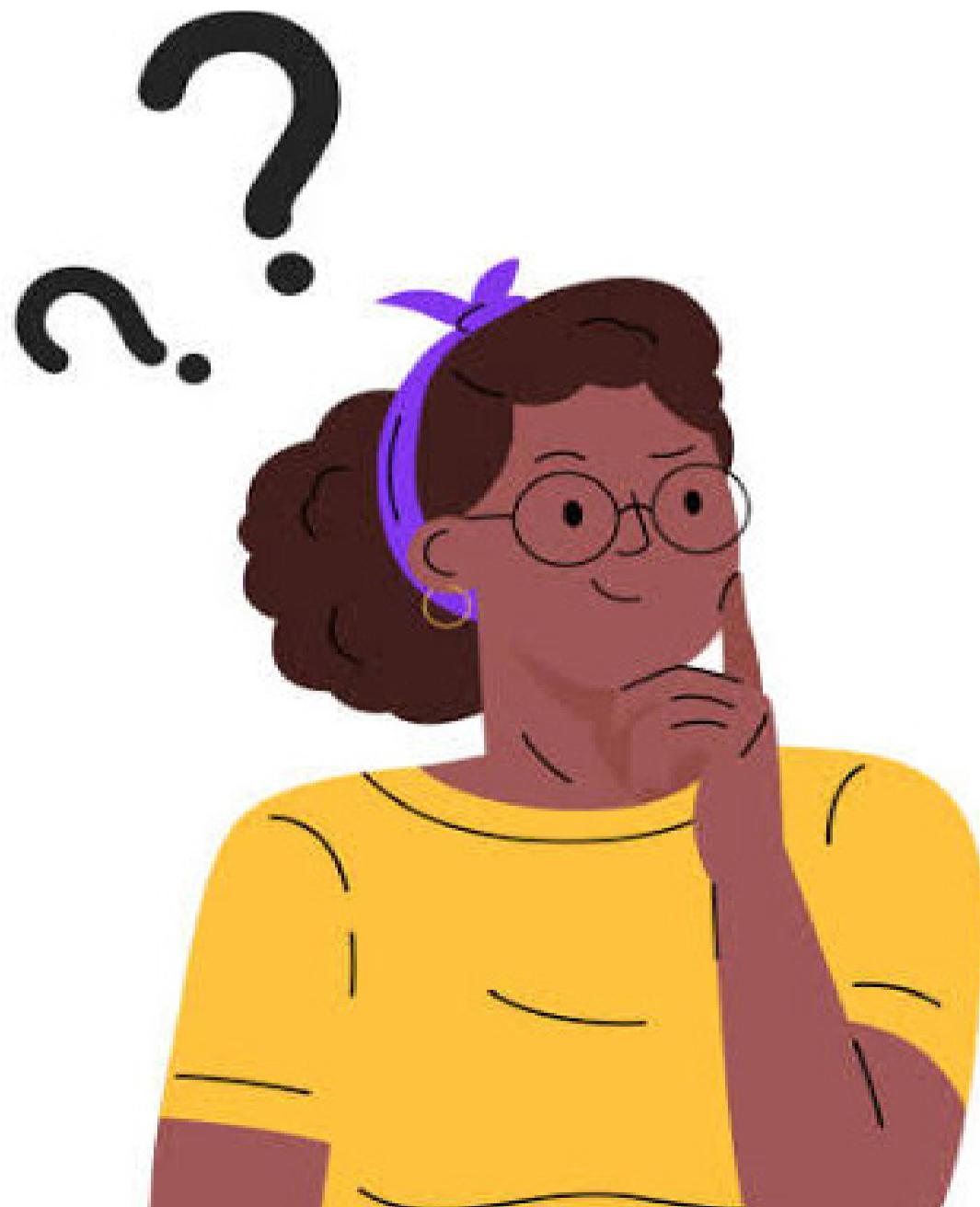
JOKES

1. Why did the smartphone go to therapy?
It had too many unresolved issues.
2. I told my boss I was late because of traffic.
He said, "Next time, don't bring the whole traffic with you."
3. Why don't secrets last in a bakery?
Because someone always spills the beans.
4. My wallet is like an onion.
Every time I open it, I cry.
5. Why did the calendar break up with January?
Too many bad dates.
6. I started reading a book on anti-gravity.
I can't put it down.
7. Why did the computer sit quietly in the corner?
It didn't want to crash the party.
8. I asked my mirror for advice.
It said, "Look at yourself first."
9. Why did the math book look stressed?
Too many problems.
10. I tried exercising, but I lost my balance.
Turns out, I don't work out — I nap in between.



RIDDLES WITH ANSWERS

1. Riddle: What has keys but no locks, space but no room?
Answer: A keyboard
2. Riddle: What runs but never walks, has a mouth but never talks?
Answer: A river
3. Riddle: The more you take, the more you leave behind. What is it?
Answer: Footsteps
4. Riddle: What has a head and a tail but no body?
Answer: A coin
5. Riddle: What can travel around the world while staying in one spot?
Answer: A stamp
6. Riddle: What has one eye but can't see?
Answer: A needle
7. Riddle: What comes once in a minute, twice in a moment, but never in a thousand years?
Answer: The letter M
8. Riddle: What gets wetter the more it dries?
Answer: A towel
9. Riddle: What has hands but can't clap?
Answer: A clock
10. Riddle: What is always in front of you but can't be seen?
Answer: The future



SPORTS: BEHIND THE SCENES

BY MUHAMMAD KUKURI,
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From Braces to the Finish Line: The incredible story of Wilma Rudolph



Rudolph

Born in 1940 in Saint Bethlehem, Tennessee, Wilma was the 20th of 22 children. She was born prematurely and spent much of her childhood battling one illness after another, including double pneumonia and scarlet fever. The biggest blow came at age four when she contracted polio. The disease paralysed her

left leg and curved her foot inward. Doctors told her mother she would never walk without a brace. For years, Wilma wore a heavy metal leg brace. But her family refused to accept the prognosis. Twice a week for several years, her mother took her on a 45-mile bus trip to a hospital that would

treat Black patients during the era of segregation. Her siblings learned how to massage her leg, performing physical therapy at home several times a day. By age nine, Wilma defied the doctors. She took off the brace and, by age 12, was walking normally without any medical aid.

Wilma didn't just want to walk; she wanted to run. She joined her high school basketball and track teams, where her natural speed quickly became undeniable. By age 16, she had already earned a bronze medal at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. But it was the 1960 Rome Olympics that

cemented her legacy. In Rome, Wilma became the first American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympic

- 100-meter dash
- 200-meter dash
- 4x100-meter relay

The Italian press dubbed her "La Gazzella Nera" (The Black Gazelle) for her fluid, graceful running style. She didn't just

win; she dominated, breaking world records and captivating a global audience. Wilma's impact didn't stop at the finish line. When she returned to her hometown for her victory parade, she insisted that the event be integrated. It became the first racially integrated event in the history of Clarksville, Tennessee.

Tyson Fury comes out of retirement to face Arslanbek Makhmudov in blockbuster comeback

Former heavyweight world champion Tyson Fury will face Arslanbek Makhmudov in his comeback fight in April, weeks after saying he would come out of retirement.

The bout between the Briton and Canadian-based Russian Makhmudov will take place in the UK on April 11, with no venue yet announced, and will be broadcast on Netflix. Fury quit boxing in January last

year after suffering a second straight defeat to Oleksandr Usyk — the latest in a string of retirements.

The 37-year-old "Gypsy King" said earlier this month he would return to the sport in 2026 and has been training in Thailand.

"Well, it's official, I'm back doing what I love to do," Fury posted on Instagram. "I've brought the biggest network along with me @netflix @netflixuk, this is going to

be astronomical. Blessed by God." Fury has a record of 34 wins, two defeats and one draw.

"I am thrilled about the opportunity," said 36-year-old Makhmudov, who has won 21 of his 23 fights. "I'm coming to deliver a war."

"Tyson Fury has been a big champion. I will be more ready than ever to leave with a massive W." Fury had been expected to build towards a long-awaited fight against fellow British



Fury

former heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, but Joshua's future is uncertain Nigeria, in which two of his close friends were killed.

BOOKS

BY MUHAMMAD AL-TIJANI

Then I Was Guided (12)

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK

On the other hand, it is not right for the Sunnis to accuse their brothers the Shi'a of being wrong because

they cry for the chief martyr. These people have lived and are still living to this present day the tragedy of al-Husayn. Even the Messenger of Allah (saw) cried after the death of his son al-Husayn, and Gabriel cried also.

I asked, "Why do the Shi'a decorate the graves of their saints with gold and silver, despite the fact that it

is prohibited in Islam?"

Al-Sayyid al-Sadr replied, This is not done just by the Shi'a, and it is not prohibited. Look at the mosques of our brothers the

Sunnis in Iraq or Egypt or Turkey or anywhere else in the Islamic world, they are all decorated with gold and silver. Furthermore, the mosque of the Messenger of Allah (saw) in al-Madinah al-Munawarah and the Kaba, the House of Allah, in the blessed Mecca is covered every year by a cloth decorated by gold which costs millions. So such a thing is not exclusive to the Shi'a.

I asked "The Saudi Ulama say that touching the graves and calling the saints for their blessings is polytheism, so what is your opinion?"

Al-Sayyid al-Sadr replied: If touching the graves and calling the dead is with the understanding that they could cause harm or render a benefit, then that is polytheism, no doubt about it, the Muslims are monotheists and they know

that Allah alone could cause harm or render a benefit, but calling the saints and Imams (may Allah bless them all) with the understanding that they could be an intermediary to Allah, that is not polytheism.

All Muslims, Sunnis and Shias, agreed on this point from the time of the Messenger up to the present day, except the Wahabiyyah, the Saudi

Ulama who contradict all Muslims with their new creed. They caused considerable disturbances among the Muslims, they accused them of blasphemy, they spilt their

blood and even beat old pilgrims on their way to the House of Allah in Mecca just because they say "O

Messenger of Allah, may peace be upon you", and they will never let anybody touch his blessed grave.

They had so many debates with our learned people, but they persisted in their stubbornness and their arrogance.

Al-Sayyid Sharaf al-Din, a famous Shi'i learned man, went on pilgrimage to the House of Allah during

the time of Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, and he was one of those Ulama who were invited to the King's palace to celebrate with the King 'Id al-Adhha, in accordance with the customs there. When his turn came to

shake the King's hand, Sayyid Sharaf al-Din presented him with a leather bound Qur'an. The King took the Qur'an and placed it on his forehead then kissed it. Al Sayyid Sharaf al-Din said, "O

King, why do you kiss and glorify the cover which is only made out of goat's skin?" The King answered, "I

meant to glorify the Holy Qur'an, not the goat's skin." Al-Sayyid Sharaf al-Din then said, "Well said, O

King. We do the same when we kiss the window or the door of the Prophet's (saw) chamber, we know it

is made of iron and could not harm or render a benefit, but we mean what is behind the iron and wood, we mean to glorify the Messenger of Allah (saw) in the same way as you meant with the Qur'an when you kissed its goat's skin cover.

The audience was impressed by al-Sayyid and said, "You are right." The King was forced to allow the

pilgrims to ask for blessings from the Prophet's relics, until the

Then I was Guided



Muhammad al-Tijani al-Samawi

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order was reversed by the successor of

that king. The issue is not that they are afraid of people associating others with Allah, rather, it is a political issue based on antagonizing and killing the Muslims in order to consolidate their power and

authority over the Muslims, and history is the witness to what they have done with the Muslim nation.

I asked him about the Sufi orders, and he answered me briefly:

There are positive and negative aspects to them. The positive aspects include self-discipline, austere

living, renunciation of worldly pleasures and elevating one's self to the spiritual world. The negative aspects include isolation, escapism and restricting the mention of Allah by verbal numbers and various

other practices. Islam, as it is known accepts the positive aspects but rejects the negative ones, and we may say that all the principles and teachings of Islam are positive.

The answers of al-Sayyid al-Sadr were clear and convincing, but it was very difficult for a person like

me to comprehend them. Twenty-five years of my life had been based on the idea of glorifying and respecting the Companions of the Prophet, especially the

Rightly Guided Caliphs. The Messenger of Allah charged with the leadership of the prayers during his illness, and said about him, if I

was taking a very close friend, I would have chosen Abu Bakr." Because of all that, the Muslims elected him as their caliph. Imam 'Ali knew the position of our master Umar, with whom Allah glorified Islam, and the Messenger of

Allah had stated before his death that Imam 'Ali should be his successor. How could I believe all that (that all Muslims and the Companions of the Prophet- who was the best of

people -, after the death of the Prophet agreed to stand against 'Ali - may Allah honor him) when we

had been taught from childhood that the Companions of the Prophet - may Allah bless them all -

respected 'Ali and knew very well what kind of man he was. They knew that he was the husband of

Fatima al-Zahra and the father of al-Hasan and al-Husayn and the gate to the city of knowledge. Our Master 'Ali knew the quality of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, who became a Muslim before anybody else, and accompanied the Prophet to the cave, as is mentioned by Allah, the Mighty, in the Qur'an,

and whom the Messenger of Allah charged with the leadership of the prayers during his illness, and said about him, if I

was taking a very close friend, I would have chosen Abu Bakr." Because of all that, the Muslims elected him as their caliph. Imam 'Ali knew the position of our master Umar, with whom Allah glorified Islam, and the Messenger of

Allah called him al-Farooq, he who separates right from wrong. Also Imam 'Ali knew the position of our master Uthman, in whose presence the angels of the Merciful felt shy, and who organized al-Ursrah's army, and who was named by the Messenger of Allah as "Dhu al-Nurayn", the man who is endowed with two lights.

How could our brothers, al-Shi'a, ignore or pretend to ignore all that, and make these personalities just

ordinary characters subject to all worldly whims and greed so that they deviated from the right path and disobeyed the orders of the Messenger after his death. This was inconceivable since we know that these

people used to hasten to execute the orders of the Messenger; they killed their sons and fathers and members of their tribes for the sake of glorifying Islam and its ultimate

victory. He who would kill his father and son for the sake of Allah and His Messenger could not be subject to worldly and transitory

ambitions such as the position of Caliph, and ignoring the orders of the Messenger of Allah.

Yes, because of all that I could not believe all the Shi'a were saying, in spite of the fact that I was convinced about many things. I remained in a state of doubt and perplexity: doubtful because of what

the Shi'i learned scholars Ulama said to me, which I found sensible and logical; and perplexed because I

could not believe that the Companions of the Prophet, may Allah bless them all, would sink to such a low

moral stand and become ordinary people like us, neither sharpened by the light of the Message nor able to be enlightened by Muhammad.

O my God, how could that be? Could the Companions of the Prophet be at the level described by the Shi'a? The important thing is that doubt and perplexity were the beginning of weakness and the realization that there were many hidden issues to be uncovered before reaching the truth.

My friend came, then we travelled to Karbala, and there I lived the tragedy of our master al-Husayn in the same way his followers, and only then did I know that he had not died an ordinary death. People

tend to crowd around his grave like butterflies and cry with such sorrow and grief that I have never seen

before, as if al-Husayn had just been martyred. I heard speakers who aroused the feelings of people

when describing the incident at Karbala, accompanied by crying and wailing, and soon the listener loses control of himself and collapses.

TO BE CONTINUED



SPACE AVAILABLE

The Arbiter

BY HASSAN GIMBA



Iran, Beware the Fangs of January, the Scourge of February, the Ides of March, by Hassan Gimba (1)

A few days ago, I woke in the night, anxious and checking the news, half-expecting America and Israel to have attacked Iran.

Given this tension, the central issue is the longstanding American-Israeli effort to destabilise Iran. Even though it cannot be exhausted in one article, I'd like you to come along as we look over the underlying hostility, the motives behind American and Israeli actions, and why both countries believe only a fractured, weakened Iran will serve their interests.

The apparent lowering of tensions and talk of de-escalation are largely superficial. America—the dog—and Israel—the tail that wags it—will never rest until they see a balkanised Iran; regime change to install a malleable monarchy is just a ruse. It is a first step to the annihilation of Iran, but at first, the people of the country have to be deceived into thinking they are going to have a new government. The tag team of Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu will not be satisfied with merely installing a malleable regime, because they represent a concept whose custodians plan in decades and think in centuries. As long as Iran remains intact, a future “antagonistic” government could replace their pliable proxy—and that is unacceptable to them. What they desire is a shattered Iran, broken into fragments and at each other's throats.

America wants to neutralise Iran to limit China's growing influence and weaken Russia. Iran currently acts as a buffer and supplies vital energy resources to China. For Israel, Iran obstructs its ambition for a so-called “Greater Israel.” Aware of Iran's strength and resilience, Netanyahu has worked relentlessly to push America into confronting Iran on his country's behalf. China now sources almost all its oil from Iran, with Venezuela no longer a

viable alternative. Should America succeed in cutting off Iran's crude oil exports to China, the Land of the Dragon would lose a critical fuel supply that sustains its economy. Without it, China's economic stability could be severely threatened.

For these reasons, America and Israel—long-time siamese twins with converging interests—have kept Iran in their sights. During the recent periods of unrest, Iran accused the CIA and Mossad of fomenting it, and both countries reportedly contemplated military action “to save Iranians” with the protests as an excuse. Following events in Venezuela involving Nicolás Maduro, Trump even considered a “limited” and “targeted” strike on Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He publicly declared America was “locked and loaded,” but several factors restrained them.

One such factor was Iran's disruption of internet services and the jamming of Elon Musk's Starlink system, rendering GPS unreliable. Without satellite navigation and insider support, American and Israeli aircraft and missiles would struggle to operate effectively and could be easily neutralised.

Another deterrent was Iran's acquisition of advanced weaponry from China and Russia, as well as the testing of its own Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). This proved Iran could hit back, raising the risk of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), recalling the Cold War.

There was also palpable fear in Tel Aviv. After Iranian missiles inflicted significant damage during the 12-day conflict last June, Netanyahu's aircraft—the Wing of Zion—was reportedly flown to Crete, Greece, with some commentators suggesting he was on board. Israel was unprepared for a direct military confrontation with Iran, goading America, instead, into



Dr Gimba.

it. It instead favoured indirect tactics, including fomenting internal unrest. Most Gulf states—except the UAE—reportedly informed America they would not allow their bases to be used for an attack on Iran. Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also urged Trump to avoid military action.

These factors collectively compelled Trump to pause. Initially, he remarked that “they have stopped shooting people,” later adding that “they have stopped the killing of about 800 people,” the majority of whom were reportedly American and Israeli operatives.

Still, Iran must punish lawbreakers according to its laws—just as America, Israel, and all sovereign nations committed to the rule of law do. Failing to act would only embolden saboteurs and invite other unpatriotic citizens to commit more destabilising acts.

History is replete with examples of nations weakened by impunity. In Nigeria, Boko Haram members and bandits are often forgiven or even treated better than their victims. Those who lost homes and loved ones are rarely compensated,

while perpetrators are “rehabilitated.” That is the civilian reality. Imagine the fate of soldiers, police, and security agents. I remember a harrowing video of a woman in Maiduguri, Borno State, accused—despite her denials—of being a DSS agent, brutally beheaded by Boko Haram. It was devastating.

But to appreciate the long-term planning of the concept the duo of Trump and Netanyahu represent, consider the recent “escape” of about 3,000 ISIS detainees from prisons run by American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria, and America's reported attempt to relocate another 7,000 ISIS prisoners to Iraq, which borders Iran. This could be interpreted as laying the groundwork for a future proxy force to destabilise Iran and push for regime change or fragmentation.

Meanwhile, Trump, who claimed he wanted to help Iranians, recently warned that he would destroy the people if anything were to happen to him. He remarked, “If anything happens, they're going to wipe [Iran] off the face of the earth,” and that, “I've

from both parties for Iran to fire the first salvo, it has resisted taking the bait, consistent with its policy of avoiding war. Yet its leaders have vowed to retaliate decisively if attacked.

The Foreign Ministry stated that Iran is prepared to respond “with everything we have.” President Masoud Pezeshkian warned on X that any American attack would provoke a “severe and regret-inducing” response. Yahya Rahim Safavi, adviser to Imam Khamenei, declared, “We are preparing for the final battle with Israel,” stressing that “we are in a war phase” with no ceasefire or agreements in place.

Major General Mohammad Pakpour, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), reinforced this Thursday, saying Iranian forces “have their hands on the trigger,” and warned against miscalculation, citing lessons from June.

Next, we will examine the choices available to both sides and how a military confrontation might unfold. It is worth noting that Israel reportedly contemplated the use of nuclear weapons in its last war with Iran—a doctrine known as the Samson Option. Should this occur, Israel would become only the second nation, after the United States in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, to deploy atomic weapons in warfare.

Least I Forget
What is wrong with our politicians that they almost always fail the test of trust or amana, in Hausa? People who were literally licking the feet of Governors turn against them the moment the Governors elevate them to that seat. God willing, we will examine how Governor Mai Mala Buni of Yobe State and Vice President Kashim Shettima are exceptional in maintaining trust and remaining loyal to their predecessors.

Hassan Gimba is the Publisher and CEO of Neptune Prime.



The best ten-year plan is to plant trees; the best plan for the rest of your life is to plant people