

FG To Sustain Drop In Food Prices - Kyari

▲ Pg. 3

2027: Yoruba Community Backs Gov. Otti For Second Term

▲ Pg.16

Lawyer Remanded Over Alleged N84m Property Fraud In Abia

▲ Pg. 9

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"Uplift the people, project the nation"

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Abia Government Moves To Fight Against Glaucoma

By Daniel Ogidiolu

The Abia State Government has reaffirmed its commitment to combating glaucoma, a leading cause of irreversible blindness, with plans to expand access to screening and treatment facilities across the state.

The Commissioner for Health, Prof. Enoch Ogbonnaya Uche, disclosed this recently during the World Glaucoma Week 2026 symposium held at the JACC Building in Umuahia, with the theme "Uniting for a Glaucoma-Free World."

Prof. Uche noted that while glaucoma cannot be reversed once vision is lost, early detection and prompt treatment can prevent further damage.

He described the theme of the symposium as a call for government, development partners and professional bodies to intensify awareness, improve diagnosis and expand treatment services.

"Vision is a very big contributor to the quality of life and human development," he said, urging residents, especially adults, to embrace regular eye screening.

Also speaking, the Administrator of the Abia State Eye Health Management Bureau, Dr. Betty Emeka-Obasi, described glaucoma as a "silent killer of human sight" and stressed the need for collective action in addressing the disease.

Contd on p2

UNESCO Applauds Otti's Education Reforms, Pledges Tech Support To Abia

By Amarachi Uzoukwu

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has commended Abia State Governor, Dr. Alex Otti, for prioritising education and human capital development, describing the State's reforms as a strong foundation for improving learning outcomes.

The UNESCO Head of Office and Country Representative to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Dr. Jean-Paul Ngome-Abianga, gave the commendation during a visit by a UNESCO delegation to the governor at Nvosi in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area.

Ngome-Abianga further commended Governor Otti for the progress made in Abia State since 2023, particularly in infrastructure development, fiscal discipline and education.

The UNESCO Representative to Nigeria and ECOWAS noted that the reforms introduced by the Otti led administration since assumption of office were already yielding visible results.

He particularly lauded the state government for allocating 20 per cent of its budget to the Education Sector and disclosed that UNESCO has been working closely with the state government and its institutions, especially in the area of health education.

According to him, the collaboration has resulted in the training of more than 1,000 teachers on Health

Education, engagement of over 700 communities and religious leaders on HIV and health awareness and involvement of more than 300 schools under the Abia First Education Programme.

"And all these started when you launched the Abia First Education Programme. So we would like to thank you for that and we would like to continue to support you in that very important agenda," he said.

Ngome-Abianga urged the state government to further deepen collaboration with UNESCO, increase budgetary provision for Health Education and expand partnership in areas within the organisation's mandate.

He added that UNESCO is ready to provide technical expertise and institutional support to the Abia State Government in designing and implementing programmes in

Education, Health Education and other areas within its mandate.

"We are here in this country because our mandate is focusing on education, the science, culture, communication and information and we are here for you."

"We are here to assist you, to support your work and we would like you to know that we are available any time you need such a support."

Continued on P.2



Dr. Alex Otti (right) shares a warm handshake with Dr. Jean-Paul Ngome-Abianga, UNESCO Head of Office and Country Representative in Nigeria and ECOWAS, during the UNESCO delegation's visit to the Governor at Nvosi in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area.

Alex Otti, An Exceptional Governor -Ex Abia State Commissioner for Information ... He came into office well prepared, with clear agenda

By Chukwuemeka Egejuru and Ekebusi Precious

Former Commissioner of Information, Culture and Tourism in Abia State, Dr.

Agbai Eke Agbai, has commended the administration of Governor Alex Otti, describing his

performance in office as exceptional and impactful.

Dr. Agbai, who served under former Governor Orji Uzor Kalu and left office in 2003, made the remarks recently during an exclusive interview session with National Ambassador in Umuahia,

the Abia State capital.

The Abiriba-born policy expert, who currently serves as the Executive Vice-President of the Centre for Policy and Foreign Engagement and a member of the Board of Trustees of

the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library, said

Governor Otti came into office well-prepared with a clear development agenda anchored on empirical evidence.

Continued on P.2

EDITORIAL:

Confronting Nigeria's Rising Glaucoma Crisis

News

UNESCO Applauds Otti's Education Reforms, Pledges Tech Support To Abia

Continued from page 1

"We would like to continue together and to support you. We will put all our technical expertise to your disposal in any area you need it", he assured.

Also speaking, Chief Executive Officer of Sterling One Foundation, Olapeju Ibekwe, highlighted the Africa Social Impact Summit, a platform convened with the United Nations system in Nigeria to and improved security for school facilities.

He assured the delegation that Abia State would continue to work closely with UNESCO and other partners to strengthen the education sector and reduce the number of out-of-school children.

accelerate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

She said the summit, launched in 2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic, was designed to promote multi-sector partnerships among government, private sector and development organisations and has already

helped unlock more than 100 million dollars in development financing.

Ibekwe also spoke about the Business Coalition for Education, launched in partnership with the Office of the Vice President to address the challenge of out-of-school children in Nigeria through private sector participation.

She invited Governor Otti to participate in the summit scheduled for July 22-23 at the Eko Convention Centre in Lagos and urged Abia State to join as a pioneer public sector partner in the coalition.

Responding, Governor Otti thanked the delegation for the visit and expressed readiness to deepen collaboration with UNESCO and other development partners.

"What you came with, a request that no one can say no to; Partnership, support to reduce the number of out-of-school children, asking that more money be allocated to health education.

"Those are good and they are imperative for a government that is serious", the Governor said.

He explained that the Abia State Government currently devotes 20 per cent of its budget to education and 15 per cent to health.

Governor Otti recounted how his administration introduced free and compulsory education after discovering that school fees were a major factor keeping children out of school.

He said that the policy led to a surge in school enrolment, prompting the government to recruit thousands of teachers and embark on massive school reconstruction, introduction of Smart Schools, Curriculum standardization

Alex Otti, An Exceptional Governor

-Ex Abia State Commissioner for Information
... He came into office well prepared, with clear agenda

Continued from page 1



L-R: The GM Abia Newspapers and Publishing Corporation (ANPC) Mazi Jones Ike handing over copies of National Ambassador to Dr. Agbale Eke Agbale at the Corporation's Headquarters Umuahia.

According to him, the infrastructural transformation witnessed across parts of the state, particularly the improved road network, has had

direct impact on the lives of residents.

"Every governor comes with the intention of doing their best, but what is quite remarkable about Governor Alex Otti is that he came prepared. Even a blind man can see the level of change," he said.

The former commissioner cited his personal experience travelling to his hometown, Abiriba in Ohafia Local Government Area, as evidence of the administration's infrastructural progress.

"In the past, it used to take me about one hour and fifty minutes to drive from Umuahia to Abiriba, but today I can get there in less than thirty-five minutes because of the improved road network. That is empirical evidence of development," he stated.

Dr. Agbale also pointed to the transformation in Abia, the state's commercial hub, noting that ongoing infrastructure and urban renewal projects have significantly improved the city's outlook and economic activities.

Speaking on institutional reforms, he lauded efforts to reposition government institutions, particularly the Abia State-owned media establishment.

He commended the leadership of the General Manager of Abia State Newspaper and Publishing Corporation (ANPC), Hon. Jones Nnanna Ike, noting that the management's vision aligns with the governor's broader agenda of building strong and vibrant public institutions.

On the role of the media, Agbale emphasized that journalists have the responsibility of independently verifying government policies and programmes to determine their real impact on the people.

"It is not the responsibility of a governor to grade himself. The duty of journalists is to go out, investigate and determine whether government policies are actually impacting the lives of the people," he said.

Highlighting sectors he considers most impressive under the current

administration, the former commissioner identified infrastructure, education and healthcare as key areas of progress.

According to him, the decision of the Otti administration to allocate about 20 per cent of the state's budget to education represents a strategic investment in human capital development.

"For someone like me who is an intellectual, education is very dear. When you invest heavily in education and health, you are investing in the productivity and future of the state," he noted.

He added that the recruitment of additional teachers and the strengthening of public school infrastructure have helped improve the state's education sector.

While acknowledging that free education also existed during the administration of Dr. Orji Uzor Kalu, Agbale explained that the current government has gone further by strengthening the system with more teachers and improved funding.

He said, "This approach has addressed some of the structural issues that previously discouraged parents from enrolling their children in public schools".

On the factors behind the governor's performance within a relatively short period in office, Agbale attributed it to Otti's private sector background, accountability-driven governance style and freedom from political godfatherism.

"He came from the private sector where performance is measured and results are expected. That mindset has helped him restructure governance with emphasis on accountability and efficiency," he said.

Looking ahead, the policy expert urged residents of the state to evaluate the administration based on the visible changes across the state.

"Abians should ask themselves a simple question: how was it before and

how is it today? When people answer that honestly, they will know the impact that has been made," he said.

On the legacy Governor Otti should aim to leave, Agbale said it would be premature to begin writing the governor's legacy, noting that history is usually written after events have fully unfolded.

"History is made in advance but written in retrospect. The governor is still making that history, and it is the people who will eventually assess and write his legacy," he added.

Change of Name

I, formerly known and addressed as Ukoma Maryann Obiageri, now wish to be known and addressed as MARYANN OBIAGERI MIKE IBEBUNJO. All documents bearing my former names remain valid. The general public should please take note.

**MARYANN OBIAGERI
MIKE IBEBUNJO.**

Change of Name

I, formerly known and addressed as Loveth Ezinne Adiele, now wish to be known and addressed as UWAEZUOKE LOVETH EZINNE. All documents bearing my former names remain valid. The general public should please take note.

**UWAEZUOKE LOVETH
EZINNE.**

Reconciliation of Name

This is to affirm that Nnameremwa Francis Njikeonye which was written in my NIN and Nnameremwa Francis Young Njikeonye which is the name I bear on my other documents are same person. I now wish to be called and addressed as NNAMEUWA FRANCIS YOUNG NJIKEONYE. All documents bearing my former names remain valid. Trustfund and the general public should please take note.

**NNAMEUWA FRANCIS
YOUNG NJIKEONYE.**

Change of Name

I, Formerly known, called and addressed as MISS KALU NKECHINYERE MIRABEL, now wish to be known, called and addressed as EZEH UBALI MIRABEL NKECHINERE. All documents bearing my former names remain valid. The general public should please take note.

**MRS. EZEH UBALI
MIRABEL
NKECHINYERE**

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that Bachelor of Science (Bsc) Certificate No. D014203 belonging to KINGSLEY CHIBUIKE AGULANNA issued by Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, has been misplaced and all efforts made to locate it have proved unsuccessfully. The certificate was issued on 9th June, 2014 under the department of Computer Science. If found, please return to the owner or contact the nearest police station. All relevant authorities and the general public should please take note that the said certificate is hereby declared LOST and INVALID.

KINGSLEY CHIBUIKE AGULANNA

Abia Government Moves To Fight Against Glaucoma

Continued from page 1

She commended the administration of Alex Otti for prioritising healthcare reforms in the state, noting that illiteracy and quackery remain major obstacles in the fight against glaucoma.

Dr. Emeka-Obasi disclosed that 6,381 glaucoma cases were confirmed in Abia State in 2024, adding that interventions by the bureau have yielded significant results.

According to her, more than 20,000 patients had received treatment, over 30,000 outreach programmes had been conducted, and over 2,000 eye surgeries had been carried out across the state.

She further praised Governor Otti for signing an Executive Order in July 2024, aimed at ensuring that no resident of Abia loses sight due to preventable causes. She emphasised that tackling glaucoma requires collaboration among government agencies, traditional institutions, health professionals and faith-based organisations.

Earlier, speakers at the symposium warned that untreated glaucoma could lead to permanent blindness.

Former Chief Medical Director of Federal Medical Centre, Umuahia, Abali Chuku, and keynote speaker, Bernadine Ekenyong urged the public to prioritise regular eye examinations and early treatment.

They also advised residents to avoid harmful substances in the eyes, maintain balanced diets and use only prescribed eye medications.

The event featured an interactive panel session with the Director of Public Health and Disease Control at the Ministry of Health, Prince Agomoh Orijeji; a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Optometry, Andrew Omaka; and former Head of Ophthalmology at Federal Medical Centre, Umuahia, Chioma Uchendu.

As part of activities marking World Glaucoma Week 2026, cash prizes were presented to students who emerged winners in essay and arts competitions.

The symposium also attracted traditional rulers and other stakeholders in the health sector, highlighting broad support for the campaign against glaucoma.

Reactions Trail Pro-Nnamdi Kanu Protest in Aba Amidst Heavy Security Presence

By Chukwuemeka Egejuru

Reactions have continued to trail the pro-Nnamdi Kanu protest held in Aba, Abia State, recently, amid a heavy deployment of security personnel across parts of the commercial city.

Continued from page 4

News

Rivers Deputy Governor Seeks Partnership with WACCIMA

From Bestman Orji, Port-Harcourt

The Rivers State Deputy Governor, Prof. Ngozi Nma Odu, has assured members of the Women Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (WACCIMA), of her readiness to partner with them to advance women's economic empowerment in the state.

Prof. Odu gave the assurance recently while receiving a delegation of the Rivers/Bayelsa Chapter of WACCIMA at Government House, Port Harcourt.

She urged women to rally round and support women in leadership, to create lasting change and inspire future generations.

The deputy governor also congratulated Dr. Chinyere Nwoga on her emergence as the first female President of the Port Harcourt Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (PHCCIMA) since its inception.

According to her, Dr. Nwoga now carries the responsibility of setting a strong example and demonstrating the capabilities of women in leadership positions.

Prof. Odu expressed delight that women are increasingly supporting one another, noting that the era when women failed to back themselves has passed.

"Our priority is to keep impacting lives, no matter how small. The moment you improve the capacity of women, whether rural or working-class women, you build their confidence and they begin to excel in what they do," she said.

Earlier, the leader of the delegation and President of PHCCIMA, Dr. Nwoga, said the visit was to express solidarity with the leadership of Governor Siminalayi Fubara, which she said has continued to foster peace, stability and strengthen investors' confidence in Rivers State.

She commended the deliberate efforts of the Fubara-led administration in infrastructure development, human capital advancement, security and economic diversification.

Nwoga noted that these initiatives align with the objectives of the Port Harcourt Chamber, the Women Chamber and the Niger Delta Chamber of Commerce in promoting economic growth and business development in the region.

Abia Moves To Enforce Supreme Court Land Ruling As Boundary Tracing Begins

By Charles Ogbomaya

The Abia State Government has defended its decision to begin field tracing and preparatory boundary work on Ogbuebulu land, saying it is acting under a constitutional obligation to implement a final judgment of the Supreme Court of Nigeria that has remained unenforced for more than two decades.

In an official response issued recently, the state said petitions submitted by individuals describing themselves as concerned citizens of Ndi Ebe Abam did not challenge the validity of the judgment, which was delivered by the high court in Umuahia in 1989 and affirmed by the Supreme Court on 12 July 2002.

According to the government, the ruling, which was entered in favour of Ndi Ebe Abam, is final and binding on all authorities and cannot be set aside or delayed by administrative hesitation or fresh claims outside the scope of the original case.

The response, jointly articulated by the office of the deputy governor and the Abia State Boundary Committee,



Chairman, Boundary Committee, Emetu

said the state would be failing in its duty if it refused to facilitate the implementation of a subsisting apex court decision. It added that enforcing the judgment was a matter of upholding the rule of law rather than interfering with judicial authority.

The Deputy Governor, Ikechukwu Emetu, who chairs the boundary committee, was said to have stepped in following repeated petitions from neighbouring Ndi Ojiugwo

Abam, which alleged encroachment and rising tensions linked to the prolonged non execution of the judgment.

Officials said the objective of the intervention was to remove long standing ambiguities on the ground, prevent communal conflict and provide certainty over boundaries through lawful and professional means.

Addressing concerns over the map being used for the exercise, the

government said the document guiding the field work is a certified true copy that was originally presented by Ndi Ebe Abam during the litigation and relied upon by the courts. It said both Ndi Ebe Abam and Ndi Ojiugwo Abam examined and accepted the same map during consultations leading up to the commencement of field activities.

The government rejected claims that an altered or externally imposed map was being deployed, describing such assertions as inaccurate.

On the conduct of the exercise, officials clarified that the current phase involves field tracing rather than permanent demarcation. They said boundary pillars would only be laid after technical consultations and agreement among professional surveyors representing all parties, in line with accepted surveying standards.

The state said it had held multiple conciliatory meetings with both communities, consulted prominent Abam stakeholders and formally

engaged the traditional leadership of Ndi Ebe Abam. These discussions, it said, resulted in a joint resolution reached on December 18, 2025, committing both sides to begin field tracing and boundary demarcation in the first quarter of 2026.

While acknowledging fears that some lands outside the litigated area might be affected, the government said speculative or future claims could not lawfully suspend the enforcement of a Supreme Court judgment. Any grievances beyond the scope of the decided case, it added, must follow separate legal processes.

Reaffirming its stance, the Abia State Government said the judgment would be implemented, the process would remain transparent and professional, and dialogue would continue alongside technical work to ensure peace.

It called on all stakeholders to cooperate with the constituted authority and allow the exercise to proceed, stressing that the goal was lasting stability and development anchored on respect for the law in Abia State.

Akpara Assesses Renovation Progress at Enyimba Garment Factory, ENASCO

By Favour Okorie

The Abia State Commissioner for Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Mazi Michael Enyinnaya Akpara, has carried out an inspection of the ongoing renovation work at the Enyimba Garment Factory and ENASCO facilities in Aba, as part of efforts to revive key industrial establishments in the

State.

The Commissioner, led a delegation of senior officials from the ministry to assess the level of progress on the project, which is being executed by the Ministry of Industry and SMEs.

The renovation is part of the state government's broader plan to rehabilitate critical industrial infrastructure,

stimulate manufacturing activities, and strengthen the state's economic base.

Speaking during the inspection, Akpara said the visit was aimed at monitoring the progress of work and ensuring that the renovation is being carried out in line with approved standards and within the expected timeline.

He stressed that regular supervision of government projects is necessary to ensure quality delivery and accountability.

The commissioner noted that the present administration remains strongly committed to restoring key industrial facilities across the state in order to boost production, encourage local manufacturing, and create employment opportunities for residents.

According to him, the revival of such industrial establishments will not only increase productivity but also contribute significantly to the economic growth and industrial development of the state.

Akpara expressed satisfaction with the level of progress recorded so far and commended both the management team and contractors handling the renovation work for their dedication to the project.

During the visit, the managing director overseeing the facilities, Miss Nnenna Kalu Ogba, conducted the delegation around the renovation sites and provided detailed explanations on the scope of work already completed as well as the ongoing phases of the

project.

She assured the commissioner and his team that every effort is being made to ensure that the project is delivered successfully and in line with the vision of the state government to reposition the industrial sector and attract more investment.

Ogba also expressed appreciation to the commissioner and members of the delegation for the inspection visit, noting that their continued support and supervision would help ensure the timely completion of the project.

The inspection visit further underscores the commitment of the Abia State Government to reviving dormant industries, strengthening local manufacturing capacity, and positioning the state as a major industrial hub in Nigeria and beyond.

Officials who accompanied the commissioner during the inspection included the Permanent Secretary, Dr. Okey Ithemanna; Director of Finance, Mrs. Okoh C. I.; Director of Administration, Mrs. Catherine Nwogu; Director of PRS, Mr. Chidiebere Offor; Head of Industry, Engr. Chima Chibueze.

FG To Sustain Drop in Food Prices - Kyari

By Ebere Tasie

The Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Abubakar Kyari, has maintained that the Federal Government would continue to create a conducive environment for agribusinesses to flourish nationwide.

Kyari disclosed this at the 2026 Ministerial Stakeholders Engagement Retreat on Agriculture transformation in Abuja, reported by African Independent Television (AIT) and was monitored by National Ambassador reporter

He stated that food prices will continue to crash until stability occurs, as federal government pledges to sustain trend by addressing high inputs

costs to ensure food remains accessible and affordable.

According to the minister, the challenges faced by the small holder farmers are enormous and government has developed short-term plans to make farm inputs more accessible and affordable.

He further revealed that the government has distributed 40 million cocoa seedlings to revitalize the country's cocoa industry, release 65 improved crop varieties with enhanced yield, climate resilience, and nutritional profiles that are ideal for small holder farmers and farmers who produce for commercial purposes.

The minister noted that the move is coming

on heels of calls for urgent government intervention and the need to ensure equilibrium prices that are fair for the consumer but profitable enough to keep the farmer in business.

The 2026 Ministerial Stakeholders Engagement Retreat on Agriculture transformation is, therefore, a key step toward creating a structured approach for Stakeholder Engagement, ensuring that government activities in the agriculture sector are transparent, well communicated and informed by Stakeholders feedback.

News

Gov. Otti Charges Matriculating Students Of ASCETA To Have Sound Character

By Offor Okechukwu

The Governor of Abia State, Dr. Alex Otti, has charged matriculating students of Abia State College of Education Technical, Arochuku, to portray character distinguished by honour, imbibe discipline, and conduct themselves as teachers.

Speaking during the 13th matriculation of the College, the governor, represented by the Commissioner for Tertiary Education, Prof. Uche Eme-Uche, enjoined the students to position themselves as teachers and solution carriers in their various discipline.

Also speaking, the Majority Leader, Abia House of Assembly, Hon. Uchenna Okoro, stated that the world has moved beyond certificate that decorate walls.

Hon. Okoro reiterated that the world demands skills that solve problems. He added that Nigeria does not lack talents but lacks discipline to execute and skilled hands to bring ideas to life.

In her speech, the Provost, of the institution, Prof. Idowu Obukohwo Eluwa, expressed deep appreciation to the College Visitor, His Excellency, Governor of Abia State, Dr. Otti, for his remarkable infrastructural transformation which are investments in the future of students and the advancement of teacher and technical education in Abia State.

In their goodwill messages, the Rector, Ogbonnaya Onu Polytechnic, Aba, Prof. Christopher Okoro, the representative of the Vice-Chancellor of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike Prof. Nneoma Obasi and Chief David Ogba Onuoha, stressed that vision without discipline is hallucination.

They urged the students to have vision to impact, create jobs, reduce dependency and restore dignity to the world.

NDDC Launches Performance Management System To Boost Efficiency

From Aligwe Stella, PH

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), has rolled out its new Performance Management System (PMS), aimed at enhancing staff productivity and driving better service delivery.

The Managing Director of the commission, Dr. Samuel Ogbuku, who spoke at a two-day retreat in NDDC Headquarters, Port Harcourt, emphasised that the system is crucial for achieving national development goals; stating that the PMS replaces the old Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) and is based on the Balanced Scorecard System, covering both organisational and individual performance.

He revealed that promotions will now be performance-based, and staff are encouraged to prioritise computer literacy and adaptability to the new system.

The Commission plans to fully automate its operations by March, with training and support systems in place to ensure a smooth transition.

In their various views, the commission's Director, planning and Statistics, Dr. Patterson Ogon and Director of Admin and Human Resources, Kelechi Nwelu, highlighted that the PMS will enable progress tracking, informed decision-making, and improved accountability.

Also, a consultant, Dr. (Mrs) Offiong Achibong, outlined key features, including regular evaluations, goal setting, and performance-based promotions, aimed at driving excellence and rewarding dedication and hard work.

Otti Reaffirms Commitment To Education

By Amarachi Uzoukwu

The Abia State Governor, Dr. Alex Otti, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to education, describing it as the foundation upon which every meaningful development rests.

Governor Otti stated this recently, when he received the Regional Chairman /Enugu State Chairman of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), East Regional Working Committee in his office at Nvosi Isiala Ngwa South LGA.

The governor noted that education remains central to his administration's development strategy, stressing that the progress of any society depends largely on the quality of its educational foundation.

"Thank you for the felicitations with the state and thank you for recognising our modest efforts at changing the narrative in Education in Abia State and other sectors in the State.

"We take Education very, very seriously. If you

ignore the very foundation of humanity, then every other thing you are doing is a waste of time.

"A lot of the problems that we face, you trace it back to Education or lack thereof. When we educate people, their thinking changes, the opportunities available to them expand", he stated.

Governor Otti explained that the State Government had consistently devoted one fifth of its annual budget to Education because of its far-reaching impact on human development and societal transformation.

"The simple reason is that none of us would be sitting here if we were not educated, including the teachers themselves.

Responding to requests presented by the teachers' union, including the provision of a bus and completion of the Teachers' House in the State, Governor Otti assured the delegation that the Government would consider their demands.

Reactions Trail Pro-Nnamdi Kanu Protest in Aba Amidst Heavy Security Presence

Continued from P.2

candidate, Omoyele Sowore.

Sowore, while addressing the protesters who gathered to welcome him to Aba, criticised the large number of soldiers and other security operatives deployed to the city during the demonstration.

He argued that such strong military presence would be more useful in areas battling insurgency and terrorist attacks in the country.

Sowore clarified that he was not the organiser of the protest but said he attended out of his belief in justice and equity, stressing that the continued detention of Kanu raises concerns about fairness and national unity.

According to Sowore, Nigeria cannot make meaningful progress when any ethnic group feels unfairly treated, adding that Kanu should be released to reunite with his family, especially before

the

Easter celebration.

The protest, organised by supporters of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), initially began around Faulks Road in Aba, but was dispersed by security operatives.

The protesters later regrouped at the Samek area of the city, where the demonstration continued with a larger number of participants.

Meanwhile, security presence remained noticeable in different parts of the city as soldiers and other operatives monitored activities to prevent any breakdown of law and order.

In Umuahia, the state capital, the situation remained calm, with police patrol vehicles seen moving around major streets to maintain peace and public order.

Azumini Community Celebrates Ikoro 2026 Festival

By Okechukwu Ubani

The people of Azumini Ancient Kingdom in Ukwu East Local Government Area of Abia State, came out in large numbers to celebrate their yearly Ikoro Festival.

The community was filled with joy as men, women, and children dressed in beautiful and colorful traditional clothes for the special occasion.

The festival displayed the rich culture and traditions of the people through cultural dances and line performances. People from different walks of life joined the celebrations. The colorful displays and joyful atmosphere showed the strong cultural heritage of the Azumini community.

Speaking with our correspondent, the Chairman of the Azumini Interim Administration, High Chief Ogbo Ubani, appreciated the people of Azumini for coming out en masse at Amaobu Playground to celebrate this year's Ikoro Festival. He said that Azumini people have always loved and respected their traditions, especially the Ikoro Festival. He noted that despite the challenges facing the community, the people still gathered to dance and celebrate their culture.

Also speaking, Soye Edwin Waboso, an indigene of Azumini from Uhu Okoroma, attended the Ikoro Festival for the first time since she was born. She shared her experience with our correspondent and described the festival as very beautiful and colorful. She said it was exciting to see both old and young people men, women, boys, and girls moving around happily. According to her, everyone forgot his/her worries and focused on laughter, play, and dancing to the rhythm of the drums. She said the experience was memorable and would remain in her heart.

Also, the President of the Azumini Welfare Association, Elder Azubuike Nwankwo, thanked everyone who attended

this year's festival despite the challenges facing the community. He also thanked God for protecting the Azumini people and appreciated the community members for standing together during difficult times.

The 2026 Ikoro Azumini Festival was organized by the Azumini Interim Administrative Council and the Azumini Welfare Association. The celebration began with Ikoro Uju on February 24, 2026, which served as the opening ceremony. This was followed by Ihu Ikoro on the 25, 27, and 28, February 2026, when the main performances and celebrations took place.

Ikoro Azumini is a special cultural event where the people gather to thank God for a good harvest from the past farming season. During the festival, they also pray for a better harvest in the coming farming season.

Azumini Ancient Kingdom, also known as the Blue River City, is an island community with ancestral ties to the Ijaw people of Ndoki. The people are known to be friendly, welcoming, and proud of their culture. They value their language, traditional foods, and especially their popular ukazi soup.

Over the years, the Ikoro Azumini Festival has grown into a colorful event that attracts both local and international visitors. Traditionally, the Ikoro dance was performed only by nobles and cultural initiates. It is similar to the Surugede dance, which is known as the dance of the spirit.

One of the highlights of the festival is the rich traditional dressing. The men wear fine outfits with bowler hats and walking sticks, while the women dress in beautiful George wrappers and beads. They move with pride and dignity as they take part in the celebrations.

Azumini is deeply rich in culture, and the people have carefully preserved their traditions over the years, even as some modern changes have been introduced.

Otti Congratulates Ikpeazu As Ambassador To Spain

By Amarachi Uzoukwu

The Governor of Abia State, Dr. Alex Otti, has congratulated the immediate past governor of the state, Dr Okezie Ikpeazu, on his appointment as Nigeria's Ambassador to Spain.

In a goodwill message signed by the Special Adviser to the Governor on Media and Publicity, Mr. Ferdinand Ekeoma, Governor Otti described the appointment as an opportunity for Dr Ikpeazu to serve the nation at the diplomatic level, while safeguarding the interests of Nigerians in Spain.

Governor Otti also expressed appreciation to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, for the appointment and urged the Federal Government to provide Dr Ikpeazu and other newly appointed Ambassadors with the necessary support to enable them discharge their diplomatic responsibilities effectively.

The governor, on behalf of his family, the government and the people of Abia State, wished the former governor a fruitful and impactful diplomatic service to the nation.

Editorial

Confronting Nigeria's Rising Glaucoma Crisis

Glaucoma, often described by medical experts as the "silent thief of sight," is emerging as one of the most serious threats to eye health in Nigeria. The disease, which gradually damages the optic nerve and leads to irreversible blindness, is increasingly being reported across the country. What makes glaucoma particularly dangerous is that it often develops without noticeable symptoms in its early stages, allowing it to progress undetected until significant and permanent vision loss has occurred. As the number of cases continues to rise, the need for urgent and coordinated action has become more compelling than ever.

Across Nigeria, health professionals have repeatedly raised concerns about the growing burden of glaucoma. The disease remains one of the leading causes of blindness globally and has a particularly devastating impact in developing countries where access to regular eye care services is limited. In Nigeria, a combination of low public awareness, late diagnosis, poor access to specialist care, and the activities of unqualified practitioners continues to worsen the situation.

Unlike many other eye conditions, glaucoma cannot be reversed once vision has been lost. Treatment can only slow down or halt further damage. This reality underscores the critical importance of early detection and prompt medical intervention. Unfortunately, many Nigerians only seek medical attention when the disease has reached an advanced stage, leaving doctors with limited options to preserve their sight.

Several factors contribute to the increasing prevalence of glaucoma in the country. First is the widespread lack of awareness about the disease. Many people are unaware that routine eye examinations are necessary even when there are no symptoms. Others mistakenly attribute early signs of vision problems to aging or fatigue and therefore delay seeking professional help. In rural communities especially, ignorance about glaucoma remains a major barrier to early diagnosis.

Another challenge is the shortage of eye care facilities and specialists, particularly in rural and

underserved areas. While major cities may have access to ophthalmologists and well-equipped hospitals, millions of Nigerians living in smaller towns and villages have little or no access to professional eye care services. As a result, they often rely on patent medicine dealers or untrained individuals who lack the expertise to diagnose or treat glaucoma.

The proliferation of quackery in the health sector further complicates the problem. Unscrupulous individuals frequently exploit the desperation of patients by offering fake treatments or harmful remedies that not only fail to cure the disease but also accelerate vision loss. Such practices must be firmly addressed through stronger regulation and enforcement by relevant authorities.

Government intervention is therefore crucial. Public health campaigns aimed at increasing awareness about glaucoma must be intensified. Citizens should be educated on the importance of regular eye examinations, especially those above the age of 40 and individuals with a family history of glaucoma, who are at higher risk. Early screening can help detect the disease before irreversible damage occurs.

In addition, government at all levels should invest more resources in strengthening eye health services. This includes equipping hospitals with modern diagnostic tools, training more ophthalmologists and optometrists, and expanding community-based eye screening programmes. Mobile eye clinics could also play a vital role in reaching remote communities where healthcare infrastructure is limited.

Private sector organisations, non-governmental groups, and professional associations also have a role to play. Partnerships between these stakeholders can support outreach programmes, subsidise treatment costs, and provide public education on preventive eye care. Schools, workplaces, religious institutions, and community groups should be incorporated into awareness campaigns to broaden the reach of these messages.

Ultimately, the fight against glaucoma requires a collective effort involving government, healthcare professionals, civil society organisations, and the general public. Individuals must take responsibility for their eye health by seeking regular check-ups and avoiding unverified treatments. Early detection remains the most effective weapon against glaucoma.

Nigeria cannot afford to ignore the growing threat posed by this disease. With proper awareness, stronger health systems, and a commitment to early screening, thousands of cases of preventable blindness can be avoided. The time to act is now before the silent thief of sight robs more Nigerians of their vision and quality of life.

LETTERS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO:
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Abians Struggle Under the Weight Of N1,500 Fuel

Dear Editor,

I am writing to draw urgent attention to the severe difficulties facing residents of Abia State. In the first two weeks of March 2026, petrol prices have risen sharply to N1,500 per litre in Aba and Umuahia, while transport fares have nearly doubled. This sudden increase is making life extremely difficult for ordinary citizens, many of whom are already struggling to meet basic needs.

The "New Abia" we are building is becoming harder to live in. Students at Michael Okpara University, Umudike, now pay N700 for a trip that used to cost N400. Some civil servants are walking long distances from Express Tower to save N300. These examples show that the crisis goes beyond fuel; the cost of food and other essentials is rising because traders pass on higher transport costs to consumers. Families are forced to cut back on meals, and small businesses are struggling to stay afloat.

The situation is creating widespread stress and anxiety among residents. Parents worry about feeding their children, workers face long and costly commutes, and students are finding it harder to focus on their studies. If left unaddressed, this economic strain could threaten the social and economic progress of the state.

We welcome Governor Alex Otti's launch of the Abia Electric Bus Service as a positive initiative. However, even the subsidized fares still take up a significant portion of daily wages in this inflationary climate. While the effort is commendable, it is not enough to ease the hardships most residents are facing.

We urge the Governor to act decisively. Citizens cannot be expected to "sacrifice" for a future they cannot reach while daily life has become increasingly expensive. The rising cost of fuel, transport, and food is placing a heavy burden on families, students, and workers, making it difficult for many to meet even basic needs. Immediate and concrete action is required to prevent further hardship.

Abia urgently needs a comprehensive plan that goes beyond temporary solutions. This plan should include immediate relief measures to support vulnerable families, such as subsidies or targeted aid, and strategies to stabilize prices for essential goods and services. By taking swift and practical steps, the government can provide real relief to the people, restore hope, and ensure that the progress of the state does not come at the expense of its citizens' well-being.

Time is of the essence. Without swift and meaningful intervention, the people of Abia will continue to bear the heavy burden of rising costs while hoping for a better tomorrow.

From **Ogidiolu Daniel.**
Umuahia



Abuja Digest

with Sophia Ovuike
+2348037744514

2027 Polls: NAF Assures INEC of Airlift Support

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has assured the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of continued operational support to ensure the smooth conduct of elections across Nigeria.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sunday Kelvin Aneke, gave the assurance recently during a courtesy visit to the INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Amupitan, at the Commission's headquarters in Abuja.

Aneke said the Nigerian Air Force remains committed to providing airlift and surveillance capabilities to facilitate the timely deployment of electoral personnel and materials, particularly to remote and difficult terrains across the country.

Responding, Prof. Amupitan, emphasised the importance of efficient logistics, proper planning and inter-agency collaboration in delivering credible elections.

According to him, the success of any election largely depends on effective logistics management.

"The election can only be as good as the logistics. Failure to plan is planning to fail. Nigerians are looking ahead to the next general election and they expect the best from us," he said.

Amupitan disclosed that the Commission had already released the timetable and schedule of activities for the 2027 general elections in line with the provisions of the Electoral Act 2026.

He stated that the Presidential and National Assembly elections are scheduled for January 16, 2027, while the Governorship and State Assembly elections will be held on February 16, 2027.

The INEC chairman noted that conducting elections in Nigeria presents significant logistical challenges due to the country's vast geographical terrain, particularly in riverine and hard-to-reach communities.

"We recognise the ongoing challenges we face, especially in deploying personnel and materials to difficult terrains. That is why this collaboration is not just important, but necessary," he said.

Amupitan commended the Nigerian Air Force for its support during previous electoral exercises, including the November 2025 Anambra Governorship Election, the February 2026 Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Area Council Election, and several by-elections nationwide.

"At very short notice, you were able to deliver. Even when we encountered minor challenges, you stepped in promptly to ensure there were no logistical gaps," he added.

He noted that seamless logistics and adequate security are crucial in strengthening public confidence in the electoral process.

"Our objective is clear – to strike the necessary link between legality and legitimacy. That link is strengthened when logistics are seamless and security is assured," he said.

Amupitan further revealed that the Commission plans to establish a joint technical team with the Nigerian Air Force to improve operational planning and coordination ahead of major electoral activities.

"We are going to engage ahead of time. Early planning, detailed timelines and clarity on deployment sizes and locations are essential. If we work together proactively, we can address challenges before they arise," he said.

Earlier, Air Marshal Aneke congratulated Amupitan on his appointment and commended INEC's reform initiatives aimed at improving operational efficiency and inclusiveness.

He described Nigeria as the largest democracy in Africa and noted that its democratic stability is sustained by strong

institutions such as INEC.

The Air Force Chief reiterated that the Nigerian Air Force is ready to provide airlift support for the deployment of election materials and personnel nationwide.

He disclosed that heavy and medium-lift aircraft in the Air Force fleet are currently undergoing routine maintenance, to ensure optimal operational readiness ahead of future electoral deployments.

Beyond logistics support, Aneke also said the Air Force would deploy Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, including drones and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), to monitor

the electoral environment and detect potential security threats.

He further emphasised the need for joint simulation exercises between both institutions to identify and address possible operational gaps ahead of major elections.

Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to sustained collaboration, expressing confidence that strengthened coordination between INEC and the Nigerian Air Force will contribute to the conduct of secure, orderly and credible elections in Nigeria.

INEC Pushes for Stronger Women Leadership in Electoral Governance

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has commemorated the 2026 International Women's Day, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening women's leadership and promoting inclusivity within Nigeria's electoral governance system.

The event, held at the Commission's headquarters in Abuja, was themed "Give to Gain: Advancing Women Leadership for Inclusive Progress," and highlighted the need to empower women to occupy more leadership and decision-making positions within the electoral body.

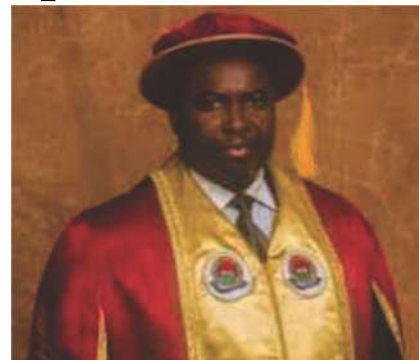
Chairman of the Organising Planning Committee (OPC), Abdu Zuru, described the celebration as both a moment of reflection and a call to action for institutions to evaluate their progress in promoting gender inclusion.

According to him, the theme underscores the belief that institutions grow stronger when opportunities are extended to all members of society.

"International Women's Day is not merely ceremonial. It invites institutions like ours to pause, reflect on progress made and recommit to purposeful action. When we give opportunities, we gain collectively and humanity prospers," Zuru said.

He noted that the Commission used the occasion to recognise women who have risen to leadership positions across various departments, units and divisions, including National Commissioners, Resident Electoral Commissioners, Administrative Secretaries and Directors.

Zuru described the honourees as women who have distinguished themselves in service and



Prof. Joash Ojo Amupitan, INEC Chairman

paved the way for others to rise.

"This clearly reflects our resolve to build a Commission where leadership is determined by competence, integrity and equitable opportunity," he added.

In his remarks, INEC Chairman, Joash O. Amupitan, said the celebration provided an opportunity to assess progress in advancing women's participation in leadership while acknowledging that more work still needs to be done.

He emphasised that inclusive leadership strengthens institutions and contributes to balanced policies and sustainable democratic outcomes.

"For us at INEC, gender inclusion is not mere rhetoric; it is a deliberate commitment. Credibility, trust and legitimacy in democratic governance are strengthened when all segments of society, including women, are adequately represented," Amupitan said.

He disclosed that the Commission currently has two female National Commissioners and a female Secretary to the Commission. At the state level, six women serve as resident electoral commissioners, while eight are administrative secretaries.

According to him, 10 out of the Commission's 23

Directors are women, representing over 43 per cent of the directorate cadre, while 218 out of the 774 Electoral Officers nationwide are women.

Amupitan also highlighted institutional reforms aimed at strengthening gender inclusion, including the establishment of a Gender and Inclusivity Department in 2021 and the appointment of Hadiza Abubakar Talba as Special Assistant on Gender and Inclusivity.

However, he raised concerns about the rising trend of gender-based disinformation and digital harassment targeting female political aspirants ahead of future elections.

"As we approach the 2027 electoral cycle, female candidates are increasingly subjected to online harassment and fake news aimed at discouraging their political ambitions. The electoral space must be a sanctuary for ideas, not a battlefield of gender-targeted attacks," he warned.

He also urged political parties to uphold genuine internal democracy and inclusivity during their primaries, noting that the Commission would intensify scrutiny of party processes to ensure women are not sidelined.

Presenting a paper titled "The journey so far," the Secretary to the Commission, Rose

Oriarian-Anthony, highlighted the progress made toward achieving the 35 per cent affirmative action target for women within the Commission.

She said the progress was driven by deliberate policies such as gender mainstreaming, inclusive recruitment practices, leadership development programmes and institutional reforms.

Oriarian-Anthony noted that women now occupy key leadership positions within the Commission, including National Commissioners, Directors, Resident Electoral Commissioners and Administrative Secretaries.

"It is not a coincidence that the longest-serving National Commissioner is a woman and that the last two successive Secretaries to the Commission are women," she said.

She further disclosed that 10 out of the 23 departments at INEC headquarters are headed by women, while 15 women currently serve as administrative secretaries across states, representing about 41 per cent.

Despite the progress recorded, she stressed that more efforts are needed to achieve the 35 per cent affirmative action target nationwide.

"The theme 'Give to Gain' perfectly captures our experience. By giving women opportunities, visibility and institutional support, INEC has gained enhanced productivity, improved stakeholder trust and stronger governance structures," she added.

In her vote of thanks, the Director of the Gender and Inclusivity Department, Dorathy Bello, commended the Commission's leadership and staff for their continued commitment to promoting gender equality and inclusive governance.

Focus

The Man And His Magic

By Dickson Paul

Honestly speaking, the present government in Abia State, led by Dr. Alex Chioma Otti, has won the hearts and confidence of many Abians. Today, many people strongly believe in the government because of the visible changes taking place in the state.

This growing support is largely due to the administrative problems left behind by previous governments, which Dr. Alex Otti has been working hard to correct.

When we look at the level of infrastructural development in Abia State today, it is clear that there is a big difference compared to the past. Governor Alex Otti has shown that he is a careful and responsible manager of both human and financial resources.

Otti is a practical and development-oriented leader, similar in style to Michael Iheonukara Okpara, the former Premier of the old Eastern Region. Many observers of good governance believe that Otti is following the developmental path that Okpara once championed. Development projects are now spread across the three senatorial zones of the state. Because of this, many people believe his chances for a second term are strong.

Abians can clearly see the transparency, accountability, and determination with which the governor is working to transform the state. One major area of change is road construction. In the past, people used to say that you could easily know when you entered Abia State because of the many potholes and bad roads. Today, the governor is changing that negative image by fixing the roads across the state.

Abia State is experiencing a notable transformation under the leadership of Alex Chioma Otti. His vision is to build the Abia State of our dreams a state that every citizen can be proud of. His administration is focused on building modern infrastructure, improving public facilities, and making the environment more attractive and organized.

The people of Abia had earlier recognized Otti's competence and leadership ability. Many supported him during the 2015 and 2019 governorship elections, and eventually stood firmly with him in 2023 when he won the

election. This shows the strong support and confidence Abians have in his leadership.

Already, his administration has significantly changed the landscape of Abia, the commercial center of the state. The story of Abia, which is known as a major commercial hub in southeastern Nigeria, is gradually changing for the better.

Today, Abia has a more hopeful and promising story. The people are pleased with the administration of Governor Otti and many say they are now seeing the real dividends of democracy.

Based on the governor's performance so far, many people believe he has done well. However, they also believe that there is still more work to be done. Abia State had suffered from years of slow development before 2023. Because of this, people are encouraging the government to continue executing more projects that will help the state compete with other developed states in Nigeria.

Governor Otti is known as someone who is committed to good governance. His administration aims to improve services to the people, open up the state's economy, and attract both local and foreign investment.

Before 2023, the journey toward development in Abia State was very difficult. Many residents felt discouraged. But when Dr. Alex Otti became governor, there was a major political shift. Since then, the people have begun to see positive results.

The reforms and projects introduced by this administration are creating opportunities and improving the lives of residents. Infrastructure development is also helping to create jobs and

stimulate economic growth across the state.

Many people respect this government because it has been able to tackle challenges that previous administrations struggled with, especially in the area of infrastructure.

Today, only a few years into his administration, many local government areas in the state are witnessing visible development.

Every leader has a different leadership style. However, many observers believe that Otti is not driven by personal wealth but by a strong desire for development. His goal is to place Abia State on the same level as more economically advanced states such as Lagos State and Rivers State.

Past governments did their best under the circumstances, but their efforts were not enough to move the state forward. One major difference with the current administration is its focus on wealth creation through economic development.

Under the present government, tax collection has improved and leakages have been reduced because many taxes are now paid directly to the government. Workers' salaries are also paid regularly and on time.

Many people describe Governor Otti as a financial expert because of his professional background in banking. This experience has helped him manage the state's resources more effectively.

The ongoing road projects are also improving transportation and making travel safer for residents.

Some well-meaning Abians have also suggested that the government should strengthen the agricultural sector. They believe the state can partner with institutions such as the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike and the National Root Crops Research Institute to develop agro-processing

industries.

Experts suggest the development of what is known as an "industrial farm" system, where agricultural products are processed, packaged, and exported. This model has helped many economies grow and create jobs.

Abia State has fertile land and great potential for commercial agriculture. For example, the state can expand cocoa farming, cassava processing, palm oil production, and yam processing.

Agriculture once played a major role in the economic development of the Eastern Region under the leadership of Michael Iheonukara Okpara. Many people believe Abia can achieve similar success again if agriculture is properly developed.

Access roads to farms should also be improved so that farmers can easily transport their produce to markets. With proper monitoring, agricultural loans can be used effectively to support genuine farmers instead of being misused.

Governor Otti understands that good road networks are essential for development. That is why road construction has become a major priority of his administration.

Many of these roads are important because they connect food-producing communities to urban markets. Interestingly, some of the roads being reconstructed today were originally built during the administration of Michael Iheonukara Okpara between 1953 and 1955 and had not been repaired for decades.

Improving these roads will bring many benefits. It will help farmers transport their produce more easily, encourage development in rural areas, and reduce the cost of transportation. It will also encourage people to invest and build in their hometowns.

Considering the major projects currently being carried out by the government, Abians are encouraged to continue supporting Governor Alex Otti. Many believe his leadership has brought pride and renewed hope to the state.

With continued support from the people and responsible leadership, Abia State can achieve greater development and prosperity in the years ahead.

Love Unscripted

10 Habits That Instantly Push Men Away: Understanding Behaviors Most Men Quietly Find Most Repelling In Relationships

By Sandra Chibuike

Relationships thrive on mutual respect, understanding, and emotional balance. While much has been said about the qualities men admire in women, there are also certain behaviors that many men quietly find difficult to tolerate.

These habits are often not about appearance, social status, or perfection. Rather, they revolve around attitude, communication, and how partners treat each other daily. When these negative patterns become frequent, they can slowly erode affection and connection.

Here are ten behaviors many men admit they find most repelling in a woman.

1. Constant Nagging

Persistent complaining or repeated criticism can make a relationship feel like a battleground. While constructive communication is healthy, constant nagging often leaves a man feeling that nothing he does is ever good enough.

2. Public Disrespect

Many men consider respect a cornerstone of love. Being mocked, belittled, or corrected harshly in public can deeply wound a man's

pride and damage the emotional safety within the relationship.

3. Unnecessary Drama

Turning minor issues into major conflicts can exhaust any relationship. Most men



appreciate a woman who can address problems calmly and maturely rather than creating emotional chaos.

4. Constant Comparison

Comparing a partner to an ex, a celebrity, or another man can feel humiliating. Statements like "Why can't you be like him?" often undermines a man's confidence and sense of worth.

5. Entitlement

Expecting constant financial provision, gifts, or attention without expressing appreciation can create imbalance. Healthy relationships thrive when both partners contribute value and gratitude.



6. Poor Personal Hygiene

Attraction is not only about beauty but also about cleanliness and grooming. Neglecting personal care can quickly diminish romantic appeal.

7. Refusing to Admit Fault

No one is perfect. However, when someone constantly shifts blame or refuses to apologize, resolving conflict becomes nearly impossible. Accountability strengthens trust.

8. Excessive Control

Trying to control a partner's friendships, movements, or personal space often suffocates the relationship. Love grows best where there is mutual trust and freedom.

9. Rudeness to Others

How someone treats strangers reveals a lot about their character. Being consistently rude to waiters, service staff, or family members can signal deeper issues that many men find troubling.

10. Lack of Appreciation

When a man's efforts go unnoticed or unacknowledged, he may begin to feel taken for granted. Simple words of gratitude can go a long way in sustaining emotional connection.

Every relationship has its imperfections, and no one is without flaws. However, cultivating respect, appreciation, kindness, and emotional maturity can significantly strengthen romantic bonds.

Often, it is not grand gestures but everyday attitudes that determine whether love grows stronger or slowly fades away.

Feature

Otti's Filth And Thirst Breakthrough In Aba

By Emenike Vincent Onyembi (EVO)

I live in Abuja now. Every morning, I wake to the quiet hum of infrastructure, the FCT Water Board doing its work, taps running, systems functioning. It is the rhythm of a capital city, the background music of modern life that most residents take for granted. Even when the Minister announces a disruption for repairs, there is always a promise of restoration. The system will hold. The water will return. This is what a 21st-century city sounds like. But my heart lives in two places.

Aba, Enyi Aba of our collective memory, has known a different music entirely. For nearly thirty years, the silence of dry taps became the soundtrack of abandoned promises. For three decades, the people of Aba woke not to the hum of water treatment plants but to the scrape of brooms over mountains of rubbish that never disappeared. The smell of rotting waste mixed with the dust of broken pipes. Children played beside dump sites as if it was normal. Mothers bargained for food stuffs while holding their noses. We all learned to breathe through our mouths and accept that this was simply how Abia was.

Everyone complained. No one acted. Until someone did.

I will never forget that afternoon in 2022 at Crystal Park junction along Port Harcourt Road in Aba. My cousin brother and I had gone to buy motor spare parts. As I stepped out of the vehicle, the smell hit me like a wall. Not just the smell of rotting waste, it was the smell of a government that had given up. The dump site had swallowed the entire roadside. Women sold food metres away from mountains of rubbish. Children stepped over plastic bottles and rotting food as if playing in filth was normal childhood. I watched a young mother hold her baby with one hand and cover her nose with the other while she bargained with a vendor.

That image stayed with me. Not because it was unusual, but because it was normal. We had all learned to accept that this was simply how Abia was. Then came Governor Alex Chioma Otti. In May 2023, he declared a state of emergency on waste and refuse disposal in Aba and Umuahia. Every Nigerian has heard such phrases before, they are the empty drums politicians beat when they want to sound serious without doing anything serious. We expected nothing. But this time, the declaration came with brooms. It came with bulldozers. It came with a quiet determination that shocked even the sceptics.

Within days, roads that had been lined with waste for years were cleaned. Gutters that had not seen daylight in decades were flowing again. The smell, that persistent, unwelcome companion that had made itself at home in every nostril, simply disappeared.

Today, the Abia State Environmental Protection Agency handles about 216,000 tons of waste every year. They have introduced door-to-door waste collection across the state. That dump site at Crystal Park junction? Gone. In its place now stands a cleaner environment where people can conduct business without holding their noses. But here is what struck me most. In November 2025, I visited Aba and spoke with some of the women who clean the CKC church premises every week. Mama Grace has lived in Aba for over forty years. She told me something that stayed with me even more than that image from 2022.

"My son, we used to sweep the church compound and the dirt would just pile up because there was nowhere to put it. The government trucks never came. Now, ASEPA collectors comes every day to pack the dirt up. They take everything." That is what change looks like. Not in government reports, not in glossy brochures, but in the everyday laughter of women who no longer fight a losing battle against dirt. But cleaning the visible dirt was only half the battle. The deeper wound ran underground, through pipes that had been dry for nearly thirty years.

Come with me to understand what water means in Aba, you must understand its history, a history that stretches back to the late Dr. Sam Mbakwe, governor of the old Imo State between 1979 and 1983. Mbakwe was called the "crying governor" because he felt the suffering of his people so deeply. In 1981, he openly wept before President Shagari while showing him the

Ndiegoro flood disaster that had devastated parts of Aba. His tears were not just for the flood, but for the people. And his tears meant something, under his administration, public water ran from taps across the commercial city.

For residents of Aba today, that era is a distant, almost mythical memory. People born after that period have never witnessed public tap water in Aba. They only see the abandoned sites as colonial-era relics, rusting monuments to what governance once meant and what it stopped meaning. For nearly three decades, the silence of the taps became a metaphor for the failure of government.

Years later, the federal government initiated the Aba Regional Water Scheme, a grand vision to revive potable water supply to Aba. But like many lofty national projects, it fell victim to bureaucratic disagreements. A dispute between the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and the contractor brought the entire scheme to a grinding halt over two decades ago. Successive administrations in Aba made futile efforts to get Abuja to resolve the dispute, but the people waited in vain. The massive infrastructure, the intake structures, the treatment plants, the pipes, stood rusting, slowly being consumed by tropical vegetation.

The people of Aba were left to the mercy of commercial borehole operators and polluted

national grid fails. That level of foresight resonates with anyone tired of the infrastzruktural fragility in Nigeria. The numbers tell the story of this ambition, the water scheme, located at Christ the King Cathedral, Aba, has a production capacity of over one million cubic metres daily, capacity that had been rendered dysfunctional by ageing infrastructure and poor maintenance.

During the commissioning, residents could not hold back their tears, not of sorrow, but of joy. For Mrs. Chinyere Onyeukwu, founder of an NGO, it was a historic moment, water had not flowed in her area for over 20 years. But here is where the story takes an unexpected turn, one that connects the brooms to the pipes, the cleaning to the flowing.

In January 2026, Governor Otti announced that waste products in Abia are now being converted into renewable energy through biogas. What was once dumped is now burned, not in the open, polluting the air, but in controlled systems that generate electricity. The pilot programme at Umuahia In-Farms is transforming organic waste into clean energy. You cannot talk about sanitation without talking about water. You cannot talk about water without talking about the energy that pumps it. The Otti administration understood something fundamental, everything is connected.

The dump sites are gone. A clean stretch of road now sits where mountains of rubbish once stood. The environment is shining. The air is clean. The little boy I once saw holding his nose, he would not need to do that today. The Otti administration understood something fundamental, you cannot build a modern state on a foundation of filth.

streams. A 2020 study in the Indian Journal of Child Health revealed the human cost, among 360 participants in Aba, a staggering 74.1% reported experiencing 1-5 episodes of diarrhoea annually, with the majority relying on borehole water that often goes untreated. Only 56.7% of participants had reliable water supply, and a concerning 70.8% admitted to not boiling water before use.

It was a crisis of dignity disguised as an infrastructure problem. Then came July 16, 2025. Governor Alex Otti stood at the premises of St. Joseph's College, Aba, and did something unprecedented, he stopped waiting for the federal government. He declared that Abia would solve its own problems. He flagged-off the resuscitation of the Aba Water Scheme, a project he described as being "very dear to my heart."

What struck me immediately, watching from Abuja, was the approach. This was not the haphazard "dig-and-forget" style we often see. This was systematic. Governor Otti's vision for the Abia Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Accelerated Programme (AIWAP) mirrors the operational logic of the Abuja Water Board itself, a phased approach that includes the revitalization of the Aba Water Intake, the Ariaria schemes, and the Ogor Hill Booster Station to create a comprehensive reticulation network.

The governor's promise is the hallmark of modern urban planning, placing a public water standpost within a 2-3 minute walk from every household. This is the kind of accessibility we chase in Abuja. This is a vision that understands that water is not just a utility, it is the bedrock of public health, education, and economic productivity.

By deploying solar-powered, renewable energy to run these facilities, Otti ensured that the water does not stop flowing when the

Speaking of power, on December 24, 2025, Abia took full control of its electricity regulation. When the national grid collapsed recently, as it often does, significant portions of Abia remained unaffected because their power infrastructure now operates under local authority. The government went further than anyone promised, they built their own framework, created their own regulatory authority, and began generating their own power from their own waste. Today, solar-powered water points and toilet blocks dot the landscape, from Okigwe Park in Umuahia to communities across the state.

In February 2026, something happened that showed how deeply this transformation has touched the hearts of Abians. The Catholic Diocese of Umuahia donated two brand-new electric street sweeping vehicles to ASEPA. Bishop Michael Kalu Ukpong personally blessed the vehicles before handing them over. He said the donation was inspired by the government's visible commitment to keeping Abia clean. When I heard that the Bishop himself blessed the sweeping machines, I said to my friends, see, even the church is happy. This government is doing something. That is the point. When faith institutions invest their resources in supporting government policies, it is not merely partnership. It is endorsement of the highest order.

Recently, critics have mockingly referred to Governor Otti as "the painter", insinuating that his work is merely cosmetic, just surface-level beauty without substance. But the evidence on the ground speaks otherwise. You cannot paint a pipe that has been dry for thirty years and expect water to flow. You have to rebuild the system from the ground up. You cannot paint over mountains of rubbish and expect them to disappear. You have to haul them away, truck by truck, day by day, until the ground beneath is

clean again.

Paying tribute to the legacy of Sam Mbakwe, Otti recently visited the late governor's residence in Imo State, describing him as a leader, whose achievements have not been equalled. He noted that the quality roads built in Aba during Mbakwe's tenure are still standing today, while many built years after him have disappeared, a proof to the standard of leadership the region once had and yearns for again.

The manifesto had promised it all. On page 38, Dr. Otti promised to restructure ASEPA. On page 27, he promised to explore renewable energy. On page 37, he promised to clear all blocked drainages. On page 24, he promised integrated economic development. On page 21, he promised transparent and open government. Three years later, every one of those promises walks the streets of Aba and Umuahia. There is data behind the visible change.

Abia now ranks above 35 other states and the FCT on ease of doing business according to Phillips Consulting as of August 2025. The state has moved from 33rd to 21st position nationally. Abia's internally-generated revenue has grown from about N15 billion annually to over N30 billion. When the environment is clean and businesses can operate, everyone benefits.

Academic research from Michael Okpara University confirms that proper waste management is essential for soil health and agricultural productivity in communities across Abia. The environment is not a separate sector, it is the foundation on which everything else is built. But transformation is never perfect. Some communities have faced challenges. When ASEPA's activities affected farmland in some areas, women spoke out, with both pain and hope. Yet the system, imperfect but responsive, has entered negotiations and is learning to listen.

That is the difference. Not a government that claims to be perfect, but a government that can be talked to, that can be held accountable, that shows up even when it makes mistakes. The manifesto had promised transparency. That transparency includes admitting when things go wrong and fixing them.

I visited Aba last in November 2025. As I walked through areas I remembered from that afternoon in 2022, I could hardly recognize them. The dump sites are gone. A clean stretch of road now sits where mountains of rubbish once stood. The environment is shining. The air is clean. The little boy I once saw holding his nose, he would not need to do that today. The Otti administration understood something fundamental, you cannot build a modern state on a foundation of filth. So they started with the basics. They started with the environment. They started with water. They started with the dignity of everyday life.

As I write this from Abuja, looking at the regulated water supply in the capital, I am filled with hope for Aba. The governor has proven that the chaos of the past is not an immutable destiny. By replicating the efficiency of the Abuja Water Board in the heart of the Enyimba City, Governor Otti is doing more than just supplying water and clearing waste. He is restoring our faith in public service.

He is proving that good governance is portable, it can travel from the federal capital to the commercial heartbeat of the Southeast. It can travel from abandoned pipes to flowing taps, from mountains of rubbish to clean streets where children play without holding their noses. The water will flow again in Aba. The streets are clean again in Aba. And with them flows the hope of a new beginning. Now, when you visit Abia, you do not hold your breath. You breathe deep. And you know that change has come.

In the end, governance is not about grand speeches or ribbon-cuttings. It is about whether a mother can bargain food stuffs without covering her nose. It is about whether a child can play without stepping over rubbish. The taps are flowing again, the streets are clean, and the people are breathing deep.

News

Lawyer Remanded Over Alleged N84m Property Fraud In Abia

By Ekebuisi Precious

An Abia-based lawyer, Mr. Peter Asagwara, has been remanded in custody by a Magistrate Court sitting in Umuahia, Abia State, over an alleged N84 million fraud involving a property transaction. Mr. Asagwara was arraigned before Magistrate Court 2 on charges bordering on obtaining money under false pretence and related offences. According to the complainant, an Abia-based businessman, Mr. Chibuike Akusiobi, he allegedly handed over the sum of N84 million to the lawyer to facilitate the purchase of a property located along the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway, close to Ariaria International Market in Aba. The businessman alleged that upon requesting a receipt or acknowledgement for the payment, the lawyer provided him with what later turned out to be a forged document presented as a Power of Attorney for the property.

He further claimed that he later discovered that only N15 million out of the N84 million he provided was allegedly paid to the land owner. The land owner was also said to have refunded the amount after the lawyer failed to pay the balance required to secure the property.

The complainant stated that efforts to recover the money proved unsuccessful, alleging that the lawyer subsequently fled his base in Aba.

Information gathered revealed that operatives of the Nigeria Police Force from Zone 9 Headquarters in Umuahia reportedly tracked and arrested the suspect last week at Omuma Road in Aba, Abia State.

When approached for comments by journalists regarding the allegations, the defendant declined to speak, stating, "No comment." Mr. Asagwara, however, pleaded not guilty to the charges when they were read to him in court.

Following his plea, the presiding magistrate ordered that he be remanded in custody, while the case was adjourned to April 8, 2026 for further hearing.

Deputy Gov Hails Eno For 40% Women Political Inclusion

From Lovina Emole, Uyo

The Deputy Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Senator Akon Eyakenyi, has applauded Governor Umo Eno, for allotting 40 per cent of political appointments and positions to women in the state.

She described the governor's gesture as unprecedented in the political history of the state, saying the record had surpassed the 35 per cent benchmark of the 1995 Beijing Conference.

Senator Eyakenyi disclosed this recently, at the Apostolic Church, Uyo, during the thanksgiving service held to commemorate the 2026 International Women's Day and the successful conclusion of the Women Sensitization Tour on Civic Responsibilities across the 31 local government areas of the state.

Highlighting the 2026 theme of the global celebration, "Rights, Justice and Action," the deputy governor said the protection of women's rights contributes to peace and stability in families and society.

Senator Eyakenyi also referenced historical struggles for women's rights, noting that the famous 1929 women uprising commonly linked to Aba was originally carried out by women from Ikot Abasi in present-day Akwa Ibom State.

She further stated that the state government had effectively implemented the principles of the Beijing Declaration, which advocates greater political inclusion for women.

"You have witnessed that Akwa Ibom State under

Governor Eno has fully implemented the declaration. For the first time in the history of the state, after 35 years, a woman is standing before you as an elected deputy governor", she said.

Further speaking, Senator Eyakenyi added that women currently occupy several key leadership positions in the state, including the offices of chief judge, head of service, commissioners, local government chairmen, vice chairmen, supervisors and aides to the governor.

"In every appointed position, Governor Umo Eno gives specific instructions and follows up to ensure women get their slots.

"Today in Akwa Ibom State, we have 40 per cent inclusion, surpassing the 35 per cent benchmark recommended at the Beijing Conference."

She disclosed that the state government had made provisions in the 2026 Budget to empower women through co-operative societies across the 31 local government areas, and also urged women in the state to pursue their aspirations with humility and determination.

In her remarks, the Co-ordinator of the Office of the First Lady, Lady Helen Eno Obareki, thanked God for the successful completion of the statewide tour and

commended the deputy governor for her leadership and resilience.

She said Governor Eno had consistently demonstrated commitment to the welfare and empowerment of women in the state, describing him as gender-friendly.

The Commissioner for Women Affairs, Mrs. Inibehe Silas Etukudo, said the sensitisation tour, which began on February 26 and ended on March 6, was designed to educate women on their civic rights and encourage greater participation in politics and public life.

While delivering the sermon, Apostle (Prof.) Ime N. George, who spoke from Numbers 27:1-11, emphasised that women and girls are not property or slaves but joint heirs with men in Christ.



Akwa Ibom woman at The Apostolic Church, Uyo, during the thanksgiving service held to commemorate the 2026 International Women's Day and the successful conclusion of the Women's Sensitization Tour on Civic Responsibilities across the 31 local government areas of the state

Abia Assembly Moves to Fix Uratta Road, Warns Against Illegal Speed Bumps

By Chijioke Chukwuemeka

The Abia State House of Assembly has raised concerns over the deteriorating condition of the Uratta Road/junction along the Enugu-Port Harcourt motorway and mandated urgent government intervention to prevent further loss of lives and property.

The motion, brought under Matters of Urgent Public Importance by the member representing Aba North State Constituency, Hon. Aaron Uzodike, drew the attention of lawmakers to the worsening state of the busy road corridor.

Following deliberations, the House referred the matter to its Committee on Works with a directive to collaborate with the State Ministry of

Works to initiate palliative repairs and address the situation urgently.

The plenary, presided over by the Speaker, Rt. Hon. Emmanuel Ihuoma Emeruwa also received students and staff of Shakens Academy, Ihie Ndume Ibeku, led by Amarachi Uwasomba, as well as students of More Than Conquerors Academy, Aba, led by Mr. Obinna Ugorji, who visited the chamber to observe legislative proceedings.

Lawmakers also received notices of fresh motions aimed at addressing key developmental concerns in the state.

Hon. Isienyi Boniface, representing Ikwoano State

Constituency, notified the House of a motion seeking government intervention to tackle infrastructural deficits and the inequitable distribution of teachers across primary and junior secondary schools in Ikwoano Local Government Area.

Similarly, the member representing Aba Central, Hon. Ucheonye Stephen Akachukwu, presented notices of two separate motions seeking the reclamation of open public spaces across the State and the regulation of loud outdoor speakers in residential areas.

The lawmakers were urged to study the

proposed motions ahead of their formal presentation on the floor of the House.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Committee on Security and Boundary Matters, Rt. Hon. Austin Okezie Nmerigini, presented the committee's report on a petition concerning alleged boundary extension, unlawful land grabbing and relocation of 37 plots belonging to the late Chief Iroabuchi Christian Uwabunkeonye at Okwuba, Umuozeala, Nsukwe Ubakala, in Umuahia South Local Government Area.

The House adopted the report as a working document and referred it to the Committee of the Whole for further legislative consideration.

In another development, the House considered a motion sponsored by Hon. Isienyi Boniface seeking to prohibit the indiscriminate installation of speed bumps on newly reconstructed roads by residents.

Following deliberations, the Assembly mandated its Committee on Works and Information to liaise with the State Orientation Agency and the Ministry of Works to sensitize the public on the dangers posed by unauthorized speed breakers and ensure their removal across the state.



ABIA STATE ROAD TRAFFIC AND SAFETY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

SUBJECT:

- Supply of Heavy Duty Towing Truck
- Setup and equipment of a standard control room including the procurement of: Smart cameras, computers with multiple screens display & internet setup e.t.c

Abia State Road Traffic and Safety Management Agency invites sealed tenders from eligible and qualified suppliers/contractors that provides of the following services/supplies

TENDER DESCRIPTION

- Supply of heavy duty towing truck
- Supply and setup of control room

Eligibility requirement

- Evidence of payment of Non- Refundable Tender Fee
- Evidence of certificate of Registration with Abia State Government as a Contractor
- Evidence of certificate of Incorporation with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC)
- Evidence of Three (3) years Company Tax Clearance Certificate
- Evidence of Bank Reference Letter
- Evidence of Details of Experience on Similar project
- Fully Priced Quotation
- Company Profile

Submission Deadline:

18th March, 2026

Completed tender document must be enclosed in plain sealed envelopes, clearly marked with tender reference number and description and submitted at Abia State Road Traffic & Safety Management Agency (ARTSMA) Headquarters office at **No. 9 factory road, Umuahia.**

Tender will be opened immediately after the closing time in the presence of bidders.

ARTSMA reserves the right to accept or reject any tender in whole or in part and is not bound to give reason for its decision.

For Further inquiries, please contact: 07061290099

Signed:
Emele Nnena Bridget
 (Director of Finance)
 For: The General Manager, ARTSMA

Photos Speak



L-R Hon. Achio Obioma, Hon. Justice Lilian Abai, Mrs. Ahamdi Nwaeke and Chief Ahamdi Nwaeke, as Gov. Alex Otti joins others at a Thanksgiving service at St. John's Anglican Church, Umuihie, Isiala Ngwa South LGA, for Nwaeke's recovery from a life-threatening



Some Abia State Permanent Secretaries, alongside a representative of the Head of Service, during a sensitization/enlightenment programme to educate Local Government Area stakeholders on the implementation of the contributory pension scheme for Local Government workers at the JAAC Building, Ogurube Layout, Umuahia.



Uke Eirinma of Azumini Ndoki, Ukwu East LGA, in a group photograph during the recent Ikoro Azumini Festival 2026 at Amaobu Playground, Azumini.



L-R: The Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Prince Uzor Nwachukwu, and the Commissioner for Finance, Mr. Uwaoma Ukandu, during a sensitization/enlightenment programme to educate Local Government Area stakeholders on the implementation of the contributory pension scheme for Local Government workers at the JAAC Building, Ogurube Layout, Umuahia.

Photos Speak



Regional Chairman/Enugu State Chairman of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Comrade Odo Nweke (3rd R), handing over a plaque to Gov Alex Otti of Abia (2nd L) while others watch as Abia Gov. received Regional Chairman/Enugu State Chairman of Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), East Regional Working Committee in his office.



L-R: Gov. Alex Otti of Abia State; Abia State Commissioner for Power and Public Utilities, Engr. Ikechukwu Monday; and Founder, Ncheta Omerekpe Foundation, Chief Ncheta Elvis Omerekpe, during the thanksgiving service where Chief Ahamdi Nwaeke returned all glory to God for saving him from a life-threatening illness after undergoing surgical procedures at St. John's Anglican Church, Umuohie, Isiala Ngwa South LGA.



L-R: National Team Leader of the Partnership for Agile Governance and Climate Engagement (PACE), Mr. Ifeanyi Ugwuoke (centre); Gov. Alex Otti of Abia State; and others during a meeting with the Governor in his office.



L-R: National Team Leader of the Partnership for Agile Governance and Climate Engagement (PACE), Mr. Ifeanyi Ugwuoke, and Gov. Alex Otti of Abia State during a meeting with the Governor in his office.



Hon. Jones Nnanna Ike, GM of Abia Newspaper and Publishing Corporation (2L); Chief Nkem Okoro (left), State Chairman of Abia Arise; and Mazi Chinese Okigbo Okoro (right), Managing Director of Abia Microfinance Bank, at the recent matriculation ceremony of Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukuwu.



Cross-section of participants, parents, and guests during the Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukuwu matriculation ceremony.



Procession of lecturers and professors during the Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukuwu matriculation ceremony.

Religion

Understanding Covenant Dimension of Prosperity!

By David Oyedepo Jnr

From scriptures, we understand that prosperity in the Kingdom doesn't answer to fasting nor does it answer to prayer or prayer of agreement. It only answers to our understanding and practice of covenant details. What we are selling or the business we are involved in is not what determines our prosperity.

No! It is the light under which we are operating that determines the results we get. As it is written, But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deuteronomy 8:18). Thus, the platform for wealth is released based on the covenant. When we step out into the covenant, we encounter the power to get wealth. Prosperity is not a promise we claim in prayers or with fastings and confession. No! It's a

covenant we practise. That means, God has set a stage for us, but we must understand our part of it and then the power to realise the promise will be delivered to us. Knowing God book

A covenant as it were is like a contract. So, it involves two or more people. In this case, it involves just you and God. God is the covenantor and we are the covenantee; that is, we are the beneficiary of the deal. All we need is a good understanding of what the covenant entails and we will be up in abundance. The Bible says, My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips (Psalm 89:34). God is a covenant keeper. His side of every covenant is forever secured; it is our side that is variable. But when we lay hold on the terms that relate to us and apply ourselves to it, God is committed. And once we locate the covenant and we enter into it, our struggles will come to an end. Since that day in March 1981 when I saw the covenant of prosperity, I entered into my

rest. We don't pray or fast for a covenant, we just enter into it. As it is written, And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about (2 Chronicles 15:12,15).

What Then, Is The Covenant Dimension Of Prosperity?

The Covenant will Always Prevail: When God said to Abraham, ...Get thee out of thy country, and from

thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-2). He moved as he was commanded yet he met famine there (Genesis 12:9-10). But in spite of that famine Abraham prevailed! As it is written, And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold (Genesis 13:2). Also, the Bible records that Isaac prevailed in famine, And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of

the Philistines unto Gerar. Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possessions of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him (Genesis 26:1, 12-14). Christianity

Note that the covenant is stronger than any climate! There is no economic dearth or crisis that can break the efficacy of the covenant. Furthermore, in Jacob's time, ... the famine was sore in the land (Genesis 43:1). But in spite of this, Jacob still had more than enough. So, famine is not our problem, ignorance of the covenant is the problem. God said in Hosea 4:6, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge... not for famine or for economic crisis of money failure.

In summary, if famine could not stop our covenant fathers, famine cannot stop

us because the economy of our nation has no bearing on our covenant walk with God. I see the covenant prevail for you in your time! May everything that is against you bow to the power of this covenant! However, the only way to prove the reality of new birth is to genuinely repent and accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Are you born again?

If you are not, this is an opportunity to do so. Simply say the following prayer: Lord Jesus, I come to You today. I am a sinner. Forgive me of my sins. Cleanse me with Your precious Blood. Today, I accept You as my Lord and personal Saviour. Thank You, Jesus, for saving me! Now, I know I am born again! Books & Literature

For further reading, please get my books: Understanding Financial Prosperity, Breaking Financial Hardship, Winning the War against Poverty, Hidden Covenants of Blessing and Covenant Wealth.

And once we locate the covenant and we enter into it, our struggles will come to an end.

Family Matters

By Ihuoma Egbeogu

Culture is the shared, learned and symbolic system of values, beliefs, traditions, behaviours and material objects that define a group's way of life, including language, religion, food and arts. It is dynamic and constantly evolving and passed down through generations.

In every society, culture is the invisible thread that binds the past, present, and future together. It shapes identity, preserves heritage, and provides moral direction. At the heart of this continuity stands the woman – the mother, the teacher, the nurturer, and the silent architect of societal values. Indeed, women have long been recognised as custodians of culture and moral values, carrying the sacred responsibility of transmitting traditions and ethical standards from one generation to the next.

However, from the earliest stages of life, a child's first contact with culture begins at home, often under the guidance of a mother. Through stories, language, songs, customs, and daily conduct, women introduce children to the beliefs and traditions that define their community. Indigenous languages are preserved not only in textbooks but in the conversations around the kitchen table. Respect for elders, communal living, way

of greeting, honesty, hard work, and reverence for God are lessons first learned at a mother's knee.

Beyond the home, women play vital roles in sustaining cultural practices. They are central figures in festivals, rites of passage, marriage ceremonies, and religious celebrations. Through these activities, they safeguard customs that might otherwise fade under the pressures of modernisation and globalisation. In many communities, women's groups and faith-based organisations serve as platforms for promoting moral instruction, community service, and social cohesion.

In today's rapidly changing world, the moral fabric of society faces significant challenges – from the erosion of family values to the influence of social media and materialism. Amid these pressures, women continue to stand as moral compasses within families and communities. By modelling integrity, compassion, discipline, and faith, they shape not only their children's character but also the broader society.

However, this responsibility should not be viewed as a burden placed solely on women.

While women have historically carried this mantle, the preservation of culture and moral values requires collective effort. Fathers, community leaders, educators,

religious institutions, and government agencies must work hand in hand to reinforce the values that sustain society. Supporting women through education, empowerment, and equal opportunities strengthens their ability to fulfil this role effectively.

It is also important to recognise that culture is dynamic. As custodians, women are not merely preservers of old traditions but also agents of positive transformation. They have the wisdom to retain what is noble and discard practices that undermine human dignity. In doing so, they help

culture evolve in ways that uphold justice, equality, and respect for all.

As we reflect on the role of women in society, we must celebrate their immense contribution to preserving our heritage and shaping our moral conscience. A nation that values its women safeguards its culture; a society that empowers its mothers secures its future.

In conclusion, women remain, undeniably, the pillars upon which the continuity of culture and the strength of moral values firmly stand.

As custodians, women are not merely preservers of old traditions but also agents of positive transformation

News

Association Urges South-East Residents To Get Voter Cards

By Richard Okore

The Association of Igbo Town Unions (AITU), has called on all eligible indigenes of the South-East Region to obtain their voter cards ahead of future elections.

The group said active participation in voter registration is important to ensure that the people of the region are properly represented in the country's democratic process.

This directive was part of the resolutions reached during an enlarged executive meeting of the Abia State Chapter of the association, held in Umuahia recently.

The meeting was convened to review and discuss key issues affecting the people of the South-East Geopolitical Zone and to find ways to strengthen civic participation among residents.

Speaking with journalists shortly after the meeting, the President of AITU in Abia State, Chief George Mgborukwe, explained that the leadership of the association had also directed town union leaders at all levels to monitor, supervise and encourage voter registration in their various communities. According to him, grassroots mobilisation would help ensure that more people take part in the process.

Chief Mgborukwe noted that the decision became necessary because of the low number of registered voters from the South-East during the last voter registration exercise. He stressed that voter registration is a shared

responsibility and urged all eligible indigenes of the region to take it seriously for the sake of the region's political future.

He further emphasised that voter cards play a vital role in a democratic system, as they give citizens the power to either retain leaders who perform well or vote them out of office during elections. Chief Mgborukwe said this makes it important for every qualified adult to register and participate in the electoral process.

He appealed to traditional rulers, religious leaders, village heads, political office holders, the media and other community stakeholders to help raise awareness about the importance of voter registration. He said their support in sensitising and mobilising the people would greatly improve participation across the region.

Some members of the executive council who also spoke at the meeting revealed that the association had been closely monitoring the performance of political leaders across the South-East. They said the group would at the appropriate time, make its position known to its members regarding the leadership situation in the region.

They also advised political office holders to remain committed to good governance and to focus on policies and programmes that will positively impact the lives and welfare of the people.

The meeting attracted the participation of more than 100 delegates from the 17 local government areas of Abia State.



Some participants during a sensitization and enlightenment programme organized to educate Local Government Area stakeholders on the implementation of the Contributory Pension Scheme for Local Government workers at the JAAC Building, Ogurube Layout, Umuahia recently.

Abia Government Extends Contributory Pension Scheme To Council Workers

By Kelechi Eme-Ogidi

The Abia State Government, has extended the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) to local government workers in the state.

This was disclosed during a sensitisation and enlightenment programme organised by the Abia State Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the Pension Transition Committee for Local Government Stakeholders on the implementation of the CPS. The event was held recently at the JAAC Building, Ogurube Layout, Umuahia.

Welcoming participants, the Commissioner for Finance and Chairman of the Pension Transition Committee, Mr. Uwaoma Ukandu, recalled that when a similar exercise was conducted for state workers, it was recommended that local government stakeholders and workers be engaged to enable them fully understand and participate in the process.

He explained that the programme was designed to ensure that public servants in Abia State are well informed, protected, and adequately prepared for a secure retirement.

Ukandu described the sensitisation as timely and strategic, noting that it provided civil servants with first hand knowledge of the operations, benefits, and transactional processes of the scheme, while also addressing concerns and clarifying possible misconceptions.

According to him, the CPS, introduced at the federal level in 2004, represents a major reform in pension administration in Nigeria and is designed to guarantee transparency, sustainability, and timely access to retirement benefits.

He added that the Abia State Government, remains fully committed to the welfare of its workforce and is determined to build a pension

system that guarantees dignity, peace of mind, and financial security for workers both in active service and in retirement.

Highlighting that Governor Alex Otti had cleared huge backlog of salaries and pensions owed civil servants by previous administration and is committed to payment of pensions and salaries every month.

In his remarks, the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Prince Uzor Nwachukwu, revealed that since the creation of Abia State in 1991, this is the first time the Contributory Pension Scheme is being introduced for local government workers in the state.

Nwachukwu stated that with the CPS in place, workers can be assured that their entitlements will be available upon retirement.

He commended Governor Otti for demonstrating strong commitment to the welfare of local government workers, citing the ongoing payment of arrears of benefits owed to former councillors by previous administrations. He, therefore, urged workers to continue supporting the present administration, because of the long term benefits to their future.

Also speaking, the Head of Service, Mr. Benson Ojiekere, represented by Mrs. Nkechi Ochu, commended the state government and the Pension Transition Committee for taking proactive steps to ensure that stakeholders are adequately informed and prepared for the successful implementation of the CPS at the local government level.

He reiterated that the government remains committed to policies and

reforms that promote the welfare of workers both in active service and retirement, describing the implementation of the CPS as a significant step towards building a reliable and sustainable pension system.

Ojiekere explained that the scheme provides a more sustainable, transparent, and effective framework for retirement benefits, unlike the former defined benefit system which was characterised by inadequate funding, delays in pension payments, and the accumulation of huge pension liabilities.

He further noted that implementing the CPS at the local government level would not only guarantee financial security for workers after retirement but also promote accountability and sustainability in pension management. The Head of Service urged stakeholders to fully understand the structure, processes, and responsibilities associated with the scheme, to ensure its smooth implementation.

Contributing, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, Mrs. Elechi Obi-Chianakwalam, and her counterpart in the Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Mrs. Ijeoma Clara Dim, commended the government for ensuring that stakeholders and workers were properly informed and prepared for the successful rollout of the scheme in the local government system.

They appreciated Governor Otti for prioritising the welfare of Abia workers through the implementation of the CPS and advised eligible workers to participate fully in the enrolment

process.

Labour unions, represented by the Chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Comrade Isaac Ogbonnaya, and a representative of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) commended Governor Otti for extending the CPS to local government workers and putting mechanisms in place to ensure the sustainability of the scheme.

They urged workers to embrace the initiative, noting that it is designed to secure their future and enable them approach retirement with confidence rather than fear.

In their presentations, representatives of the approved Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs), Mr. Dike Christopher of Veritas Glanvills Pensions and Mr. Oge Uhuegbu of Fidelity Pension Managers, gave detailed explanations of how the Contributory Pension Scheme operates. They provided insights into its processes, contributors' rights, benefits, and the roles of the various parties involved in pension administration in Nigeria.

They also commended Governor Otti for successfully introducing the scheme in the state and assured that with the CPS in place, no Abia State worker would retire without receiving his or her gratuity and pension.

The programme featured an interactive question and answer session and was attended by the Commissioners for Finance and Local Government & Chieftaincy Affairs; Mayors and Deputy Mayors of the 17 local government areas; the chairman and members of the local government service Commission; permanent secretaries; heads of service of the various LGAs; labour and union leaders; traditional rulers; heads of government agencies; and other relevant stakeholders and workers.



INEC Chairman, Prof. Joash Ojo Amupitan

Opinion

Iran's Palaver, Nigeria's Dilemma Beneath The Surface

By Dakuku Peterside

Some wars begin with missiles and end with maps. Others begin far away and end up in the kitchen, the filling station, the church, the mosque, the market stall, and the national mood. The escalating U.S.-Israeli confrontation with Iran is that kind of war for Nigeria. As of March 4, 2026, Brent crude had risen to about \$81.40 a barrel after several days of disruption around the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow maritime chokepoint through which about 20 million barrels per day moved in 2024, roughly 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption. Once that artery convulses, the shock does not remain in the Gulf. It travels through shipping costs, insurance premiums, refined-product prices, exchange-rate expectations, and investor psychology. Nigeria, for all its distance from Tehran, sits directly in the path of those aftershocks.

Iran itself is a lesson in the tragedy of squandered possibility. The country remains one of the most naturally endowed states in the world: the U.S. Energy Information Administration says Iran ranked as the world's third-largest oil reserve holder and the second-largest natural-gas reserve holder in 2023, with an estimated 1,200 trillion cubic feet of proved gas reserves. Yet abundance has not translated into serenity or broad-based prosperity. The same EIA brief notes that sanctions and underinvestment have constrained production and infrastructure, even as petroleum remains central to state revenue. The political story is harsher still. A 2024 U.N. fact-finding mission concluded that Iranian authorities were responsible for egregious abuses during the 2022 protest wave, documenting 551 deaths in 26 of 31 provinces, mass arrests, torture, sexual violence, and at least 22,000 people later "pardoned," implying an even larger dragnet of detention and prosecution. Iran's predicament is therefore not simply about geopolitics. It is about what happens when a state accumulates power but erodes legitimacy.

That is where the mirror turns towards Nigeria. We, too, are a richly endowed but institutionally strained republic. Our problem is not a lack of promise; it is the chronic weakness of the machinery that should convert promise into resilience. Afrobarometer's recent findings are sobering: 80% of Nigerians say corruption worsened over the past year, 90% say the government is performing poorly in fighting it, and only 10% believe people can report corruption without fear of retaliation. The same research shows a telling hierarchy of trust: 60% of Nigerians say they trust religious leaders "somewhat" or "a lot," compared with just 27% for the president, 19% for the National Assembly, and 23% for the electoral commission. That gap is more than a polling curiosity. It reveals a country where moral authority is migrating away from public institutions. A state can survive hardship; it struggles to survive sustained disbelief.

This is why the Iranian crisis matters to Nigeria far beyond oil. Yes, the first-order effect is fiscal. Nigeria's 2026 budget is built on a benchmark oil price of \$64.85 per barrel and a production assumption of 1.84 million barrels per day. At \$81.40, Brent is about \$16.55 above that benchmark, roughly 25.5% higher. In theory, that should brighten government revenue, ease financing

pressure, and strengthen external buffers. The country already has a somewhat sturdier starting point than it did not long ago: the Central Bank says net FX reserves rose to \$34.8 billion at the end of 2025, while gross reserves reached \$50.45 billion by February 2026. On the surface, then, this war looks like a windfall. But windfalls are only blessings in countries with discipline; elsewhere, they become invitations to complacency.

Even on strictly economic grounds, the good news is less clean than it appears. Nigeria cannot fully monetise a high-price moment if it underproduces. Reuters reported that Nigeria pumped 1.48 million barrels per day in January against an OPEC+ crude quota of 1.5 million, while average daily production in the fourth quarter of 2025 was 1.58 million barrels per day. In other words, the country is still below the level assumed in the federal budget. That means Abuja may earn more per barrel, but not as much as headline prices suggest in aggregate. It also means that a surge in oil prices can co-exist with continued fiscal frustration. This is the old Nigerian paradox in modern dress: the nation is lifted by price

headline inflation had only just eased to 15.10% in January 2026, down from 15.15% in December, while food inflation slowed to 8.89%. The central bank responded with a small rate cut in February, suggesting policymakers believed the worst of the price spiral might be passing. A prolonged Middle East energy shock could interrupt that fragile descent. The damage would not be evenly shared. Wealthier Nigerians can absorb higher transport and food bills with discomfort; poorer households absorb them with skipped meals, school absences, reduced clinic visits, and deeper resentment toward the state. The political consequences of inflation in Nigeria are rarely immediate and dramatic. They are cumulative, granular, and corrosive. They erode faith one market day at a time.

The socio-political implications may, in fact, be even more combustible than the economic ones. Nigeria has already suspended Christian pilgrimages to Israel because of the deteriorating security environment. NiDCOM says it has received enquiries from Nigerians in Iran, Qatar, and the UAE about possible evacuation. And the emotional spillover is no longer hypothetical: Reuters footage

technology, water management, and agriculture; the United States and Europe remain important sources of investment, trade, and diplomatic leverage. Yet Nigeria also has domestic constituencies that read Middle East conflicts through moral and religious lenses, not through the cold grammar of statecraft. This is why non-alignment, restraint, and a clear call for de-escalation are not signs of weakness. They are the only sane posture for a plural country that already imports too much volatility. The task of Nigerian diplomacy is not to perform indignation. It is to protect room for manoeuvre.

That caution is especially important because Nigeria's external position, while improved, is still fragile in composition. The Central Bank reported a \$6.83 billion balance-of-payments surplus for 2024, supported by a \$13.17 billion trade surplus and \$20.93 billion in remittances. But the same data show that while portfolio inflows more than doubled to \$13.35 billion, foreign direct investment fell 42.3% to just \$1.08 billion. That distinction matters. Portfolio money is fast money; it arrives quickly and leaves quickly. FDI is slower, stickier, and more developmentally valuable. In a world darkened by war risk, shipping disruption, and oil-price volatility, investors often retreat first from places where policy signals are noisy and political risk is hard to price. Nigeria cannot assume that an oil rally automatically outweighs geopolitical anxiety.

So the real lesson of this war for Nigeria is not that high oil prices are good or bad. It is that they are never enough. If Abuja treats this moment as a lucky revenue break, it will repeat the habits that made earlier booms evaporate into patronage, inflation, and debt. But if it patrones this moment as a warning, then the path becomes clearer. Save part of the windfall. Publish the numbers transparently. Protect poor households before transport and food costs rise again. Accelerate refining, gas infrastructure, and renewable alternatives. Keep diplomacy calm and language disciplined.

Above all, rebuild public trust through fairer elections, more credible institutions,

This is why the Iranian crisis matters to Nigeria far beyond oil. Yes, the first-order effect is fiscal. Nigeria's 2026 budget is built on a benchmark oil price of \$64.85 per barrel and a production assumption of 1.84 million barrels per day.

but limited by volume, cheered by the market but constrained by its own structural weaknesses.

Nor should anyone imagine that local refining has fully insulated Nigeria from the global storm. Dangote's refinery is operating and was still issuing March tenders for gasoil and jet fuel this week, which is important because it gives the country more domestic processing capacity than in previous crises. But the deeper truth remains: crude, freight, and insurance are globally priced, and refined-product markets react to international shocks. Reuters reported that U.S. diesel prices jumped to \$4.04 per gallon, the sharpest one-day rise since March 2022, with about 900,000 barrels per day of diesel and 350,000 barrels per day of jet fuel from the Gulf at risk. For Nigeria, where diesel powers logistics, farms, telecom towers, factories, banks, hospitals, and countless generators, that pattern is a warning. Even where local refining softens the blow, it does not cancel the transmission mechanism. Higher energy costs still flow through to transport fares, food distribution, manufactured goods, and household survival. That is how a foreign war becomes domestic inflation.

And that inflationary danger is arriving at a delicate time. Nigeria's

and reporting show members of Nigeria's Shi'ite Islamic Movement protesting in Kano after the reported killing of Iran's supreme leader. That matters because Nigeria does not process Middle East conflicts as neutral foreign events. They are often filtered through faith, identity, grievance, and solidarity networks. Once that happens, external war acquires internal life.

History warns against dismissing this as symbolic theatre. Nigeria has a record of deadly confrontations involving the Islamic Movement of Nigeria and security agencies. Reuters reported serious clashes in Abuja in 2019, and again in March 2025, when security forces and Shi'ite protesters violently confronted each other in the capital. So when the current Iran crisis triggers demonstrations in Kano and elsewhere, the risk is not merely that people gather; it is that old fractures find a new script. A tense economic environment, polarised rhetoric, and an over-militarised response can quickly convert protest into disorder. That is how geo-political shock migrates into domestic security strain.

Nigeria's diplomatic response, therefore, must be guided less by emotion than by strategic sobriety. The country has reasons to preserve relations across multiple poles. Israel matters to Nigeria in areas such as security co-operation,

Change of Name

I, formerly known and addressed as Miss Onyekwere Queen Chinenyenwa, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. IBEAWUCHI QUEEN CHINENYENWA LEBECHI. All documents bearing my names remain valid. The general public should please take note.
MRS. IBEAWUCHI QUEEN CHINENYENWA LEBECHI.

Change of Name

I, formerly known and addressed as Miss Ozichi Emmanuela Nwaogu, now wish to be known and addressed as MRS. OZICHI EMMANUELA ORJI. All documents bearing my former names remain valid. The general public should please take note.
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News

ABSUTH Promotes Kidney Health Awareness

By Lovina Onwuka

The Abia State University Teaching Hospital (ABSUTH), Aba, joined the rest of the world to celebrate World Kidney Day with an awareness campaign to educate people on kidney health and the prevention of kidney diseases.

The programme was organised by the hospital's management and medical team. It brought together healthcare workers, hospital staff, and members of the public.

The aim of the event was to help people understand the importance of keeping their kidneys healthy and living in ways that can reduce the risk of kidney disease.

During the programme, medical experts explained the important role the kidneys play in the human body. They said the kidneys help to remove waste from the blood, balance body fluids, and support the proper functioning of the body.

They also noted that kidney disease is becoming more common and that many people are not aware of the dangers.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Uwa Onwuchekwa, Prof. Nneka Okoronkwo, and Dr. Jeoma Stella, stressed the need for early detection and regular medical check-ups. They explained that kidney disease can develop slowly and may not show symptoms in the early stages. Because of this, they encouraged people to go for routine health checks.

The doctors also advised the public to adopt healthy lifestyles to protect their kidneys. They encouraged people to drink enough water, eat healthy and balanced meals, control their blood pressure and blood sugar levels, exercise regularly, and avoid the excessive use of drugs without proper medical advice.

Participants were also educated on some early warning signs of kidney disease. These include swelling in the body, constant tiredness, changes in urination, and difficulty concentrating. They were advised to seek medical help quickly if they notice any of these symptoms.

The awareness programme featured health talks and interactive sessions where participants were able to ask questions and learn more about kidney health. The discussions also encouraged people to take responsibility for their health by adopting healthy habits.

The management of ABSUTH said the hospital remains committed to promoting preventive healthcare and educating the public on important health issues. They noted that programmes like this help people become more aware of diseases and how they can prevent them.

The event is part of the hospital's ongoing efforts to support global health campaigns and improve health awareness in the community.

2027 Polls: Yoruba Community Backs Governor Otti for Second Term

By Okereke Kate

The Yoruba community in Abia State has expressed strong support for the re-election of Governor Dr Alex Otti.

The group under the aegis of Yoruba United Community Abia Arise, unanimously agreed to support the governor's administration and what they described as his good governance in the state.

Speaking during the inauguration of the group's leadership, the State Co-ordinator, Comrade Olalekan Adedeji, said the Abia Arise Movement is gaining momentum and spreading across different parts of the state.

According to him, the Yoruba community decided to align with the movement in recognition of the governor's achievements.

Adedeji noted that Abia Arise remains the only political structure established by Governor



Abia State Governor, Dr Alex Otti

Otti prior to his election, adding that other support groups have since collapsed into the movement.

In his remarks, the State Chairman of Abia Arise, Hon Nkem Okoro, said the inauguration of the Yoruba Community Chapter was significant, considering the contributions of the Yoruba people to the

development of Abia State.

He charged members of the group to help spread information about the achievements of the governor across their communities.

Okoro said the aim of the movement is to transform the state in line with the ideals of Abia Arise, stressing that Abia has already begun to

witness positive changes. He commended the governor for his performance in office and expressed confidence that he would be re-elected in 2027.

According to him, there is "No vacancy in Government House," noting that anyone aspiring to become governor would need to

clearly demonstrate what he could offer that the current administration has not already delivered.

He also clarified that the leadership of the Yoruba community was selected by the group itself, adding that Abia Arise did not impose any leaders on them.

Okoro further described Governor Otti's track record as commendable, pointing out that since leaving the banking sector, there has been no case involving the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

He urged members of the newly inaugurated chapter to mobilize more people into the movement, expressing his desire to see the chapter grow stronger.

Okoro further added that if Governor Otti is re-elected in 2027, the people of the state will enjoy even greater dividends of democracy.

NIPR Seeks Partnership With Ogonnaya Onu Polytechnic

By Chukwuemeka Egejuru

The Chairman of the Abia State Chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR), Onyinye Ralph-Nwachukwu, has called for stronger institutional collaboration between the Institute and Ogonnaya Onu Polytechnic, Aba, to promote professionalism in public relations practice and enhance mentorship opportunities for students.

Ralph-Nwachukwu made the call during a courtesy visit by the leadership of the Institute to the Rector of the Polytechnic, Engr. Dr. Christopher K. Okoro, in his office recently.

In her remarks, the NIPR Chairman commended the Rector for his efforts in repositioning the institution and strengthening its academic programmes, particularly the Department of Mass Communication, which she described as crucial to developing future communicators and reputation managers.

She also noted their shared academic roots at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, describing the Rector as a worthy ambassador of the institution and a strong advocate of academic

excellence and institutional development.

Ralph-Nwachukwu further appreciated the Rector for supporting professionals within the Polytechnic, especially a member of the Institute who currently serves as the Head of the Department of Mass Communication.

According to her, such encouragement demonstrates a clear understanding of the strategic role of public relations in shaping institutional reputation and strengthening public trust.

She emphasised the need for deeper collaboration between the Polytechnic and the Institute through professional development programmes, public lectures, communication strategy engagements and mentorship initiatives for students.

The NIPR Chairman also encouraged staff of the Polytechnic, particularly those performing communication-related functions, to register as members of the Institute in order to align with professional standards and ethical communication practices.

She explained that public relations practice in Nigeria is regulated under the NIPR Act, which requires individuals performing public relations functions to be registered members of the Institute.

Ralph-Nwachukwu also urged the Polytechnic's management to consider enrolling the institution as a Corporate Member of NIPR, noting that such membership would enhance the institution's visibility and provide valuable professional exposure for Mass Communication students.

She further informed the Rector that the Abia State Chapter of the Institute would participate in key professional engagements this year, including the Nigeria Public Relations Week scheduled for April 19-25, 2026, in Kaduna, and the World Public Relations Forum (WPRF) later in the year in Abuja.

She appealed for the institution's support in sponsoring NIPR members within the Polytechnic to participate in these events, noting that the exposure would strengthen professional competence and enhance the institution's reputation.

The Chairman also appreciated the Rector for granting the Institute the opportunity to interact with final-year students of the Department of Mass Communication as part of activities marking the 2026

International Women's Day celebration.

She noted that although the global focus is on empowering women, the Institute promotes inclusivity, which informed the decision to involve both male and female students in the mentorship programme.

Ralph-Nwachukwu also congratulated the Rector on his appointment as Chief Examiner for Abia State by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), describing the recognition as well deserved.

Responding, the Rector, Engr. Dr. Christopher K. Okoro, directed the Head of the Department of Mass Communication, Dr. Dennis Ubani, to liaise with the Institute to facilitate the Polytechnic's registration as a Corporate Member of NIPR.

He also directed that staff of the department participate in the upcoming Nigeria Public Relations Week and the World Public Relations Forum, stating that the institution could sponsor up to eight delegates for the programmes.

Okoro explained that the Polytechnic's management has continued to support staff in professional development through the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund).

He disclosed that over 300 staff members were sponsored for professional and academic development programmes last year, while more than 90 have already benefited this year.

The Rector stressed the importance of professional membership for career progression, noting that lecturers and staff involved in public relations practice must belong to recognised professional bodies in their fields.

In his vote of thanks, Sir O.J. Bob Amanze expressed appreciation to the Rector for the warm reception accorded the delegation and assured him that the Institute would continue to strengthen its partnership with the Polytechnic in advancing the communication profession.

Members of the NIPR executive who accompanied the Chairman on the visit included the Vice Chairman, Oluchi Iyke Odionyenfe; Secretary, Ori Innocent Onuoha; Assistant Secretary/ICT Officer, Victor Onwuka; Treasurer, Onyinyechi Obi; Financial Secretary, Grace Gbagi; and Public Relations Officer, Promise Uzoma Okoro.

Also present were the Head of the Department of Mass Communication, Dr. Dennis Ubani, the Polytechnic's Director of Research and Development, and other lecturers from the department.

Joseph Jacob

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Creative Writers Hangout

Dear Step-mother (2)

Sandra was dumbfounded as she gaped at Uche standing at the gate, smiling from ear to ear. The July clouds were gathering over Umuahia. Sandra moved her eyes from the gloomy sky to Uche. He was wearing Pa Ikechi's obituary T-shirt, a faded jump-up trouser, and tattered sandals. The hold-all bag slung over one shoulder had its zippers open and was torn in several places.

"It seems you're not happy to see me," Uche said, breaking the gloomy silence between them.

"I'm happy to see you," Sandra replied, smiling weakly. "I'm just dumbfounded."

"I came to say goodbye," Uche said worriedly, noticing that Sandra was not the same person he saw a week ago when school vacated.

Her heart skipped.

"Goodbye? To where?" she asked as she opened the gate and stepped aside for him. "Come in."

He came in and stood behind her as she looked the gate.

"Are you going to see your mum at home?" Sandra asked.

"No."

"So where are you travelling to?" she asked as she led him into her room.

Uche sat on her reading table and looked at the novel lying face-down, *Hot Snow*. Sandra sat on her bed, struggling to process his words. Uche kept looking around the room instead of answering.

"Where are you travelling to?" she asked again.

"Senior, have you forgotten —"

"Please, stop this senior stuff. We're not in school. Call me Sandra."

"Okay... senior—sorry, Sandra," he stuttered. "Have you forgotten I was selected to travel to Scotland?"

She stared at him as if he were joking.

"Scotland? As in... Europe?"

He laughed softly. "Yes. I'll be playing football for Rangers Academy. They signed me."

For a moment, Sandra felt proud. Then pain rushed in. She wiped her face.

"So... you're leaving me here?"

Uche looked away. "I didn't want to go without seeing you."

Thunder rumbled and rain began to fall.

Sandra glanced at the wall clock. It was 11:29. "When are you leaving?"

"Mr Godwin asked me to be at his house by 4:30."

Tears filled her eyes as joy, sadness, and loneliness collided inside her.

"So what the principal said is true?"

"Yes," Uche smiled. "Soon I'll be speaking with white man's intonation." He pretended to make a call. "Hello, senior Sandra, this is Mr Uche speaking..."

Sandra burst into laughter. She threw her pillow at him. He caught it and threw it back. After laughing, she wiped her tears.

"Have you eaten today?"

"I haven't eaten since last night. My aunt said she won't give me food again unless I beg my uncle to send me back to my mother."

"Is she aware of your journey?"

"No. I didn't tell anyone."

Sandra lifted her foam mattress and brought out two crumpled ₦1000 notes—her entire savings. Without hesitation, she ran into the rain, bought eggs, noodles, and vegetables, and cooked quickly.

She served him and pretended to read while watching him eat.

"Come and eat with me," Uche said.

"No, it's for you."

Uche attacked the food hungrily and finished it in minutes.

"Thank you, senior—sorry, thank you, Sandra."

"I know it's not delicious."

"I have not eaten such a delicious food for a long time. I liked every bit of it."

Sandra opened her wardrobe and brought out a black jean and a blue tulle neck t-shirt and a white trainers, "Change into these." She said as she took the plate Uche used for eating into the kitchen and washed it.

When she returned, Uche was completely transformed. Even Uche who cares little about how he looks was excited as he titivates before the mirror.

"Thank you Sandra, what would I do without you? It's now I look like someone travelling to Europe."

"Yes, you look nice."

"Thank you."

Sandra brought out her hold all bag and emptied its content on her bed, "you will go with this bag," she said as she took Uche's bag, opened it and move the contents of few home clothes into her own bag. She brought out a Chelsea jersey and put it inside the bag.

Uche sat quietly watching her as she go about the packing. She brought a new toothbrush and a tooth paste as well as a tablet of toilet soap and packed all of them into the bag and zipped it.

All these while, Uche was rambling from one topic to another, how he will be speaking perfect English and how he will become a great goalkeeper that everyone will be talking about. Suddenly he realizes that Sandra had not been responding. Infact she had been in the same posture since she zipped the bag sitting with her back to Uche.

"Sandra, Sandra." She did not respond.

Uche stood up and crossed to look at her face. She was sobbing. Tears were flowing down her cheeks. She turned away from Uche and wiped her eyes with the back of her hands.

Uche was stunned, "Did I offend you?" he asked confused.

"No" Sandra sobbed.

"Why then are you crying?"

"Since we became friends, I never knew how much you mean to me until now you are leaving."

The excitement evaporated from Uche. He felt like cold water was poured on him. He could not feel his legs again. He had never seen Sandra cry. She was the one that gave him strength throughout his ordeal at Wellington High School. Seeing his source of comfort needing to be comforted dampened his spirit. He sat down on Sandra's bed with the hold all bag between them.

"You are all I have", Uche managed to say.

"Uche, I'm very happy that you're leaving. I'm proud of you. You have silenced all those that looked down on you. But..." She closed her eyes as she tried to hold back the tears, "I'm feeling very

lonely and empty".

"You are the mastermind of my success," Uche started happily as he suddenly remembered what to say. "Have you forgotten that you taught me how to read and how to speak good English?"

Sandra nodded and blew in her nose as she consoles herself. She smiled, "I remembered how you stopped that boy from beating me up that day in school."

Uche smiled, "And you saved me from entering into another problem."

"I learnt that Europe is very cold", Sandra said as she got up and took a sweater from her wardrobe and put it into the hold all bag. "Take good care of yourself."

They heard banging on the gate. "Stay here, my step-mother and her children are back." Sandra said as she left to the gate. She opened the gate, "welcome madam."

What will Adaku do if she sees Uche inside Sandra's room?

Poem of the Week

Alex Otti: Joy in the Land

I sat to think,
what could I possibly give to a man
whose act of leadership has brought
joy to the land,
empowerment to the mind,
and peace to the soul.

Songs are sung in the streets,
in churches, marketplaces, buses, and
kekes,
celebrating the exploits
and transformative leadership
of Otti.

King James has it
"The Word brought joy to a city."
So let it be written,
that through one man,
there is joy in Abia.

In less than a year,
I have not only heard,
but seen, felt, and benefited
from governance once rationed like a
cake,
now shared with fairness and purpose.

A head whose acts have raised
healthcare reforms,
advanced education, built
infrastructure beyond stomach needs,
while discipline and transparency
stand as pillars of his rule.

Here is the proof of the words on the
streets, Otti the Talk and Do.
Marking the date of birth
is not a mere calculation of years,
but a reminder of living in purpose.

Otti has dutifully shown this
generation,
and those yet to come,
that leadership is not about titles,
but about impact
and selflessness.

Thank God for the gift of you,
Your Excellency.
Long live Otti.
Long live Abia.

By Daniel Ogidiolu
08142083329

AUTHOR of the WEEK Elenor Catton

Elenor Catton is a both ambitious and daring, showcasing her mastery of complex storytelling.

In 2013, Catton made history by becoming the youngest person ever to win the Man Booker Prize for *The Luminaries*, at just 28 years old. The achievement brought her worldwide recognition and established her as one of the most significant writers of her generation. Her victory was especially meaningful for New Zealand literature, which gained renewed global attention through her success.

Beyond her novels, Catton is also known for her thoughtful public commentary on politics, culture, and the role of art in society. She has spoken as a philosopher and her mother as a librarian. This environment naturally immersed her in books, ideas, and debates from an early age. Surrounded by intellectual honesty and literature and critical thinking, she developed a strong appreciation for storytelling and analysis, which would later define her unique literary voice.

Catton later published *Birnam Wood* (2023), a sharp



She studied English and modern political thriller literature at the University of Canterbury and later earned a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Victoria University of Wellington. During this period, Catton refined her craft and began to attract attention for her talent. Her academic background gave her not only technical skill but also a deep respect for structure, form, and the traditions of classic literature.

Her first novel, *The Rehearsal* (2008), announced her as a major new voice in contemporary fiction. The book explored adolescence, performance, and emotional vulnerability through an experimental narrative style. It received widespread critical acclaim and won several awards, instantly placing Catton on the international literary map.

However, it was her second novel, *The Luminaries* (2013), that transformed her into a global literary star. Set during the 19th-century New Zealand gold rush, the novel is an intricate blend of mystery, historical fiction, thrillers, she continues to redefine what ambitious storytelling can achieve.

Entertainment

 With
Akinrujomu
Gideon Oluwatobi


Mercy Johnson Okojie

Senator Monday Okpebholo.

From Screen To Statehouse: Mercy Johnson Okojie, Appointed Special Adviser

Nollywood actress and philanthropist Mercy Johnson Okojie, has been appointed as the special adviser on public engagement and advocacy to the Edo State governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo. The appointment was announced recently by the secretary to the state government, Musa Ikhilor, as part of efforts to strengthen communication between the state government and its residents.

her appointment, therefore, aims to strengthen citizen's engagement and improve government's communication across the state, leveraging her wide public appeal, communication skills, and grassroots connections. In her new role, mercy johnson okojie, will focus on deepening public participation in government programmes and policies, while strengthening the link between the edo state government and the people. She has expressed her commitment to carrying out her responsibilities with humility, dedication, and an unwavering focus on service, aligning with governor okpebholo's shine agenda, with a career spanning nearly two decades and appearances in over 200 films, mercy johnson okojie is widely respected for her humanitarian work, specifically through the mercy johnson okojies foundation, which champions initiatives in women's empowerment, child welfare, education support, healthcare outreach, and civic awareness.

The Rise And Fall Of King Mitchy: Influencer At Centre Of Death Hoax

The management of a social media influencer, Michelle Mukoro, popularly known as King Mitchy, has retracted its earlier announcement of her alleged death, clarifying that she is alive and in stable condition, punch newspaper had reported that philanthropist and content creator King Mitchy, recently announced that she renovated a dilapidated school in six days, suggesting that the project was proof and that meaningful change could happen swiftly when there was genuine intent, however, she reportedly made comments widely interpreted as subtle jabs at Verydarkman, who, in turn, accused her of being used as a political pawn to launder the image of President Bola Tinubu's administration. The controversy deepened after Verydarkman alleged that Seyi Tinubu, son of President Bola Tinubu, was



Michelle Mukoro, AKA King Mitchy

Verydarkman (VDM)

financing Mitchy's philanthropic projects, the claim sparked heated debate on social media and further intensified the influencer's online backlash. Mitchy later said the sustained harassment led to the loss of her business instagram account, the situation took a dramatic turn during a live video session recently in which Mitchy, visibly distressed, appeared to consume a substance believed to be bleach, while viewers expressed concern and attempted to

dissuade her, her management later announced that she had passed away in a statement via her Instagram page, the post claimed that she died at prime care hospital in Abuja and that medical efforts to revive her had been unsuccessful. It also requested privacy for her family during their time of grief. More so, in a subsequent post on her Instagram page, her management reversed its earlier position, stating that she was alive and recovering.

"Michelle is okay now," the post read, however, before the retraction, prime care hospital swiftly denied the claim in a separate statement, saying the influencer was neither admitted nor died at its facility, the management of prime care hospital wishes to inform the public that the announcement of the alleged death of miss Mukoro Michelle, popularly known as King Mitchy, at our facility in Abuja is false and that king Mitchy was never a patient in our hospital and did not pass away here.

2baba: A Quarter Century Of Music Magic At The Experience



Innocent Idibia

2baba, [Innocent Idibia] the Nigerian music icon, is celebrating 25 years in the industry with a major concert titled "The Experience" on March 29, 2026, at Eko Hotel, Lagos time: 18:00 WAT - 23:00 WAT, ticket prices: 20,000.00 - 10,000,000.00

this milestone event will be a celebration, and feature powerful appreciation of Nigerian performances, special and African music's guest appearances, and evolution on the global memorable moments stage. 2baba has showcased Nigerian music's legacy. The concert will honour not just 2baba's career, but also the growth of it is about the journey of afrobeats and the many artists who have and the many talented elevated Nigerian music artists who have carried worldwide, the concert will be a historic world. moment of reflection,

Foreign News

US Blasts Iranian Mine Layers In Strait Of Hormuz, Tensions Soar.

The u.s. military confirmed recently that it destroyed 16 Iranian mine-laying vessels near the strait of hormuz.

the strikes were a preemptive response to intelligence reports indicating that, Iran had begun laying naval mines in the world's most critical oil shipping lane.

president donald trump warned tehran that any mines already placed must be removed "immediately" or Iran would face military consequences "at a level never seen before,

intelligence assessments suggest Iran has already deployed a "few dozen" mines using small boats, with



IRAN TARGETS STRAIT OF HORMUZ SHIPS



escalates, the strait of hormuz handles approximately 20% of global oil shipments, the threat of a full blockade and reports of commercial ships being hit by "unknown projectiles" have caused global oil

prices to soar above \$100 a barrel, while a minimal amount of traffic continues, major insurers and tanker operators are reassessing security, and aramco has warned of a "market catastrophe" if the strait does not reopen fully soon.

-source bbc news

the capacity to deploy hundreds more if the conflict

Sporting Ambassador



"How to Become A Pro Football Referee"

-Elder Nwogu, Abia Football Referees' Boss

By Joseph Jacob

Elder Ogunta Matador Nwogu is the Chairman of Abia State Football Referee's Council. He officiated in the Nigerian Premier Football League between 2003 and 2016, served as match commissioner and currently serves as a referee assessor. In the second part of this explosive interview, he explains how to become a professional football referee and other issues affecting referees in Nigeria.

So what can be done to help Abia State referees become FIFA-badged?

For example, if you are talented, and desire to become a referee, we have the number of years you are expected to be for you to join. There are stages you must pass through. Referee in training, Grade 2 referee, and Grade 1 referee. So those in grade 1 referees are always invited from time to time for FIFA listing. I must confess, they have been inviting Abia State referees but they have not been badged. So we need to catch them young and they need to start on time. That's where there is a need for us to have parental support. Because it's expected that at the age of 19, or at the age of 18, after you finish secondary school, you should have gotten your Grade 1. So if you are in that age bracket, and you are a Grade 1 referee, most likely they will invite you for a FIFA trial.

So if you do not become a referee on time, it may rub off. You cannot become a Grade 1 referee at the age of 25 and expect them to invite you for listings.

So the issue is that parents should support their children. And you know that people who are within this age bracket are still students. Parents still feed them. The daddy and the mommy will be supporting that person as they start from referee in training, Grade 3, Grade 2, paying all the dues and all the fees.

So what is the council itself doing to catch referees young?

The council is handicapped because without the society, you cannot have the council. The council job is more of administrative to oversee the activities of the society. Referees are recruited at the society. For example, if you are in Arochukuwu, and there's no referee society there, how can you become a referee? So you can only come to the Local Government Area where there are referee societies, and that's where you are recruited, and that's where you are trained. It's not for the council to train, what we do is to give technical support to the society.

It's in the society level that referees are recruited and trained.

So what are the societies doing to tell people, 'come and join us'?

They have their own challenges at the society level. Most of the challenges they have has to do with finance. Like I said, if you are bringing in a kid referee, it's permissible to have a kid referee, then aside from that we have referees in training. These are students, who will pay for their registration? Who will pay for their examination? Who will pay for their training material? If you love somebody and you want to help him, you need to sponsor that person at that level. That's the simple truth. So it's not only time-consuming, that little child must have the passion, that's one, and then must have the sponsor.

So money is a very big factor.

How does referee society gets money?

There is what we call a rebate. When the referees go for a match, for example, if a referee is paid \$10,000 for officiating a match, he gives the society 5%, that's the only means of getting funds. Societies can't do much unless there's somebody who is sponsoring that society.

So money is a major factor at that starting level. But, how much do they pay a match official in Nigeria that will make the 5% he gives to his society substantial?

In one year, what will it cost to be a member of the society?

Okay, let me breakdown the structure. Each referee society, are supposed to have, in a week, days of activities. One, on Saturday, most times it's for physical fitness, because every referee must be fit. So you must go to training every Saturday. That's for physical fitness. Then, within the week, you can choose either Monday or Tuesday for the lectures. So each society operates on two folds. One day is for lecture, one day is for physical fitness. So imagine a child, for example, in the Osioma Referees Society, who lives in Ogbor Hill. He travels from Ogbor Hill to Osioma on Saturday, do the running around and then go home. On Tuesday he will transport himself again. So it's not easy for you to say, this is the amount of money that can be invested. But it has to be related to the passion that your sponsors have.

Even if you are living very close to your society, you will take your time on Saturday morning, for physical fitness, and midweek for lectures. And in that lecture, you write and use computers. So you are required to get an Android phone. Besides the electronic gadgets, budget #30,000 to #40,000. Multiply that amount with five or six assuming you are grooming such number of persons.

Even when you are willing to sponsor a child, the parents may say that you are denying them the help their child renders at home as the child is engaged twice a week with referees' activities. So sometimes, the child may be under pressure.

If government do have budget for the Nigerian Football Federation, is it not possible for government to sponsor these societies?

No, I want to let you know that Nigeria Football Referee Association is an NGO. We are a registered entity. In Nigeria, what we have is Nigeria Football Federation, the parent of all football. They are on their own, we are under them. But even aside from being under them, we are still a registered NGO. NFF does not recruit referees. It is Nigeria Football Referee Association that train and manage referees. But we always collaborate with them as our superior.

We are always servicing them by giving them match officials.

Are the state FAs functioning very, very well? Financially, are they buoyant enough to send a helping hand? So that's the challenge we have. So it's our prayer that the time will come when state governments, will have an understanding with the state FAs. And let the FA run the way it's supposed to run. As a member of their congress, we can always say, please send a helping hand to us. But as I speak to you today, that synergy is not there.

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possible that Nigeria will start importing referees if the young ones do not join?

No, that cannot happen. We have referees who officiate in CAF Champions League and other competitions. We have many women referees too. So aside from being at the Nations Cup, we have referees that officiate other CAF and FIFA sponsor tournaments. We have referees, yes.

As a referee, can you recall your best moment and your worst moment?

It's not easy for me to recall my best moment. Because one thing about match officiating is that if you go for the match and it ends successfully, without any violence it's another best moment. So if you go for any match in Nigeria, and you come back successfully, there's no problem, even if the home team loses that match, and there's no violence, it's a good moment for you as a referee.

Now, there's one ugly moment I had in a match at Ibadan, that match almost ran into a stalemate. We didn't find it comfortable, because we were highly harassed. The home team was under pressure and they were having a bad day, and there was a right



decision we made against the home team. At the end of the match all hell would lose.

What is your message to football fans as regards to the future of refereeing in Nigeria?

We are asking for understanding. As referees in Nigeria, we are working under a very tough terrain, in the English Premier League, there are not only safety, but adequate security. Now, if you go for the match, even if the team is losing at home, the referee handles his match normally, because he is guaranteed adequate security.

In Nigeria, if you lose a match, the coach, the technical crew will go and report to Nigerians that the referee was not fair to them. They always expect to win even when they play badly. A club can sell their quality players in the previous season and made their money. In the new season they will buy amateur players and yet they still want to win. So the pressure will now fall on the match officials. So we are praying for understanding.

Let them know that we are working under a very tight situation. Aside from that, remuneration: How much are referees being paid in Nigeria? I know, for the past two years, a referee in London goes with either 4,000 Euros. So if a referee is properly paid, we'll be able to give our best.

We need quality training.

Yes, because if you apply training, if you bring quality training with technology, like you see the importance of VAR. Even if you think you've made a wrong call, they will call your attention to it, but in Nigeria nobody calls you. So, you are on your own.

There's a need for all fans to read the laws of the game. It's in the internet. It's in football websites. If they read the laws of the game, they will now discover that each year, these laws are reviewed by International Football Association Board (IFAB).

Granted that now, because of betting, much money has been expended, people have now seen it as a means of livelihood. But if we see football first of all as a sport, you win some, you lose some, life still continues.

Ultimately, you bring fans to the stadium to make them happy. Once we see football as a sport, it will help to calm down nerves. Even the person whose club wins today will lose tomorrow. So, we must not try to win at all cost because it mounts so much pressure on match officials.

Are referees insured? Going by the risk they take to officiate a match, is there any insurance policy for referees?

We are supposed to be insured. But, because of the level at which we're operating, we've not gotten to that. I know the people who are running the league are thinking along that line,

Thanks for speaking with us.

Thank you so much.

FACT FILE

FULL NAME:	Ogunta Matador Nwogu
DATE OF BIRTH:	15 th July 1967
SPOUSE:	Mercy Nwanyimma Ogunta
CHILDREN:	3 (two girls and one boy)
START OFFICIATING:	2003
RETIRED:	2016
BEST FOOD:	Garri and Ogbonor Soup
BEST COLOUR:	Blue
HOBBIES:	Table tennis and painting

UEFA Champions League: English Clubs Battle For Survival

By Joseph Jacob

A few weeks after England made history by becoming the first country to have six clubs in the knockout stage of the UEFA Champions League, all six clubs are on the verge of being eliminated after woeful outings in the first leg of their round-of-16 encounters.

Kai Havertz scored a late penalty to help Arsenal secure a 1-1 draw against Bayer Leverkusen at the BayArena. The Gunners, who are corner-kick specialists having scored 19 goals from corners this season, were served a dose of their own medicine early in the second half when Robert Andrich headed in a corner delivered by Alex Grimaldo to give Leverkusen the lead.

Arsenal pushed for an equaliser, with manager Mikel Arteta introducing Gabriel Jesus in place of Eberechi Eze, Kai Havertz in place of Viktor Gyökeres, and Noni Madueke in place of Bukayo Saka to change the game.

A strong run by Noni Madueke led to a penalty after he was fouled by Malik Tillman. Havertz calmly converted the spot-kick in the 89th minute, earning Arsenal a valuable draw ahead of this midweek's second leg. While the contest is still open, Arsenal are under more pressure to win as they are the favourites.

Another English side that managed to secure a draw was Newcastle United, who welcomed Barcelona to St James' Park.

Newcastle appeared to be heading for a memorable win when Harvey Barnes fired them ahead in



Liverpool captain, Virgil van Dijk

the 86th minute with a first-time finish from Jacob Murphy's cross, beating Barcelona goalkeeper Joan García and sending the home crowd into celebration.

However, deep into stoppage time, Barcelona were awarded a penalty after substitute Dani Olmo

was fouled in the box by Malick Thiaw. Lamine Yamal calmly converted the spot-kick, sending Aaron Ramsdale the wrong way to level the match with the final kick of the game. The late equaliser was a cruel blow for Newcastle and coach Eddie Howe, whose team had been seconds away from beating the five-time European champions before the return leg at Camp Nou this midweek.

Liverpool suffered a narrow 1-0 defeat to Galatasaray in Arne Slot's 100th match in charge, giving the Turkish side a slim advantage ahead of the second leg at Anfield. Playing in a hostile Istanbul atmosphere, Liverpool conceded early when Mario Lemina headed home in the seventh minute from a set-piece after a flick-on by Victor Osimhen. The goal highlighted Liverpool's ongoing vulnerability at corners, marking the 10th they have conceded from such situations this season.

Liverpool created several chances to respond but failed to convert them. Florian Wirtz went close early, while goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili made an important save to keep the deficit

at one. Osimhen briefly thought he had doubled Galatasaray's lead, but the goal was ruled out for offside in the build-up. Liverpool also had a goal disallowed after VAR judged that Ibrahima Konaté handled the ball during a chaotic goalmouth scramble. Despite late pressure, Liverpool could not find an equaliser and must now overturn the deficit in the return leg at Anfield.

Recall that Liverpool were eliminated at this stage last season by eventual winners PSG. Liverpool are now under intense pressure to turn the tables this midweek.

World champions Chelsea did not live up to expectations as they were humbled by Paris Saint-Germain in Paris. The home side took a huge step toward the quarter-finals with a 5-2 victory over Chelsea in the first leg at Parc des Princes.

Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé scored early for PSG, while Chelsea responded through Malo Gusto and Enzo Fernández to level the match at 2-2.

The game turned when Chelsea goalkeeper Filip Jørgensen made a costly error, allowing Vitiña to lob him and restore PSG's lead.

Substitute Khvicha Kvaratskhelia then scored twice late in the game, including a superb curling strike, to seal a dominant victory.

Chelsea now face a difficult task in the return leg at Stamford Bridge as they attempt to overturn a three-goal deficit.

Similarly, Real Madrid took firm control of their last-16 clash after defeating Manchester City with a dominant first-leg display.

Federico Valverde starred for the Spanish giants, scoring a brilliant first-half hat-trick to punish City's defensive weaknesses.

Despite missing key players including Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham, Real Madrid still had enough attacking quality to overwhelm Pep Guardiola's side.

City created chances but failed to convert them, with goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois making important saves to keep the visitors at bay.

The result leaves Manchester City facing a daunting challenge in the second leg this midweek if they are to keep their Champions League hopes alive.

Tottenham Hotspur were humiliated by Atlético Madrid in a chaotic match marked by defensive errors and early goals. Goalkeeper Antonín Kinský had a disastrous start, slipping twice to gift goals to Marcos Llorente and Julián Álvarez. In between those mistakes, Micky van de Ven also slipped, allowing Antoine Griezmann to score, while

Robin Le Normand added a fourth within 23 minutes. After his costly errors, Kinský was substituted by interim coach Igor Tudor and replaced by Guglielmo Vicario.

Spurs briefly responded through Pedro Porro and later Dominic Solanke after an error by Atlético goalkeeper Jan Oblak, but Álvarez struck again on the counterattack to deepen Spurs' misery. The defeat marked Tottenham's fourth straight loss under Tudor, intensifying pressure on the manager. A late clash of heads between João Palhinha and Cristian Romero forced Palhinha off the pitch, leaving Spurs to finish the game with ten men. They will have to overturn a three-goal deficit – a mission that seems impossible going by their current form.

In other fixtures this midweek, Bodø/Glimt will storm Lisbon to take on Sporting CP at the Estádio José Alvalade with a three-goal advantage.

The Norwegian underdogs secured their fifth straight victory in the competition after previously eliminating Inter Milan in the play-off round.

Sondre Fet opened the scoring from the penalty spot after a VAR review confirmed a foul by Georgios Vagiannidis.

Ole Blomberg doubled the lead before halftime, and Kasper Høgh added a third in the second half after a cross from Jens Petter Hauge.

Bodø/Glimt aim to continue their fairytale run and set up a quarter-final clash with either Arsenal or Bayer Leverkusen.

Bayern Munich produced a dominant display to thrash Atalanta in the first leg, despite the absence of injured striker Harry Kane. With Kane only fit enough for the bench, Michael Olise stepped up and inspired Bayern's attack. The French winger was involved in the first three goals as Bayern raced into a commanding lead within 25 minutes. His quick corner set up Serge Gnabry, whose pass allowed Josip Stanišić to score the opener, before Olise added the second with a curling strike and then assisted Gnabry for the third.

The German champions continued their attacking dominance in Bergamo as Olise scored again, while Nicolas Jackson and Jamal Musiala also found the net, giving Bayern six goals by the 67th minute. Mario Pašalić pulled one back late for Atalanta, but the result left Bayern in complete control of the tie. The emphatic victory also extended Bayern's unbeaten away run to nine matches and puts them in a strong position ahead of the return leg at the Allianz Arena this Wednesday.

SUDOKU

Puzzle By: Prince Blessing Lazarus

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All you have to do is fill the grid in such away that every 3X3 box and row and column, contains the numbers 1-9.