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**Sunday**

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# 'Tinubu administration has no achievements to stand on', says Atiku

By Friday Omosola

**F**ormer Vice President Atiku Abubakar has criticised President Bola Tinubu's administration, stating it has no tangible achievements to showcase and no credible record to defend.

Reacting to the wave of defections from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku, in a statement posted on his X page yesterday, said the Tinubu administration's only strategy is 'chaos and division,' which he described as 'the last refuge of the incompetent.'

Atiku compared Tinubu's leadership to that of an unskilled captain who not only wrecks his ship but endangers the lives of all on board.

He maintained that freedom of association and expression are fundamental rights in any democracy, stressing that every citizen has the right to align with any political party of their choice.

"Alongside these stand the pillars of a just and functional democratic society: the people, the rule of law, credible elections, and accountability. Undermine any of these, and democracy itself begins to crumble," he stated.

Reaffirming his commitment to democratic values, Atiku said he bears no grudges against anyone exercising their right to political alignment.

"Defections, alliances, and realignments are part and parcel of democratic politics. We have seen them before, and we will see them again," he added.

Atiku also addressed criticisms surrounding his recent visit to former President Muhammadu Buhari in



Kaduna, noting that some political actors resorted to insults over the meeting.

He argued that Buhari remains a significant figure in Nigeria's political history, recalling that during the 2013 opposition merger, wide consultations were held with former leaders like Olusegun Obasanjo and Ibrahim Babangida.

"So why is it now sacrilegious for me and other leaders to visit Buhari in Kaduna?" he asked. "If you truly believe in freedom of association, then you must respect the rights of all political actors to engage, regardless of party lines."

He accused some PDP leaders of double standards, noting that when party figures engage with President Tinubu, it is labelled a strategic alliance, yet his own engagements with figures like Peter Obi, Nasir El-Rufai, or Buhari are treated as a crisis.

"Hypocrisy and the politics of selective outrage have never been this



fashionable!" Atiku declared.

He further urged Nigerians to recognise the real political battle ahead, stressing that it is not a struggle between political parties but a confrontation between the people and an administration that has, in his words, 'plunged the nation into untold suffering.'

"The economy is in freefall. Inflation is choking the masses. Jobs are vanishing. Youth restiveness is surging to terrifying levels. Nigerians are not just tired — they are angry, and rightfully so," Atiku said.

He warned against distractions based on ethnic, regional, or religious sentiments, describing them as tools of manipulation wielded by an administration with nothing else to offer.

"This moment is about collective survival," Atiku stressed. "The real enemy is the Tinubu administration's abysmal failure, and we must stand united to confront it."



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## EFFECTIVE FROM DECEMBER 1, 2024

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
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9X5	225,738.00
9X4	193,500.00
9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
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4X4	60,166.50
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3X2	17,400.00
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9X5	206,000.00
9X4	177,500.00
9X3	150,000.00
8X6	216,000.00
8X3	98,500.00
7X4	164,002.00
6X4	94,010.50
6X3	78,500.00
6X2	47,500.00
5X5	100,000.00
5X4	61,500.00
5X3	57,819.00
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10X4	142,787.50
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9X5	169,050.00
9X4	137,875.00
9X3	112,875.00
8X6	179,368.00
8X5	143,500.00
8X4	93,500.00
8X3	82,434.50
7X4	111,173.50
6X4	82,434.50
6X3	59,250.00
6X2	40,000.00
5X6	98,749.50
5X4	65,833.00
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## PRODUCT BLACK & WHITE

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10X4	103,963.00
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9X6	162,222.445
9X5	168,191.50
9X4	N/A
8X6	N/A
8X3	N/A
7X4	72,676.00
6X4	65,000.00
6X3	41,124.50
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5X6	71,378.00
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5X2	22,841.00
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3X2	14,923.00
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# Shettima hails UBA's innovation, endurance

By Friday Omosola

Vice President Kashim Shettima has praised the United Bank for Africa (UBA) for its outstanding record of innovation, growth in emerging markets, and sustained excellence over the past 75 years.

Speaking at UBA's 75th Anniversary Dinner held at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Senator Shettima described the bank as a 'pacesetter' and a 'quintessential specimen' of what African institutions can achieve when excellence is institutionalised.

"Seventy-five years is not something you pick up at a supermarket. It is earned — through risks and calculations, through storms and sunshine, through mergers and acquisitions, and through the brainpower and courage of those who believe in its promise of a new world," the Vice President declared.

He lauded UBA's evolution as a financial institution that continues to pay close attention to innovation, emerging markets, and the shifting ambitions of generations.

"UBA has remained a pacesetter because it is led by people who do not just manage capital but manage curiosity," Shettima said, adding that the bank's staying power stems from its relentless pursuit of relevance.

He also commended UBA's ability to influence economies and shape the narrative of what African financial institutions can become, noting that the bank serves millions across the continent and beyond.

Shettima reserved special praise for UBA's Group Chairman, Tony Elumelu, whom he described as "one of the finest sons of Africa" and "a bridge between the old and the new."

He remarked that Elumelu had won the trust of even the younger, digital-savvy generations by listening across generations and adapting to changing



times.

"Tony Elumelu is not a dreamer; he is a dream-maker. He has shown that it is possible to build without breaking, to lead without losing touch, and to dream without borders," Shettima said, highlighting Elumelu's ability to balance corporate leadership with family life.

He also praised Elumelu's wife, Awele Elumelu, describing her as an 'Amazon' and the quiet strength supporting her husband's success.

In his remarks, Tony Elumelu expressed profound gratitude to the Shettima, UBA's customers, shareholders, and founding pioneers, acknowledging the strong foundations laid over decades.

"This is a night of celebration and gratitude to God, to our customers, and to shareholders who have made this possible," he said.

Looking to the future, Elumelu expressed confidence in UBA's continued success, tying it to Nigeria's improving economic environment under President Bola Tinubu.

He said, "Just keep transforming our domestic economy as President Tinubu is doing, and UBA will keep roaring."

In his welcome address, UBA Group Managing Director, Oliver Alawuba, reflected on the bank's journey since its inception 75 years ago on Kakawa Street, Lagos, as the British & French Bank (BFB).

Today, UBA operates in 24 countries, with 1,000 business offices, over 25,000 staff, and more than 45 million customers.

Alawuba reported that in 2024, UBA posted a profit after tax of ₦766.6 billion, with total assets reaching ₦30.4 trillion. Shareholders were rewarded with a ₦5 dividend per share, delivering a dividend yield of 14.5% — the highest among peers in the industry.

He also noted that shareholders' funds rose significantly to ₦3.419 trillion in 2024, from ₦2.030 trillion the previous year.

Looking ahead, Alawuba outlined an ambitious vision for UBA to establish a presence in every African country and expand to over 100 countries worldwide within the next 75 years.

The event was attended by prominent figures from across the financial and political sectors, who joined in celebrating UBA's landmark achievement.

# Wike moves against unregistered hospitals after pregnant woman's death

By Friday Omosola

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Nyesom Wike, has launched a crackdown on illegal and unlicensed medical practitioners, following the death of a pregnant woman at an unregistered clinic in Abuja.

Wike, issued the directive in a statement released on Saturday by his Senior Special Assistant on Public Communications and Social Media, Lere Olayinka.

The former Rivers State governor declared, 'Henceforth, anyone found to be operating or working in an unregistered health facility should be arrested and prosecuted.'

The move comes after 35-year-old Chekwube Chinagorom died following a caesarean section conducted at Afolmi Hospital, an unauthorised private health facility located in Durumi.

Her newborn baby was delivered alive and later transferred to Asokoro District Hospital for medical attention.

Olayinka described the situation as regrettable, especially considering the availability of free healthcare services for pregnant women under the Federal Capital Territory Health Insurance Scheme (FHIS).

"In the FCT, vulnerable persons, including pregnant women, enjoy free enrolment into the FHIS, which allows them free access, through the Primary Health Care Centres, to all services covered in the Basic Minimum Package of Health Services," he said.

He also highlighted that Gwarinpa,



Nyanya, Abaji, and Kuje General Hospitals have been designated as Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care centres, where caesarean sections are performed at no cost.

"Our pregnant women are once again urged to take advantage of this free health insurance scheme and stop visiting quack medical personnel and unregistered health facilities," he added.

Investigations by the Private Health Establishments Registration and Monitoring Committee (PHERMC) confirmed that Afolmi Hospital was operating without the necessary approvals.

During an inspection, officials found only one staff member on duty — Mr Simon Elisha Godiya, a Junior Community Health Extension Worker.

The statement revealed that Mr Godiya stated the surgery was carried out by one Murtala Jumma alongside another

unidentified person.

All efforts to contact Murtala Jumma by telephone were unsuccessful.

Shortly after officials of the Private Health Establishments Registration and Monitoring Committee (PHERMC) arrived at Afolmi Hospital, officers from the Durumi Divisional Headquarters of the Nigeria Police also reached the scene.

The case was immediately transferred to the police for further investigation.

The officer in charge requested that the PHERMC team accompany them to the station to formally document the incident, a request to which the team complied.

The Nigeria Police are currently working to identify those involved in performing the surgery, verify their medical credentials, and investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of Chekwube Chinagorom at the unregistered facility.



# 'Stop de-marketing Nigeria' - Sowunmi to Obi

By Friday Omosola

A prominent chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Segun Sowunmi, has criticised Peter Obi, the 2023 presidential candidate of Labour Party (LP) over his recent comments on Nigeria's economic situation during a lecture at Johns Hopkins University in the United States.

Obi, speaking on 'Politics and Change in Nigeria' at the invitation of Professor Peter Lewis, drew comparisons between Nigeria and three other nations — China, Vietnam, and Indonesia — assessing their development trajectories since 1990.

The former Anambra State governor noted that while all four countries were categorised under the medium Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, Nigeria had since fallen into the low category, whereas the other three had advanced to the high category.

Obi also highlighted Nigeria's decline in GDP per capita relative to these nations and the dramatic rise in poverty levels.

He stated that the difference stemmed largely from the quality of political leadership, stating that competent, compassionate, and capable leaders in China, Vietnam, and Indonesia drove critical investments in education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation, whereas Nigeria lagged behind due to leadership failures.

However, Sowunmi, in his reaction via his X page, accused Obi of presenting a skewed and damaging portrayal of Nigeria on international platforms.

"With due respect Peter Obi, these measurements are faulty. Extremely skewed, for those who manipulate



these figures have no metrics to measure the informal sector in Nigeria," Sowunmi wrote.

He cautioned the 63-year-old against 'de-marketing' the same country he aspires to lead.

He urged Obi to challenge the international community's 'crazy neoliberal policies' and the destabilisation of the Sahel region, which, he argued, had significant adverse effects on Nigeria.

"No one who wishes to lead a nation called Nigeria must be the de-marketer on steroids of the same country he or she wishes to lead. Stop it immediately," Sowunmi declared, adding, "you need to cut the crap. Nigeria first."

Sowunmi's criticism of Obi came two days after he called for him to rejoin the PDP.

He argued that Obi's political ascent was largely shaped during his time with the party.

Speaking during an appearance on

Arise Television on Thursday, Sowunmi stressed that Obi's prominence on the national stage could be traced back to his association with the PDP.

He warned that a divided opposition would weaken any chance of removing the All Progressives Congress (APC) from power in the 2027 elections.

Obi, who was Atiku Abubakar's running mate in the 2019 presidential election under the PDP banner, defected to the LP in 2022 and subsequently ran as its presidential candidate in the 2023 elections.

Sowunmi pointed to Obi's impressive showing in the 2023 polls as clear proof of his electoral influence, suggesting that the PDP would be significantly strengthened by his return.

Reaffirming his call, Sowunmi insisted that unity within the opposition is essential, saying "The PDP needs Obi back in its fold. We cannot afford to approach 2027 with a fractured opposition that would once again hand victory to the ruling party."

# Uganda declares end of sixth ebola outbreak after 42-day countdown

By Helen Okechukwu



Following the outbreak of the sixth Ebola virus disease (EVD) in the country, the people of Uganda have finally announced their freedom since the disease resurfaced on 30 January 2025 in Kampala.

The declaration of the end of EVD follows after the last patient was discharged on 14 March, with a 42-day countdown leading to the deaths of a child and a nurse.

With about 534 people identified as contacts of suspected cases, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said, "During this outbreak, 14 cases, 12 confirmed and two not confirmed through laboratory tests (probable), were reported. Four deaths, two confirmed and two probable, occurred. Ten people recovered from the infection."

Since the outbreak in the country, Uganda faced the Sudan virus disease (SVD) subtype, marked as a severe strain, killing 4 in 10 infected people, with over 15,000 deaths reported across Africa.

Although there is no approved vaccine for the Ebola-Sudan strain, free trial vaccines were administered, which witnessed significant improvement.

Meanwhile, WHO described it as the fastest roll-out to tackle the disease.

In a post shared on Uganda's health ministry X page on Saturday, it was written, "The current Ebola Sudan Virus Disease outbreak has officially come to an end."

To support their declaration, the

ministry added, "This follows 42 days without a new case since the last confirmed patient was discharged on March 14, 2025."

Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, Acting WHO Regional Director for Africa, while highlighting challenges met with global funding constraints, said, "This outbreak challenged us in new ways."

Tedros Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of WHO, hailed the efforts and commitment of health workers and the Ugandan government for winning the battle against EVD.

Ebola, transmitted between two people via body fluids, is highly contagious, with a window period of 2 to 21 days. Symptoms of EVD include fever, vomiting, bleeding, and diarrhoea.



# Police commence rescue search for 12 passengers abducted in Calabar waterways

By Helen Okechukwu



**C**ross River State Police Command spokesperson, Irene Ugbo, said a rescue mission with sister agencies has commenced for 12 passengers abducted along Calabar waterways.

The passengers were said to have been abducted by sea pirates on their way from Calabar to Oron in Akwa Ibom State, according to a report on Saturday.

The 12 victims boarded the “Heavenly Grace” boat in

Calabar last weekend as they were on their way to Akwa Ibom.

Reacting to the incident, Ugbo, who described the incident as rare, noted that investigation is ongoing to unravel the attack.

Ugbo explained that security agencies, including the navy, have been deployed along the waterways to ensure the safety of travelers.

The police spokesperson

added, “we are working to ensure the speedy release of the 12 abducted passengers.”

A source, however, revealed that gunmen overtook the passengers’ boat, forcefully stopped them, and ordered everybody into their (sea pirates’) boat.

Before they drove away, the kidnappers moved the passengers’ goods into their boat and made away with both the 12 passengers and their goods to an unknown destination.



# Five dead after explosion hits illegal petrol storage dumps in Rivers

By Helen Okechukwu



**F**ive persons have reportedly lost their lives in Rivers State after an explosion occurred at an illegally refined petroleum product storage located in Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni Local Government Area (ONELGA) of the state.

The incident occurred in Omoku on Saturday at approximately 11 am, after a fire erupted from the illegally dumped storage house, killing four females and one male, who were burnt beyond recognition.

The Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre (YEAC-Nigeria), in a statement signed by Dr. Fyneface Fyneface, the Executive Director of YEAC-Nigeria, confirmed the incident.

Read Also: Seven killed as suspected herdsmen attack Benue community

The Advocacy Centre youth volunteers network, under the umbrella body of One Million Youth Volunteers Network of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters in the Niger Delta, reported the incident.

The storehouse reportedly housed condensate meant for resale in the area.

The statement read, “Members of the Advocacy Centre youth volunteers network under the auspices of the One Million Youth Volunteers Network of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters in the Niger Delta in ONELGA told the Executive Director of YEAC-Nigeria, Dr. Fyneface Dumnamene Fyneface that the incident occurred in the late hours of Saturday, April 26 by about 11AM, killing five persons, four females and one male burnt beyond recognition.”

The advocacy organisation, while calling for an investigation to be carried out, warned residents and youths to shun pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft, artisanal refineries, and trading in illegally refined petroleum products.

It also added that, to avoid future occurrences, residents should refrain from using their homes as storage sites, emphasizing the severe implications.

“The group also used the opportunity to renew its call on the federal government to legalise artisanal refineries in the Niger Delta through the establishment of its July 27, 2020 proposed Presidential Artisanal Crude Oil Refining Development Initiative (PACORDI) and/or Modular Refineries for artisanal Refiners in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region to mitigate incidents of this nature.”

# WhatsApp counters FCCPC's \$220 million

By Damilola Olufemi



WhatsApp announced on Saturday that it would swiftly move to stay and appeal a ruling by Nigeria's Competition and Consumer Protection Tribunal, which upheld a \$220 million imposed by the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

In a statement issued in Lagos and shared with the News Agency of Nigeria, the messaging giant expressed its disagreement with the tribunal's decision.

The tribunal's ruling, delivered on Friday, not only upheld the hefty penalty but also directed WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta Platforms Incorporated, to pay an additional \$35,000 to the FCCPC for investigative costs.

## EARLIER MATTER

The FCCPC initially imposed the \$220 million fine over accusations that WhatsApp and Meta engaged in discriminatory data practices affecting Nigerian users. WhatsApp and Meta had appealed the penalty, but the tribunal dismissed their challenge.

The initially imposed the \$220 million fine over accusations and Meta engaged in discriminatory data practices affecting Nigerian users. WhatsApp and Meta had appealed the penalty, but the tribunal dismissed their challenge.

Responding to the decision, WhatsApp said: "We are urgently applying to stay the order and appeal today's decision to avoid any impact to

users."

The company further criticised the ruling, arguing that it misrepresented its practices. "WhatsApp relies on limited data to run its service and keep users safe and it will be impossible to provide WhatsApp in Nigeria, or globally, without the infrastructure of our parent company, Meta," it said.

WhatsApp stressed that it disagreed with the tribunal's findings, pointing out that the FCCPC's order included "multiple inaccuracies and misrepresented how WhatsApp worked."

The development marks a significant legal battle as WhatsApp seeks to protect its operations in one of Africa's largest digital markets.



# Inspiring journey of Dr. Olayemi Abiodun-Oyebanji to Govt house

By **Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi**

**D**r. Olayemi Jumoke Abiodun-Oyebanji, wife of the Executive Governor of Ekiti State, was born in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, into the distinguished family of High Chief Samuel Adedipe (Elerebi Omowa) of Irona Quarters, Ado-Ekiti. She commenced her education at Baptist Primary School, Irona, Ado-Ekiti, from 1976 to 1982, and continued at Baptist Secondary School, Ado-Ekiti, between 1982 and 1987, where she served with distinction as Head Girl. Motivated by a profound love for learning, she pursued a degree in Educational Management and Economics at the University of Ibadan, graduating in 1997 with a Second-Class Upper Division.

Following her mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) year, Dr. Oyebanji advanced her studies at the University of Ado-Ekiti (now Ekiti State University), earning a Master's degree in Educational Management in 2001. She further distinguished herself academically by obtaining her Doctorate degree in 2010 with a thesis titled "Resource Situation and Academic Staff Job Performance in Southwest Nigerian Universities." Her academic specialization spans Institutional Administration, Higher Education, Quality Assurance, Human Resource Development, and Leadership in Education.



She began her academic career as a Graduate Assistant at the University of Ado-Ekiti (now Ekiti State University) in 2000, steadily rising through the academic ranks. In 2013, she transferred to the University of Ibadan to be closer to her family, accepting a position as Lecturer II. Since then, she has advanced consistently and is currently an Associate Professor, awaiting promotion to full Professorship.

Throughout her career, she has undertaken numerous leadership and administrative roles within the university system, contributing significantly to academic development, quality assurance, community service, student affairs, and institutional governance.

Her professional affiliations reflect her dedication to scholarship and service. She holds membership in prominent national and international academic bodies, including the National Association

of Women in Academics, the National Association of Educational Administration and Planning, the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management in New Zealand, the Global Education Network, and the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria, among others. Her consultancy experience includes work with reputable organizations such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers, the State Universal Basic Education Board, and UNICEF. She has also participated in academic engagements across Nigeria and internationally, travelling to countries such as Ghana, Iceland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and Canada.

**Continue reading  
on next page**

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**D**r. Oyebanji has supervised several doctoral and Master's students and boasts over ninety publications in respected local and international journals, many of which are accessible on academic platforms such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate. Beyond academia, she enjoys a fulfilling family life, being happily married and blessed with children.

### Public Service and Advocacy

Currently serving as the First Lady of Ekiti State, following her husband's election in 2022, Dr. Oyebanji has extended her service to the public sphere with the same passion and dedication that marked her academic career. Recognized throughout Southwest Nigeria for her advocacy, she is a prominent voice in the promotion of women's rights, gender equality, and community development.

Among her many initiatives is the establishment of the Adire Ekiti Hub, which seeks to promote the state's rich cultural heritage while providing economic opportunities for women. The commissioning of the hub's main building and workshop in March

2024, officiated by Olori Aderonke Ogunwusi, wife of the Ooni of Ife, marked a significant milestone for the project and for Ekiti State. Dr. Oyebanji described the occasion as the beginning of a new chapter, promising long-term benefits for both beneficiaries and the local economy.

A deeply empathetic individual, she also founded the Widows and Orphans Hope (WAOH) Project, designed to support and empower vulnerable populations. Her life story reveals a personal history of resilience; she has openly shared the financial hardships she faced as a student, struggling to afford basic needs while pursuing her education. Nevertheless, through perseverance and faith, she achieved academic excellence and professional success.

In a 2023 interview with The PUNCH, she recounted asking her husband, Biodun Oyebanji, during their courtship whether he intended to enter politics, revealing her initial hesitation about political life. Despite his diplomatic answer at the time, she later embraced the divine direction of his political journey, confident that God's guidance would sustain him.

As First Lady, Dr. Oyebanji has made the empowerment of women and youth her primary mission. She has been a leading figure in the fight against gender-based violence, spearheading advocacy campaigns in universities across the state and strengthening the activities of the State Gender-Based Violence Management Committee. Through her efforts, she continues to push for safer, more inclusive environments for women and children while promoting community development, arts and culture, and social welfare.

### A Legacy of Leadership and Compassion

Dr. Olayemi Jumoke Abiodun-Oyebanji's life is a powerful testament to resilience, leadership, and service. Her journey from humble beginnings to distinguished academic achievement, combined with her ongoing commitment to public service, continues to inspire generations within and beyond Ekiti State. Balancing her roles as scholar, advocate, mother, and First Lady, she remains dedicated to building a more just, inclusive, and prosperous society for all.



# Hardship in Nigeria led me into music, singer Segun Johnson

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

**S**egun Johnson, a rising star in Nigeria's music scene, has opened up about the real reason he chose a music career.

Known for his lively performances and catchy hype songs, Johnson said it was not passion alone that brought him to the stage; hunger and hardship played a big role.

## Opening up to Teju Babyface

Speaking in an interview with popular media personality Teju Babyface, the singer shared his story of humble beginnings. During their conversation, Teju asked him a simple but powerful question: "Was music always what you wanted to do? Or when did you discover that music could work for you?"

Segun Johnson responded in Yoruba, saying, "Ebi ni, hunger ni," which means, "Hunger led me to it." His answer was honest, raw, and reflective of the reality many young Nigerians face today.

## Survival first, passion later

He explained that the tough economic situation in Nigeria left him with very few choices. "If you are in Nigeria, you don't have a choice," he added. Johnson made it clear that while he loved music, survival pushed him to take it seriously and turn it into a career.

Growing up, Johnson had dreams like many others. However, the lack of opportunities and financial difficulties forced him to find a way to make a living. Music became that way. What started as a necessity soon grew into a passion and a full-time profession.

## Building a unique brand

Today, Segun Johnson is a household name, especially at parties, weddings, and corporate events. He is famous for his energetic and engaging style of



hyping crowds, making every event lively and memorable. His popular songs, Sho Fine Gan and Sho Ma Nawo Yen Tan, have become favourites among party lovers and fans of live performances.

But the road to success was not smooth. Johnson had to work hard to build his brand. Without the support that many established artists enjoy, he carved a niche for himself by focusing on live performances rather than mainstream studio releases. His ability to connect with audiences, combined with his catchy lyrics and infectious energy, helped him stand out in a competitive industry.

## The climb to success

Transitioning from a struggling young man to a sought-after performer was not easy. Johnson recalled performing at small events for little or no pay just to gain experience and exposure. Each performance, no matter how small, became a steppingstone to bigger opportunities.

As more people noticed his unique talent, his popularity grew. Event organizers began to book him regularly. Fans loved his ability to make them dance, sing along, and feel good. Over time, Segun Johnson became more than just a performer; he became a symbol of hope



for many young Nigerians who dream of turning their struggles into success stories.

## An inspiration to many

Today, he continues to perform across Nigeria and beyond. His journey is a reminder that sometimes life pushes people into their destiny through unexpected paths. What started as a way to survive has now become a platform for Johnson to inspire others.

During the interview, Teju Babyface praised him for his honesty and resilience. He noted that many successful people share similar stories where hunger, hardship, and tough choices led them to discover their true talents.

## The journey continues

Segun Johnson's story is both inspiring and humbling. It highlights the reality many Nigerians face and the power of determination in overcoming challenges. Through his music and performances, he not only entertains but also shares a deeper message: with hard work, creativity, and persistence, it is possible to turn even the toughest situations into success.

# Army, Immigration officials searched for me, Davido reveals

**A**frobeats star Davido recalls running away as a teen to chase his music dreams, sparking a major search by his billionaire father and security forces.

In a recent interview, he revealed how his disappearance led to a full-scale search by Nigerian security agencies on the orders of his billionaire father, Dr. Deji Adeleke.

Speaking on the American podcast Bagfuel Brigade, Davido recalled how it all began shortly after the death of his mother. At the time, he was living alone with his father in a massive 16-bedroom mansion in Nigeria, while his siblings were studying abroad in the United States.

Despite his father's strict household, Davido secretly built a fully equipped music studio inside the mansion. He spent hours recording songs and experimenting with beats, all without his father's knowledge. Music quickly became his obsession.

"I was living alone with my dad in a 16-bedroom mansion because all my siblings were in America," Davido said. "I had a studio in the house and he didn't know. A complete studio where I spent most of my time making music and smoking."

## A bold escape to London

The secrecy could only last so long. Davido soon grew tired of hiding his passion. He made a bold decision that would change his life forever. He fled to London. There, he lived with a producer friend for six months, dedicating all his time to making music without any restrictions.

Meanwhile, back in Nigeria, chaos broke out in the Adeleke household. Davido's sudden disappearance sparked panic among his family members. His father, desperate to find him, contacted every



security agency he could reach. Immigration officers, the police, the army, and other forces were put on high alert to locate the missing son of one of Nigeria's richest men.

"My dad was looking for me. The army, immigration officers, every security agency in Nigeria was looking for Dr. Deji Adeleke's son, which is me," Davido explained.

## Caught at the airport

The search continued for months without success. Davido remained hidden in London, focused on creating music and shaping his future career. But his freedom eventually came to an end. When he decided to return to Nigeria, he was immediately recognised and caught at the airport.

He shared how the dramatic moment unfolded: "When I returned to Nigeria, I wasn't planning to go home. I landed at the airport intending to go to a friend's place, but the moment I stepped out, an army officer walked up to me and escorted me outside."

Waiting outside were several uniformed officers and his father.

## A surprising reunion

Davido braced himself for the worst. He expected a harsh scolding or even punishment. However, what happened next surprised him.

"I thought my dad would scold me, but instead he hugged me," Davido said. "He was happy to see me."

The experience marked a turning point in Davido's relationship with his father. Although his father had hoped he would follow a more traditional path, Davido's passion for music could no longer be denied. Over time, Dr. Deji Adeleke came to support his son's dreams, even though it was a far cry from the future he had first imagined for him.

## From runaway teen to global star

Today, Davido stands as one of Africa's biggest musical exports, with international awards, sold-out concerts, and hit records to his name. His journey from a runaway teenager to a global star is a testament to his determination, boldness, and unwavering love for music.

Through it all, the lessons of family, forgiveness, and following one's passion have stayed with him.



# Justin Bieber speaks out amid divorce rumours with wife Hailey

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

American pop star Justin Bieber has spoken out for the first time amid swirling rumours about trouble in his marriage to Hailey Bieber.

In recent weeks, social media platforms buzzed with claims that the celebrity couple was heading for a divorce. Fans and gossip pages speculated endlessly, pointing to public appearances and vague posts from the pair. The noise grew louder despite no confirmation from either Justin or Hailey.

A marriage under public scrutiny

Justin and Hailey Bieber, who married in a private ceremony in September 2018, have faced heavy public scrutiny throughout their relationship.

The couple, who recently celebrated a major milestone with the birth of their first child in August 2024, have remained mostly private about their personal lives.

However, the constant speculation appeared to reach a breaking point this week.

Justin responds with a message of faith

On Friday, Justin took to Instagram to address the rumours directly, using a lengthy and emotional post. In it, he appeared to push back against the negativity, emphasising forgiveness and faith over public judgment.

Without mentioning the divorce rumours outright, Bieber expressed frustration at those who spread falsehoods about his marriage. He called out what he described as the jealousy and negativity aimed at him and Hailey.

He wrote, "That feeling of guilt can be relieved. Not by going to church or reading your Bible but just receiving that God forgives. The message is forgiveness. Jesus forgives who the culture never forgives."

Coping with criticism and staying grounded

Bieber continued, sharing how he copes with criticism and hates from the public.



"They treat me like trash out here, but when I remember that I'm flawed too and that God forgave me, it helps me not to feel better than those who are mean and hurtful," he said. "When I'm really honest, I know I can also be mean and hurtful."

The singer also reflected on human nature, admitting that everyone struggles with their flaws. He pointed out that while he may not gossip or spread lies online, he still makes mistakes. "There's other stuff I do that I'm not proud of, but God is gracious with me," he added. "Hurt people hurt people."

Addressing the critics directly

In a more direct message to critics, Bieber hinted at why he believes the negativity exists. He suggested that jealousy might be at the heart of the criticism.

"Honestly, if I was you, it would be hard not to be jealous if I saw me and Hailey going so crazy," he wrote. "It's really up for us, and it's understandable why people can't stand it. I don't blame them."

Fans show support amid the rumours

The heartfelt post quickly went viral. Fans flooded the comments with messages of support, praising the singer for his

vulnerability and honesty. Some defended the couple, urging critics to give them privacy during this time.

Despite the rumours and online chatter, Justin and Hailey have not publicly confirmed any marital issues. Instead, both have continued to post glimpses of their life together on social media, sharing moments of joy and togetherness.

Focus on family and future

Earlier this month, Hailey posted a series of photos showing her and Justin enjoying a quiet weekend at home. In the pictures, the two looked relaxed and happy, further challenging the rumours of a split.

The couple, who have often spoken about the challenges of fame and maintaining a relationship in the public eye, seem determined to stick together. In past interviews, they have emphasised the importance of faith, communication, and patience in their marriage.

As of now, it seems Justin and Hailey are choosing to focus on their family and their future, rather than the endless noise online. While the rumours may continue, Justin's message is clear: forgiveness, not judgment, leads the way.

# Pope Francis buried at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome

By Friday Omosola



On Saturday, Pope Francis was laid to rest in his favoured Roman church after a funeral Mass at St Peter's Square.

The 88-year-old pontiff, who passed away on Monday, was interred during a brief 30-minute ceremony that commenced at 1:00 pm (1100 GMT) within the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, one of Rome's most significant ancient churches.

Video footage released by the Holy See captured cardinals affixing red wax seals to his simple wooden and zinc coffin.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who as camerlengo oversees the Vatican's operations until a new pope is chosen, sprinkled holy water over the coffin before it was lowered into its resting place in a side alcove.

Above the tomb hangs a replica of the pectoral cross Francis wore throughout his papacy.

Honouring his wish for humility, Francis had requested a plain burial site, with the tombstone bearing only the Latin inscription "Franciscus."

The marble used for the tomb was sourced from Liguria, a region tied to the Argentine-born pope's ancestral roots.

The late pontiff, born Jorge Bergoglio, had specified in his will both his burial place and the desire for a modest memorial, situated near the altar dedicated to Saint Francis.

His deep devotion to the Virgin Mary was well known; before and after each international trip, he made a point of visiting Santa Maria Maggiore to offer prayers.

Although several popes have been interred in the basilica, it had been centuries since the last — Pope Clement IX — was buried there in 1669.

In more recent times, St Peter's Basilica had become the customary burial site for popes.

Santa Maria Maggiore, one of Rome's four major papal basilicas, houses not only papal tombs but also the remains of notable figures like Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the architect behind St Peter's Square.

Constructed in the 5th century under Pope Sixtus III, the church is home to revered relics, including an icon of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus, traditionally attributed to Saint Luke.



# Trump, Zelensky meeting in Rome productive - U.S. Officials

By **Fatimah Idera**

**U**.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskiy had a “very productive” meeting on Saturday in Rome, a White House official said, as both leaders attended the funeral of Pope Francis.

A spokesman for Zelenskiy’s office said the two leaders, in an encounter in St. Peter’s Basilica, which lasted about 15 minutes, had agreed to have a second meeting later on Saturday and that their teams were working on arrangements for that.

The meeting at the Vatican, their first since an angry encounter in the Oval Office in Washington in February, comes at a critical time in negotiations aimed at bringing an end to fighting between Ukraine and Russia.

“President Trump and President Zelenskyy met privately today and had a very productive discussion. More details about the meeting will follow,” said Steven Cheung, White House communications director.

Zelenskiy’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, described the meeting as “constructive” in a post on social media.

Zelenskiy’s office released photographs of the Rome meeting. In one, the Ukrainian and U.S. leaders sat opposite each other in a large marble-lined hall, around two feet apart, and were leaning in towards each other in conversation. No aides could be seen in the image.

In a second photograph, from the same location, Zelenskiy, Trump, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and French President Emmanuel Macron were shown standing in a tight huddle. Macron had his hand on Zelenskiy’s



shoulder.

Washington is proposing a legal recognition that Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula annexed by Moscow in 2014, is Russian territory, something that Kyiv and its allies in Europe say is a red line they will not cross.

There are also differences in how quickly sanctions on Russia would be lifted if a peace deal was signed, what kind of security guarantees Ukraine would have, and how Ukraine would be financially compensated.

Trump and Zelenskiy have had a rocky personal relationship. At their Oval Office meeting, Trump accused the Ukrainian leader of “gambling with World War Three.”

Since then, Kyiv has tried to repair relations, but the barbs have continued. Zelenskiy has said Trump was trapped in a “disinformation bubble” that favoured Moscow, while the U.S. leader accused Zelenskiy of foot-dragging on a peace deal and making “inflammatory”

atements.

But the two men need each other. Trump requires Zelenskiy’s buy-in to achieve his stated ambition of bringing a swift peace between Russia and Ukraine, while Kyiv needs Trump to pressure Moscow into diluting some of the more onerous conditions it has set for a truce.

At the Oval Office meeting in February, a reporter who was present from a conservative U.S. news network accused Zelenskiy of disrespecting the occasion by not wearing a suit.

Zelenskiy, since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, has eschewed suits in favour of military-style attire, saying it is his way of showing solidarity with his countrymen fighting to defend Ukraine.

In Rome on Saturday, Zelenskiy again decided against a suit and instead wore a dark shirt, buttoned up to the neck with no tie, and wore a dark military-style jacket over the top of that.

# Russia claims victory over Ukrainian Forces in Kursk Region

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

All Ukrainian forces have been expelled from Russia's Kursk region, according to claims made by the Russian military on Saturday.

General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces, informed President Vladimir Putin during a video conference that the village of Gornal, the last Ukrainian-held settlement in the region, had been "liberated."

"Today, the last settlement in the Kursk region, the village of Gornal, has been liberated from Ukrainian forces," Gerasimov announced, as reported by AFP.

Ukrainian officials have not confirmed Russia's claims. In its Saturday morning update, Ukraine's General Staff stated that Ukrainian forces continue to resist Russian advances in the Kursk sector, countering assertions that they had been fully dislodged.

President Putin congratulated Russian troops and commanders, proclaiming that Kyiv's operation had "completely failed."

"The complete defeat of our enemy along Kursk's border region creates the right conditions for further successes for our troops and in other important areas of the front," Putin stated.

Ukraine's audacious offensive into Kursk, launched in August 2024, stunned even its Western allies. At its peak, Ukrainian forces controlled approximately 500 square miles of Russian territory, aiming to leverage the gains in potential ceasefire negotiations. However, by early 2025, Russian forces had gradually reversed Ukrainian advances, culminating in Saturday's announcement.

With Russian troops now fully securing the border, concerns are growing for Ukraine's neighboring Sumy region, as Russian forces prepare to increase pressure there, according to AFP.

In a striking development, Gerasimov confirmed that North Korean soldiers



fought alongside Russian troops during the defense of Kursk.

"North Korean soldiers participated in combat missions shoulder to shoulder with Russian servicemen during the repelling of the Ukrainian incursion," Gerasimov said, praising their "high professionalism, fortitude, courage, and heroism."

The admission follows months of speculation. In the fall of 2024, Ukraine, the U.S., and South Korea alleged that Pyongyang had deployed between 10,000 and 12,000 troops to Russia, claims that Moscow and Pyongyang had previously dodged with vague denials.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to end the conflict appear to be gaining momentum.

On Saturday, U.S. President Donald Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, following the funeral of Pope Francis. The two leaders spoke privately for approximately 15 minutes and agreed to continue discussions later the same day, according to Ukrainian presidential spokesman Serhii Nykyforov.

White House Communications Director Steven Cheung described the meeting as "very productive."

President Trump, who departed Italy

shortly after the funeral, expressed optimism about ongoing negotiations. On Friday, Trump's Middle East adviser, Steve Witkoff, had met with Putin, and Trump stated that both sides were "very close to a deal."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoed that sentiment in an interview with CBS's Face the Nation, suggesting that a potential agreement is within reach, though "some elements need to be fine-tuned."

"The President of the United States believes, and I think rightly so, that we are moving in the right direction," Lavrov said.

In a statement Friday night, President Zelenskyy emphasized the urgency of securing an unconditional ceasefire.

"Real pressure on Russia is needed so that they accept either the American proposal to cease fire and move towards peace, or our proposal, whichever one can truly work and ensure a reliable, immediate, and unconditional ceasefire, and then, a dignified peace and security guarantees," Zelenskyy said.

As talks intensify, the world watches closely, with hope, with caution, and with the heavy weight of a war that has already rewritten history.



# Epstein Accuser: Virginia Giuffre dies at 41

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Virginia Giuffre, one of the most prominent voices in the fight against sexual abuse and sex trafficking, and a key accuser of Jeffrey Epstein, has died by suicide at her farm in Western Australia, her family confirmed Friday. She was 41.

Her family remembered her as a “fierce warrior” who spent her life advocating for survivors of sexual exploitation, despite enduring unimaginable hardship herself.

“Virginia was the light that lifted so many survivors,” the statement read. “Despite all the adversity she faced in her life, she shone so bright. She will be missed beyond measure.”

Giuffre had been seriously injured last month when the car she was riding in was struck by a school bus. Her family did not comment on whether the incident had any connection to her death.

Born in California, she moved with her family to Florida during grade school. Her early years were marked by trauma; she revealed to the Miami Herald that she was first molested by a family friend at the age of seven, an experience she said irrevocably altered the course of her life.

As a teenager, Giuffre met British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell while working as a locker room attendant at President Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club, where her father was employed as a maintenance worker.



Giuffre alleged that Maxwell introduced her to Epstein, setting off a chain of abuse that would define much of her life’s narrative.

Giuffre became a central figure in the Epstein saga, publicly accusing him, Maxwell, and others, including Britain’s Prince Andrew, of sexual exploitation. In a high-profile lawsuit filed in 2021, Giuffre alleged that Prince Andrew sexually abused her when she was 17. Though the prince denied the allegations, the case was settled out of court in 2022.

Attorney Sigrid McCawley, who represented Giuffre, paid tribute to her client and friend in a statement: “Virginia was much more than a client to me; she was a dear friend and an incredible champion for other victims. Her courage pushed me to fight harder, and her strength was awe-inspiring. The world has lost an amazing human being today. Rest in peace, my sweet angel.”

Following Epstein’s 2019 death, ruled a suicide in a Manhattan jail cell while awaiting trial, Giuffre remained an unrelenting advocate for victims of sexual abuse. She founded Speak Out, Act, Reclaim (SOAR), a nonprofit dedicated to educating the public about sex trafficking and providing support for survivors.

In 2022, Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison for her role in Epstein’s decades-long abuse of underage girls, a conviction that Giuffre had long fought to see.

Virginia Giuffre’s death is a devastating loss for a community that found hope and strength in her advocacy. She leaves behind a legacy of bravery, resilience, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced.

# CIA Deputy Director's son killed while fighting in Ukraine

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**M**ichael Alexander Gloss, identified as the son of a deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was killed in Eastern Ukraine in 2024," NBC reported a CIA spokesperson as saying on Friday.

21-year-old Gloss was reportedly fighting in Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

He died on 4 April 2024 in "Eastern Europe", according to an obituary published by his family.

His mother was Juliane Gallina, who was appointed the deputy director for digital innovation at the Central Intelligence Agency in February 2024.

The story of how the son of a top-ranking US spy died fighting for Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is an unlikely tale of how homegrown anger at the United States and online radicalisation led from a middle-class Virginia childhood to the killing fields of eastern Ukraine.

On a VKontakte page attributed to Gloss, a high school football player born to parents who both served in the military, he described himself as "a supporter of the multipolar world. I ran away from home. traveled the world. I hate fascism. I love my homeland."

He also posted the flags of Russia and Palestine.

According to the investigative website iStories, Gloss is one of more than 1,500 foreigners who have signed contracts with the Russian military since February 2022.

The database for the enrollment office was later leaked, exposing him as having signed the contract in September 2023.

Sources told iStories that Gloss had been deployed with "assault units", those



engaged in harsh frontline fighting, in December 2023. An acquaintance said that he had been deployed to a Russian airborne regiment sent to storm Ukrainian positions near the city of Soledar.

"With his noble heart and warrior spirit Michael was forging his own hero's journey when he was tragically killed in Eastern Europe on April 4, 2024," his family wrote in the obituary, which did not mention Russia and Ukraine or discuss the circumstances of his death.

In university, Gloss was active in gender equality and environmental protest circles. He joined Rainbow Family, a leftwing environmental protest group, and in 2023 traveled to Hatay, Turkey, to assist in the recovery following the earthquake that killed more than 56,000 people. He had also become increasingly angry at the US for its support of Israel and the war in Gaza.

While in Turkey, Gloss began expressing a desire to go on to Russia.

"He was usually watching videos about Palestine and was so angry at America," one acquaintance told iStories. "He started

thinking about going to Russia. He wanted to war with the USA. But I think he was very influenced by the conspiracy theory videos."

After receiving a visa to Russia, he traveled around the country before arriving in Moscow, where he joined the military shortly before his documents expired.

Photographs and videos obtained by iStories showed he was sent to a Russian training camp, where he mostly trained alongside Nepali contract soldiers. Three months after enlisting, an acquaintance said, he was deployed to Ukraine as a member of an assault battalion.

The circumstance's of Gloss's death are not known. A friend said that his family had been informed by the Russian government of his death but were given little other information.

"It was announced that he died within the borders of Ukraine," the friend wrote. "We do not know whether he participated in the war. They did not provide any other detailed information."



# Canada's main election contenders raise investor hopes of pro-business era

By Fatimah Idera

Canada stands to elect a more business-friendly government than has been the case in recent years but its trade-dependent economy could be in line for an increased level of deficit spending, analysts and investors said before Monday's vote.

Spurred on by a global trade war, Canada's new prime minister, Mark Carney, who leads the Liberal Party, and his main election opponent, Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre, have both proposed sweeping changes to boost economic growth.

The Liberals are expected to win the most seats, according to the latest polls, although the race is tightening.

While U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs are a massive risk for the Canadian economy, market observers said they are encouraged by the policy choices offered in the election.

"I think Canadians should feel really good about their choices this time around," said Barry Schwartz, chief investment officer at Baskin Wealth Management. "You have to be the most bullish you can be on Canada for ten years."

Canadian GDP per capita, a measure of living standards, has barely increased in the years since Carney's predecessor, Justin Trudeau, came to power in 2015, held back by lackluster productivity growth.

Carney, who worked for Goldman Sachs before running the central banks of Canada and Britain, has canceled a proposed increase in capital gains taxes that was unpopular with investors. His government is aiming for free trade within the country by July 1, while both he and Poilievre have promised to fast track energy projects to diversify oil exports away from the United States.



"There is now a catalyst and momentum to do things that should have been done for decades," said Tony Stillo, director of Canada economics at Oxford Economics. "Everything from internal free trade to not putting all our eggs in the U.S. basket as far as a trading partner."

Canada sends about 75% of its exports to the United States, including steel, aluminum and autos, which have been hit with hefty U.S. tariffs, while its role as a major oil producer could leave it particularly vulnerable to a downturn in the global economy.

The IMF has slashed its Canadian growth forecast to 1.4% in 2025 and 1.6% in 2026 from 2% projected for both years in January.

But one positive is the move to a more business-friendly Canadian government, said Greg Taylor, a portfolio manager at Purpose Investments, adding the threat of tariffs has galvanized the country to take measures to raise productivity.

"The market is already assuming, because of the polls, that Carney is going to win," said Marc Chandler, chief market strategist at Bannockburn Global Forex. "He has already jettisoned some of Trudeau's less popular policies and I

think he is more likely to move closer to Europe."

## DEFICIT SPENDING

Election platforms released by the two main contenders in recent days show the Liberals planning to spend more than the Conservatives, while the Conservatives plan bigger tax cuts.

Oxford Economics' Stillo said the Liberal platform offered massive fiscal support for the economy, estimating additional deficit spending at 2.5% of GDP over the next four years compared to 0.3% in the Conservative platform.

His analysis included some adjustments to the candidates' numbers, including stripping out the estimate for revenue gains from stronger economic growth in the Conservative plan.

Investors tend to favor the mix of tax cuts, lower deficits and deregulation promised by Poilievre. The Canadian dollar would likely rally on a surprise Conservative victory while a Liberal win could reduce the need for additional Bank of Canada interest rate cuts and add to already elevated debt issuance, say some analysts.

# Turkey detains 47 members of Istanbul municipality in widening crackdown

By Fatimah Idera



**T**urkish authorities on Saturday detained 47 more members of the Istanbul municipality over accusations of corruption, broadcaster NTV and other media reported, amid a widening legal crackdown against the opposition and the city's jailed mayor.

Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who is also President Tayyip Erdogan's main political rival and leads him in some polls, was jailed in March pending trial over charges of corruption and aiding a terrorist group. The mayor has denied all charges and his arrest triggered mass protests, economic turmoil, and broad accusations of a politicised judiciary.

On Saturday, NTV said the municipality's secretary general, Imamoglu's chief of staff, the chairman and deputy chairman of the municipality's water and sewerage

administration (ISKI), as well as a department head at ISKI were detained, among others.

Authorities also detained the wife of Imamoglu's aide, Murat Ongun, NTV said. It added that several other senior officials in the municipality and institutions tied to it were taken as part of the probe.

The detentions bring the number of arrests since Imamoglu was detained to at least 150, though the exact number is unclear.

Imamoglu, who has dismissed all charges and accusations against him and his municipality as politically fabricated to remove an electoral challenge to Erdogan, said the people detained had done nothing wrong and called on citizens to battle "those rotting our state".

"What happened? Were you unable to fill up your empty file?" he said on X, referring to the ongoing legal cases, adding that the detentions were aimed at "filling empty files with lies and slander".

"It must be known very clearly that I will defend all of my colleagues until the end of this process. Nobody will be left behind. These days will pass," he added.

Imamoglu's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has accused the judiciary of doing Erdogan's bidding, saying the arrests of numerous CHP mayors are part of a broader campaign to neutralize elected opposition officials ahead of any future national elections.

The government has rejected those claims and says the judiciary is independent.



# Explosion at Iranian port injures 400

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The number of people injured in an explosion at a major southern Iranian port Saturday has risen sharply to 400, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

Mojtaba Khaledi, spokesman for Iran's National Emergency Organization, confirmed the updated toll. The blast occurred at Rajaei Port, located just outside the city of Bandar Abbas. Rajaei serves as a critical hub for the Islamic Republic, handling roughly 80 million tons of goods annually.

Footage shared on social media showed thick black smoke rising from the port, while additional videos captured the aftermath, shattered windows and damaged buildings miles from the explosion's epicenter.

Authorities have yet to determine the cause of the blast. Industrial accidents are not uncommon in Iran, particularly at aging oil and gas facilities hampered by years of international sanctions. However, Iranian state television was quick to stress that no energy infrastructure had been involved or damaged.

Mehrdad Hasanzadeh, a provincial disaster management official, told Iranian state TV that emergency responders were working to access the affected area and evacuate the site. He indicated the explosion appeared to originate from containers at the port but did not provide further details.

Reports from state television also mentioned a building collapse linked

to the blast, though specifics remain scarce.

Rajaei Port sits approximately 652 miles southeast of Tehran, near the Strait of Hormuz, a strategic chokepoint through which about 20% of the world's oil supply flows.

The explosion coincided with U.S.-Iranian negotiations in Oman on Saturday. Talks reportedly focused on Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, according to Iranian state media and a U.S. official.

As investigations into the cause of the explosion continue, officials have urged the public to avoid the area and allow emergency crews to conduct rescue operations.

# Federal Court probes deportation of 2 year old American citizen

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



A federal judge sharply criticized the U.S. government Friday, warning that a two-year-old American citizen may have been unlawfully deported to Honduras this week alongside her mother and older sister, all without due process.

Judge Terry Doughty of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana wrote in an emergency order that there was “strong suspicion that the Government just deported a U.S. citizen with no meaningful process,” according to court documents obtained by CBS News.

The child, identified in filings only as “V.M.L.,” was born in Baton Rouge in January 2023. Her deportation, despite her U.S. citizenship, has sparked outrage and urgent questions about government accountability and immigration enforcement practices.

Efforts to reach the child’s mother late Friday were unsuccessful. Justice Department lawyers informed Judge Doughty that “a call would not be possible” because the mother, and presumably V.M.L., had already been released in Honduras.

The family’s full immigration status remains murky. While the two-year-old is a U.S. citizen, it is unclear whether her mother, sister, and father possess legal status. However, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement that “it is common that parents want to be removed with their children.”

The sequence of events leading to the deportation unfolded rapidly and chaotically. On Tuesday morning, the mother and her daughters were detained during a routine Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) check-in in New Orleans, appointments the mother had faithfully attended for four years, often with her daughters by her side.

According to a petition filed by Trish Mack, a friend of the mother, the family had been dropped off at the ICE office by the girls’ father. After the family was taken into custody, ICE agents handed the father paperwork confirming that the mother was under arrest and promised she would “call him soon.”

Alarmed by the sudden detention, the

family’s attorney immediately contacted ICE, providing a copy of V.M.L.’s U.S. birth certificate to verify her citizenship. Nevertheless, that evening, an ICE agent informed the father by phone that the mother and daughters would be deported.

In a desperate attempt to keep his daughters in the United States, the father filed a petition for temporary custody on Tuesday, seeking to transfer legal guardianship to his sister-in-law, a U.S. citizen residing in Baton Rouge.

Despite this effort, ICE refused to release V.M.L. into her custodian’s care, arguing it was unnecessary because the child was “already with her mother.” According to court documents, an ICE agent also warned that if the father tried to retrieve the child, he too would be detained.

Now, the government faces intense scrutiny over how a U.S. citizen, a toddler no less, was deported without a hearing, a formal review, or proper notice.

Judge Doughty has scheduled a hearing in the case for May 16.



# Maresca: Palmer's goal drought is mental, not tactical

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca believes Cole Palmer's recent goal drought is a mental challenge rather than a technical issue. The 22-year-old forward, who had a blistering start to the season with 14 goals in his first 23 appearances, has failed to find the net in his last 16 games.

Palmer's struggles have coincided with Chelsea's dip in form, falling from second place in the Premier League to sixth, and currently sitting outside the Champions League qualification spots. Despite his goalless run, the England international has continued to be a key attacking presence, taking more shots (41) than any other Premier League player during that spell.

"For sure it's a mental thing," Maresca said in Friday's press conference. "It's not tactical or technical. Cole is still the player who scored 14 goals earlier this season. Nothing has changed around him — same club, same manager, same style."

Maresca pointed to the pressure Palmer feels to perform, especially with Chelsea's top-four hopes slipping away. "You can see he's a little bit worried because he wants to help the team. He's struggling a



bit with that, but he showed great spirit after the Fulham game," he added.

"If you go game by game, he had at least one or two chances every match. It's not about how the team is playing."

Palmer's consistency in getting into goal-scoring positions suggests the goals will return, but Maresca admits the mental weight of expectation could be affecting his young star's composure in front of goal.

The manager will not be on the touchline for Chelsea's clash with Everton on Saturday due to a one-match ban. Former Blues goalkeeper and current assistant coach Willy Caballero will take charge from the sidelines.

"They asked me if I need someone next to me in the stands," joked

Maresca. "I don't know if I'll be alone or with someone, but I'll still try to do my job as usual. It's now up to the leadership group in the squad to take responsibility."

Despite Chelsea's slide in the league, Maresca insists the campaign is not a failure. The Blues remain in contention for silverware, with a UEFA Conference League semi-final ahead.

"Compared with the past two years, it is not a failure," said the Italian. "How many times were Chelsea in the Champions League positions during those years? This season, we've been there for most of it. That's already an improvement."

With four league games left and a European trophy still up for grabs, Maresca is optimistic that both Palmer and the team can finish strong.

# Tears and tension: Real Madrid clash with copa final refs

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi



Real Madrid have firmly denied rumours they might pull out of Saturday's Copa del Rey final against Barcelona, despite growing tensions over referee criticism. This comes after an emotional news conference where match official Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea broke down in tears while addressing the pressure he and his family have faced due to repeated attacks from Real Madrid TV.

The 39-year-old referee, who will oversee Saturday night's highly anticipated Clasico in Seville, is the latest target of scrutiny from the club's media outlet. A controversial video highlighted his alleged bias, lack of top-tier tournament experience, and past decisions in matches involving both Barcelona and Real Madrid.

De Burgos Bengoetxea delivered a heartfelt message in response. "When your child comes home crying because schoolmates call his father a thief, it's totally messed up," he said. "I try to teach my son that his father is honest — above all, honest — and like any sportsperson, he can make mistakes."

Real Madrid, angered by the backlash from referees, responded by boycotting official pre-match activities, including the mandatory press conference and open training session. However, they later released a statement clarifying their commitment to the final.

"In light of the rumours... Real Madrid CF announces that our team has never considered withdrawing," the club said. "Despite the hostility and animosity manifested once again today, the values of football must prevail."

This isn't the first clash between Real Madrid and Spanish football authorities. In February, the club issued a scathing letter to the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) and Spain's High Council for Sports, alleging systemic bias and claiming that Spanish refereeing was "rigged" and "discredited." That letter followed a narrow 1-0 defeat to Espanyol.

VAR official Pablo Gonzalez Fuertes also addressed the situation, warning that

officials are nearing a breaking point. "Have no doubt we are going to take much more serious measures. We won't continue to bear what we're putting up with," he said. "Soon, you'll hear from us."

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick expressed concern over the escalating hostilities. "It's only a sport. It's only football," said the German. "Our responsibility is to protect everyone involved — not just the players. It's not nice what happened today. Something must be done."

The RFEF previously condemned the "repulsive" abuse faced by officials, including referee Jose Luis Munuera Montero after he controversially sent off Jude Bellingham in February.

As the countdown to kick-off continues, tensions remain high. The final in Seville is no longer just about silverware — it's now a focal point in an increasingly bitter battle between one of the world's most storied clubs and the officials charged with enforcing the rules of the game.



# Liverpool eye historic title as Slot urges focus

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

**L**iverpool manager Arne Slot says his players carry a “big responsibility” as they prepare to clinch a historic 20th top-flight title in front of their home fans this Sunday against Tottenham Hotspur.

The Reds need just a single point from their Anfield showdown to seal the Premier League title, after Arsenal’s 2-2 draw with Crystal Palace on Wednesday widened the gap at the top. With four games remaining, Liverpool have the chance to wrap up the league in dominant fashion, boasting a 12-point lead over second-placed Arsenal.

Sunday’s match holds extra significance for the Merseyside faithful. The last time Liverpool won the league — in the 2019-20 season under Jurgen Klopp — fans were unable to celebrate at Anfield due to pandemic restrictions. The iconic stadium stood empty as captain Jordan Henderson lifted the club’s first league trophy in 30 years.

Slot, who replaced Klopp last summer and is in his debut season at the helm, is determined to bring the moment home — this time with a full house watching.

“First of all, that’s a big responsibility,” said the Dutchman, who previously led Feyenoord to the Eredivisie title. “We are aware that the last time this club won the league, it was during Covid, so everybody is looking forward to Sunday. But we know there is still a job to be done — and that’s at least



one point.”

Slot praised the Anfield crowd for their unwavering support and urged them to rise once more for what could be a memorable day.

“Hopefully our fans support us in the best possible way — like they have all season — and are aware of the fact that we still need a point. It’s a nice game to look forward to, but it’s also a responsibility we have.”

Liverpool have been in imperious form this season, suffering just two league defeats — one of them at home — and boasting the Premier League’s best home record with 41 points from 16 games at Anfield.

Tottenham, meanwhile, arrive on Merseyside with history and form against them. Spurs have not won at Anfield since 2011 and have lost 18 league matches this term. With their focus likely leaning toward a crucial Europa League semi-final

first leg against Norwegian side Bodo/Glimt next Thursday, manager Ange Postecoglou may be forced to juggle priorities.

Despite some critics claiming this season’s Premier League lacked competitiveness, Slot dismissed the idea, calling it “a really difficult league” to win.

“In all the years before, it was quite clear which clubs would take the top spots,” he said. “But this season, it’s been very competitive — especially in the race for the top four and five.”

As Liverpool stand on the verge of a landmark achievement, the stakes couldn’t be higher. For the players, the manager, and the fans, Sunday could be the day they finally celebrate a title win together at Anfield — a scene long overdue.

Will you be watching the history unfold?