



**N1.81trn FCT budget for 2025 gets Senate approval** **Pg 2**

**El-Rufai to pay N900m in damages for unlawful detention of Adara elders** **Pg 5**



# The New Daily Prime

f @new\_daily\_prime x @prime\_daili149 @ @new\_daily\_prime

...your prime source for excellence in journalism

**Fuel subsidy removal: Two years after - gains, pains, what comes next?** **Pg 8 & 9**



**Trump orders halt on F1 visas for Nigerian students** **Pg 18**

**WORLD**

**Pg 19**

**Literary icon Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o dies at 87**



**WORLD**

**Pg 30**

**Chelsea crush Betis to claim Conference League glory**



**2-year-old British boy becomes youngest ever member of Mensa** **Pg 20**

# N1.81trn FCT budget for 2025 gets Senate approval

By Friday Omosola



**T**he Nigerian Senate has approved a statutory budget totalling ₦1.81 trillion for the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) for the 2025 financial year, following the bill's third reading.

The approval came after Senator Mohammed Ibrahim presented the harmonised report of the joint committee, which incorporated recommendations from both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The report was prepared in line with Sections 62, 80, 88, 89, and 299 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

According to the breakdown, the budget will be funded through projected revenue for the year.

Personnel expenses are allocated ₦150.35 billion (8.29%), overheads are pegged at ₦352.03 billion (19.41%), and

capital development receives the largest portion—₦1.31 trillion (72.31%).

The total recurrent expenditure, which includes both personnel and overhead costs, stands at ₦502.38 billion.

The significant capital allocation underscores the government's intention to boost infrastructure across Abuja and its satellite towns.

The joint committees noted that the budget was the result of in-depth consultations with FCT Minister Nyesom Wike and senior officials of the FCT Administration.

The spending plan aims to fast-track infrastructural growth, improve essential services, and meet the rising demands of residents in the capital city.

During his budget defence at the Senate the previous week, Wike raised concerns

over escalating security issues and the strained state of healthcare delivery in the territory.

He urged a swift and unified national response to address the challenges.

Wike also highlighted Abuja's strategic importance as the nation's administrative and diplomatic core, stressing the need for a tailored and robust security architecture.

On healthcare, the former Rivers State governor revealed that the FCTA recently acquired advanced diagnostic machines to upgrade health services across the FCT.

He described the move as a major stride in the administration's broader effort to enhance access to quality medical care.



# THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

## PUBLIC NOTICE COLOUR

## PRODUCT COLOUR

## EFFECTIVE FROM DECEMBER 1, 2024

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	372,500.00
HALF PAGE	213,000.00
QUARTER PAGE	106,500.00
14X2	118,000.00
10X6	261,585.50
10X5	255,238.00
10X4	206,890.50
10X3	179,608.00
9X6	254,977.00
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
5X2	42,916.50
4X4	60,166.50
4X3	36,499.50
4X2	29,333.50
3X3	28,000.00
3X2	17,400.00
2X2	13,000.00
2X1	8,600.00
1X1	4,400.00

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	329,868.50
HALF PAGE	192,500.00
QUARTER PAGE	100,000.00
14X2	109,500.00
10X6	242,500.00
10X5	237,500.00
10X4	192,500.00
10X3	171,000.00
9X6	232,500.00
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
5X2	40,379.50
4X4	55,000.00
4X3	31,000.00
4X2	22,003.50
3X2	17,260.00
2X2	12,945.00
2X1	8,630.00
1X1	4,315.00

## POLITICAL COLOUR

SIZE	RATE
CENTRESPREAD	1,200,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD	885,000.00
FULL PAGE	420,000.00
HALF PAGE	213,250.00
QUARTER PAGE	115,012.50

## POLITICAL BLACK & WHITE

SIZE	RATE
CENTRESPREAD	1,050,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD	745,000.00
FULL PAGE	315,777.50
HALF PAGE	184,700.00
QUARTER PAGE	95,222.50

## CORPORATE BLACK & WHITE

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	254,533.50
HALF PAGE	142,787.50
QUARTER PAGE	80,706.50
14X2	78,222.50
10X6	217,830.00
10X5	192,305.50
10X4	142,787.50
10X3	121,355.50
9X6	192,305.50
9X3	107,757.50
8X6	170,725.00
8X3	70,390.00
7X4	58,666.50
6X4	67,048.00
6X3	53,361.50
6X2	37,694.00
5X6	83,850.00
5X4	55,900.00
5X3	43,705.00
5X2	27,938.00
4X4	44,493.00
4X3	33,524.00
4X2	22,350.00
3X2	16,763.00
2X2	10,877.00
2X1	5,588.50
1X1	2,795.50

## SPECIAL POSITIONS

2X6 FRONT PAGE	700,000.00
2X6 BACK PAGE	300,000.00
2X6 INSIDE PAGE	155,000.00
3X6 FRONT PAGE	1,200,000.00
4X6 FRONT PAGE	2,250,000.00
5X6 FRONT PAGE	3,350,000.00
10X6 FRONT PAGE	8,250,000.00
EARPIECE FRONT PAGE(1.5X2)	246,500.00
EARPIECE INSIDE PAGE(1.5X2)	117,875.00
EARPIECE BACK PAGE	236,796.50
CENTRE SPREAD COLOUR (PUBLIC NOTICE)	1,027,000.00
CENTRE SPREAD COLOUR (PRODUCT)	929,000.00
CENTRESPREAD B&W	800,000.00
CENTRE SPREAD HALF COLOUR	575,000.00
CENTRESPREAD STRIP COLOUR	191,668.50
DOUBLE SPREAD COLOUR	721,500.00
DOUBLE SPREAD HALF COLOUR	432,881.00
DOUBLE SPREAD STRIP COLOUR	144,294.00
CENTRE SPREAD B&W	835,000.00
CENTRE SPREAD HALF PAGE B &W	550,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD B &W	725,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD HALF B &W	425,000.00
FULL WRAP AROUND	15,000,000.00
HALF WRAP AROUND	8,500,000.00
HALF PAGE FRONT	5,500,000.00

## PUBLIC NOTICE BLACK & WHITE

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	280,690.00
HALF PAGE	164,178.00
QUARTER PAGE	84,641.50
10X6	228,000.00
10X5	201,600.00
10X4	149,440.00
10X3	127,108.00
9X6	201,600.00
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
5X3	49,375.00
5X2	32,916.50
4X4	52,666.50
4X3	39,499.50
4X2	26,333.50
3X2	19,750.00
2X2	13,000.00
2X1	6,500.00
1X1	3,292.00

## PRODUCT BLACK & WHITE

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	210,795.50
HALF PAGE	124,236.00
QUARTER PAGE	70,950.00
14X2	76,128.35
10X6	194,961.00
10X5	162,222.445
10X4	103,963.00
10X3	N/A
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
6X2	29,858.00
5X6	71,378.00
5X4	42,825.00
5X3	29,858.00
5X2	22,841.00
4x4	N/A
4X3	N/A
4X2	17,737.50
3x3	23,458.00
3X2	14,923.00
2X2	10,200.00
2X1	5,439.50
1X1	2,700.00

## ALLURE RATE

SIZE	RATE	TOTAL
CENTRESPREAD		967,500.00
DOUBLE SPREAD		806,250.00
ALLURE COVER		750,000.00
(IBC) Inside Back Cover		376,250.00
(IFC) Inside Front Cover		430,000.00
(BC) Back Cover		483,750.00
Full Page		430,000.00
10X5		295,625.00
Half Page		225,000.00
EVENT		250,000.00

## PICTURE & CAPTION

SIZE	RATE	7.5% VAT	TOTAL
PHOTO NEWS PAGE 2	50,000.00	3,750.00	53,750.00
PHOTO NEWS (3X3)	30,000.00	2,250.00	32,250.00
PHOTO NEWS (4X4)	53,333.30	4,250.00	57,583.30
PRESS RELEASE (4X4)	30,000.00	2,250.00	32,250.00
EVENT COVERAGE	100,000.00	7,500.00	107,500.00
FEATURES	200,000.00	15,000.00	215,000.00

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**SERIES DISCOUNT**  
5 PAGES 2.5%  
10 PAGES 5%  
15 PAGES & ABOVE 7.5%

**SURCHARGE**  
PAGE 3 (100%)  
PAGE 4, 5, 7 AND 8 (50%)  
PAGE 2 (75%)

**LOOSE INSERT**  
LEAFLET, POSTERS 1,000 COPIES  
SPECIAL INSERTS (8 PAGES) COPIES  
SPECIAL INSERTS (4 PAGES) 1,000 COPIES  
HANDLING CHARGES FOR LESS THAN 35,000 COPIES  
HANDLING CHARGES MORE THAN 35,000 COPIES

**CLASSIFIED ADVERT RATES**  
CHANGE OF NAME  
GUIDE BLACK & WHITE  
GUIDE COLOUR

25,000.00  
45,000.00  
30,000.00  
75,000.00  
100,000.00

2,000.00  
3,750.00  
4,250.00

## CONTACT US

**Correspondent Address:**  
Real Group Plaza, No.1 Junaid Dosumu  
Street, CBD, Alausa, Ikeja, Lagos  
**Call the Editor on: 07025014298, 09014323792**

**E-mail Address:**  
**info@newdailyprime.news**  
Terms and Conditions apply

**ALL RATES ARE VAT INCLUSIVE**

# Tinubu pledges tougher crackdown on corruption, says 'no hiding place for looted funds'

By Friday Omosola

**P**resident Bola Tinubu has reaffirmed his administration's firm commitment to combating corruption, vowing to recover stolen assets and ensure no refuge for corrupt individuals.

Speaking at a one-day Asset Recovery Summit held in Abuja yesterday, Tinubu decried the deep-rooted impact of corruption across key sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

He noted that the consequences of diverted public resources remain starkly visible across the country.

Highlighting the damaging effects of corruption—including weakened institutions, a loss of public trust, and the denial of basic services to vulnerable citizens—Tinubu promised that his government would pursue offenders without fear or favour.

"My government is resolute in its efforts to reclaim misappropriated funds. Every kobo recovered will be returned to serve the Nigerian people," he declared.

"We are committed to bolstering anti-corruption frameworks, ensuring transparency, and enforcing accountability, regardless of whose interests may be affected."

The president praised the organisers of the summit, describing its theme, "Synergising Towards Effective Assets Recovery and Management"—as timely and essential to Nigeria's drive for improved governance and sustainable development.

According to Tinubu, asset recovery not only restores public wealth but also reinforces the principles of justice and restitution.

"It's about rebuilding trust and ensuring that public funds are used for the collective benefit," he said.

"The message is clear: there will be no sanctuary for corruption in Nigeria."



He further explained that his administration has taken deliberate measures to promote transparency in the deployment of recovered assets, particularly by allocating them to critical infrastructure projects.

Among the projects cited were the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the Second Niger Bridge, and the Abuja-Kano Road, along with rural electrification schemes.

"These initiatives reflect our determination to deliver on democratic dividends through transparency and service delivery," Tinubu stated.

He also stressed that Nigeria remains committed to international standards, especially the Global Forum on Asset Recovery (GFAR) Principles.

The country has continued to engage civil society organisations in overseeing how recovered funds are used, he added, pointing to periodic audits and public disclosures as vital tools for institutional accountability.

Also speaking at the summit, Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, highlighted recent milestones achieved in asset recovery.

Fagbemi said agencies including the Federal Ministry of Justice (via its Asset Recovery and Management Unit), EFCC, ICPC, NDLEA, NFIU, and the Nigeria Police had made significant contributions

towards reclaiming illicit wealth.

He disclosed that the EFCC alone, in 2024, had recovered over ₦248 billion, \$105 million, and seized 753 duplexes.

The ICPC reportedly reclaimed ₦29.7 billion and \$966,900 in assets, while the NDLEA intensified asset seizures linked to narcotics trafficking, ensuring such funds were not redirected to fuel more criminal activity.

In terms of international recoveries, Fagbemi noted that the Federal Ministry of Justice had, between 2017 and 2024, facilitated agreements leading to the return of over \$763 million and £6.47 million.

He added that \$102.88 million and £2.06 million had been recovered so far in 2024, citing specific cases including Galactica Assets (\$52.88 million), the Glencore fine (\$50 million), and Useni/Miner (£2.06 million). He mentioned ongoing discussions to recover other offshore assets.

Between 2017 and 2024, he said, a total of \$659.9 million and £6.47 million in repatriated funds were channelled into conditional cash transfer programmes and key infrastructure projects under the Presidential Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF), including the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, Second Niger Bridge, and Abuja-Kano Road.



# El-Rufai to pay N900m in damages for unlawful detention of Adara elders

By Friday Omosola



**T**he Federal High Court sitting in Kaduna has ordered the former governor of Kaduna State, Nasir El-Rufai, alongside five others, to pay ₦900 million in compensation for the illegal detention of Adara community elders in Kajuru LGA back in 2019.

Justice Hauwa'u Buhari delivered the ruling in favour of Awemi Dio Maisamari and eight fellow elders who were arrested and held without justification in connection to the murder of their traditional leader, Raphael Maiwada Galadima.

El-Rufai, who was sued in his personal capacity, was held

responsible for sanctioning the arrest and detention of the elders.

The court rejected the respondents' objections that questioned the jurisdiction of the Federal High Court and attempted to classify the matter as a tort rather than a fundamental rights issue.

Reacting to the judgement, the plaintiffs' lead counsel, Gloria Ballason, hailed it as a significant legal win.

"This decision marks a pivotal moment in challenging executive impunity. It sends a clear message that those in power can be held accountable even after their

tenure," she stated.

The elders were apprehended during a 2019 town hall meeting called by El-Rufai, following the kidnapping and subsequent killing of their monarch.

Among those detained were a former state commissioner and a retired police officer.

They remained in custody for several months until the Kaduna State Attorney General advised their release, citing a lack of legal grounds for their continued detention.

# Strategic partnerships, investment key to solving Nigeria's housing crisis – Minister

By Friday Omosola



The Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development, Yusuf Ata, has reaffirmed that strategic partnerships and investment remained central to resolving Nigeria's housing challenges.

Ata made this known in Abuja yesterday during a meeting with Allen Le and Partners, an international investment consulting firm based in Vietnam.

"The primary mandate of the ministry is to provide mass housing for Nigerians, and we welcome potential collaboration with Ms Allen Le and Partners International Investment Consulting Joint Company in achieving this goal," the minister stated.

He reiterated the ministry's commitment to tackling Nigeria's housing deficit through public-private partnerships and investment.

He noted that the ongoing construction of Renewed Hope Cities and Estates was a top priority under President Bola Tinubu's administration.

"Under the Renewed Hope Agenda, we are constructing 3,000 housing units each in Lagos, Abuja, and Kano for the Renewed Hope Cities, and 250 housing units in each of the 36 states for the Estates," Ata said.

He further disclosed that the ministry's social housing initiative aimed to deliver 77,400 housing units, 100 units in each of Nigeria's 774 local government areas.

"We need to know specifically how we will partner with you. Make a formal proposal to the Ministry indicating where you want to collaborate with us. We look forward to clearly seeing the areas you want us to come in," he added.

Ata stressed the ministry's openness to partnerships that align with its mandate of providing affordable and sustainable housing for Nigerians.

He also revealed that 30 percent of the 77,400 social housing units would be allocated to low-income Nigerians.

He commended President Tinubu for

insisting on the 30 percent allocation, despite a proposal to reduce it to 20 percent.

Speaking earlier, the leader of the six-man delegation, Allen Ke Nam of SV-NED Incorporated, expressed interest in contributing to Nigeria's growing housing sector.

He sought partnership with the Federal Government in the construction of affordable homes for Nigerians and requested land to facilitate the investment.

Allen Le Nam noted that the collaboration would boost employment and skills acquisition, as the company planned to introduce modern construction methods during project implementation.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Shuaib Belgore, commended the delegation for their presentation and assured them of the ministry's readiness to collaborate on affordable housing delivery.



# UTME: We are not asking candidates to reprint exam slips – JAMB

By Alade Adisa

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB, has said it is not asking candidates to reprint exam slips for any further resit of its Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, UTME.

The Board, in a statement on Wednesday, said people should disregard such messages making the rounds, even though they are emanating from a 66019 short code, being used by JAMB, the board described the short code as a spoofed version.

"The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board wishes to draw the public's attention to misleading messages circulating via a spoofed version of its 66019 shortcode.

"These messages instruct candidates, some of whom have already sat for the



resit examination and received their results, to reprint their examination slips for a resit examination.

"We categorically state that these messages are not from JAMB. There are currently no scheduled examinations, and candidates who have successfully completed the resit examination and

received their results need not be concerned. Such messages are fraudulent and intended to sow confusion.

"The only examination that JAMB is planning to conduct, which has yet to be scheduled, is the foreign examination held in nine countries across Europe, the Middle East, and certain African nations.

"Additionally, there will be a mop-up examination for candidates who missed the main and resit examinations and have been granted waivers only for 2025 to participate in the usual mop-up for those who experienced biometric failures.

"We urge the public to disregard these deceptive messages. Those qualified for the mop-up examination, as specified, will be duly notified once preparations are finalised."

# Tinubu appoints new governing councils for UNIABUJA, UNN, NAU

By Friday Omosola

President Bola Tinubu has appointed new members to the governing councils of three federal universities—the University of Abuja (UNIABUJA), the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU).

Bayo Onanuga, the Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, announced the appointments in a statement yesterday.

The appointment came after Tinubu, in February 2025, dissolved the governing council of the University of Abuja and dismissed the university's vice-chancellor, Aisha Maikudi, following controversy surrounding her eligibility for the position.

For the University of Abuja, Tinubu appointed Professor Rosemary Iriowen Egonmwan from the South-South region, Adedeji Adefuye from the South-West,



Professor Sarki Abba Abdulkadir from the North-West and Professor Aminu Mohammed Dukku from the North-East.

At the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the newly appointed council members are Barrister Ogbonna Eugene Odo from the South-East and Muhammad Inuwa Tahi from the North-West.

For Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Tinubu appointed Nkem Okeke, Ofoke Chukwuma Charles Ugbala, and Dame Amina Patrick Yakowa from the South-East and North-West respectively, along with Nojeeb Oriola Agunbiade from the South-West.



# Fuel subsidy removal: Two years after – gains, pains, what comes next? **By Alade Adisa**

On May 29, 2023, President Bola Tinubu, in his inaugural speech as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, made a landmark declaration: “Subsidy is gone.” With that single phrase, he signaled the end of the petrol subsidy regime in Nigeria. While subsidies on diesel and kerosene had already been removed by the previous administration, petrol remained untouched due to anticipated widespread economic impacts. The fuel subsidy, long seen as a populist tool, had become financially unsustainable.

## The Origins of Fuel Subsidies

Nigeria began subsidizing fuel in the 1970s in response to the global oil crisis sparked by the Israeli-Arab war. Although the surge in oil prices created a financial windfall for the country, local refining capacity lagged behind national demand. At that time, Nigeria had only one refinery — the Old Port Harcourt Refinery, commissioned in 1965 with a capacity of 60,000 barrels per day. Additional refineries followed, including Warri (1978), Kaduna (1980), and a second Port Harcourt refinery (1989). The subsidy policy was formally embedded in law with the 1977 Price Control Act, which made it illegal to sell certain goods, including petrol, above regulated prices.

## Pre-Removal Landscape: A System Riddled with Corruption

Over the decades, the subsidy system became a hotbed of corruption. The administration of President Goodluck Jonathan witnessed severe allegations of fraud in subsidy payments, especially due to Nigeria’s dependence on imported refined fuel.

Turnaround maintenance of local



refineries was often promised but rarely fulfilled. As of 2023, only two of the four national refineries operated at minimal capacity — barely reaching 50% utilization.

In 2012, the House of Representatives revealed that over \$6 billion had been misappropriated through fraudulent subsidy claims. A committee chaired by Hon. Farouk Lawan was formed to investigate, but the effort was later tainted by bribery scandals involving Lawan himself and another committee member, Emenalo Boniface.

Despite public outcry and protests, including a general strike, the Jonathan administration partially reinstated the subsidy after initially removing it on January 1, 2012, raising petrol prices from ₦65 to ₦140 per litre. Public pressure forced a reduction to ₦97.

## Post-May 2023: The Pains Begin

Although many Nigerians acknowledged the need to end fuel subsidies, there was no consensus on how or when to implement the policy. The abrupt announcement by President Tinubu

triggered economic shockwaves.

Labour Party’s 2023 presidential candidate, Mr. Peter Obi, likened the process to removing a tooth without anesthesia — arguing that while the removal was necessary, the execution lacked empathy.

## Spiraling Costs and Rising Hardship

Since the subsidy removal, virtually every sector has felt the impact. The cost of living has risen sharply, and job losses have intensified.

Alhaji Haruna Danjuma, National President of the National Parent Teacher Association of Nigeria (NAPTAN), noted the strain on families. “Many parents are struggling. Some have lost their jobs, and students can no longer afford basic upkeep,” he said, pointing out that the new student loan scheme is not sufficient to meet demand.

**Continue reading  
on next page**

# Cont from page 8

Former National President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Comrade Lucky Emonefe, acknowledged the provision of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses but insisted more is needed.

Transport costs have surged, with fares from Lagos to Ibadan rising from ₦1,000–₦1,500 to ₦5,000 per trip. The financial burden has forced people to cut back on travel, leading to a noticeable decrease in city traffic.

## The High Cost of Doing Business

For petrol station owner Mr. Soji Ogunesan in Lagos, the new operating reality is daunting. “Starting a filling station used to cost around ₦40 million. Now, it requires over ₦300 million,” he said. Many stations now share fuel deliveries due to high upfront costs and falling demand.

## The Gains: Silver Linings in a Tough Transition

Despite widespread hardship, the subsidy removal has brought some benefits.

1. Curbing Smuggling – Fuel smuggling into neighbouring countries — including Niger, Chad, and Cameroon — has declined. Nigeria’s artificially low fuel prices previously encouraged cross-border black markets. The new pricing regime has

disrupted that trade.

2. Increased Government Revenue – Monthly allocations to the three tiers of government have more than doubled. What used to average ₦600 billion now exceeds ₦1.3 trillion. This has boosted the financial standing of federal, state, and local governments — though concerns remain about how well the funds are utilized.

3. Emergence of Local Refineries – The Dangote Refinery — the largest in Africa — has started production. Several modular refineries have also emerged in states such as Edo, Abia, and Anambra. While most currently produce diesel, petrol production is expected to follow.

The BUA Refinery, owned by industrialist Abdul Samad Rabiu, is also poised to enter the market, potentially increasing competition and stabilizing prices. So far, fuel availability has improved, and long-standing fuel queues have diminished.

## Calls to Revive Government Refineries

The successful operation of private refineries has intensified pressure on the government to rehabilitate state-owned ones. Nigerians are questioning why privately funded refineries thrive while government facilities remain dormant.

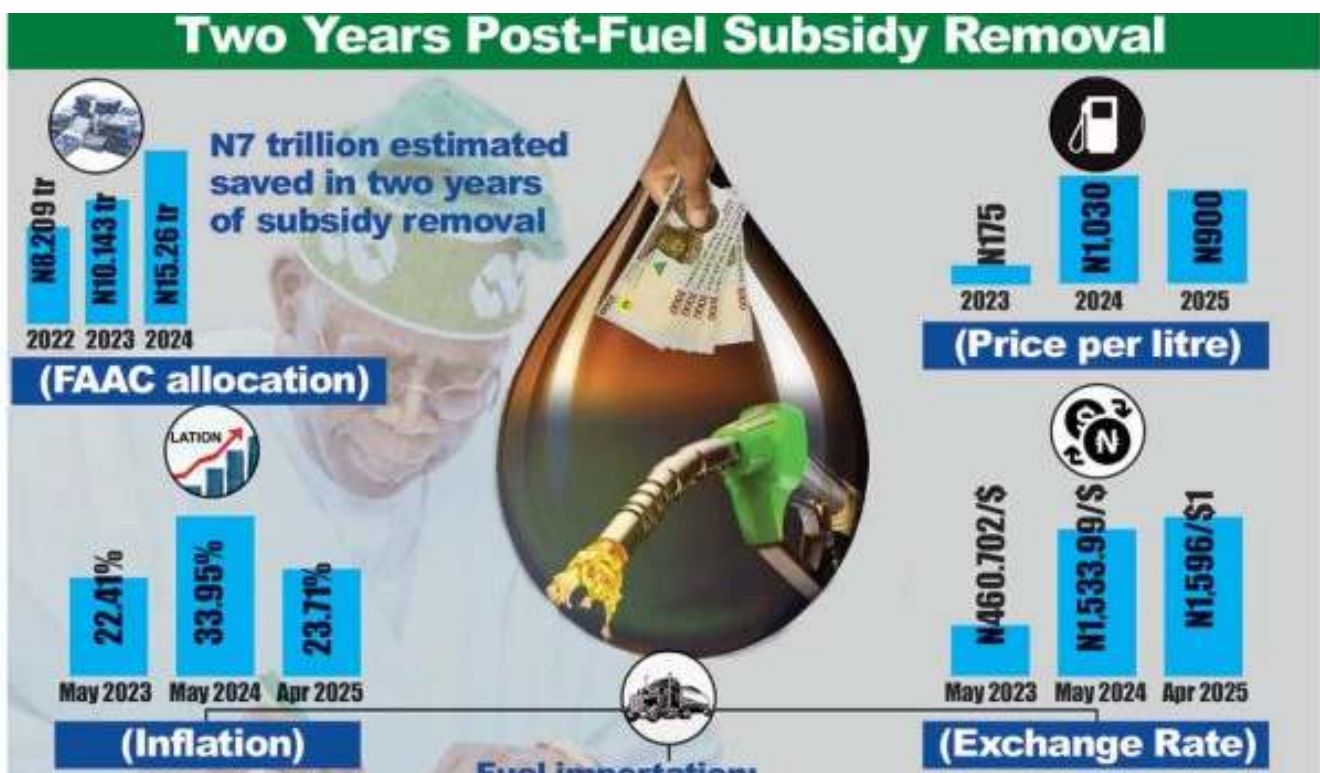
Reviving these refineries would create jobs, reduce fuel prices, and rejuvenate abandoned NNPC depots across the country.

## What’s Next for Nigeria?

The long-term goal is to transform Nigeria into a net exporter of refined petroleum products. This would conserve foreign exchange, which is currently depleted by fuel imports consuming nearly 60% of forex earnings.

To realize this goal, continued investment in local refining, improved infrastructure, and transparent governance are critical. Strategic planning is also necessary to ensure that revenue gains from subsidy removal are effectively deployed to improve citizens’ welfare.

Two years after subsidy removal, Nigeria is grappling with both the costs and the opportunities of economic reform. While the pains are real and widespread, the gains — particularly in revenue, refinery investment, and reduced smuggling — offer a glimmer of hope. The challenge for the government is to cushion the impacts on citizens while accelerating reforms to build a more self-sufficient and equitable economy.





# Bagudu: FG to boost transport sector through innovative PPP models

By Friday Omosola

The Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Abubakar Bagudu, has revealed the federal government plans to adopt innovative public-private partnership (PPP) strategies to improve Nigeria's transport infrastructure, particularly in the road sector.

Bagudu disclosed this during a courtesy visit by the new Japanese Ambassador to Nigeria, Hideo Suzuki, at his office in Abuja.

Bagudu emphasised that Nigeria is actively testing new approaches to road infrastructure development through strategic partnerships.

He noted that sustainable collaboration is essential for long-term growth, given the country's heavy reliance on road transportation.

The minister explained that under the Agenda 2050 Long-Term National Development Plan, Nigeria projects an annual infrastructure investment requirement of at least \$100 billion to achieve its goal of a \$30,000 per capita GDP by 2050.

"In line with President Bola Tinubu's eight-point agenda, we are committed to building a \$1 trillion economy within the next five years. This is an ambitious goal, and we have already achieved over 10% of this target," Bagudu stated.

The minister underscored the importance of overcoming underinvestment in infrastructure and encouraged the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to apply its global expertise and innovative models to Nigeria's development needs.

He expressed gratitude for JICA's growing involvement in various national projects, describing the Nigeria-Japan partnership as a pathway to integrating



global best practices while preserving each nation's unique identity and development goals.

Meanwhile, Suzuki highlighted the significance of the ongoing Data Collection Survey on Transport and Logistics in Nigeria.

He also mentioned that the project titled "Development of a Supportive Environment for Start-ups and Addressing Social Challenges," signed in Abuja in April 2024, was the first of its kind from Japan and had already garnered significant interest in Tokyo due to its innovative and inclusive approach.

Suzuki further outlined other Japanese-backed initiatives in Nigeria, including the FCT Reduction of Non-Revenue Water Project, the Promotion of Market-Oriented Agricultural Extension Systems for Livelihood Improvement, and the Post-Harvest Processing and Marketing Pilot Project in Nasarawa and Niger States.

"These initiatives reflect Japan's strong

commitment to supporting Nigeria in developing inclusive systems that address real-world challenges," he said, expressing a desire to deepen bilateral cooperation across various sectors.

Suzuki succeeds Ambassador Matsunaga Kazuyoshi, who served in Nigeria for four years.

Also speaking, the Director overseeing the Office of the Permanent Secretary and Director of the International Cooperation Department, Samson Ebimaro, reaffirmed the ministry's mandate to grow the economy through the creation of an enabling environment for investment and infrastructure development.

"Boosting key economic indicators requires efficient infrastructure, especially in transport," Ebimaro said.

Nigeria's primary exports to Japan include crude oil, petroleum products, cocoa, and cashew nuts, while Japan exports machinery, vehicles, and chemical products to Nigeria.



# Nigeria's public debt nears N180trn as President seeks new leading

By Damilola Olufemi

Nigeria's total public debt is on course to cross ₦180 trillion, following a formal request by President Bola Tinubu to the National Assembly for authorisation to secure additional external and domestic financing worth ₦34.15 trillion.

In the official correspondence sent to both legislative chambers, President Tinubu outlined a proposal for external loans amounting to more than \$21.5 billion, equivalent to about ₦33.39 trillion based on the current exchange rate of ₦1,590 to the dollar.

Tinubu had requested the backing of the National Assembly for a new round of borrowing aimed at stabilising Nigeria's economy and addressing key infrastructure and pension challenges.

The request, laid out in three separate letters read on the floor of the House of Representatives by Speaker Tajudeen Abbas, outlines plans for substantial foreign and domestic borrowing.

In one of the letters, the president proposed the establishment of a foreign currency-denominated issuance programme within Nigeria's local debt market. This initiative, which would be managed by the Debt Management Office (DMO), is expected to raise \$2 billion under the provisions of the Presidential Executive Order on Foreign Currency Denominated Financial Instruments, Local Issues Programme of 2023.

According to Tinubu, the aim is not merely to borrow but to create local opportunities for dollar-denominated investments, deepen the financial market, and stabilise the foreign exchange system. He stated that "the proceeds will be channelled into critical sectors of the economy capable of driving growth, enhancing infrastructure, creating employment, and boosting foreign exchange inflows."

The proposal includes a broader external borrowing plan that totals \$21.54 billion,



₦2.19 billion, and 15 billion Japanese Yen, along with a grant of €65 million. The president emphasised the urgent need for this facility in light of the economic strain caused by fuel subsidy removal and other fiscal adjustments.

"In light of the significant infrastructure deficit in the country and the paucity of financial resources needed to address this gap amid declining domestic demand, it has become essential to pursue prudent economic borrowing to close the financial shortfall," he explained.

Tinubu assured the legislature that the funds would be used to deliver large-scale infrastructure projects, with a focus on transportation, healthcare, and other development programs in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. He added that "this initiative aims to generate employment, promote skill acquisition, foster entrepreneurship, reduce poverty, and enhance food security, as well as to improve the livelihoods of Nigerians."

He urged lawmakers to act swiftly in approving the requests and reiterated his administration's pledge to maintain transparency and responsible financial management.

The Senate referred the borrowing proposal to its committee on local and

foreign debts, while the House assigned it to the committees on national planning and pensions for detailed consideration.

## Nigeria's public debt rises

Nigeria's public debt ballooned by nearly 49 per cent in 2024, reaching ₦144.66 trillion, up from ₦97.34 trillion the previous year. Of this, the Federal Government alone accounted for ₦137.28 trillion, or 95 per cent of the total.

With the new borrowing requests and the ₦10.85 trillion already raised from domestic markets between January and April 2025, the total debt is now projected to exceed ₦180 trillion.

The government's ability to manage its debt repayments appears to be weakening. The debt service-to-revenue ratio rose to 131 per cent during January and February 2025, a significant jump from 118 per cent during the same period in 2024.

Central Bank data for the first two months of 2025 shows that the government spent ₦1.399 trillion on servicing debts, a 25% increase from ₦1.117 trillion the previous year. Meanwhile, revenue over the same period grew by just 13%, from ₦943.4 billion to ₦1.067 trillion.

# 172 dead, over 2,500 infected as Sudan battles cholera outbreak

By Helen Okechukwu



A fast-spreading cholera outbreak in Sudan has left at least 172 people dead and over 2,500 infected within just one week, according to the country's health authorities.

The epicentre of the outbreak is Khartoum and its twin city, Omdurman, although infections have been reported in several provinces nationwide.

The spike in cases, which began in mid-May, is overwhelming a healthcare system already stretched thin by ongoing conflict and severe resource shortages.

International medical charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has reported treating nearly 2,000 suspected cases in the past week alone.

Joyce Bakker, Sudan coordinator for MSF, said the situation in our treatment centres is heartbreaking, noting that several patients are arriving too late to survive.

"We don't know the true scale of the outbreak, and our teams can only see a fraction of the full picture," she said.

Bakker emphasised the urgent need for a coordinated humanitarian response, including improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, as well as the establishment of additional treatment facilities.

Earlier this year, a cholera outbreak in White Nile State claimed 92 lives and infected over 2,700 people, highlighting the recurring nature of the disease in Sudan.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes cholera as a rapidly progressing, water-borne illness that causes acute diarrhoea, potentially leading to death within hours if untreated.

It is commonly spread through the consumption of contaminated food or water.

Sudan's Health Minister, Haitham Ibrahim, attributed the surge in cases in Khartoum to the recent return of displaced citizens. He noted that the sudden population increase has put immense pressure on the already fragile water infrastructure in the capital.

The outbreak unfolds against the backdrop of a broader humanitarian emergency in Sudan. Since conflict erupted in 2023, more than 20,000 people are believed to have been killed, and over 14 million have been displaced.

The United Nations has labelled Sudan's situation the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, driven by war, disease, hunger, and a lack of access to clean water.

The crisis in Sudan is part of a wider cholera wave sweeping across Africa, affecting 18 countries, including Angola, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to WHO data.

Sudan Health minister speaks



# 20 million Nigerians live with mental health problem – WHO

By Helen Okechukwu



According to the WHO, mental health problem is a disorder characterised by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour. It is usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning. There are many different types of mental disorders. It may also be referred to as mental health conditions.

The Secretary, Board of Trustees of the Nigeria-American Institute for Mental Health, Dr Azubike Aliche, said this at a mental health GAP Action training programme organised by the institute, in Owerri, on Tuesday.

According to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), the training was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Social Awareness, Advocacy and Ethics, a Non-Governmental Organisation.

Aliche said that the training, sponsored by the Nigeria Mental Health Practitioners USA Incorporated, would equip non-psychiatrists to be able to conduct screens to identify mental health symptoms and

work with people to manage those symptoms.

He described as “alarming” the caseload of depression in Nigeria, which he said was reportedly the highest in the world and called for deliberate efforts to change the narrative.

“Available reports indicate that only 10 per cent of people living with mental illness have access to care in Nigeria, and this has to change”.

Speaking, an Executive Member of the NMHP USA, Rev. Sr Josephine Nzeke, said that the four-day training would capture a total of 25 healthcare professionals, five from each of the five council areas of Imo in its pilot stage.

She said that the trainees would return to their different community health centres after the training to provide grassroots services.

The state's Commissioner for Health, Dr Chioma Egu, described the mental health crisis as a “global challenge” and called

on the institute to leverage the government's mental health policies.

One of the training facilitators, Mr Justice Ulunta, of the Federal University of Allied Health Sciences, Enugu, called for the allocation of adequate resources by the government for the training of mental health experts and the equipping of facilities.

Also, CSAAE's Chief Operations Officer, Miss Francisca Ekwonu, said that the organisation was open to effective collaborations to tackle the challenge head-on.

“As Nigerians grapple with hardship and young people are subjected to information overload, it is part of our mission, through our C-Health program, to propagate mental health support at the grassroots.

“Our toll-free line 08009001000 is open, and our mental health support specialist will be there to provide support”, she said.



# NDLEA boss, Justice minister push for stronger drug laws to curb abuse

By Helen Okechukwu



**T**he Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, Prince Fagbemi, SAN, and National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Chairman, Brig Gen Mohamed Marwa (Rtd), have expressed confidence that the amended NDLEA Act will boost Nigeria's fight against drug abuse and trafficking once signed by President Bola Tinubu.

Speaking at the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Drug Control meeting in Abuja, Fagbemi, represented by the Director of Public Prosecution, Mr. Mohammed Abubakar, said the amendment will enhance NDLEA's legal and operational powers.

He praised NDLEA's achievements in arrests, convictions, and public awareness through its War Against Drug Abuse (WADA) campaign.

"The Federal Ministry of Justice has worked together with the NDLEA to ensure that our national legal system effectively supports the drug control efforts of the agency," he said.

He urged stakeholders to expand prevention programmes targeting youth, women, and vulnerable groups.

NDLEA boss Marwa said the amended Act, now awaiting presidential assent, would significantly boost the agency's ability to cut drug supply.

He admitted that funding challenges had slowed progress but stressed that the agency remained determined.

Between 2023 and 2024, Marwa disclosed that over 31,000 drug offenders were arrested, with about 7,000 convictions recorded.

He also reported the seizure of more than 4.3 million kilograms of illicit drugs and the destruction of over 426 hectares of cannabis farms.

On the rehabilitation front, NDLEA provided counselling and treatment to over 19,000 individuals and expanded public sensitisation efforts through WADA.

UNODC Country Representative, Cheikh Toure, represented by Dr. Akani Ibanga, warned of the rising drug use problem in Nigeria.

"At least three million people are said to be suffering from drug use disorder, Ibanga stressed while calling for the immediate intervention and commitment to the National Drug Control Master Plan.

# England resident doctors demand 29% pay rise amid renewed strike threats

By Helen Okechukwu



**D**octors in England are demanding a 29% pay increase to restore real-terms earnings to 2008 levels, warning that failure to act now would deepen NHS challenges and worsen staff retention.

The British Medical Association (BMA), which represents resident doctors (formerly junior doctors), began balloting its members this week for potential industrial action.

The move follows widespread criticism of the government's latest pay offer—a 4% increase plus a £750 one-off payment for resident doctors.

The BMA insists this falls far short of reversing years of pay erosion, claiming doctors have lost 23% of their earnings in real terms since 2008.

If approved, the strike mandate will run from July to January 2026, renewing the threat of disruption to

healthcare services.

The Independent publication noted that as of last year, doctors staged 44 days of walkouts before a 22% pay deal ended the dispute.

Co-chairs of the BMA's resident doctors committee said the NHS “does not have the time” to delay pay restoration, citing record waiting lists and widespread staff burnout.

They acknowledge that doctors must be kept in the system now while urging colleagues to vote for further strike action.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting has acknowledged poor treatment of NHS doctors but cautioned against fresh strikes, arguing they would jeopardise recovery efforts across the health service.

He pointed to three successive above-

inflation pay rises as evidence of progress.

Meanwhile, the demand adds pressure on Chancellor Rachel Reeves ahead of next week's spending review.

Already grappling with requests for more funding from police and security services in light of proposed early prisoner releases, Reeves now faces scrutiny over whether her fiscal rules can withstand rising public sector costs.

BMA chair Professor Philip Banfield said the latest award “delays pay restoration even more,” warning that the government has offered “without a government plan or reassurance to correct this erosion of what a doctor is worth.”

Meanwhile, the doctors' ballot closes on July 7.



# Global COVID-19 activity: WHO calls for vigilance, continued vaccination

By Helen Okechukwu



**G**lobal COVID-19 activity is on the rise once more, reaching levels not seen since July 2024, according to recent data from sentinel surveillance sites.

This was contained in the World Health Organisation (WHO) situational report shared to journalists on Thursday.

The WHO reports that since mid-February 2025, the SARS-CoV-2 test positivity rate has climbed to 11 per cent, underscoring the need for continued vigilance.

The increase in cases is being primarily observed in countries across the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia, and Western Pacific regions. This trend coincides with a shift in global variant patterns.

While the prevalence of the LP.8.1 variant has been waning, the NB.1.8.1 variant — currently classified as a

Variant Under Monitoring (VUM)—is on the rise, accounting for 10.7% of global sequences as of mid-May.

Though current activity mirrors patterns seen around this time in 2024, WHO notes that COVID-19 still lacks a predictable seasonal cycle.

Combined with limited surveillance in many regions, this makes real-time tracking and response more challenging.

“Recent increases in SARS-CoV-2 activity are broadly consistent with levels observed during the same period last year; however, there still lacks a clear seasonality in SARS-CoV-2 circulation, and surveillance is limited. Continued monitoring is essential,” the report noted.

In light of the evolving situation, WHO is urging all Member States to maintain a risk-based, integrated approach to

COVID-19 management, in line with the Director-General’s Standing Recommendations.

This includes robust surveillance, timely reporting, access to COVID-19 vaccines, strengthening healthcare delivery systems, and maintaining healthcare readiness.

The report added that, “African Region, European Region, and the Region of the Americas are currently reporting low levels of SARS-CoV-2 activity with per cent positivity from sentinel or systematic virological surveillance sites ranging from 2% to 3%.”

“As the virus continues to evolve and circulate, the international health body reiterates the importance of transparency, data-sharing, and community engagement in curbing the virus’s impact.”



# I'm not first to know if Priscilla is pregnant, Enioluwa reveals

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

**S**ocial media influencer and content creator, Enioluwa Adeoluwa, has addressed recent rumours suggesting that his best friend, Priscilla Ojo Mkambala, is expecting her first child.

He clarified while speaking with journalists in Tanzania.

Enioluwa is currently in the East African country for the final leg of Priscilla's wedding celebrations with her husband, singer Jumax. The couple's wedding has drawn attention from fans and the media alike, with speculation surrounding a possible pregnancy adding to the buzz surrounding the event.

"I'd be the third to know", Enioluwa

During the brief interview, one of the journalists hinted at a possible pregnancy, stating, "You will be an uncle very soon. Priscilla is pregnant."

Caught off guard by the question, Enioluwa expressed genuine surprise. "The questions you guys ask me shock me so much," he said, laughing. "Priscy is pregnant? Where? Today is the first time I'm hearing it. Even upstairs, people were saying the same thing, that Priscy is pregnant."

The interviewer followed up by asking if Enioluwa truly had no idea. In response, he made it clear that he was unaware of any pregnancy news. "I don't know that she is pregnant," he said. "But I believe that if she were, I would be among the very first people to hear it. After her mother and her husband, I should be the third person she would tell. She hasn't told me anything like that."

Fans eager for baby news

The rumours began circulating shortly after videos and photos from the couple's wedding surfaced online. Some fans claimed that Priscilla's body language and choice of outfits hinted at a



pregnancy, though no official statement has been made.

Priscilla, daughter of Nollywood actress Iyabo Ojo, tied the knot with Jumax in a well-publicised ceremony attended by celebrities, friends, and family. The multi-day event has generated headlines across Nigerian and international entertainment media.

For fans of the couple, the possibility of a baby arriving soon only adds to the excitement. Many have taken to social media to express their hopes that Priscilla and Jumax will start a family soon.

Respect for privacy

Enioluwa acknowledged that, whether the news is true or not, it's a deeply personal matter. "If it's a private issue, then yeah," he said. "Everybody wants them to have children, of course. But I'm sure when it is the right time comes, they will have children. There's no rush."

He also emphasised the importance of respecting people's choices and timing. "People should be allowed to enjoy their marriage and take things one step at a time," he added.

Close friendship built on trust

Enioluwa and Priscilla share a close bond that has captured the hearts of many of their followers. They often appear together on social media and are known for their playful, supportive friendship.

Because of this strong connection, fans often expect Enioluwa to have the inside scoop on Priscilla's personal life. But as he reminded everyone, not everything is shared publicly, and even he doesn't always know every detail.

"I think people just assume I know everything," he said. "But sometimes, I'm just as surprised as everyone else."

No confirmation yet

As of now, neither Priscilla nor Jumax has confirmed or denied the pregnancy rumours. The couple has remained silent on the issue, possibly choosing to keep any personal news away from the spotlight, at least for now.

Until there is an official announcement, fans and the media are left to speculate. But for Enioluwa, one thing is clear: if and when the news comes, he expects to be among the first to know, after all, best friends usually are.

# Trump orders halt on F1 visas for Nigerian students

By **Fatimah Idera**



**A**ccording to a U.S. State Department cable issued on Tuesday, embassies and consulates worldwide, including those in Nigeria, have been instructed to pause scheduling any new appointments for student (F, M) and exchange visitor (J) visas until further notice.

“The department is conducting a review of existing operations and processes for screening and vetting of student and exchange visitor visa applicants,” the statements reads.

With new guidelines on expanded vetting expected within days. This

development comes at a time when Nigerian students already endure notoriously long wait times for U.S. visa interview dates, some delayed by months or even over a year.

The policy shift is part of Trump’s broader crackdown on what he labels far-left ideologies in American universities. It also ties into a controversial push against pro-Palestinian campus activism, with earlier instructions telling consular officers to screen social media posts for signs of support for terrorist activity, including backing for Palestine.

Now, the intensified vetting will apply to all applicants, not just flagged activists. Officers are expected to comb through applicants content on platforms like TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram for any red flags.

Over one million foreign students contribute an estimated \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy annually, including thousands of Nigerians. But with visa appointments now frozen and scrutiny ramped up, Nigerian students may be left in limbo just months ahead of the fall 2025 academic intake.



# Literary icon Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o dies at 87

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The world is mourning the loss of celebrated Kenyan author, playwright, and academic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who passed away on Wednesday morning, 28th May 2025, at the age of 87. The news was confirmed by his family in a heartfelt statement released by his daughter, Wanjiku wa Ngugi.

"It is with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of our dad, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o," the statement read. "He lived a full life, fought a good fight. As was his last wish, let's celebrate his life and his work. Rîa ratha na rîa thûa. Tûrî aira!"

Tributes have poured in from around the globe, reflecting the profound impact of Ngũgĩ's work on generations of readers, scholars, and activists.

Homa Bay Governor Gladys Wanga expressed her condolences via X (formerly Twitter), stating:

"Sad to learn of the passing on of a literary giant whose words shaped African thought and inspired generations. Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's works challenged oppression and celebrated the power of indigenous voices with courage, globally advocating for African languages."

Another user, Peter Gathunuku, recalled his introduction to Ngũgĩ's writing, posting:

"Kenya and indeed Africa can never thank you enough for all your work. My first encounter was the classic Ngahika Ndenda. RIP Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o."

The advocacy group Kongamano la Mapinduzi wrote:



"Through Prof. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's words, he gave voice to the oppressed."

## A Literary and Political Giant

Born in 1938 in Kamirithu, Kiambu County, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o rose from humble beginnings to become a towering figure in world literature. His early novels, including *Weep Not, Child*, *The River Between*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Devil on the Cross*, are widely taught in schools and universities, both in Africa and abroad.

But Ngũgĩ was more than a writer, he was a revolutionary thinker and activist. A vocal critic of neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism, he was imprisoned without trial in 1977 for his political theatre work and later forced into exile. He eventually settled in the United States, where he continued to teach and write, becoming a long-serving professor at prestigious institutions such as Yale University and the University of California, Irvine.

Perhaps most famously, Ngũgĩ made the radical decision in the late 1970s to stop writing in English, choosing instead to write in Gikuyu, his mother

tongue. This act of linguistic defiance challenged the dominance of colonial languages in African literature and inspired a movement to embrace indigenous languages as vessels of knowledge and resistance.

## An Enduring Legacy

Over the course of his career, Ngũgĩ authored dozens of novels, plays, essays, and memoirs, including his powerful autobiographical works *Dreams in a Time of War* and *Birth of a Dream Weaver*. His intellectual contributions spanned literature, post-colonial theory, language politics, and education.

To many, he was not just a writer but a cultural warrior, a voice for the voiceless, a defender of African identity, and a lifelong champion of the continent's right to define itself on its own terms.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o leaves behind a monumental legacy, both on the page and in the hearts of millions. As his family and admirers around the world mourn his passing, they also celebrate a life lived with unwavering purpose and immense literary brilliance.

# 2-year-old British boy becomes youngest ever member of Mensa

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



A British toddler has made history by becoming the youngest person ever accepted into Mensa, the high-IQ society, according to Guinness World Records.

Joseph Harris-Birtill, born on November 23, 2021, was inducted into the exclusive club at just two years and 182 days old, breaking previous records and stunning experts with his extraordinary intellect.

Joseph, whose parents both work at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, began displaying signs of exceptional development early on. "It soon became clear that he was an exceptional little being," said his mother, Rose Harris-Birtill. "He rolled over at five weeks, spoke his first word at seven months, and read his first book out loud before turning two."

At just two, Joseph can already read fluently, decode Morse code, recite the Greek alphabet, and has developed an

active interest in the periodic table. His thirst for knowledge and natural curiosity led his parents to seek additional support, eventually leading them to Mensa.

"I searched online for any further support available and saw that Mensa offers resources for highly able children," said Rose. "We hope this accomplishment will give him a sense of pride when he is older. It's a very unusual accolade, and the credit is all his."

Joseph has now overtaken two record holders: American Isla McNabb, previously the youngest female member admitted to Mensa at two years and 195 days, and fellow Brit Teddy Hobbs, who held the UK record for joining Mensa at age four in 2023.

While Joseph's abilities are remarkable, his parents emphasise the importance of emotional support and appropriate learning environments for gifted

children. "It's a common misconception that everything is easy for gifted children," Rose explained. "But all children, including highly able learners, need understanding and tailored stimulation. Otherwise, their unique talents can be dimmed by pressure to conform to standard expectations."

Parents hope Mensa provides a peer community to support Joseph's growth

Thankfully, Joseph is currently thriving in an accommodating nursery and benefits from an excellent music teacher. His parents hope that Mensa will provide a peer community to support his growth and ensure his formidable intellect continues to blossom.

With his record-breaking induction, Joseph Harris-Birtill not only secures a place in Mensa history but also shines a light on the importance of recognising and nurturing exceptional talent from the earliest stages of life.



# Gaza's youngest influencer killed in Israeli airstrike

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**Y**aqeen Hammad, an 11-year-old girl who became Gaza's youngest influencer and a beloved figure of hope, was killed on Friday night when Israeli airstrikes targeted her family's home in Al-Baraka, Deir al-Balah. Her torn body was recovered from the rubble, ending a life that had, against all odds, become a symbol of resilience for Palestinians living under siege.

Yaqeen's death has sent shockwaves across the world, with activists, journalists, and thousands of followers mourning the loss of a child who used social media not for vanity but for survival. Amid air raids and starvation, Yaqeen turned her platform into a sanctuary of joy and practical advice. Her videos taught others how to cook without gas and how to find light in the darkness.

"I try to bring a bit of joy to the other children so that they can forget the war," she wrote in one of her posts.

Her final posts were full of life: dancing, handing out ice cream, gifting new clothes to orphans, and smiling in the face of relentless violence. On May 15, she wrote to her 103,000 Instagram followers, "Despite the war and the genocide, we came today to make the children happy." Underneath a video of laughing children, she asked, "Is there anything more beautiful than the smile of Gaza children?"

Gaza's 11-year-old girl's smile is now a memory

Yaqeen was killed during the same wave of airstrikes that reportedly took the lives of 52 people on Monday, including 31 sheltering in a school, and nine children of a single paediatrician. According to Gaza's health ministry, nearly 54,000 Palestinians have been killed since the Israeli offensive began in 2023, 16,503 of them children. Recent figures show the



scale of this devastation: 916 infants under one, 4,365 children aged 1–5, 6,101 aged 6–12, and 5,124 teenagers between 13 and 17 have died.

Yaqeen's work extended far beyond her Instagram feed. Alongside her older brother, Mohamed, a humanitarian worker, she delivered food, toys, and clothing to displaced families through the Ouena collective, a Gaza-based non-profit. Together, they brought cheer to shelters and camps across the territory.

"She had an entrepreneurial spirit and was always the first to do good," said Hani Abu Rizq, a journalist and colleague at Ouena. "She loved helping others and bringing joy to children in displacement camps. She had a special touch, spreading hope and optimism among people despite the difficult circumstances."

Even at her young age, Yaqeen carried the heart of a leader and the fire of a humanitarian. In one video, she demonstrated how to cook on makeshift wood stoves: "Did they cut off the gas? We made gas," she wrote. "Gaza: No to the impossible."

Her death has left her community in mourning and the world reeling. Mahmoud Bassam, a Gaza photojournalist, said, "Her body may be gone, but her impact remains a beacon of humanity."

"She was a child who carried in her heart a love for doing good," added Mohamad al-Kadri, a volunteer with Muslim Doctors for Humanity. "She dedicated her young energy to planting hope in the hearts of those around her."

The Israeli military has not commented on Yaqeen's death but has intensified its air campaign in recent days. As international condemnation builds, Yaqeen's story has become a haunting example of the war's toll on Gaza's children and a reminder of their dignity and defiance.

"Yaqeen was martyred," Palestinian photojournalist Amr Tabash wrote, "yet certainty remains in our hearts that the children of Gaza are the heartbeat of humanity and a reflection of global silence."

# French surgeon bags 20 years jail for raping hundreds of child patients

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A 74 year old former surgeon Joël Le Scouarnec has bagged 20 years in prison on Wednesday for the rape and sexual abuse of hundreds of patients, most of them children under the age of 15.

Le Scouarnec, a former digestive surgeon who operated in both public and private hospitals across Brittany and western France, faced charges of 111 rapes and 189 sexual assaults committed between 1989 and 2014. His victims were often under anaesthetic or recovering from surgery when the abuse occurred. The average age of the children was 11.

During the three-month trial in the town of Vannes, Le Scouarnec admitted to all charges and made no plea for leniency. "I was a surgeon who benefited from my status to attack children. I don't deny that," he said in court. Psychological evaluations have deemed him still highly dangerous.

## A Systemic Failure

Le Scouarnec's crimes continued for decades, despite early warning signs. In 2004, the FBI flagged him to French authorities for accessing child sexual abuse imagery on the dark web. A year later, he was convicted in France for possessing such material and received a four-year suspended sentence. The court, however, failed to bar him from working with children.

He continued practising, receiving top surgical appointments at hospitals desperate to retain experienced professionals. One hospital director, Michèle Cals, testified that Le Scouarnec had disclosed his conviction but convinced her it was tied to personal distress from a marital separation. With no directive from medical authorities



against his hiring, she appointed him in 2008. "We needed surgeons," Cals said.

Critics have described the decades of inaction as a collective failure of the French medical and judicial systems. Thierry Bonvalot, a psychiatrist who attempted to raise concerns about Le Scouarnec, described the cover-up as a "medical fiasco." Joël Belloc, head of the local Order of Physicians, conceded, "With hindsight, it's obvious we could have done more."

## A National Reckoning

Victims and child protection groups are now demanding sweeping reforms. Outside the courthouse earlier this month, survivors and their families protested the silence of the political establishment. "We are appalled to see that this trial of the century is not a watershed event in the eyes of the government and, more broadly, the general public," a victims' group said in a statement.

One survivor, Manon Lemoine, who was raped at age 11, told reporters: "They're trying to make him out to be a monster, but this monster is the society that created

him and allowed him to continue."

The state prosecutor, Stéphane Kellenberger, emphasised the magnitude of the case, noting that Le Scouarnec would likely have faced a 2,000-year sentence if tried under U.S. legal standards. France, however, does not combine sentences; the 20-year term is the maximum allowed for aggravated rape.

Le Scouarnec is already serving a 15-year sentence from a 2020 conviction involving four other children. The prosecutor's office has opened an additional investigation into potential victims not included in the current trial, hinting that the full scale of the abuse may still be unfolding.

Kellenberger condemned the former surgeon in his closing remarks. "You were the devil, and sometimes the devil is dressed in a white coat," he said.

As France prepares for the verdict, many are left asking how such prolonged abuse could go unchecked and how to ensure that it never happens again.



# Trump hits nearly 50% approval as voters say U.S. is on right track

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



President Donald Trump's approval rating has surged to new heights, with fresh polling data indicating a majority of Americans believe the country is now on the right track. This boost in public confidence follows a string of recent policy victories and legislative momentum from the Trump administration.

A new poll released Tuesday, primarily based on data from Rasmussen Reports and reported by Fox News, shows that 50% of likely voters approve of President Trump's job performance. This marks a significant milestone in his second term, signaling a renewed sense of national optimism.

Further strengthening this trend, a poll conducted by InsiderAdvantage between May 17 and May 19 found that 55% of likely voters approve of Trump's performance, compared to 44% who disapprove, with just 1% undecided. The poll, which surveyed 1,000 likely voters, has a margin of error of  $\pm 3.09\%$ .

Several recent accomplishments appear to be bolstering Trump's numbers. Among them, a landmark trade agreement with the United Kingdom aims to establish fairer terms for American exporters. Additionally, the President has signed an executive order to expand the nation's nuclear energy sector, marking a major step in his energy strategy.

Security has also remained a central theme of Trump's agenda, with the deployment of additional troops to fortify the southern border with Mexico. Meanwhile, the President's signature legislative proposal — dubbed the "Big, Beautiful Bill" — has successfully passed the House of Representatives. The bill promises sweeping tax cuts and increased government spending, aligning with Trump's economic agenda.

The latest approval ratings underscore the complex and evolving landscape of American political sentiment. While

Trump's presidency has been marked by sharp polarization, these numbers suggest that a growing segment of voters is responding positively to his recent moves on trade, energy, and national security.

Putin snubs Trump's peace deal, Kremlin says talks dying slowly  
Rasmussen Reports, a polling organization founded in 2003, has become a key source of data on American political trends. Known for its frequent national and state-level polling, Rasmussen offers daily tracking on elections, consumer confidence, and presidential job performance.

With key legislative battles and the 2026 midterms on the horizon, Trump's rising approval ratings could offer a strategic advantage — and signal a shift in voter alignment that may define the political climate in the months to come.

# Boris Johnson's comeback struggles as Farage leads by 15 points

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

**B**oris Johnson's rumored return to politics has taken a major blow, as a new poll shows Nigel Farage pulling far ahead of him in key Red Wall seats. The survey, conducted by Merlin Strategy and shared with GB News, shows Farage leading Johnson by 15 points among voters in these former Labour strongholds.

The poll reveals that just 12% of Red Wall voters would pick Johnson as their top choice, compared to 27% for Farage, leader of Reform UK. While Johnson does outperform current Tory leader Kemi Badenoch (8%), he remains far behind in terms of support. In terms of the top three preferred candidates for Prime Minister, Farage still leads with 44%. Johnson and Labour leader Keir Starmer tie at 39%, while Badenoch trails behind with 33%.

Conservative MP Robert Jenrick, seen as another possible leadership candidate, fares even worse, with only 3% naming him as their first choice and 24% placing him in their top three.

Scarlett Maguire, founder of Merlin Strategy, said the numbers paint a grim picture for the Conservative Party:

"All three Conservative big names fall short of Nigel Farage in the Red Wall. Even if Johnson returns, it doesn't look like enough to bring the party out of third place right now."

The poll also highlights major shifts in party support:

- Reform UK now has 34% support in the Red Wall, a big jump from just 7% when it was the Brexit Party in 2019.
- Labour has dropped to 27%, down from 41% last year.
- The Conservatives have fallen to 22%, less than half of the 47% support they had



under Johnson in 2019.

Boris Johnson led the Tories to win 33 Red Wall seats in 2019 and even added Hartlepool in a 2021 by-election. But Labour, under Starmer, flipped 34 of 36 Brexit-voting seats in the Midlands and North in 2024, tightening their grip in the region.

Despite his growing unpopularity in the polls, Johnson remains more favored than Badenoch among 2019 Conservative voters. About 40% still rank him as their number one choice, though Farage leads with 31%. However, Reform insiders say Johnson's record on immigration — especially the 872,000 net migration figure in 2022 — could be a major weakness.

"Boris opened the doors to mass migration like never before," one Reform UK source said.

"Red Wall voters have watched their communities change because of his choices. Thinking he can win them back is simply unrealistic."

Johnson has recently returned to the spotlight, publicly criticizing Labour's Brexit policy and warning against the UK becoming "a puppet of Brussels." He also took aim at Starmer's leadership after the rejection of an appeal in the high-profile Lucy Connolly case.

As Kemi Badenoch struggles following poor local election results, some Conservative MPs are reportedly trying to bring Johnson back to the frontline. But the new polling shows that even his return may not be enough to revive the party's fortunes in the Red Wall.

One senior Tory insider said:

"Boris is still the wildcard. If the party needs someone to shake things up, he's the one Labour and Reform fear the most."

But for now, the numbers speak for themselves — and they show a Conservative Party in crisis, with Reform UK rising fast.



# Trump's spending bill 'undermines' DOGE's work – Elon Musk

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**T**esla CEO and the main driver of the US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Elon Musk, has spoken out against President Donald Trump's "big beautiful" spending bill.

The tech billionaire criticised the bill in an interview with CBS Sunday Morning that is set to air on June 1.

In his comments, which were featured in a clip of the interview shared on X on Tuesday, the world's richest man said, "I was disappointed to see the massive spending bill, frankly, which increases the budget deficit, not just decrease it, and undermines the work that the DOGE team is doing."

The tech guru has worked closely with the White House DOGE office on efforts to cut government spending and eliminate fraud and waste in the federal budget. Musk recently said he is scaling back his work with DOGE.

Trump's spending bill, which passed the House last week, would make some of his 2017 tax cuts permanent and add trillions to the federal deficit.

"I think a bill can be big or it could be beautiful, but I don't know if it could be both," Musk told CBS.

In November, Trump announced that DOGE would be co-led by Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy. Trump said the commission would conclude its work by July 4, 2026. Ramaswamy left DOGE in January, leaving Musk as its sole leader.

Musk had lofty goals for DOGE. In



October, Musk said DOGE would save at least \$2 trillion for the government. He later said in January that saving \$2 trillion would be a "best-case outcome" and DOGE had a "good shot" at saving \$1 trillion.

Elon Musk speaks

Last month, Musk told reporters DOGE saved \$160 billion in federal spending and cut 20,000 government jobs, or about 1% of the federal workforce.

"In the grand scheme of things, I think we've been effective. Not as effective as I'd like. I think we could be more effective. But we've made progress," Musk said on April 30.

Musk has faced increased calls from investors to spend more time on his businesses after his work at DOGE sparked boycotts and protests against Tesla.

Last week, Musk embarked on a media blitz where he reaffirmed his commitment to Tesla. Musk said in an interview with Bloomberg on May 20 that he will be cutting down on his political spending.

"In terms of political spending, I'm going to do a lot less in the future," Musk told Bloomberg. "I think I've done enough."

Musk later told CNBC on the same day that he would still be spending time in Washington. Last month, Musk said in a Tesla earnings call that he plans to scale down his involvement with DOGE to focus on Tesla.

"My rough plan on the White House is to be there for a couple of days every few weeks. And to be helpful where I can be helpful," Musk told CNBC.

# Israeli troops kill one, injure 48 at Gaza food point

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**A**t least one Palestinian civilian has been killed and 48 others wounded after Israeli troops opened fire on a crowd at a food distribution site in Gaza on Tuesday, according to local health officials.

The incident occurred after the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a group newly authorised by Israel to manage food distribution, lost control of its compound amid a surge of desperate civilians.

Witnesses described scenes of panic and desperation as hundreds of Palestinians, many of them women and children, breached the fencing surrounding the GHF's Secure Distribution Site (SDS) in Rafah. In one widely circulated video, frightened civilians are seen trampling fences and fleeing as gunshots rang out and an Israeli helicopter fired flares overhead.

Ajith Sunghay, head of the UN human rights office for the Palestinian territories, confirmed that most of the injuries were caused by gunfire. Gaza's health ministry said at least one person had died in the chaos.

The Israeli military claimed it had only fired "warning shots" to regain control of the situation and denied deliberately firing at civilians. But aid groups and human rights monitors quickly condemned the escalation, calling it the latest failure in a deeply flawed aid strategy.

"This new aid model is chaos masquerading as humanitarianism," said Philippe Lazzarini, head of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. "We already have a distribution system that works. What's happening now is a deliberate distraction from atrocities and a misuse of precious resources."

The GHF, a U.S.-backed organisation recently tasked with coordinating food aid, admitted in a statement that its staff had been overwhelmed and forced to abandon their posts as crowds swelled. "At one moment in the late afternoon, the volume of people at the SDS was such



that the GHF team fell back to allow a small number of Palestinians in Gaza to take aid safely and dissipate," the statement read.

The situation in Gaza has grown increasingly dire. Israel imposed a full blockade on aid supplies in March, alleging that Hamas was diverting food for its fighters, an accusation the group denies. The blockade, now in its 11th week, has pushed Gaza to the brink of famine.

According to the IPC, a global hunger monitor, nearly half a million people in Gaza are at risk of starvation, with close to 71,000 children under the age of five expected to be acutely malnourished, including 14,100 cases deemed severe in the coming months. UN-operated bakeries have shut down due to fuel shortages, and food prices have soared beyond affordability for most families.

On Sunday, Jake Wood, founding director of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, resigned, citing the impossibility of operating under current conditions while upholding humanitarian principles. "Delivering aid under these terms undermines neutrality, humanity, and independence," he said.

Critics argue the new distribution system

is not only inadequate but dangerous. Aid organisations, including ActionAid, have refused to cooperate with the GHF, warning that the model effectively turns food aid into a weapon of war.

"Aid that is used to mask ongoing violence is not aid," a coalition of NGOs said in a joint statement earlier this month. "It is humanitarian cover for a military strategy of control and dispossession."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged the incident on Tuesday, saying there had been "some loss of control momentarily," but claimed that Israeli forces had quickly stabilized the situation. He reiterated plans to relocate Gaza's civilian population to a "sterile zone" in the south as Israeli forces continue operations against Hamas elsewhere in the territory.

The United Nations and its partners continue to call for unfettered humanitarian access and an immediate end to the blockade. "The clock is ticking towards famine," Lazzarini warned. "Let humanitarian actors do their life-saving work now before it's too late."



# 17 bodies found in Mexican house plagued by cartel violence

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



**A**uthorities in Mexico have uncovered a mass grave containing 17 bodies in an abandoned house in Irapuato, Guanajuato, a central Mexican state gripped by an unrelenting wave of cartel violence.

The discovery, announced by the state prosecutor's office on Monday, marks one of the most chilling finds in recent months in a region overwhelmed by gang warfare.

The bodies were located using ground-penetrating radar and cadaver dogs during a targeted search last week. Prosecutors also recovered a cache of tools from the site, including machetes, knives, pickaxes, and shovels, suggesting the house had been used as an execution or burial site.

Five of the victims, four men and one woman, have been identified as individuals previously reported missing. "Their families are being informed," said Jorge Jimenez, a Guanajuato state official.

This discovery comes just days after a brutal shooting in the same region left seven people, including children,

dead. Authorities believe the violence is part of an ongoing conflict between the Santa Rosa de Lima gang and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), one of Mexico's most powerful and feared criminal organisations.

Despite its thriving manufacturing sector and popular tourist destinations, Guanajuato is Mexico's deadliest state. Last year, it recorded 3,151 homicides, over 10% of the nation's total killings, according to government data.

The region's violence has become so pervasive that local civil society groups, formed by families of the disappeared, have taken up the grim task of searching for remains in cartel-controlled areas, often at great personal risk and with little government support.

Since the Mexican government launched a militarized anti-drug operation in 2006, more than 480,000 violent deaths have been recorded nationwide. In Guanajuato, the situation continues to deteriorate.

Earlier this month, gunmen opened fire in a Guanajuato neighborhood,

killing seven people, including children. Authorities found cartel-style banners at the scene referencing the Santa Rosa de Lima gang. In February, eight people were gunned down in broad daylight; in January, a shootout between law enforcement and gunmen left ten suspects dead and three police officers wounded.

In December, a roadside stand was attacked, killing eight. Just weeks before that, twelve mutilated police officers were found scattered across the region, each body bearing torture marks and accompanied by threatening cartel messages.

The escalating violence has raised concerns about state capacity, cartel impunity, and the safety of everyday citizens. With mass graves surfacing and gunmen attacking residential centers and public spaces, Guanajuato has become emblematic of Mexico's broader struggle against organized crime and systemic impunity.

As the families of victims await justice, the grim discoveries in Irapuato serve as a stark reminder of the deep human cost of Mexico's ongoing cartel wars, a crisis with no clear end in sight.

# U.S. warns citizens against travelling to Venezuela, cites severe risks

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



**T**he U.S. Department of State has reissued its starkest warning yet about travel to Venezuela, urging all American citizens to avoid the country entirely and for those currently there to leave immediately. Citing “severe risks,” the advisory highlights threats including wrongful detention, kidnapping, and even torture.

In a press release issued Tuesday, the department emphasised that it does not maintain an operational embassy or consulate in Venezuela and is therefore unable to provide emergency or routine consular services. U.S. citizens who find themselves detained in the country are essentially on their own.

“U.S. citizens are at extreme risk of detention when entering Venezuela at any location,” the statement warned. “They may be unjustly charged with terrorism or other serious crimes and detained for long periods.”

According to the department, more American nationals are wrongfully

detained in Venezuela than in any other country, with some cases involving individuals who unintentionally crossed poorly marked borders from neighbouring countries like Colombia or Brazil. In such situations, even accidental entry into Venezuela can result in serious criminal charges and indefinite imprisonment.

Once detained, U.S. citizens have no reliable way to contact relatives, legal counsel, or the U.S. government. Venezuelan authorities do not report detentions to the U.S., making any intervention virtually impossible.

The advisory paints a bleak picture for anyone considering travel to the politically unstable South American nation. U.S. citizens have reportedly been arrested upon arrival at land borders, airports, and even maritime ports. The State Department underscored that there is “no safe way” for Americans to travel to Venezuela.

In addition to detention risks, the advisory cited the arbitrary

enforcement of local laws, ongoing civil unrest, and a dangerously under-resourced healthcare system as further reasons to steer clear of the country.

Venezuela, under President Nicolás Maduro’s authoritarian regime, has long had a strained relationship with the United States. Numerous international watchdogs have documented widespread human rights abuses and political repression in the country.

The U.S. shuttered its embassy in Caracas in 2019 and has since issued regular travel warnings. However, the new advisory significantly sharpens its tone, describing the current situation as exceptionally perilous.

The State Department advises any Americans still in Venezuela to depart immediately using commercial options if available. Those who cannot leave are urged to maintain a low profile and avoid discussing their nationality publicly.



# Missouri stops abortion after state Supreme Court ruling

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**A**bortion services in Missouri have come to an abrupt halt once again after the state's Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that a lower court used the wrong legal standard in allowing the procedure to resume.

The two-page ruling from the Missouri Supreme Court directed Circuit Judge Jerri Zhang to vacate her earlier orders, which had temporarily blocked enforcement of the state's sweeping abortion restrictions. The justices said Zhang's rationale, that abortion rights advocates were likely to win their case, was not sufficient to allow the procedures to continue during litigation. Instead, the high court said she must first weigh the potential harms of permitting abortions to resume.

The ruling marks a dramatic reversal in Missouri's ongoing legal saga over abortion rights. It comes just months after voters approved a ballot measure overturning the state's near-total abortion ban, making Missouri the only state to have done so via referendum since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022.

Planned Parenthood, which operates the state's only abortion clinics in Columbia and Kansas City, immediately began calling patients to cancel appointments.

"We've had to make these calls before," said Emily Wales, President and CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Plains. "To be in that position again, after the people of Missouri voted to ensure abortion access, is incredibly frustrating. Once again, political interference has denied patients care they were scheduled to receive."

Among the regulations that will now be enforced again are requirements for abortion providers to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals and maintain strict sanitation standards, rules Planned Parenthood argues are



medically unnecessary and intentionally burdensome.

Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey hailed the court's decision, calling it "a win for women and children."

"This ruling sends a clear message: abortion providers must comply with state law regarding basic safety and sanitation requirements," Bailey said.

Supporters of the abortion restrictions, like Sam Lee of Campaign Life Missouri, celebrated the court's order.

"This means that our pro-life laws, which include many health and safety protections for women, will remain in place," Lee said. "How long they'll remain is up to the courts, but for now, this is a victory."

Planned Parenthood has signalled its intent to return to court quickly. The organisation contends the laws in question were passed not to protect health, but to make abortion functionally inaccessible in the state.

Tuesday's ruling is the latest twist in a contentious back-and-forth between Missouri's courts, voters, and lawmakers. Although voters rejected

the ban at the ballot box last November, abortions did not resume until more than three months later due to continued legal challenges from the state.

Earlier this month, Republican lawmakers took steps to revive abortion restrictions via another proposed constitutional amendment. The new measure, which includes exceptions for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest, could go before voters as soon as 2026, or sooner if Gov. Mike Kehoe calls a special election.

The amendment passed the House last month and cleared the Senate 21-11 after Republicans used rare procedural manoeuvres to block extended debate from Democrats. The vote prompted an outcry from abortion rights advocates, with protesters erupting into chants of "Stop the ban!" before being removed from the chamber.

Missouri enforcing abortion ban

Missouri remains one of 12 states currently enforcing full abortion bans. Four others restrict the procedure after roughly six weeks of pregnancy, often before individuals are even aware they are pregnant.

# Chelsea crush Betis to claim Conference League glory

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

In a dazzling second-half display, Chelsea turned a 1-0 deficit into a resounding 4-1 victory over Real Betis to win the UEFA Europa Conference League final in Wrocław. The win not only capped a strong end to the season for the Blues but also marked a historic milestone—making Chelsea the first club to win all four major UEFA competitions.

## A Tale of Two Halves

The match started brightly for Real Betis, who looked confident in possession and sharp in attack. Their efforts were rewarded in the 9th minute when Abde Ezzalzouli finished off a well-worked move with a low strike into the bottom corner, assisted by the evergreen Isco. The Spanish side controlled the remainder of the first half, taking a deserved 1-0 lead into the break.

However, whatever Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca said at half-time had a transformative effect.

## Blues Blitz After the Break

The second half was a different story. Chelsea emerged with a renewed intensity and immediately put Real Betis on the back foot. Cole Palmer, Chelsea's standout creator all season, orchestrated the turnaround. In the 65th minute, he found Enzo Fernández in space, who slotted home the equalizer. Just five minutes later, Palmer picked out Nicolas Jackson with a perfectly weighted pass, and the striker made no mistake to put Chelsea 2-1 up.

The flurry of goals stunned Betis, who struggled to regain their composure. Chelsea's momentum was unstoppable, and in the 83rd minute, substitute Jadon Sancho added a third with a composed finish at the far post following an assist from Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall. Sancho, on loan from Manchester United, may have just scored the goal that secures his Chelsea future.



As if to underline their dominance, Moises Caicedo capped off the performance with a fourth in stoppage time, his long-range shot taking a slight deflection before nestling into the net. Caicedo, who started all 38 Premier League matches this season, was immense again—his engine and tactical discipline pivotal to Chelsea's control.

## A European Milestone

The result means Chelsea have now won the Champions League, Europa League, Cup Winners' Cup, and the Conference League—an unprecedented feat in European football. The club's young squad, led by Palmer, Jackson, and Caicedo, is showing signs of maturity and unity that bodes well for the future.

Former Chelsea midfielder Steve Sidwell summed it up on Sky Sports: "They are back to winning ways. This is what Chelsea Football Club is all about."

## The Maresca Effect

Credit must also go to Enzo Maresca, who has guided Chelsea back to the Champions League while delivering silverware. His tactical tweaks at half-

time and bold substitutions changed the game. As pundit Lucy Ward put it: "Chelsea have turned a good season into a great season."

The turnaround was also a testament to Maresca's courage. Having faced criticism for his possession-heavy style earlier in the campaign, he made decisive changes during the final that paid off in emphatic fashion.

## Tears and Triumph

As the final whistle blew, Real Betis players dropped to the turf in disappointment, while Chelsea's squad celebrated with unfiltered joy—dancing to "Freed From Desire" as fans serenaded them from the stands.

It was a night of high drama and emotion, and for Chelsea, a trophy that not only fills a missing gap in their European cabinet but may also signal the dawn of a new era under Maresca.

From despair to dominance, Chelsea's night in Wrocław will be remembered as one of European football's great second-half turnarounds.



# Man Utd booed after shock defeat to ASEAN all-stars

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

In searing Malaysian heat, Manchester United's miserable season found a new low. Booed off at full-time after a 1-0 defeat to the ASEAN All-Stars, head coach Ruben Amorim insisted the jeers were "something we need" as United's post-season tour got off to a rocky start.

Myanmar winger Maung Maung Lwin's second-half strike sealed a shock win for the South East Asian XI in front of 72,550 fans at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium. Many had paid up to £260 to watch their idols—only to be left disappointed by a blunt and weary United side.

Despite deploying 25 outfield players and regularly rotating the squad, Amorim's men failed to convert a host of chances. The result, though technically meaningless, was symbolic of a campaign that has unravelled spectacularly for the 20-time English champions.

Just days after limping to a 15th-place Premier League finish—their worst since 1974—United now find themselves unable to beat a regional all-star side, thousands of miles from home. The match capped a turbulent stretch that included a Europa League final loss to Tottenham and a 60-game marathon season.

Amorim, whose own position is under scrutiny after failing to lift the mood since taking over in February, struck a reflective tone post-match.

"The boos maybe are something we need," he said. "Every game we lost in the Premier League, the fans were always there. I felt when we finished every time, the supporters were with us. Let's see for next season."

Still, there are signs of change. The club is expected to finalise a £62.5m deal for Wolves striker Matheus Cunha, who has been cleared for a medical. Amorim, however, remained tight-lipped: "You



have to wait for that for the next season. I have no news."

Meanwhile, Ipswich Town's Liam Delap is being closely monitored as United aim to reshape their attack. The 21-year-old striker is available for £30m following Ipswich's relegation and is reportedly choosing between United and Chelsea. A decision is expected before the start of the European U21 Championship in June.

With Garnacho told he can leave and Bruno Fernandes potentially weighing a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia, the squad is on the cusp of major upheaval. Yet despite the gloom, United's hierarchy remains publicly optimistic.

Chief executive Omar Berrada, speaking to club media before the Kuala Lumpur defeat, said:

"We know what we need to do. We have a very clear idea of where we need to invest in the squad to improve. Now it is a question of executing that plan in a way that is prudent but ambitious."

Veteran goalkeeper Tom Heaton is set to sign a one-year extension, providing continuity in a squad likely to see heavy

turnover. But questions persist, particularly over Rasmus Hojlund. The Dane managed just four goals in 32 Premier League appearances and faces an uncertain future if both Cunha and Delap arrive.

"Sometimes you go on holiday and come back to a new season and the environment is better," said Amorim. "We do have a lack of goals. We will try to assess that and be prepared."

The Red Devils now head to Hong Kong for the final leg of the tour. With around 10,000 tickets still unsold at the 40,000-capacity stadium, Amorim was asked why fans should pay again.

He answered with a story from his youth:

"It was difficult supporting Benfica in the 1990s, but I never stopped going. These people believe in Manchester United, no matter what the context."

Friday offers United a chance to save face before heading into a crucial summer. But with the fans restless and patience wearing thin, nothing less than a convincing win—and clear progress—will do.

# Police get more time to question suspect in Liverpool parade crash

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

**M**erseyside Police have been granted additional time to question a 53-year-old man arrested on suspicion of attempted murder, following the shocking incident in Liverpool city centre during the Premier League victory parade on Monday. The suspect, from West Derby, remains in custody as detectives continue their investigation into the crash that left 79 people injured.

The suspect was also arrested on suspicion of dangerous driving and driving while unfit through drugs. The Ford Galaxy he was driving struck football fans gathered on Water Street shortly after 18:00 BST, after following an ambulance through a lifted roadblock intended to allow emergency access to a separate medical incident.

Police confirmed they had spoken to 14 more victims in the past day, raising the total known casualties from 65 to 79. Seven people remain hospitalised, including some with serious injuries. One survivor, Daniel Eveson from Telford, described the scene as “just chaos” after his partner was dragged under the vehicle and their baby’s pram was flung across the road. While his son escaped unharmed, his partner remains in hospital.

“It was meant to be the perfect day,” Mr Eveson said. “But under the sea of chaos, it changed to the worst day of my life.”

Emergency services responded in large numbers, and Water Street has since reopened after overnight cleanup operations. Flowers and messages have been laid at the scene as the city comes to terms with the tragic events that marred what was meant to be a joyful celebration.

Detectives are conducting a comprehensive review of CCTV footage across Liverpool to track the car’s movements prior to the crash. Det Supt Rachel Wilson, leading the investigation, said: “We continue to support those still receiving treatment



and, as part of our ongoing enquiries, we are identifying more people who were injured.”

She added that significant progress is being made in understanding the full circumstances surrounding the incident.

Meanwhile, the suspect continues to be held as police explore every legal avenue to extend his detention. Under UK law, suspects can be held for 24 hours without charge, with a superintendent’s approval for an initial 12-hour extension. Authorities can apply to a magistrate to hold suspects for up to 96 hours in total—unless the offence is related to terrorism, which allows for longer detention. In this case, police have clarified that the incident is not being treated as terrorism.

Within hours of the suspect’s arrest, Merseyside Police confirmed he was a white British male and cautioned the public against spreading misinformation. One local man, Peter Cunningham, was wrongly identified on social media as the suspect. The 54-year-old from Huyton pleaded with authorities to release the real suspect’s name, saying: “I’m in work—the police need to give the name out because I’m

getting accused.”

The incident has prompted national concern, with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer visiting Merseyside Police headquarters on Thursday. Speaking at a meeting with senior officers and local leaders, he said: “The scenes on Monday were just awful. To see incredible joy at an amazing achievement turn to horror in a moment—it’s deeply troubling.”

The Prime Minister commended the emergency services for their swift response and expressed his support for the ongoing investigation.

As Liverpool recovers from the trauma, many fans and residents are reflecting on the fragility of such public events. More than 500,000 people had packed the city streets to celebrate Liverpool FC’s second Premier League title and 20th top-flight crown overall.

What began as a day of celebration quickly turned into one of the darkest moments in the city’s recent memory. Police continue to urge anyone with footage or information to come forward as they seek justice for the victims and accountability for the chaos that unfolded.