



Peter Obi dismisses Okpebholo's warning, affirms right to visit any state

Pg 2

Atiku slams Tinubu for meddling in opposition affairs amid national crises

Pg 11



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New Nigeria tax Act exempts baby products, electricity, EVs, others from VAT

Pg 10



Trump and Powell clash over Fed renovation costs during rare visit

Pg 21

WORLD

Pg 22

Reeves may override Supreme Court in £44bn car finance scandal



WORLD

Australia and UK sign 50-year defence pact

Pg 23



WAFCON 2024 Final: Nigeria vs Morocco for the title

Pg 25

Peter Obi dismisses Okpebholo's warning, affirms right to visit any state

By Friday Omosola



The 2023 presidential candidate of the Labour Party, LP, Peter Obi, has rejected the assertion by Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo, that he must obtain security clearance before visiting Edo State.

The former Anambra State Governor declared his unwavering resolve to visit any part of Nigeria without fear, especially when the purpose is aligned with national development.

Obi made this known in Onitsha during a ceremony where he presented a ₦50 million cheque to his alma mater, Christ the King College (CKC), to support infrastructural development.

This significant donation, made in collaboration with other Old Boys of the institution, aims to enhance educational facilities and improve learning conditions at the venerable school, established in 1932.

CKC boasts a distinguished alumni list, including former Rivers State Governor Dr Peter Odili, and two former Anambra governors, Obi

himself and Willie Obiano.

Speaking at the event, he stated, "I am not afraid of visiting any state in Nigeria, particularly when the purpose is to support causes that contribute to nation-building, such as education, health, and poverty alleviation."

He expressed disappointment over the politicisation of his recent visit to Benin, clarifying that his presence was strictly to support healthcare advancement within the state.

"I went to Benin to invest in a better life for the people. If they have good doctors and nurses, life will be better for them. What I expect the governor to do is to complement efforts aimed at improving society," Obi added, suggesting a collaborative approach to societal upliftment.

Regarding the donation to CKC, Obi described the gesture as an expression of gratitude to the institution that significantly influenced his and many others' core values.

"This school helped form the values I and many others still hold dear today, discipline, moral grounding, and academic excellence. Supporting it is a way of giving back," he affirmed.

He also called upon other alumni, both from CKC and across the nation, to support their former schools, stressing that the responsibility for educational development should not rest solely with the government.

Receiving the generous donation on behalf of the school, the Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev. Valerian Okeke, who is also an alumnus, commended Obi and his fellow Old Boys for their dedication to education and national progress.

He offered prayers and urged others to follow their commendable example.

Master Ejike Ekene, the school's Senior Prefect, also offered remarks, describing the 64-year-old as an inspiring role model for the students and expressing profound appreciation for the substantial support.

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9X4	193,500.00
9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
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9X5	206,000.00
9X4	177,500.00
9X3	150,000.00
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8X3	98,500.00
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6X3	78,500.00
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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
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10X4	103,963.00
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9X5	168,191.50
9X4	N/A
8X6	N/A
8X3	N/A
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6X4	65,000.00
6X3	41,124.50
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5X6	71,378.00
5X4	42,825.00
5X3	29,858.00
5X2	22,841.00
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4X3	N/A
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Tinubu pledges action on GenCo debts, urges patience amidst power sector liquidity crisis

By Friday Omosola



President Bola Tinubu on Friday appealed to power generation companies (GENCOs) for more time to finalise the verification of significant long-standing debts owed to them by the Federal Government (FG).

During a meeting with the Association of Power Generation Companies at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, Tinubu affirmed his administration's dedication to resolving the severe liquidity challenges plaguing Nigeria's power sector.

Olu Verheijen, Special Adviser to the President on Energy, disclosed that Tinubu has granted anticipatory approval for a substantial ₦4 trillion bond program specifically designed to address the sector's financial shortfall.

Acknowledging the considerable liabilities inherited from previous administrations, Tinubu assured the GENCOs of his commitment to a fair and transparent resolution.

"I accept the assets and liabilities of my predecessors, and there is no question about that," he stated.

"But that acceptance must be on credible grounds. I need to wear the audit cap of verifiability, authenticity, and the fact that this inheritance is not a mere deodorant but a support structure for critical economic and industrial promotion."

The President emphasised the necessity for patience from both the GENCOs and financial institutions, explaining that government agencies are actively engaging audit and legal firms to meticulously scrutinise the claims.

"Give us time to do verification and validation of the numbers," he urged.

Reaffirming his belief in a market-driven electricity sector, Tinubu noted that the industry's long-neglected legacy issues are now receiving priority attention.

He also highlighted savings from fuel subsidy removal and the introduction of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) as an alternative.

Tinubu reassured the banking sector of

the government's resolve to create a stable investment climate, cautioning against extreme measures such as asset foreclosures against generation companies.

"To our friends in the banking sector, I ask that we avoid foreclosures. Sharpen your pencils, but keep an eraser handy. Let's persevere together," he advised.

He underscored electricity's pivotal role, describing it as 'the most important discovery of humanity in the last 1,000 years' and fundamental to economic growth and human dignity.

Special Adviser Verheijen attributed the power sector's liquidity crisis to a combination of 'unfunded tariff shortfalls and market shortfalls' that have accumulated over a decade.

She confirmed that as of April 2025, the FG's verified exposure to GENCOs stands at ₦4 trillion, a sum accrued since 2015.

**Continue reading
on next page**

Cont from page 4

While GENCOs claimed about ₦4 trillion for the period from 2015 to the end of 2023, the Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading Company (NBET) has so far validated ₦1.8 trillion of these claims.

An additional ₦200 billion in unfunded subsidies has further contributed to the federal government's liability, bringing the total current exposure to ₦4 trillion, though this figure remains subject to final validation and negotiation before bond issuance.

Minister of Power, Adebayo Adelabu, commended Tinubu for his focused attention on the power sector, crediting the administration's reforms with restoring investor confidence and enhancing performance across the electricity value chain.

Adelabu highlighted critical milestones achieved in less than two years, including the signing of the Electricity Act, 2023 – the President's first legislative act, which liberalises the market.

He noted the launch of Nigeria's first Integrated National Electricity Policy in 24 years, attracting over \$2 billion in new private capital, and a 70% growth in the sector's annual revenue (from ₦1 trillion in 2023 to ₦1.7 trillion in 2024), reducing government subsidy obligations by over ₦700 billion.

Adelabu reported an increase in installed generation capacity from 13,000 MW to 14,000 MW, with a record peak generation of 5,801 MW and maximum daily energy delivery of 120,370 MWh achieved on March 4, 2025.

He announced that there had been no national grid collapse in 2025, attributing this to interventions under the Presidential Power Initiative, which added over 700MW of

transmission capacity.

Significant progress in narrowing Nigeria's metering gap was also reported, through the ₦700 billion Presidential Metering Initiative and the World Bank-supported Distribution Sector Recovery Programme (DISREP).

Despite these strides, Adelabu warned that the sector faces an urgent liquidity crisis that could jeopardise the sustainability of ongoing reforms.

He appealed to the President for immediate support to at least partially clear these obligations over a defined period and urged continued backing for structural reforms to ensure a resilient and financially viable power market.

Business leaders Tony Elumelu and Kola Adesina also made fervent appeals for swift intervention.

Elumelu described the situation as a 'last hope', emphasising that GENCOs are heavily indebted to banks, with real foreclosure threats looming due to systemic arrears.

He praised the Tinubu administration for restoring integrity to oil production, noting that daily output

has recovered from a 97% loss in 2023 to 98% retention today.

"We don't need power to complete your transformation, we need power to enable it," Elumelu stated, urging a resolution to the debt issue.

Adesina reiterated the critical need for immediate liquidity, also raising concerns about gas supply shortfalls.

He warned that without urgent action, generation capacity would stall, imperilling Nigeria's industrial and economic aspirations.

Adesina specifically proposed unlocking 800 million cubic feet of gas through NLNG to boost supply to underperforming power plants in the Afam axis.

The high-level meeting saw the attendance of key government officials, including the Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabamila; the Coordinating Minister of the Economy and Minister of Finance, Mr. Wale Edun; and the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Alhaji Mohammed Idris, alongside various regulators and stakeholders from the electricity industry.



Nigeria pivots to private sector-driven food systems reform ahead of UN summit

By Friday Omosola



Vice President Kashim Shettima has declared Nigeria's strategic intent to pursue a transformative, private sector-led approach to reforming its food systems.

This ambitious strategy aims to position Nigeria as a continental frontrunner in agricultural innovation, with the government committed to providing robust support structures.

He spoke yesterday during a briefing by the Task Force on the 2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4) at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Shettima hinted at the potential introduction of single-digit credit facilities to finance agricultural ventures.

He drew a parallel to the early development model of countries like South Korea, which significantly supported industrial conglomerates.

"Our role as a government is to derisk, catalyse and convene," Shettima stated, outlining a framework designed to empower private enterprise through supportive government policies.

"We will be active in policy formulation and support structures. We should allow the private sector to drive the process."

As Nigeria prepares its delegation for the upcoming summit, co-hosted by Ethiopia and Italy, Shettima outlined three primary objectives.

Establishing Nigeria as a thought leader on African food systems reform, leveraging international partnerships to align with domestic priorities, and advancing a private sector-led blueprint for continental food transformation.

Shettima underscored the broader significance of this shift: "Food systems transformation is not just about reacting to crises but about building the economic backbone of a resilient Nigeria."

"Our pathway is clear – empower the private sector, unlock functioning markets and ensure that every reform we pursue lays the foundation for long-term national productivity and prosperity."

The 2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake, scheduled to convene global leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from July 27th to 29th, 2025, will assess progress made on food systems

transformation commitments from the inaugural summit.

Dr Sanjo Faniran, National Convener and Director of the Social Development Office, Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, recalled that Shettima's leadership at the 2023 stocktaking events in Rome was instrumental in guiding Nigeria's current food system transformation efforts.

Faniran emphasised the crucial importance of the Vice President's presence at the forthcoming Ethiopia summit, noting ongoing collaborations with all 36 states and the FCT.

Among the key sideline events at the summit, Faniran mentioned a ministerial roundtable on public finance, trade, and responsible investment, organised by the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on the second day.

This roundtable, to be convened by the United Nations Deputy Secretary General, Hajiya Amina Mohammed, further underscores the necessity of high-level Nigerian representation

Presidency rejects Kwankwaso's claim of Northern neglect

By Friday Omosola



The presidency has dismissed claims made by Senator Rabiu Kwankwaso, the 2023 presidential candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), that President Bola Tinubu's administration is neglecting Northern Nigeria.

In a statement issued on Friday, Special Adviser to the President on Media and Public Communication, Sunday Dare, rejected the allegations, stating that significant projects are currently underway across the northern region.

"The claim that Northern Nigeria has been left behind is incorrect. The Tinubu administration has initiated and continued several landmark projects in the North, covering roads, agriculture, healthcare, and energy," Dare said.

He provided details of key infrastructure and development projects, including the Abuja-Kaduna-Kano Expressway, the Sokoto-Badagry Super Highway, and the Ajaokuta-Kaduna-Kano Gas Pipeline.

The presidential aide also referenced a \$158.15 million agriculture value chain initiative being implemented in nine

northern states, alongside the Kolmani Integrated Development Project, which spans Bauchi and Gombe.

Other programmes highlighted in the statement include the Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL), aimed at restoring one million hectares of degraded land in the North.

In the health sector, Dare cited expansions and investments at institutions such as Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital in Zaria, University of Jos Teaching Hospital, and Federal Medical Centre in Nguru. He added that approximately 1,000 primary healthcare centres across the North are being revitalised.

On transportation, he mentioned major road upgrades like the Kano-Kongolam Road, Kaduna-Jos Road, the Kano-Maiduguri Dual Carriageway, and other rehabilitation efforts in Borno and Adamawa.

Energy projects, according to the statement, include the 614 km Ajaokuta-Kaduna-Kano Gas Pipeline, the Gwagwalada Power Plant, and planned solar installations in Kaduna.

Ongoing rail developments such as the Kaduna-Kano Rail Line, the Kano-Maradi Rail Line, and Abuja Metro repairs were also cited.

"Northern Nigeria is not left behind. From road networks to gas pipelines, agriculture, health, and rail, this administration has the North well covered," Dare added.

Kwankwaso accuses Tinubu of neglecting North

The response came after Kwankwaso, speaking at a constitutional dialogue in Kano on Thursday, accused the Tinubu administration of marginalising the North while prioritising development in the South. He voiced frustration over deteriorating infrastructure, particularly federal roads in the North, recalling a recent experience where he had to travel by road from Abuja to Kano via Kaduna due to a cancelled flight. He described the journey as "hell" because of the poor road conditions.

Kwankwaso also warned that the perceived imbalance in resource allocation was contributing to worsening poverty and insecurity across Northern Nigeria.

FG moves to repatriate citizens stranded in Central African Republic

By Friday Omosola



The Federal Government (FG) has initiated efforts to rescue and repatriate a group of its citizens abandoned by their employers in the Central African Republic (CAR).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed this action in a statement released on Friday.

This followed the widespread circulation of a video depicting the distressed Nigerians in the remote Bambari region, approximately 850 kilometers from CAR's capital, Bangui.

According to Kimiebi Ebienfa, spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials from the Nigerian Mission in the Central African Republic have established contact with the affected individuals.

The Embassy of Nigeria in Bangui is now actively collaborating with local authorities to ensure the safety, well-being, and prompt return of the

stranded workers.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is deeply concerned about the welfare of Nigerian workers currently stranded in the Central African Republic," the statement added.

It acknowledged the viral video showing nationals abandoned by their employers and facilitators.

The Ministry further detailed the ongoing rescue operation: "The affected Nigerians have been contacted by the hardworking officials of our Mission in the Central African Republic, and the Embassy of Nigeria in Bangui is actively engaging with relevant authorities to ensure the safety, protection, and swift repatriation of the affected Nigerian nationals."

Their passports have been retrieved, and a vehicle, accompanied by a military escort, has been dispatched to Bambari to transport them to Bangui.

They are expected to arrive in the capital city on Saturday, July 26.

Discussions are also underway with the company responsible for their employment to secure their accommodation and welfare in Bangui, as well as their subsequent journey back to Nigeria.

Reaffirming its dedication to safeguarding its citizens globally, the FG urged Nigerians seeking employment abroad to exercise caution.

It advised prospective travelers to thoroughly verify the credibility of potential employers and ensure all travel documents are in proper order before departure.

Additionally, Nigerians residing in foreign countries are encouraged to register their presence and that of their employees with the nearest Nigerian Embassy or Mission to prevent difficulties in the event of consular issues.

“Tough decisions, gentle tone”: New APC Chair Yilwatda outlines leadership vision

By Gbenga Olaleye



The newly appointed National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Professor Nentawe Yilwatda, has opened up about his emergence as the party's leader and how he intends to steer the ruling party through consultation, teamwork, and decisive but measured leadership.

Speaking on Politics Today, a programme on Channels Television aired Thursday evening, Yilwatda addressed questions about his calm and reserved nature and how he intends to handle the responsibilities that come with leading the APC, which currently controls more than 20 states and holds a majority in the National Assembly.

“Look at the body language of Mr President—soft, calm, and gentle. You can see where he is driving the country's economy, taking tough decisions where people fear to even discuss,” Yilwatda said, referencing President Bola Tinubu as his model of leadership.

Pressed on whether he would take similarly tough decisions, he

responded firmly:

“I will, because that's what the President asked me to do, and the members asked me to do also. Take tough decisions, but with a gentle tone and also incorporate teamwork in it for collective interest in the party.”

He was quick to clarify, however, that such decisions would not be made unilaterally, noting that the APC's National Working Committee (NWC) operates through collective input.

“It's our party. It is all about consultation, because I am a coordinator of the national and the sub-nationals,” he explained. “We have very little job here to do, just coordination.”

Yilwatda, a former Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and an engineer by training, hails from Plateau State—an opposition-controlled state—yet secured his new role with broad support from party stakeholders, including governors.

Asked how he emerged without the political backing of a sitting governor in his state, he described the process as smooth and inclusive.

“You can see how exemplary APC displayed—very smooth, very mature, no controversy—because this party is built on consultation,” he said.

“Almost everything was done based on consultations. You consult, you discuss, because that is what politics is all about.”

He added that the party's strength lies in its structure from the grassroots up, emphasising that real power rests with the wards, governors, and state party chairmen, while the national leadership plays a coordinating role.

Yilwatda's appointment is seen by many as a strategic move to further stabilise the party and align it more closely with President Tinubu's policy direction, particularly as the APC prepares for future electoral battles and governance reforms.

New Nigeria tax Act exempts baby products, electricity, EVs, others from VAT

By Gbenga Olaleye

President Bola Tinubu has signed the Nigeria Tax Act into law, exempting several goods and services from the 7.5% value-added tax (VAT). The Act, part of a broader tax reform initiative, was signed on June 26, alongside three other laws — the Nigeria Tax Administration Act, the Joint Revenue Board (Establishment) Law, and the Nigeria Revenue Service (Establishment) Act.

These reforms, which are expected to take effect from January 1, 2026, will operate under a newly branded agency — the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS).

According to the law, as sighted by The New Daily Prime, 15 categories of items will be completely VAT-exempt, while an additional 19 items will be subject to VAT at a zero per cent rate. In October 2024, a separate VAT modification order had already introduced similar reliefs specifically targeted at the oil and gas sector.

Full List of VAT-Exempt Items Supplies Fully Exempted from VAT:

1. Oil and gas exports
2. Crude petroleum oil and feed gas for processed gas
3. Goods bought for humanitarian or donor-funded projects
4. Baby products
5. Locally made sanitary towels, pads, or tampons
6. Military hardware, arms, ammunition, and locally produced uniforms for the armed forces and security agencies
7. Shared passenger road transport services
8. Purchase or lease of tractors, ploughs, and other farm equipment
9. Goods/services consumed within export processing or free trade zones for approved activities
10. Goods/services to diplomatic missions or individuals under the Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges Act (non-profit, public interest only)
11. Educational plays or performances by schools



12. Land or buildings (including rights or interest in them)
13. Money or securities (including related interests)
14. Government-issued licences
15. Assistive and disability-related products like wheelchairs, hearing aids, and braille materials

Items Charged to VAT at 0%:

1. Basic food items
2. All medical and pharmaceutical products (including herbal medicine)
3. Educational books and materials
4. Fertilisers
5. Locally made agricultural chemicals
6. Locally produced veterinary medicine
7. Locally made animal feed
8. Live cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry
9. Agricultural seeds and seedlings
10. Electricity generated by GENCOs and sold to the national grid or NBET
11. Electricity transmitted by TCN to DISCOs
12. Medical services
13. Tuition for nursery, primary, secondary, or tertiary education
14. Exported goods (excluding oil and gas)
15. Exported services
16. Exported incorporeal property
17. Medical equipment
18. Electric vehicles
19. Parts and semi-knockdown units for assembling electric vehicles

VAT relief for oil and gas, renewable energy

The law also reinforced the October 2, 2024, VAT modification order, which excluded a number of oil and energy products from VAT collection. These include diesel, LPG, CNG, and renewable energy infrastructure like clean cooking equipment and electric vehicles.

Taiwo Oyedele, chair of the Presidential Committee on Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms, confirmed that 63 specific items were listed as VAT-exempt under the updated fiscal regime.

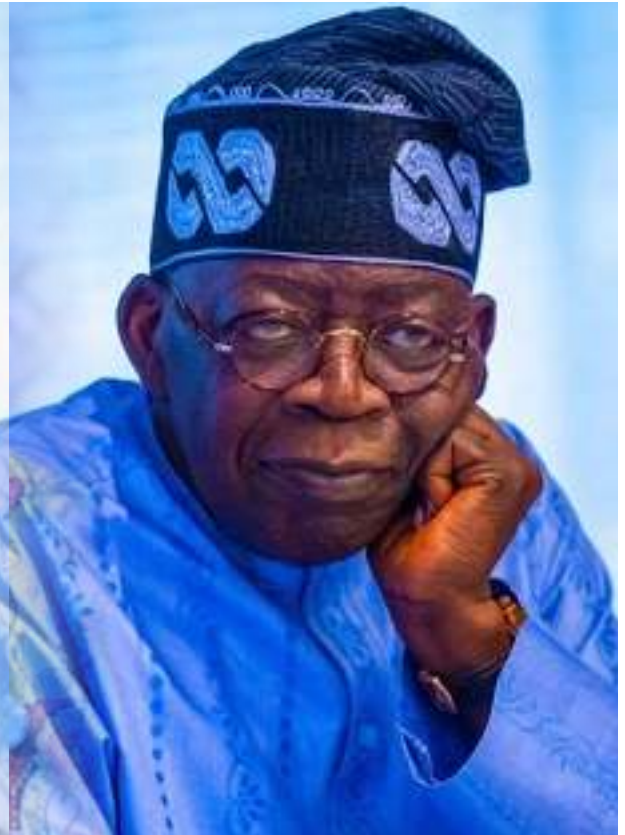
However, the law gives the finance minister the discretion to determine the commencement or suspension of VAT collection on these items “by an order issued in the Official Gazette.”

The Act also allows for future expansions: “Other goods and services may be classified as exempt or zero-rated by order of the Minister published in the official gazette,” the document states.

This move is seen as part of the government’s efforts to simplify taxation, incentivise growth in strategic sectors, and reduce the burden on low-income households.

Atiku slams Tinubu for meddling in opposition affairs amid national crises

By Gbenga Olaleye



Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar has criticised President Bola Tinubu and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), accusing them of interfering in the affairs of opposition parties while ignoring Nigeria's worsening economic and security challenges.

In a strongly worded statement released by his media aide, Paul Ibe, Atiku lambasted the President for mocking the African Democratic Congress (ADC) during the recent 14th APC National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting, claiming it reflects a broader strategy to undermine opposition parties.

"President Tinubu should first resolve the visible rift between himself and Vice President Kashim Shettima and fix Nigeria's broken economy before meddling in the affairs of the ADC," the statement read.

Atiku alleged that Tinubu's administration is using public funds and state institutions to destabilise alternative political voices in a desperate bid to create a one-party state. He also accused the presidency of engineering conflicts within the opposition coalition, particularly between his supporters and those of Labour Party presidential candidate, Peter Obi.

"We are fully aware that the supposed disagreements between supporters of Atiku and Peter Obi within the Coalition were deliberately stirred up by the presidency. Sadly for them, that divisive tactic has failed. The cracks have been mended, and the Coalition is now stronger than ever," the statement added.

The former Vice President described the APC-led government as "directionless,

incompetent, and completely disconnected from the suffering of ordinary Nigerians," citing rising insecurity, hunger, and poverty as evidence of failure.

He further accused the Tinubu administration of weaponising anti-corruption agencies to harass opposition figures into defecting to the APC, warning that such intimidation tactics were undermining democracy.

Atiku concluded by urging the President to abandon political distractions and instead focus on addressing Nigeria's urgent socioeconomic problems.

"The presidency is spending scarce public funds to fuel internal divisions in an attempt to weaken alternative political voices, President Tinubu must rise above petty politics and lead a government that truly serves the people," the statement said.

Bago hails Yilwatda's emergence as APC national chairman: "A round peg in a round hole"

By Gbenga Olaleye



Niger State Governor, Mohammed Umaru Bago, has commended the appointment of Prof. Nentawe Yilwatda as the new National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), describing it as "putting a round peg in a round hole."

In a congratulatory statement issued through his Chief Press Secretary, Bologi Ibrahim, Governor Bago expressed confidence in Prof. Yilwatda's capacity to lead the ruling party, citing his blend of academic brilliance, technocratic experience, and political acumen.

"I have confidence that Prof. Yilwatda has the wherewithal to transform the APC, strengthen unity among party members, and consolidate its hold on power at the centre, as well as win more states in the 2027 general elections," the governor stated.

Bago also described the emergence of Yilwatda, who is the current Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, as a strategic move that would benefit the APC both structurally and electorally. He further pledged the unwavering support of the Niger State

government in ensuring Yilwatda's success in his new role.

Prof. Nentawe Yilwatda's appointment was ratified by a voice vote during the National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of the APC, and he was officially sworn in during a session at the Presidential Villa, Abuja. The meeting was attended by several party stakeholders, including Governor Bago.

Yilwatda now assumes the helm of the APC with high expectations ahead of the 2027 general elections.

Yilwatda

Yilwatda is an engineer and academic who emerged as the APC flagbearer in the 2023 gubernatorial election in Plateau State but lost to Caleb Mutfwang of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

He challenged the victory of the PDP but after the Supreme Court upheld Mutfwang's win, he accepted the verdict.

Between July 2017 and December 2021, he served as the Resident Electoral Commissioner in Benue State.

Prior to that, he held the position of Director of ICT at the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi, where he worked for 12 years.

During the 2023 general elections, Yilwatda was appointed as the coordinator of the Tinubu/Shettima Campaign Organisation in Plateau State.

He maintains a close political alliance with former Plateau State Governor, Simon Lalong.

Following Lalong's election as senator representing Plateau South Senatorial District, the state's ministerial slot became vacant.

In response, several party chieftains and political groups rallied behind Yilwatda, urging his nomination as Lalong's replacement.

Tinubu subsequently nominated him for a ministerial role.

After undergoing screening by the National Assembly, he was sworn in as the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs on 24th October 2024.

Kwankwaso welcomes thousands of APC defectors to NNPP in Kano

By Gbenga Olaleye

Former presidential candidate and leader of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP), Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, has announced the defection of thousands of All Progressives Congress (APC) members into his party in Kano State.

Kwankwaso, who made the disclosure via his official X (formerly Twitter) handle on Friday, described the event as a "momentous occasion," praising the growing appeal of the NNPP's leadership in the state.

"Yesterday was a momentous occasion, as I received thousands of defectors from the All Progressives Congress (APC) into the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP)," he wrote.

The former governor of Kano State



and national leader of the Kwankwasiyya Movement hosted the defectors at his residence in Kano, where he assured them of fair treatment and full inclusion within the party.

"Speaking during the event at my

residence in Kano, I welcomed the new members into our party and I promised them equitable treatment and cooperation," he added.

Kwankwaso attributed the wave of defections to the NNPP's strong political leadership and its growing influence in Kano.

"The distinguished leadership style in Kano and our political leadership keep attracting more people into our fold, and I encourage those considering joining to do so without any hesitation," he said.

The mass defection marks a significant gain for the NNPP as it positions itself ahead of the 2027 general elections, with Kano remaining a key battleground in Nigeria's political landscape.



Lagos ranked second-best nightlife city in Africa

By Friday Omosola



Lagos, Nigeria's bustling commercial hub, has earned international recognition for its vibrant nightlife, securing a place among the world's top cities for after-dark entertainment.

The prestigious Time Out Magazine has positioned Lagos as the second-best nightlife destination in Africa, only surpassed by Cape Town, South Africa.

According to the renowned global media and entertainment brand, a significant 79% of Lagosian residents surveyed offered a positive assessment of their city's nocturnal scene.

This strong local endorsement helped Lagos outrank other major African cities, with Cairo, Egypt, placing third and Marrakech, Morocco, securing the fourth spot.

The magazine highlighted a notable evolution within Lagos's nightlife landscape, observing a shift from traditional, exclusive lounges towards more inclusive, energetic underground rave events, exemplified by popular gatherings like 'SweatItOutLagos' and 'Our Group Therapy.'

Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Gbenga Omotoso, lauded the ranking as a direct testament to the enhanced security and safety measures implemented across the state.

"It shows that the security architecture put in place by Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu is working," Omotoso stated.

He further linked the accolade to the increasing influx of tourists and the resounding success of the state's annual 'Detty December' festivities.

Looking ahead, he said Sanwo-Olu's administration is actively planning to regularise and calendarise various tourism activities, particularly those concentrated in the final quarter of the year.

According to him, Lagos is also set to make history by becoming the first African city to host the prestigious EI (water race) Championship.

Additionally, Omotoso noted that the African Union (AU) has chosen the state as the host city for the African Music Awards, scheduled from November 25 to 30, further bolstering the state's international profile.

These year-end events, colloquially known as 'Detty December' consistently generate substantial positive impacts on the state's socio-economic fabric.

The magazine's ranking methodology involved surveying thousands of city-dwellers and consulting a panel of experts.

The publication noted that nightlife worldwide is continually adapting to changing social habits, and its aim was to identify cities that excel in offering exceptional post-dark experiences.



ADC congratulates Yilwatda, warns against partisan overreach

By Friday Omosola



The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has extended a cautious congratulation to Nentawe Yilwatda following his appointment as the new National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), becoming the ruling party's fourth leader in two years.

In a press statement issued on Friday and signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Bolaji Abdullahi, the ADC said Yilwatda's emergence offers the APC a renewed opportunity to uphold democratic values and engage opposition parties with greater tolerance and respect.

While acknowledging the significance of leadership transitions in political organisations, Abdullahi criticised the APC for what it described as a history of conflating governance with propaganda and exercising

power with impunity.

He urged the new chairman to reverse this trend by fostering a more inclusive and accountable political environment.

"We hope that under Yilwatda's leadership, the APC and the federal government it controls will learn to accept disagreement as a democratic necessity, not sabotage, and view criticism as constructive, not subversive," the statement read in part.

Abdullahi also expressed concern over the venue of the APC's National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting that brought Yilwatda into office, which was held at the State House.

He described the choice of venue, a public facility funded by taxpayers, as a violation of the principle separating party and

state.

"This decision signals how far the ruling party has drifted from the standards of democratic accountability," Abdullahi stated, urging Yilwatda to guide the APC back to respecting institutional boundaries.

He further noted Yilwatda's past service as a Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC), describing it as a weighty credential that demands a commitment to electoral neutrality.

He urged him to use his experience to protect the integrity of Nigeria's democratic processes rather than manipulate them to the advantage.

Abdullahi expressed hope for a more honourable and enduring tenure for Yilwatda than those of his immediate predecessors.

Emir of Gusau, Ibrahim Bello, dies aged 71 after long illness

By Gbenga Olaleye



Ibrahim Bello, the Emir of Gusau in Zamfara State, has passed away at the age of 71 following a prolonged illness. The respected traditional ruler died on Friday in Abuja, the nation's capital.

The news of his passing was officially confirmed by Sulaiman Idris, spokesperson to Zamfara State Governor Dauda Lawal.

In a heartfelt statement released shortly after the announcement, Governor Lawal expressed his deep sorrow over the loss, describing the late Emir as a pillar of wisdom and stability within the state.

"I received with deep sadness the news of the passing of our father, His Royal Highness, Dr Ibrahim

Bello, the Emir of Gusau," Governor Lawal said. "I have lost a confidant and a father whose wisdom guides me and other state leaders. May the Almighty Allah (SWT) forgive his shortcomings and grant him Aljannah."

Emir Bello ascended to the throne in March 2015 following the death of his father, becoming the 16th Emir of Gusau. Over his decade-long reign, he was widely regarded as a unifying figure and played a significant role in promoting peace, cultural heritage, and community development in Zamfara State.

His leadership was marked by a commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation among the diverse communities under his domain. He was also known for his efforts

in supporting state initiatives aimed at addressing security and social challenges in the region.

Tributes have poured in from traditional institutions, political leaders, and citizens alike, all mourning the loss of a monarch whose influence and compassion left a lasting impact on the lives of many.

Funeral arrangements are expected to be announced in due course. The late Emir is survived by his family, members of the Gusau Emirate Council, and the people of Zamfara, who now mourn the passing of a revered leader.

May his soul rest in peace.

“Africa will remain enslaved to West for 25 years” — Primate Ayodele warns AU, ECOWAS

By Gbenga Olaleye

The Leader of the INRI Evangelical Spiritual Church, Primate Elijah Ayodele, has issued a dire warning regarding the state of the African continent, asserting that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) lack the capacity to resolve the growing crises facing the region.

In a statement signed by his media aide, Osho Oluwatosin, Primate Ayodele lamented what he described as stagnation among African leadership, claiming it has led to worsening socio-political and economic conditions across the continent.

“There is a problem everywhere in Africa, and these bodies, ECOWAS and AU, don’t have the solution to Africa’s problems,” he said.

The cleric predicted that internal strife will intensify, leading African nations to rise against one another, citing deep-rooted leadership failures and systemic corruption. He warned that the African continent will remain subjugated to Western influence for the next quarter of a century unless a radical transformation occurs.

“Africa will rise against Africa, there won’t be unity, and the continent will be used as a dumping ground for the Western world. The continent needs prayers to survive,” Primate Ayodele stated.

He also raised concerns about the integrity of the African Union Commission, predicting that it will soon be viewed as a corrupt and biased institution. The prophet painted a bleak picture of the future, suggesting that Africa will continue to face political instability, infrastructure setbacks, and the emergence of extremist threats.

“There is danger ahead for the African Union Commission; it will be seen as an organisation that is corrupt and one-sided,” he added.



Touching on the wave of military coups that have rocked several African nations in recent years, Primate Ayodele warned that such upheavals are far from over. He highlighted misinformation, weak governance, and unresolved conflicts as major triggers for further unrest.

“Coups are not yet over in Africa because a lot of misinformation will affect the continent,” he said. “There will be a lot of controversial matters that ECOWAS will face, like border problems, expansion in the free trade zone, road networking, and infrastructure.”

The prophet also urged for fervent prayers to avert the untimely death of a prominent African leader and potential attacks on several African countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Somalia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Togo, and Ghana.

On security matters, Primate Ayodele forecasted the emergence of new terrorist groups in several countries, warning of an increasingly fragile security landscape.

“There will be a new terrorist group in

Guinea, Mali, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Togo, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, the Benin Republic, and Burundi,” he cautioned. “The continent needs a unified force that will come against these terrorists, and I see the economy not becoming stable.”

He further criticised ECOWAS for what he described as missteps in its policies and interventions, stating that the regional body’s future actions may hinder Africa’s development rather than support it.

“ECOWAS will get so many things wrong because their attempt to secure Africa will be very slim. The body will carry out an action that will affect the expansion of Africa.”

In concluding his prophetic message, Primate Ayodele called for a continental spiritual awakening and a unified front to confront the numerous challenges plaguing Africa.

“The continent will continue to be a slave to the Western world for 25 years, until a new Africa emerges,” he reiterated.

Tems crowned Africa's top-selling female artiste

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Nigerian music star, Temilade Openiyi, widely known as Tems, has achieved a new milestone as the best-selling female artist in Africa.

Since launching her music career in 2018, Tems has risen to global prominence with her unique sound and vocal style. Now, she has surpassed celebrated artists like Angelique Kidjo, Tiwa Savage, and Yemi Alade in total certified music sales.

According to international music chart data, Tems has sold over 25 million certified units worldwide. These sales include streams, downloads, and physical copies, with official certifications from major music markets.

Tems' biggest success so far remains "Essence," her 2020 collaboration

with Wizkid. The song, which became a global Afrobeats anthem, has been certified 5x Platinum in the United States, representing over five million units sold.

Another major hit, "Wait For U", a collaboration with American rapper Future and Drake, has gone 3x Platinum in the U.S., with over three million units sold. The track made history in 2022 when it debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100, making Tems the first African female artist to top the chart.

Her solo songs have also done well. "Free Mind" has earned 2x Platinum certification, and "Higher" has been certified Platinum, all in the U.S. Tems also holds multiple Platinum and Gold certifications in countries like Canada, the UK, France, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, and South Africa.

Tems' rapid rise has made her one of the most prominent voices in the global Afrobeats movement. She won a Grammy Award in 2023 and has worked with top international artists, earning critical acclaim along the way.

While Tems leads among female African artists, Algerian singer Cheb Khaled remains the best-selling African act overall, with 81 million units sold. He's followed by Nigerian Afrobeats star Wizkid, with 75 million units.

Still, Tems' rise to the top in less than a decade is nothing short of historic. With new music expected soon and a growing international fanbase, her influence continues to grow, both at home and around the world.

Omah Lay, manager Muiyiwa Awoniyi part ways

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian talent manager, Muiyiwa Awoniyi, has officially announced the end of his professional relationship with music star, Omah Lay.

Awoniyi shared the news on Friday through a post on his official X (formerly Twitter) account. In the message, he confirmed that he is no longer managing the 'Soso' singer and made it clear that the decision was mutual and made with respect.

"With love and respect, I am no longer managing @Omah_Lay," he wrote. "That's my brother and I wish him all the best in his endeavours for life!"

Though brief, his post carried a strong message of goodwill. Awoniyi made it clear that there was no conflict between them. He emphasised that they remain close personally, even as they go their separate ways professionally.

Since the announcement, many fans and industry observers have reacted online. Some praised the manager for how gracefully he handled the announcement, while others expressed curiosity about what led to the decision. However, both Awoniyi and Omah Lay have chosen not to share further details, keeping the reasons behind their split private for now.

Omah Lay, whose real name is Stanley Omah Didia, became widely known in 2020 with the release of his debut project *Get Layd*. The project earned him massive attention and made him one of the most promising voices in Afrobeats. He has since delivered hit songs such as "Godly," "Understand," "Attention," and "Soso," gaining international recognition.

During this period of growth, Muiyiwa Awoniyi served as his manager, working behind the scenes to guide his career. His strategic approach helped Omah Lay secure major collaborations, award nominations, and global performances. Many industry insiders credit Awoniyi for



helping to shape Omah Lay's early success.

Aside from managing Omah Lay, Awoniyi is well known in the Nigerian music industry as the man behind Tems, the Grammy-winning R&B artist. Under his guidance, Tems has collaborated with major international stars such as Wizkid, Drake, and Beyoncé. Her rise to global fame has been one of the most talked-about success stories in recent years, and Awoniyi's role in it is widely acknowledged.

He also previously managed Nonso Amadi, a Nigerian-Canadian singer known for blending R&B with Afrobeat influences. Awoniyi's track record shows a strong ability to spot talent early and build effective strategies to elevate artists on the global stage.

Following Friday's announcement, fans have been eager to know who will take over the management of Omah Lay going forward. Some speculate that the singer may already have a new team in place, while others believe he may be exploring new directions in his career.

Omah Lay yet to react

So far, Omah Lay has not made any

official comment about the development, and it is unclear whether he will release a statement or introduce a new manager soon. What's certain is that the singer continues to enjoy strong fan support and is expected to release new music soon, following the success of his debut album *Boy Alone*.

In the entertainment world, it is not unusual for artists and their managers to part ways. These decisions often reflect personal growth, new goals, or changes in creative direction. What makes Awoniyi's exit stand out is the mutual respect and brotherhood he expressed in his message, a tone that many described as rare and admirable in today's fast-moving music scene.

As for Awoniyi, he remains focused on his work with Tems and is likely to continue shaping the careers of top-tier artists. With his reputation and experience, he may soon be linked with other rising stars or perhaps take on new roles beyond artist management.

While their professional journey has ended, it's clear that Awoniyi and Omah Lay still share a strong personal bond. Their time together marked an important chapter in the singer's career and the Nigerian music industry at large. Whatever paths they choose next, both appear set for continued success.

Terry G: 'Entertaining at political events doesn't equal support'

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian singer Gabriel Oche Amanyi, popularly known as Terry G, has addressed the backlash he received for performing at political events, saying his presence on such stages does not mean he supports any political party.

In a recent episode of The Real Shareholders podcast, the "Akpako Master" spoke candidly about the criticism he faced after performing at President Bola Tinubu's pre-inauguration concert in May 2023. The event, held at the MKO Abiola National Stadium in Abuja, drew mixed reactions online, with some accusing Terry G of aligning himself with the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

But Terry G insists that he is not affiliated with any political group. According to him, he is an independent musician simply doing his job.

"As an artist, we are usually invited and paid to perform. That's how we earn a living," he said during the podcast. "In today's tough economy, if a political party calls you for a show, you're lucky. It's an opportunity. So respect to the party, but that doesn't mean I support them."

Terry G explained that his role was strictly professional and should not be misunderstood as a political endorsement.

"I'm an independent artist. I didn't go to those events to campaign or to declare support for any candidate. I was there to perform. That's my job," he stressed. "If I had climbed the stage and told people to vote for APC or any other party, then maybe the criticism would make sense. But I never did that."

He went further to say that people were unfair in their judgment.

"People should judge me based on



what I said, not just because I showed up. I went there, performed, and left. Nothing more," he said. "Many of my colleagues have done the same thing, yet I don't understand why mine is different. It's like people are waiting to find fault."

Terry G shares artiste's financial reality

Terry G also pointed out the financial realities of being an artist in Nigeria. He said musicians, like everyone else, are trying to survive and keep their careers going in a difficult economy.

"Music is my source of income," he said. "I have bills to pay. If a legit offer comes through, and it doesn't involve endorsing anything against my beliefs, I'll take it. Performing at a political concert is not a crime."

However, his performance at the pre-inauguration concert did more than spark outrage. It also led to a bitter fallout between the singer and organisers linked to the event.

In November 2023, Terry G publicly accused the APC of failing to pay him for his performance. He claimed that some individuals hijacked the money meant for him, leaving him unpaid

for the show.

Speaking at the time, he wrote on social media, "I supported APC, performed at their event, and till now I haven't been paid. Some people hijacked the money and left me in the dark."

The statement stirred further reactions from fans, with some sympathising with him and others pointing fingers.

Despite the controversy, Terry G says he has no regrets about performing at the concert. But he wants people to understand the difference between doing a job and endorsing a cause.

"Artists are not politicians," he said. "We entertain. That's what we're paid for. Don't confuse performance with politics."

He ended by calling for a more balanced view of musicians who take up political gigs, urging fans not to jump to conclusions without facts.

"I'm just out here working hard, like everyone else," he said. "Let's not turn everything into a political war."

Trump and Powell clash over Fed renovation costs during rare visit

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



In a rare and unusually tense presidential visit to the headquarters of the US Federal Reserve, President Donald Trump clashed with Fed Chair Jerome Powell on Thursday over the ballooning costs of ongoing renovations at the central bank's historic buildings.

The visit, part of Trump's continued efforts to pressure the Federal Reserve to slash interest rates, quickly turned combative as the president criticised the \$2.5bn bill for the renovation project, suggesting the costs were edging into fraudulent territory.

Donning hard hats inside the heart of the construction zone, Trump called on Powell to stand beside him and accused the project of now costing \$3.1bn. "It looks like it's about \$3.1bn, it went up a little bit or a lot," Trump said, prompting a visibly irritated Powell to shake his head and respond, "I am not aware of that."

Trump then handed Powell a sheet of

paper, which the Fed Chair briefly examined. Powell clarified that the higher figure appeared to include the cost of renovating the Martin Building, another Federal Reserve facility that was refurbished five years ago. "It's not new," Powell added dryly.

The clash underscores the growing tension between Trump and the Fed, as the president intensifies calls for an aggressive interest rate cut, specifically, a three-point drop. The Fed's current benchmark rate stands between 4.25% and 4.50%, and its 19-member policy committee is expected to leave it unchanged at their upcoming two-day meeting next week.

When asked by a reporter how he would respond if a project manager oversaw such a drastic budget overrun, Trump was blunt: "I'd fire him." However, he softened his tone shortly after, walking back previous threats to dismiss Powell, a move that has previously spooked

financial markets. "To do that is a big move, and I just don't think it's necessary," Trump said. "I believe he's going to do the right thing."

Fed officials, anticipating the visit, had earlier escorted journalists through the active construction sites, guiding them around cement mixers and heavy machinery as drills and saws whirled in the background. They pointed out advanced security features, including blast-resistant windows, which they said were partly responsible for the project's steep cost. Tariffs and rising material and labour prices were also cited as contributing factors.

The encounter adds another dramatic chapter to Trump's turbulent relationship with the Federal Reserve, a relationship marked by name-calling, public criticism, and ongoing attempts to influence monetary policy.

Reeves may override Supreme Court in £44bn car finance scandal

By Fatimah Idera



Rachel Reeves is reportedly considering overruling the Supreme Court if judges rule in favour of consumers in the £44 billion car finance scandal.

According to reports, the Chancellor is exploring plans for the Government to retrospectively change the law to limit the compensation lenders would have to pay if the Supreme Court upholds a recent Court of Appeal ruling. This could significantly reduce the financial liabilities of Britain's biggest banks and lenders.

The scandal revolves around claims from drivers who say they were unlawfully sold car loans, potentially forcing lenders, including Close Brothers, Barclays, Santander, and Lloyds, to pay out up to £44 billion in compensation. The Treasury is debating whether new legislation could be applied retrospectively to cover past contracts and cases, a move that would lower the multibillion-pound payouts faced by these lenders.

Retrospective legislation could also prevent the scandal from expanding beyond car loans, shielding lenders from further claims related to commission payments on other financial products, such as loans for household appliances and furniture.

Government sources have neither confirmed nor ruled out such an intervention by Reeves.

The Supreme Court was expected to announce a date for its ruling on Thursday, but did not, raising the possibility that a decision could coincide with the autumn Budget.

This follows a February ruling in which the Supreme Court halted the Chancellor's attempt to block compensation payments to drivers. The Treasury had argued that large payouts could harm the UK economy and deter investment, insisting that any compensation should be capped.

Currently, the rules governing these

payments are based on common law, meaning they are shaped by judicial decisions rather than Parliamentary legislation. New laws would give Parliament ultimate authority over the regulation and transparency of commission arrangements given to borrowers.

While retrospective legislation on compensation cases is rare and controversial in the UK, it is not without precedent. In 2013, Parliament passed the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act, which prevented £130 million in compensation payments to individuals whose benefits were stopped after refusing to work for private companies.

Several lenders have already set aside funds to cover potential compensation costs: Lloyds Banking Group has reserved £1.2 billion, Santander UK £295 million, and Close Brothers £165 million.

The Treasury is yet to comment.

Australia and UK sign 50-year defence pact

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Australia and the United Kingdom will sign a landmark 50-year defence treaty this weekend to bolster their partnership under the Aukus submarine pact, even as the United States, the key partner in the trilateral alliance, hesitates amid a review of its commitments.

The treaty, to be formally signed on Saturday, will be announced on Friday following the annual Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations (Aukmin) in Sydney. Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles will be joined by their British counterparts, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Defence Secretary John Healey, to unveil the agreement.

Notably, the US is not a party to the treaty, which underscores the strengthening bilateral defence and industrial ties between Canberra and London. The deal comes as the Trump administration reassesses whether the Aukus submarine deal aligns with its "America First" doctrine, raising questions about the future of US involvement.

Although full details of the treaty have yet to be released, it is expected to provide a broad framework for cooperation on the development of nuclear-powered submarines under the Aukus programme. The first submarines in the new class will be built in the UK, with Australian production to follow in Adelaide.

"The UK-Australia relationship is like no other," said UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy. "In our increasingly volatile and dangerous world, our anchoring friendship has real impact in the protection of global peace and prosperity."

The treaty will also strengthen economic collaboration, particularly around industrial capacity, with Australia already committed to investing around \$4.6bn in British



industry to support reactor development for the future Aukus submarines.

In a joint statement, Wong and Marles said the treaty represents a critical alignment of strategic and economic interests. "We take the world as it is but together, we are working to shape it for the better," Wong stated.

Under the broader \$368bn Aukus programme, Australia is expected to purchase at least three Virginia-class submarines from the United States beginning in the early 2030s, before transitioning to domestically produced Aukus-class vessels. The first Australian-built submarine is anticipated to be in the water by the early 2040s.

However, the US leg of the pact has been thrown into doubt by a review launched by the Trump administration, led by Pentagon Undersecretary of Defence for Policy, Elbridge Colby. A known sceptic of the agreement, Colby has warned the deal could undermine US naval strength at a time when America's submarine fleet is operating at just 75% of its target and producing vessels at half the necessary rate.

According to the Aukus agreement, the US president must certify that the sale of any submarine to Australia does not compromise American undersea

capabilities, a clause now under intense scrutiny.

While many analysts believe the US will ultimately reaffirm its Aukus commitments, speculation persists that Washington may demand additional concessions. These could include increased financial investment from Australia or explicit diplomatic support in the event of a US conflict with China over Taiwan.

In a show of solidarity and presence in the Indo-Pacific, the UK's carrier strike group, led by HMS Prince of Wales, arrived in Darwin on Wednesday as part of the Talisman Sabre multinational military exercises. It is the first UK carrier strike group to visit Australia since 1997.

The task force includes five ships, 24 jets, and 17 helicopters, and underscores Britain's growing engagement in the region. Ministers Marles and Wong will join their British counterparts in Darwin on Sunday to observe operations.

UK High Commissioner to Australia Sarah MacIntosh described the strike group's arrival as a symbol of the nations' enduring commitment. "This is an anchor relationship in a contested world," she said.

US withdraws from Gaza ceasefire talks

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The United States has withdrawn its negotiating team from ceasefire talks in Qatar, marking a significant setback in efforts to end the 21-month-long war in Gaza. The move follows a statement from Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, who accused Hamas of lacking the will to reach an agreement.

"While the mediators have made a great effort, Hamas does not appear to be coordinated or acting in good faith," Witkoff said on Thursday. "We will now consider alternative options to bring the hostages home and try to create a more stable environment for the people of Gaza."

The abrupt withdrawal casts fresh doubt over the already fragile diplomatic process, which has been mediated by Qatar with limited progress. Israel has also recalled its negotiating team following Hamas's latest response, effectively suspending the talks.

According to Haaretz, Israeli officials described the withdrawals as a coordinated move intended to apply pressure on Hamas. The decision comes despite mounting humanitarian desperation in Gaza, where the UN reports that Israeli forces have killed more than 1,000 people in recent weeks, many while attempting to retrieve food. At least 85 Palestinians were reportedly killed on Sunday alone.

The World Health Organization on Wednesday described the crisis as "man-made mass starvation" driven by strict limitations on aid deliveries.

In response to Witkoff's remarks, Hamas said it was "surprised",



insisting its latest position had been welcomed by mediators and offered a viable path to a comprehensive agreement.

"The movement affirms its keenness to continue negotiations and engage in them in a manner that helps overcome obstacles and leads to a permanent ceasefire agreement," Hamas said in a statement early Friday.

The proposed deal on the table had included a 60-day ceasefire during which Hamas would release 10 living hostages and the remains of 18 others in stages. In return, Israel would release Palestinian prisoners, increase humanitarian aid to Gaza, and engage in further negotiations towards a lasting truce.

However, talks have repeatedly stalled over key points of contention, chief among them, the redeployment of Israeli forces during a ceasefire. Israel is reportedly insistent on retaining control of the Netzarim and Philadelphi corridors, while also demanding the full disarmament and surrender of Hamas before the war is brought to an end.

Hamas, for its part, has signalled a willingness to step down from power under specific conditions but has not agreed to Israel's terms in full.

Other unresolved issues include the identities of Palestinian prisoners to be released and the specific areas from which Israeli troops would withdraw during any pause in fighting.

Thursday's development marks a stark contrast to earlier signals from the Trump administration, which had expressed cautious optimism about securing a breakthrough. The former president, now back in office, campaigned on promises to end America's involvement in foreign wars and has pushed for a ceasefire deal in Gaza as part of that effort.

The last temporary ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, reached in January, collapsed in March after a surprise wave of Israeli airstrikes killed more than 400 people.

Now, with both sides stepping back from the table, and no clear "alternative options" outlined by the US, hopes for peace in Gaza appear to be fading once again.

WAFCON 2024 Final: Nigeria vs Morocco for the title

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

All eyes will be on Rabat's Olympic Stadium this Saturday as Nigeria's Super Falcons lock horns with host nation Morocco in the 2024 Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) final. It's a clash steeped in significance: Nigeria, the continent's most decorated women's team, are chasing a record-extending 10th title, while Morocco are bidding to make history by lifting the trophy for the first time.

Kick-off is at 20:00 GMT, and the stakes could not be higher.

Nigeria have been dominant throughout the tournament, conceding just once in five matches. Their semi-final victory over defending champions South Africa came courtesy of a stoppage-time winner from right-back Michelle Alozie, continuing their "Mission X" campaign — a slogan that symbolizes the squad's drive to reclaim the crown last won in 2018.

"We're born with the zeal to fight and win," said forward Esther Okoronkwo. "We've grown as a team and shown that in every game."

Under coach Justin Madugu, the Falcons have found the perfect balance between strength and style. Nine different players have scored so far, showcasing the team's depth and versatility. Goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie has barely been tested, conceding only from the penalty spot.

Morocco, meanwhile, are hoping to complete a fairy-tale run. The Atlas Lionesses, runners-up in 2022, are now one win away from becoming the first North African team to win the WAFCON title. Their semi-final win over Ghana came via penalties, and they've shown resilience throughout the tournament — coming from behind in multiple matches.

"We've seen a Moroccan team that doesn't give up," said Nigerian legend Desire Oparanozie. "They keep coming at you. That's impressive."



However, the hosts have looked more vulnerable than during their 2022 run. Goalkeeper Khadija Er-Rmichi has made notable errors, and star captain Ghizlane Chebbak — joint-top scorer with four goals — has struggled in the knockout stages. Winger Sanaa Mssoudy, expected to be a key creative outlet, has also failed to hit top form.

Despite this, Morocco have weapons of their own. Ibtissam Jraidi leads the line with pace and composure, and coach Jorge Vilda — the Spaniard who led his country to World Cup glory in 2023 — has been tasked with transforming individual talent into collective success.

Vilda's appointment has been controversial due to his exit from the Spain job amid misconduct allegations surrounding former federation president Luis Rubiales. Still, he could make history by becoming the first coach to win continental titles with two different nations — and the first to lead Morocco to WAFCON glory.

"It's a divided issue, but a win here would be transformative for women's football in Morocco," said journalist Maher Mezahi.



While Morocco aim to inspire a new generation, Nigeria are motivated by redemption. The Falcons were eliminated by Morocco in the 2022 semi-final after two red cards and a heartbreaking penalty shootout loss. This final offers the perfect chance for revenge.

"The pressure is on Morocco as hosts," Oparanozie said. "But Nigeria is built for big moments. We've silenced home crowds before."

Indeed, in 2016, the Super Falcons beat host Cameroon in front of 40,000 fans in Yaoundé — proof they can handle the pressure of a partisan stadium.

A win for Morocco would signal a shift in African women's football and reward the nation's vast investment in the women's game. A Nigerian victory, meanwhile, would reinforce their legacy and reassert their dominance.

Saturday's final isn't just about a trophy. It's about power, pride, and progress. One team will make history — either by confirming supremacy or by breaking new ground.

Let the battle for African glory begin.

Gyokeres set to join Arsenal in £63.5m move

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Arsenal are on the brink of completing the high-profile signing of Swedish striker Viktor Gyokeres from Sporting CP in a deal worth £63.5 million. The transfer, one of the most anticipated of the summer window, is expected to be finalised over the weekend, with only minor details concerning add-on payments delaying the announcement.

The 27-year-old has been granted permission to travel and undergo a medical with Arsenal, and he is expected to sign a five-year contract. Once completed, the deal will mark a major statement of intent by Mikel Arteta's side as they aim to close the gap on Premier League champions Liverpool.

Arsenal are currently in Singapore for the opening leg of their pre-season tour of Asia. Speaking on Friday, manager Mikel Arteta remained tight-lipped when asked about the potential new arrival but hinted that any signing would join the squad as soon as possible.

"I cannot talk about a player who is not ours yet," Arteta said. "But obviously, once we finalise everything with a player, we want to integrate him with the team quickly. Immediately is better so they can start to join the team, get to know each other, and absorb the ideas we want to instill."

Gyokeres has been in blistering form for Sporting, scoring an astonishing 54 goals in 52 matches last season and playing a vital role in securing back-to-back Primeira Liga titles. His eye for goal and relentless physical presence have caught the attention of Europe's top clubs, but it's Arsenal who have emerged victorious in the race for his signature.

BBC Sport revealed earlier this month that Arsenal turned their attention to Gyokeres after hitting a roadblock in negotiations with RB Leipzig for Benjamin Sesko. Gyokeres quickly



became the top priority for the Gunners, who have been seeking an elite centre-forward to bolster their attacking line.

Despite finishing second in the Premier League last season, Arsenal struggled at times in front of goal, scoring 17 fewer goals than title-winners Liverpool. Arteta has been clear in his desire to address this shortfall and believes Gyokeres' signing could be the key to unlocking their full potential.

Gyokeres' journey to the top has been anything but conventional. After showing promise in the Championship with Coventry City, where he netted 43 goals in 116 appearances and was named in the 2022-23 Championship Team of the Year, he earned a £20 million move to Sporting in the summer of 2023. Since then, he has developed into one of Europe's most clinical finishers.

His remarkable goal-scoring return in Portugal — 97 goals in just 102 appearances — has made him one of the most sought-after strikers in Europe. His blend of strength, intelligent movement, and ruthless finishing has drawn comparisons to Premier League greats, and he will

now have the chance to test himself at the highest level in England.

Gyokeres has also been a regular for Sweden since making his debut in 2019, scoring 15 goals in 26 appearances. His international experience adds further value to a player entering the prime of his career.

His arrival follows the recent signing of England winger Noni Madueke from Chelsea, as Arsenal continue to strengthen their squad ahead of the new campaign. Arteta is determined to build a team capable of challenging on multiple fronts and sees Gyokeres as a central piece in that puzzle.

If the deal is completed as expected, Gyokeres could link up with the Arsenal squad as early as next week, giving him the opportunity to integrate with his new teammates during the pre-season tour.

Arsenal fans will be eager to see whether Gyokeres can replicate his prolific Portuguese form in the Premier League. If he does, the Gunners could finally have the firepower needed to bring the title back to North London.

Super Falcons urged to stay focused for WAFCON glory

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

As the stage is set for the grand finale of the 2024 Women's Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON), former Nigerian international goalkeeper Alloy Agu has called on the Super Falcons to give nothing less than 100% concentration if they are to overcome a resurgent Moroccan side and lift their record-extending 10th continental title.

The eagerly anticipated clash will take place at the 21,000-capacity Olympic Stadium in Rabat on Saturday, where Nigeria will face the host nation Morocco in what promises to be a pulsating final between two undefeated teams.

Speaking to Completesports.com, Agu emphasized that the Falcons must remain fully alert for the entire 90 minutes, avoid costly mistakes, and maintain defensive discipline if they hope to return home with the coveted trophy.

"I see a very open and interesting final between the Super Falcons and host Morocco," Agu said. "The Moroccans have improved massively compared to previous editions. Their game has become more fluid, and they now possess players who can individually turn a game around."

The Super Falcons have conceded just one goal en route to the final, showing impressive defensive resilience throughout the tournament. However, they will be up against a Moroccan team that has grown in stature and confidence since their semi-final win over Nigeria in 2022 — a match that ended 1-1 and saw Morocco triumph 5-4 on penalties.

Led by captain Ghizlane Chebbak, Morocco has developed into a formidable unit. Players like Fatima Tagnaout, Sanaa Mssoudy, Ibtissam Jraidi, and Sakina Ouzraoui have been standout performers, blending



technical skill with relentless energy. The North Africans have also benefitted from an enthusiastic home crowd, which has acted as a twelfth player throughout the tournament.

Despite the quality of the opposition, Agu believes Nigeria's experience at this level gives them the edge. "As hosts, the pressure will be on the Moroccans to deliver in front of their fans. But our players are experienced. They know how to handle such moments. I think we'll weather their early aggressive play and take control as the game progresses," he said.

Nigeria's journey to the final has been nothing short of dominant. Victories over Botswana, Zambia, and South Africa have highlighted the team's maturity, tactical awareness, and depth in talent. With star players like Rasheedat Ajibade, Asisat Oshoala, and Christy Ucheibe in fine form, the Falcons will be banking on their firepower and big-match temperament.

Agu also praised the leadership and unity within the Super Falcons camp. "They're not just playing for themselves; they're playing for national pride and to make history.

You can see how united the squad is. That spirit can carry them over the line."

Earlier in the week, President Bola Tinubu approved the full payment of allowances and bonuses for the team, a move that has reportedly boosted morale in camp. The gesture underscores the importance of the match not just for the players, but for the nation as a whole.

Should the Super Falcons emerge victorious, it will mark their 10th WAFCON title, reinforcing their status as Africa's most successful women's team. The magnitude of the occasion is not lost on the players, many of whom have spoken openly about their desire to lift the trophy in front of a global audience.

For Nigeria, Saturday's final is more than just a football match. It's a chance to reclaim dominance, avenge past heartbreak, and celebrate a legacy built over decades. But as Alloy Agu rightly noted, only maximum concentration and flawless execution will see the Falcons soar one more time.

The world will be watching.