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# Doro tells Senate: Poor budget releases stalling poverty projects

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

The Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs has appealed to the Senate for increased funding in the 2026 fiscal year, warning that Nigeria's deepening poverty crisis requires stronger and more sustained government intervention.

Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Bernard Doro, made the appeal on Wednesday in Abuja while defending the ministry's 2026 budget proposal before the Senate Committee on Poverty Alleviation and Social Investment Programme. He told lawmakers that additional resources were critical to expanding poverty reduction programmes and improving the living standards of millions of vulnerable Nigerians.

Doro's presentation painted a picture of ambitious plans constrained by limited releases and funding gaps in previous budget cycles. Reviewing the ministry's 2024 performance, he disclosed that ₦1.24 billion was allocated to capital projects, while ₦682 million was set aside for overhead costs. Out of ₦12.62 billion appropriated for capital expenditure that year, ₦11.23 billion was utilised, leaving a balance of ₦1.39 billion by the end of the fiscal period.

Despite these figures, the minister admitted that the ministry recorded an overall budget performance of just 19.39 per cent in 2024, attributing the low performance to funding delays and implementation challenges.

For 2025, Doro said ₦1.522 billion was allocated for personnel costs and fully released. Overhead costs stood at ₦978 million, but only ₦568 million was eventually utilised. The biggest shortfall, however, came in capital funding. According to the minister, ₦30 billion was appropriated for capital projects in 2025, yet only ₦2.265 billion was released, allowing the ministry to work on just 15 out of 60 planned projects nationwide.

He explained that the 2026 budget proposal was prepared in line with the Federal Government's directive to roll over the 2025 budget into 2026. Under the proposal, the ministry is seeking a total allocation of ₦43.52 billion, with



₦1.399 billion earmarked specifically for capital expenditure.

Doro assured senators that the ministry remained committed to transparency, prudent spending and effective supervision of agencies implementing national social protection and poverty alleviation programmes. He said improved funding would enable the ministry to scale up interventions targeting the poorest households and address structural vulnerabilities.

The appeal comes against the backdrop of troubling poverty statistics that place Nigeria among countries with the largest absolute number of people living in poverty globally. Official data from the National Bureau of Statistics' Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), based on the 2021/2022 survey, shows that 63 per cent of Nigerians, about 133 million people are multidimensionally poor.

International benchmarks paint an equally grim picture. World Bank estimates using the \$3.00-per-day poverty line for lower-middle-income countries suggest that 41.8 per cent of Nigerians, roughly 93 million people, live in extreme poverty. Using the \$4.20-per-day threshold, the figure

rises to 64 per cent, or about 143 million people.

The data also reveal sharp disparities across geography and demographics. Poverty rates in rural areas are as high as 75.5 per cent, compared with 31 to 42 per cent in urban centres. Northern Nigeria records significantly higher poverty levels than the south, with rates reaching between 70 and 91 per cent under national and multidimensional measures. Children, women and people without formal education are the most affected.

Nigeria's MPI value of 0.257 indicates that poor Nigerians experience more than one-quarter of all possible deprivations across health, education and living standards.

As senators deliberate on the 2026 budget, the humanitarian ministry's request places renewed focus on whether increased funding, combined with tighter oversight, can translate into real improvements for millions living on the margins. The coming weeks will determine whether lawmakers agree that the scale of Nigeria's poverty challenge demands a bigger fiscal response.

# THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

## PUBLIC NOTICE COLOUR

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SIZE	TOTAL RATE
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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
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14X2	109,500.00
10X6	242,500.00
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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
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10X4	142,787.50
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9X6	192,305.50
9X3	107,757.50
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8X3	70,390.00
7X4	58,666.50
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6X3	53,361.50
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### PUBLIC NOTICE BLACK & WHITE

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7X4	111,173.50
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10X4	103,963.00
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9X5	168,191.50
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8X3	N/A
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5X3	29,858.00
5X2	22,841.00
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4X3	N/A
4X2	17,737.50
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CENTRESPREAD B&W	800,000.00
CENTRE SPREAD HALF COLOUR	575,000.00
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# Tinubu decorates Disu as acting IGP

By Damilola Olufemi

President Bola Tinubu has officially decorated Tunji Disu as the acting Inspector-General of Police at a ceremony held at the State House, Abuja.

Disu assumed leadership of the Nigeria Police Force following the resignation of Kayode Egbetokun. Prior to his appointment, he served as an Assistant Inspector-General of Police.

Speaking after the decoration, Disu described his elevation as a profound honour, saying it was a testament to his years of dedication to policing and national service. He expressed gratitude to the President for the trust reposed in him, noting that Tinubu's remarks during the event carried deep personal meaning.

According to him, the President's references to his career trajectory and previous assignments showed deliberate monitoring of officers across the country.

"It shows the president took his time to monitor officers working everywhere in the country," he said.

"It also shows that the president was throwing a challenge at me to go out there and do what I'm known for; and ensure that I bring peace and recognition to country. Top priority for Nigeria.

"In one of the first lectures with my men, I'm going to talk to them, let them know that the citizens of the country are the boss."



Disu emphasised that fostering stronger collaboration between the police and the public would be central to his leadership agenda.

Outlining his priorities, the acting IGP pledged to enforce strict discipline within the force, with a focus on accountability and adherence to human rights standards.

"I will let them know that the era of impunity is over. I will ensure that I train and encourage them to ensure they follow human rights," he added.

"I will ensure that they know that I will try to follow a regime of zero tolerance to corruption, and most importantly, I'm

going to drum it into them that we can never succeed without the cooperation of members of the public.

"I will mention that the country is facing a particular problem — the issue of banditry and insurgency. I know all police officers have been doing their best.

"They are hardworking people. All I need to do is to channel their morale and their thoughts to make anything better."

Disu's appointment comes at a time when the country continues to grapple with insecurity, including banditry and insurgency, placing heightened expectations on the new police leadership.



# INEC denies vote inflation claim in FCT polling unit, cites clerical error

By Gbenga Olaleye



**INDEPENDENT**  
National Electoral Commission

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has dismissed allegations that a polling unit in the Federal Capital Territory recorded more votes than registered voters during Saturday's Area Council election, describing the claim as false and misleading.

The controversy centred on Kuroko Health Centre polling unit in Yangoji Ward, Kwali Area Council, where reports circulating on social media alleged that a political party received 1,219 votes despite the unit having only 345 registered voters and 213 accredited voters.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC) for the FCT, Aminu K. Idris, said the commission had investigated the matter and found that the discrepancy arose from a clerical error made by the Presiding Officer while entering the results.

According to INEC, after the ballots were sorted and counted at the polling unit, 122 votes were initially recorded for the All Progressives Congress (APC). However, during the final tally, the Presiding Officer noticed an overcount of one vote.

"On tallying everything, she noticed an overshoot by one (1). So, they had to recount the ballots in the open, and that was when she realised that APC should have 121 votes, not 122," the statement explained.

INEC said the officer corrected the figure by cancelling the final digit '2' and replacing it with '1' to reflect 121 votes. The correction was also made in words on the result sheet to ensure consistency and transparency.

The commission stressed that the official result uploaded from the polling unit clearly shows that the party scored 121 votes, not 1,219 as alleged. It added that the accurate

figure was subsequently entered into the ward collation form EC8B and used in the collation process at both ward and Area Council levels.

"The figure used for collation at the Ward and Area Council levels was 121, not 1,219 as alleged, consistent with the number entered at the polling unit," the statement said.

INEC further maintained that its current result management architecture, including the use of the INEC Result Viewing (IReV) portal, makes the type of manipulation alleged on social media "technically impossible in the manner described".

The commission urged members of the public to rely on verified information from official sources and avoid spreading unsubstantiated claims that could undermine confidence in the electoral process.

**Congratulations!**

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Rilwan Disu**

on your appointment as the

**Inspector-General  
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# EFCC arraigns ex-NRC MD Okhiria over alleged \$385,000, N165m fraud

By Damilola Olufemi

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has brought former Managing Director of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), Fidete Okhiria, before a Lagos court over alleged financial crimes amounting to \$385,000 and N165,438,000.

Okhiria was docked on Tuesday before the Special Offences Court sitting in Ikeja on a seven-count charge bordering on money laundering and related offences.

According to the charge sheet, the anti-graft agency accused him of transferring large sums of money suspected to be proceeds of unlawful activities to an overseas account.

“That you, Fidete Okhiria Edetanle, while serving as the Managing Director of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, between May 29, 2024, and September 11, 2024, in Lagos, transferred a cumulative sum of Two Hundred and Five Thousand United States Dollars (\$205,000.00) from your domiciliary account in Access Bank Plc (account number 0010069159) to the account of Ehimen Richard Okhiria at



ABN AMRO Bank, Netherlands (account number NL38ABNA011257662), being proceeds of unlawful activities, thereby committing money laundering,” part of the charge sheet reads.

The commission further alleged:

“You, Fidete Okhiria Edetanle, after leaving office, between October 21, 2024, and November 21, 2024, in Lagos, transferred Forty Thousand United States Dollars (\$40,000.00) from your Access Bank domiciliary account to the account of Ehimen Richard Okhiria at ABN AMRO Bank, Netherlands, being proceeds of unlawful activities, committing money laundering.”

The former railway chief pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Following his plea, EFCC counsel, Abba Muhammad, urged the court to set a date for trial and remand the defendant in custody pending proceedings.

However, defence counsel Adebawale Kamoru told the court he had only just received the charge and requested a brief adjournment to enable him file a bail application.

In his ruling, Justice Rahman Oshodi ordered that Okhiria be remanded in a correctional facility.

# DSS captures sixth Owo church attacker

By Yunusa Umar

Operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS) have arrested the sixth person involved in the 2022 attack on St. Francis Catholic Church, Owo, Ondo state, in which over 40 worshippers lost their lives and scores more were left injured.

According to Zagalola Makama, a counter security expert based in Lake Chad said a high profile ISWAP commander hid in Edo village for 4 hours.

Adeyanju urges EFCC, DSS to probe El-Rufai over alleged corruption, insecurity

The DSS is currently prosecuting five persons — Idris Omeiza (25), Al Qasim Idris (20), Jamiu Abdulmalik (26), Abdulhaleem Idris (25), and Momoh Otuho Abubakar (47) for allegedly carrying out acts of terrorism.

For nearly four years, the sixth suspect evaded arrest, making him one of the



most wanted fugitives in Nigeria.

A security source who spoke to Zagalola said that DSS operatives, who had for years been on the trail of the sixth suspect, identified as Sani Yusuf, arrested him in Iguosa community, along Powerline in Ovia North Local Government Area of Edo State.

According to the source, Yusuf, a high-profile commander of the Islamic State

West Africa Province (ISWAP) after the Owo church attack, temporarily slipped into Kano before deciding to relocate to the sleepy community in Edo State.

The source further disclosed that Yusuf has since confessed to being involved in the planning and execution of the Owo church massacre.

In addition, continued the source, he confessed to other terrorist attacks by ISWAP, including the July 2022 Suleja military barracks attack, and kidnappings in Kaduna State and environs.

“He admitted his role in the Owo church attack, the Zuma Rock checkpoint assault, which claimed the lives of five soldiers, and several ISWAP kidnap operations,” the source disclosed.

“Yusuf also disclosed that he served under other ISWAP top commanders like Abu Ikirimah, who was arrested by the DSS in 2024,” another source offered.

# US congress urges sweeping security pact with Nigeria to tackle religious violence

By **Gbenga Olaleye**

The United States Congress has called for a far-reaching bilateral agreement between Washington and Abuja aimed at protecting vulnerable Christian communities, dismantling jihadist terror networks and countering the growing influence of China and Russia in Nigeria.

The proposal was contained in a joint position by the House Appropriations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, details of which were shared on X by Congressman Riley Moore on Tuesday.

In a statement entitled Ending the Persecution of Christians in Nigeria, lawmakers commended Donald Trump for redesignating Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), describing the move as decisive in holding perpetrators of religious violence to account. In October 2025, the United States announced that Nigeria would once again be added to the US State Department's CPC list, having first been designated in 2020 during Mr Trump's previous term before being removed shortly after Joe Biden took office.

Mr Trump stated on X that Christians in Nigeria were facing persecution and violence, justifying the country's return to a religious freedom watchlist. Earlier in February, Congress recommended visa bans and asset freezes against individuals and groups accused of violating religious freedom, including former Kano State Governor Rabi'u Kwankwaso and the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria.

## Congressional findings

According to the committees, Mr Trump tasked Mr Moore, House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole and other members with investigating what they described as the "persecution and slaughter of Nigerian Christians". Appropriations Vice Chair Mario Diaz-Balart hosted an investigative roundtable and led a congressional delegation to Nigeria, while House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast and Africa Subcommittee Chairman Chris Smith convened hearings to gather testimony from officials and civil society representatives.

In its findings, Congress declared that after decades of violence, "Nigeria is the deadliest place in the world to be a



Christian". Lawmakers alleged that Christians face ongoing attacks from well-armed Fulani militias and terrorist groups, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths, the destruction of churches and schools, and widespread kidnappings.

The report also criticised the application of blasphemy laws in certain northern states, arguing that they are used to silence dissent and target religious minorities without due process.

## Proposed strategic partnership

While acknowledging Nigeria as a key US partner, Congress urged stronger political will from Abuja. Central to its recommendations is a security and economic accord under which Nigeria would co-fund humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons, particularly in the Middle Belt, strengthen early-warning systems and deploy adequate rapid-response security forces.

Lawmakers also called for expanded defence cooperation, including divestment from Russian military equipment in favour of American systems, enhanced counter-terrorism collaboration and the potential provision of excess US defence equipment. Additional proposals include sanctions against perpetrators of religious violence,

tighter oversight of US aid through a Government Accountability Office audit and a National Intelligence Estimate on sectarian conflict.

Engagement with international partners such as France, Hungary and the United Kingdom was also recommended.

Following the redesignation, Nigeria dispatched a delegation led by National Security Adviser Nuhu Ribadu to Washington to address concerns. The Nigerian government has acknowledged the killings but maintains they are not religiously motivated, citing complex security challenges including terrorism and organised criminality.

In December 2025, the United States Africa Command coordinated operations with Nigerian authorities against terrorist enclaves, while US personnel have been deployed to support training and intelligence-sharing.

Nigeria's Minister of Information, Mohammed Idris, welcomed the congressional report as an opportunity to deepen cooperation, insisting there is no state policy of religious persecution and reaffirming Abuja's commitment to safeguarding all citizens regardless of faith.

# Fubara pledges cooperation with APC lawmakers after Rivers bye-elections

By Gbenga Olaleye



**G**overnor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State has said he is ready to work with all members of the State House of Assembly, including newly elected lawmakers from the All Progressives Congress (APC), following recent bye-elections.

Bye-elections into the Rivers State House of Assembly were held on 21 February, filling vacant seats in parts of the state. Ukalikpe Napoleon emerged victorious in Ahoada East State Constituency II, while Loolo Bulabari Henrietta secured the Khana State Constituency II seat.

Speaking after the announcement of the results, Governor Fubara described the victories as well-deserved, noting that they reflected the confidence and trust reposed in the candidates by their constituents.

“It is the beauty of democracy. When the people believe in your capacity, they will give you their votes,” the

governor said.

He added: “I look forward to working with them and their colleagues in the Rivers State House of Assembly for the progress of our state.”

The governor also commended residents of Ahoada East and Khana constituencies for what he described as their peaceful conduct before, during and after the elections. According to him, the orderly process demonstrated democratic maturity and a commitment to stability in the state.

The latest political developments come against the backdrop of a prolonged crisis within the state’s political leadership. On 19 February, the Rivers Assembly suspended impeachment proceedings against Governor Fubara, easing tensions that had persisted for months.

The dispute had pitted the governor

against his predecessor and current Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike. The rift triggered significant political uncertainty and at one stage contributed to the imposition of a six-month emergency rule in the oil-rich state.

Observers say the governor’s conciliatory tone towards opposition lawmakers signals a possible shift towards reconciliation and institutional cooperation. With the bye-elections concluded and impeachment threats suspended, attention is now expected to turn to governance and policy delivery.

Governor Fubara reiterated his commitment to inclusive leadership, stressing that the priority of his administration remains the development and stability of Rivers State, regardless of party affiliation within the legislature.

# Why court adjourns El-Rufai's arraignment to April 23

By **Damilola Olufemi**



The planned arraignment of former Kaduna State Governor, Nasir El-Rufai, could not proceed on Wednesday due to his absence in court, prompting Justice Joyce Abdumalik to adjourn the matter to April 23, 2026.

At the resumed hearing, prosecution counsel Oluwole Aladedoye informed the court that although the case was slated for arraignment, the defendant was not produced because he is currently in the custody of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

Aladedoye requested an adjournment until March 10 to allow the anti-graft agency produce the defendant, noting that the Department of State Services (DSS) had no authority over the ICPC despite both being federal agencies.

Defence counsel Oluwole Iyamu did not oppose the request for adjournment but informed the court that discussions with the prosecution indicated the state would not contest a bail application. The prosecution confirmed in open court that the offences were bailable.

The defence subsequently urged the court to hear the bail application before further steps in the trial. However, the

prosecution opposed this, asking the court to defer consideration of bail for two weeks.

Iyamu argued that detaining his client for an additional two weeks would amount to suppression, particularly as he had yet to be arraigned.

He stressed that the defence had not taken the defendant into custody and therefore could not be expected to produce him in court.

He added that the situation might have been different if the DSS had custody of the former governor, suggesting that the circumstances surrounding his detention required judicial intervention.

Citing Section 159, Iyamu urged the court to order the defendant's production irrespective of which agency currently held him.

In her ruling, Justice Abdumalik held that since the defendant had not been formally arraigned, the issue of bail could not be entertained.

Referring to Section 156 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, 2015, she described the bail request as premature and fixed April 23, 2026, for

arraignment.

The DSS had filed a three-count charge against El-Rufai on February 16, 2026, before the Federal High Court in Abuja, accusing him of unlawfully intercepting telephone communications of the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu.

The charge, marked FHC/ABJ/CR/99/2026, alleged that the former governor admitted during a February 13 appearance on Arise TV's Prime Time Programme that he and others intercepted the NSA's communications. The offences are said to be punishable under the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Amendment Act, 2024 and the Nigerian Communications Act, 2003.

Meanwhile, El-Rufai, through his lawyers, filed a motion on notice on Tuesday asking the court to quash the charges, which he described as "unconstitutional and an abuse of court process."

He also sought N2 billion in costs against the DSS, alleging that the agency had abused and misused the criminal justice system to harass, embarrass and publicly victimise him.

# Tinubu says Naira will strengthen to N1,000 per Dollar in coming weeks

By **Gbenga Olaleye**



President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has expressed confidence that the naira will appreciate to ₦1,000 against the United States dollar in the coming weeks, citing ongoing monetary policy interventions by his administration.

The President made the remarks on Tuesday while speaking at the Renewed Hope Ambassadors Summit in Abuja. He revealed that the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) intervened in the foreign exchange market on Monday by mopping up excess dollars in a bid to stabilise the local currency.

According to Mr Tinubu, recent policy measures are beginning to yield tangible results.

“In fact, if not for the interventions by the Central Bank of Nigeria yesterday (Monday), the ₦1,000 to a dollar, we are going to attain it in weeks, not in months,” he said.

Despite the President’s optimism, market data on Tuesday showed continued pressure on the naira. The currency depreciated to ₦1,355.3745 at the official window and around ₦1,370 per dollar on the parallel market.

Meanwhile, the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Olayemi Cardoso, provided further insight into the country’s financial position during a briefing following the apex bank’s 304th Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting on Tuesday.

Mr Cardoso disclosed that Nigeria’s gross external reserves had risen to a 13-year high of 50.45 billion US dollars as of 16 February 2026. The increase in reserves, he said, reflects improved foreign exchange inflows and stronger macroeconomic management.

Economic analysts say the trajectory of the naira will depend on sustained foreign exchange supply, investor

confidence and the effectiveness of the CBN’s monetary tightening measures. The apex bank has in recent months adopted a series of reforms aimed at unifying exchange rates, improving transparency in the FX market and curbing speculative activities.

President Tinubu has repeatedly maintained that his administration’s economic reforms, though challenging in the short term, are designed to restore stability and attract investment in the long run. He urged Nigerians to remain patient, assuring them that the government’s policies are beginning to lay the foundation for a stronger and more resilient economy.

The coming weeks are likely to test the administration’s projections, as market forces and policy interventions interact to determine the naira’s direction.

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# Disu promises welfare boost, discipline as he takes charge of police

By **Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi**

Nigeria's policing landscape entered a new chapter on February 24, 2026, as President Bola Ahmed Tinubu appointed Assistant Inspector-General of Police Olatunji Rilwan Disu as the Acting Inspector-General of Police, following the resignation of Kayode Egbetokun.

Disu's appointment, which took immediate effect, was formally sealed at a brief but symbolic ceremony at the State House, Abuja, where the President decorated him with his new rank. The event, held around 4pm in the President's office, was attended by key members of the Federal Government's security and political leadership, including the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu; the Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila; the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, George Akume; and the immediate past IGP, Kayode Egbetokun.

Born on April 13, 1966, on Lagos Island, Disu was 59 at the time of his appointment, just 48 days shy of the mandatory retirement age of 60. However, under the amended Police Act, which grants Inspectors-General a four-year tenure regardless of age, he may remain in office until 2030 if confirmed as substantive IGP by the Nigeria Police Council and the Senate. If confirmed, he would become the 23rd indigenous Inspector-General of Police.

A career officer with over 33 years of service, Disu joined the Nigeria Police Force on May 18, 1992. His policing journey spans operational, intelligence and leadership roles across the country. He holds a Bachelor's degree in English Education from Lagos State University, a Postgraduate Diploma in International Relations and Strategic Studies, a Master's degree in Public Administration from Adekunle Ajasin University, and another Master's degree in Criminology, Security and Legal Psychology from LASU.

Disu is widely recognised for his tenure as Commander of the Lagos State Rapid Response Squad between 2015 and 2021, where he led reforms that reshaped the



unit's image and operations. Under his leadership, officers were rebranded as "The Good Guys," community-oriented policing was strengthened, and strategies such as crime mapping, hotspot policing and first-aid training were introduced. The RRS earned multiple regional awards during this period.

He later served as Head of the Intelligence Response Team, succeeding Abba Kyari, and handled several high-profile operations against organised crime. His senior command postings include Commissioner of Police in Rivers State and the Federal Capital Territory. Before his elevation, he was Principal Staff Officer to the former IGP and later headed the Force Criminal Investigation Department Annex in Alagbon, Lagos.

Speaking after his decoration, Disu described his appointment as unexpected and deeply emotional. He thanked President Tinubu for the confidence reposed in him, saying the President's remarks on his career almost brought him to tears.

More importantly, the new Acting IGP sent a strong message to officers and the public alike. He declared that the era of impunity within the police was over,

promising zero tolerance for corruption, strict adherence to human rights, and firm discipline. He said the welfare of police officers would be a top priority, stressing that a motivated force was critical to effective policing.

Disu also emphasised that citizens must be at the centre of policing, declaring that "the citizen of the country is the boss." He said public cooperation was non-negotiable and pledged to strengthen partnerships with communities. On security challenges, he vowed to confront banditry and other crimes head-on while sharpening the force's operational focus.

Reacting to the appointment, Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu congratulated Disu, describing the appointment as well deserved. He praised Disu's professionalism and leadership, particularly his impact while leading the RRS, and expressed confidence that he would bring accountability and effectiveness to the Nigeria Police Force.

As Disu assumes office at a critical moment, expectations are high that his experience, reform-driven mindset and firm tone will translate into a police force that is more disciplined, citizen-focused and capable of restoring public trust.

# ADC demands clarification over alleged N10bn ransom, prisoner release in Papiri school abduction

By Yunusa Umar

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has urged the Federal Government to clarify a report by Agence France-Presse (AFP), an international media, alleging that the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu paid over ₦10 billion in ransom and released two senior Boko Haram commanders to secure the release of abducted pupils and staff of St. Mary's Catholic School, Papiri.

In a statement signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Bolaji Abdullahi, the party said it welcomed the safe return of the victims but warned that any such arrangement would contradict the government's public position on ransom payments and weaken Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts.

"The African Democratic Congress (ADC) has reviewed reports in sections of the international media alleging that the Federal Government, under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, paid a ransom of over ₦10 billion and released two senior Boko Haram commanders to secure the release of the abducted pupils and school staff of St. Mary's Catholic School, Papiri," the statement read.

The party recalled that government officials and security agencies had earlier denied paying ransom after the victims were freed.

"We recall that shortly after the kidnapped victims were released, the Federal Government as well as the various security agencies denied, variously, that the government paid any ransom to secure their release," the ADC said.

It cited comments credited to the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu, noting that "ransom payments are 'one of the worst things' promoting insecurity in the country."

The ADC also referenced existing laws, stressing that the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022, expressly outlaws negotiations and ransom payments to kidnappers and terrorists."



According to the party, confirmation of the reports would suggest a troubling contradiction in government policy.

"However, what this report would mean is that the government has been doing brisk business with terrorists all along and passing off ransom payments as rescue operations," the statement said.

The opposition party warned that allegations involving ransom payments of such magnitude and the possible release of high-value terror suspects pose serious risks.

"Allegations of ransom payments at this scale, and the possible release of high-value terror elements, raise serious concerns about terrorism financing, the rule of law, and the safety of citizens," it said, adding that Nigeria "cannot claim to discourage ransom payments while operating in a manner that, if confirmed, rewards terror networks, incentivises future abductions, and puts more communities at risk."

The ADC therefore demanded a clear response from the Federal Government.

"Accordingly, the ADC calls on the Federal Government to issue a

categorical explanation on whether any ransom, directly or indirectly, was paid in relation to the Papiri abduction, and whether any detainees or captured terror actors were released, exchanged, or otherwise discharged as part of negotiations," the statement said.

While acknowledging the pressure on authorities to secure the release of abducted persons, the party accused the government of hypocrisy.

"While the government may be acting under pressure to win short-term political gains for bringing kidnapped victims back home, its hypocritical posture on the issue of ransom payments risks confusing citizens and promoting the vicious cycle of kidnapping in the country," the ADC stated.

It concluded that, "No serious government will sacrifice national security principles on the altar of political expediency and short-term media applause."

As of the time of filing this report, the Federal Government had yet to respond to the allegations.

# EFCC arraigns three NRC directors over alleged N2.04bn fraud in Lagos

By Yunusa Umar



The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Wednesday, February 25, 2026, arraigned three senior officials of the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) before the Lagos State High Court sitting in Ikeja over alleged fraud and money laundering amounting to over ₦2.04 billion.

The defendants — Felix Njoku, a former Director of Finance of the NRC; Benjamin Chinwuba Iloanusi, Director of Procurement; and Oche Jerry Ogbole-Inalegwu, Director of Mechanical — were arraigned before different judges of the Special Offences Court on separate charges bordering on abuse of office, corruption, unlawful enrichment and money laundering.

Njoku was arraigned before Justice Olubunmi Abike-Fadipe on a 17-count charge involving an alleged fraud of ₦736,320,807.08.

One of the counts read in court stated:

“That you, Felix Njoku, transacting under the name of FC Njoku and

Company, after leaving office as the Director Finance, Nigerian Railway Corporation, between 2nd January, 2024 and 3rd December, 2024 in Lagos within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, committed an offence, to wit; unlawful enrichment by receiving the cumulative sum of Two Hundred and Forty Million, Nine Hundred and Forty Thousand Naira (₦240,940,000.00) from contractors of the Nigerian Railway Corporation through the bank account of FC Njoku and Company domiciled in Zenith Bank Plc with account number: 1014247906, on account of the contracts awarded to the contractors during the discharge of your official duties.”

The EFCC alleged that Njoku received the sum of ₦240,940,000.00 from NRC contractors through the said account after leaving office, in connection with contracts awarded during his tenure.

He pleaded “not guilty” to the charges.

Following his plea, prosecution counsel, Abba Muhammad, SAN, sought trial dates and urged the court to remand the defendant in a correctional facility pending trial, noting that the prosecution

intended to respond to aspects of the bail application on points of law.

Defence counsel, Mordecai Adejo, informed the court that a bail application had been filed and served, urging the court to allow the defendant to continue enjoying the administrative bail earlier granted by the EFCC.

Justice Abike-Fadipe granted Njoku temporary release on health grounds, ordering him to deposit his international passport with the court and to report to the EFCC Lagos Directorate 1 office every Monday and Friday.

The matter was adjourned to March 10, 2026, for hearing of the bail application and to May 11, 12, 18 and 19, 2026, for commencement of trial.

Iloanusi Faces 10-Count Charge

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## Iloanusi Faces 10-Count Charge

Iloanusi was arraigned before Justice Ismail Ijelu on a 10-count charge involving an alleged ₦915,265,472.60 fraud.

One of the counts read:

“That you, Benjamin Chinwuba Iloanusi, while serving as the Director Procurement Department, Nigerian Railway Corporation, between 4th January, 2022 and 30th December, 2022 in Lagos within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, committed an offence, to wit; corruption by receiving the cumulative sum of One Hundred and Sixty Million, Nine Hundred and Thirty Thousand, Four Hundred and Fifty-Eight Naira, Four Kobo (₦160,930,458.04) from contractors of the Nigerian Railway Corporation through your bank account domiciled in Polaris Bank Plc with account numbers: 1060170530 and 1767841197 respectively, on account of the contracts awarded to the contractors during the discharge of your official duties.”

The prosecution alleged that the

payments were linked to contracts awarded during his time as Director of Procurement.

He also pleaded “not guilty.”

Justice Ijelu ordered that Iloanusi be remanded in a correctional centre and adjourned the case till March 3, 2026, for hearing of his bail application and commencement of trial.

Ogbole-Inalegwu arraigned on nine counts

Ogbole-Inalegwu was arraigned before Justice Mojisola Dada on a nine-count charge involving an alleged ₦395,190,600.00 fraud.

One of the charges stated:

“That you, Oche Jerry Ogbole-Inalegwu, while serving as the Railway District Manager, Nigerian Railway Corporation and transacting under the name of Altech Engineering Services, between 12th February, 2019 and 29th October, 2019 in Lagos within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, committed an offence, to wit; corruption by receiving the cumulative sum of Eleven Million,

Three Hundred and Ninety-Seven Thousand, Five Hundred Naira (₦11,397,500.00) from China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC), a contractor of the Nigerian Railway Corporation through the bank account of Altech Engineering Services domiciled in Access Bank Plc with account number: 0018021498, on account of the contracts awarded to CCECC during the discharge of your official duties.”

The EFCC alleged that the payment from China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC), an NRC contractor, was connected to contracts awarded during his official duties.

He pleaded “not guilty” to the charges.

Justice Dada allowed him to continue enjoying the administrative bail earlier granted by the EFCC and adjourned the case till April 23, 2026, for hearing.

The offences are said to contravene Sections 332(1) and 332(3), Section 73(1), and Section 82(c) of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011.

# APC belongs to all, not Tinubu — Kalu tells party faithful

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Kalu, on Wednesday issued a blunt reminder to members of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Abia State, declaring that the ruling party belongs to its members collectively and not to any individual, including President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

Kalu delivered the message in Umuahia during a rescheduled ward congress of the APC, an exercise aimed at easing internal tensions and restoring unity after months of factional disputes. The Abia chapter of the party had earlier postponed its ward and local government congresses after rival groups failed to comply with national party directives.

Addressing party faithful, Kalu described the gathering as a “congress of harmonisation,” stressing that it was designed to give every stakeholder a fair sense of belonging as preparations for the



2027 general elections gather pace.

“No one man will own this party,” Kalu said. “Not Benjamin Kalu, not anybody. This party belongs to all of us.”

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To reinforce his point, the deputy speaker recalled a personal conversation with President Tinubu, noting that the president consistently refers to the APC as “our party” rather than “my party.” According to Kalu, the choice of words reflects the leadership’s commitment to collective ownership and internal democracy.

Forms for the ward congress were distributed across all 184 wards in Abia State on Tuesday, with local government congresses scheduled to follow on Thursday. Party leaders say the staggered approach is meant to reduce tension and allow for broader participation.

Chairman of the Abia APC Congress Committee, Emmanuel Goar, assured members that the process would be peaceful and transparent. He said the national leadership and state structures

were working closely to ensure credibility and fairness throughout the exercise.

For the APC, unity in Abia carries strategic importance. The state has long been dominated by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and the ruling party has struggled to gain a firm foothold in the South-East. Party leaders believe internal cohesion is essential if the APC hopes to mount a serious challenge in 2027.

Kalu’s intervention also comes at a sensitive time nationally, as opposition parties accuse the APC of being overly centralised and dominated by a narrow circle of power around the presidency. By openly rejecting the idea of personal ownership, the deputy speaker appears to be countering that narrative while reassuring grassroots members that their

voices still matter.

The broader political climate adds weight to his remarks. Since Tinubu assumed office in 2023, the APC has faced growing public frustration over rising fuel prices, inflation and the cost of living. Critics argue that economic hardship has eroded public confidence in the government’s “Renewed Hope” agenda.

In such an atmosphere, party insiders acknowledge that internal cohesion and openness are crucial to maintaining support. Kalu used the occasion to urge discipline, inclusion and patience, arguing that unity within the party is key to navigating both political and economic challenges.

## APC belongs to all, not Tinubu — Kalu tells party faithful

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“No one man will own this party,” Kalu said. “Not Benjamin Kalu, not anybody. This party belongs to all of us.”

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# APC launches progressive institute to boost policy thinking ahead of 2027

By **Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi**

The ruling All Progressives Congress has unveiled a new policy think tank, the Progressive Institute, in a move aimed at sharpening its ideological focus and strengthening evidence-based governance as Nigeria heads toward the 2027 elections.

The party on Wednesday inaugurated the Governing Council of the institute, describing it as a decisive shift from politics driven mainly by electoral calculations to one anchored in ideas, research and long-term planning. National Chairman Nentawe Yilwatda said the institute represents “a decisive step toward entrenching ideology-driven politics and policy-based governance.”

First announced in September 2024 at the instance of President Bola Tinubu, the institute has now been formally registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission and secured approvals from relevant education regulators. According to party officials, it will function as a full-fledged think tank, with statutory responsibilities covering public policy research, leadership development, international conferences and the preservation of the APC’s institutional memory.

Director-General Lanre Adebayo said the institute has already begun laying foundations for its work. He cited early skill-acquisition programmes across several states and emerging partnerships with international bodies, including the European Union. Planned activities include workshops on intra-party democracy, election management and institution-building—areas where Nigerian political parties have historically struggled.

For the APC, which has governed since 2015, the launch carries political and symbolic weight.



Critics have long argued that the party functions more as a coalition of interests than as an ideologically coherent organisation. By institutionalising policy research and training, the party hopes to provide governors, lawmakers and officials with structured intellectual support rather than relying on ad-hoc advice.

However, scepticism remains. With inflation high, economic reforms biting and opposition parties reorganising, observers note that the timing raises questions about whether the institute will offer practical solutions or become another elite forum with limited impact. Much will depend on whether it is allowed to operate with intellectual independence or simply mirror positions from the presidency.

Yilwatda was careful to acknowledge the role of former national chairman Abdullahi Ganduje, crediting him with laying

the groundwork for the institute. Party officials say the composition of the Governing Council—which includes academics and policy professionals—is meant to underline seriousness rather than symbolism.

Beyond partisan politics, analysts say the initiative could have broader implications for Nigeria’s democracy. Political parties have often treated governance as patronage distribution rather than problem-solving. A functioning policy institute, if taken seriously, could raise the quality of debate and force rival parties to strengthen their own intellectual infrastructure.

For now, the APC has staked a claim to being more than an election-winning platform. Whether the Progressive Institute becomes a genuine ideas factory or fades into political theatre will be judged by the relevance and quality of the policies it produces in the run-up to 2027. Nigerians, increasingly weary of slogans, will be watching closely.

# ADC brands APC 'terrorist organisation' over alleged Edo attack, threatens ECOWAS court action

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Nigeria's political temperature rose sharply on Wednesday after the African Democratic Congress (ADC) accused the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) of operating like a "terrorist organisation" following an alleged gun attack on prominent opposition figures in Edo State.

In a strongly worded statement, the ADC claimed that shots were fired at its secretariat and at the residence of a former national chairman of the APC, John Odigie-Oyegun, during a visit to the state by key opposition leaders. Those named include former Labour Party presidential candidate Peter Obi and former Edo governorship candidate Olumide Akpata. Edo State Police Command confirmed that gunshots were reported at the locations and said investigations were ongoing.

The ADC's National Publicity Secretary, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi, described the incidents as part of what he called a "dangerous and escalating pattern of political intimidation and terror." He alleged that the attacks were politically motivated and accused the APC of fostering an atmosphere of fear aimed at silencing opposition voices.

"This is not random violence," Abdullahi said. "It bears the unmistakable marks of organised political intimidation. Nigeria is not a private estate, and Edo State is not the personal property of any party or any governor."

The opposition party singled out Edo State Governor Monday Okpebholo, accusing him of contributing to the tension through what it described as inflammatory rhetoric. The ADC cited an earlier statement attributed to the governor in which he reportedly said he could not guarantee Peter Obi's safety



during political activities in the state. According to the ADC, such comments embolden violence and undermine democratic norms.

Escalating the dispute, the ADC said it is compiling a dossier of alleged "acts of terrorism" linked to the APC and plans to submit the material to diplomatic missions as well as the ECOWAS Court of Human Rights. The party vowed it would not be intimidated and warned that continued violence against opposition figures could have regional and international consequences.

As of Wednesday evening, the APC had not issued an official response to the allegations.

The accusations mark one of the most aggressive rhetorical attacks by an opposition party against the ruling party in recent years. Edo State has a long history of intense political rivalry, with past elections often marred by violence, intimidation and legal disputes. Analysts note that while the facts surrounding the reported gunshots are still under investigation, the language used by the ADC signals a

worrying hardening of political positions.

For the APC, the claims come at a sensitive time as it seeks to project stability, reform and control amid economic and security challenges nationwide. For the ADC, the choice of language carries risks, potentially alienating moderate voters who may share concerns about political violence but reject extreme rhetoric.

Beyond party politics, the episode highlights the fragile state of Nigeria's democratic culture. With the 2027 general elections approaching, observers warn that rising hostility, threats and distrust could further shrink the space for peaceful political engagement.

Whether the Edo incidents turn out to be coordinated political attacks or isolated criminal acts will be determined by investigators. What is already clear, however, is that Nigeria's political climate is becoming increasingly volatile, a trend that raises serious questions about the future of democratic competition and public trust in the system.

# New study finds sperm swim faster in summer, slowing down in winter

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

**A** new international study has found that sperm move faster during the summer months and slow down in winter, shedding fresh light on how seasons may influence male fertility.

The research, carried out by scientists from the United Kingdom, Canada and Denmark, analysed semen samples from 15,581 men aged between 18 and 45. The samples were collected in Denmark and the US state of Florida, two locations with very different climates.

Despite the contrast in weather conditions, researchers found a strikingly similar pattern. Sperm motility — the ability of sperm to swim effectively, peaked consistently in June and July in both regions. The lowest levels were recorded in December and January.

Sperm motility plays a crucial role in fertility, as sperm must be able to swim efficiently to reach and fertilise an egg. The findings suggest that men may have a higher chance of successful conception during the summer months, even in places where temperatures remain warm throughout the year.

The study, published in the journal *Reproductive Biology and Endocrinology*, shows that sperm quality appears to follow a seasonal rhythm rather than being driven solely by temperature. In Florida, where winter temperatures remain relatively high, sperm motility still dipped during the colder months, mirroring the pattern observed in Denmark.

Researchers found no seasonal changes in total sperm concentration — the number of sperm present in semen, or in ejaculate volume. This indicates that while the quantity of sperm produced remains stable



throughout the year, the quality, particularly the ability to move effectively, fluctuates with the seasons.

Scientists believe these patterns could have important implications for fertility treatment and testing. Understanding when sperm motility is naturally higher may help doctors better time fertility assessments and treatments, providing clearer guidance to couples trying to conceive.

The study also points to factors beyond ambient temperature influencing male reproductive health. Sperm is stored in the testes, which function best at temperatures two to four degrees lower than the body's normal temperature of 37 degrees Celsius. Deviations from this range — whether higher or lower — can reduce sperm motility and affect fertility.

Professor Allan Pacey of the University of Manchester, a co-author of the study, said the consistency of the findings across different climates was unexpected.

“We were struck by how similar the seasonal pattern was in two completely different climates,” he said. “Even in Florida, where temperatures stay warm, sperm motility still peaked in summer and dipped in winter, which tells us that ambient temperature alone is unlikely to explain these changes.”

He added that the findings underline the need to consider the time of year when evaluating semen quality.

“Our study highlights the importance of seasonality in male reproductive health,” Pacey said. “These seasonal changes in sperm motility occur even in warm climates and may help improve fertility outcomes if taken into account.”

As fertility challenges affect millions of couples worldwide, researchers say insights like these could play a role in improving success rates and understanding the subtle biological factors that influence reproduction.

# Bill Gates admits affairs but denies involvement in Epstein Crimes

By New Daily Prime

Bill Gates has admitted making a “huge mistake” in associating with Jeffrey Epstein, telling staff at his charity foundation that he had affairs with two Russian women but denying involvement in the disgraced financier’s crimes.

The Microsoft co-founder is among the prominent names appearing in documents released by the US Justice Department that revealed close friendships, illicit financial dealings and private photos with convicted sex offender Epstein.

In a town hall Tuesday with staff at the Gates Foundation, a recording of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, Gates expressed regret that his relationship with Epstein had affected the work of his philanthropic organisation.

“It was a huge mistake to spend time with Epstein” and to also bring Gates Foundation executives into meetings



with Epstein, he said.

“I apologise to other people who are drawn into this because of the mistake that I made.”

In a draft email among the documents released by the Justice Department, Epstein alleged Gates engaged in extramarital affairs, writing that his relationship with Gates ranged from “helping Bill to get drugs, in order to deal with consequences of sex with Russian girls, to facilitating his illicit trysts with married women”.

Gates, 70, admitted at the town hall to two affairs.

“I did have affairs, one with a Russian bridge player who met me at bridge events and one with a Russian nuclear physicist who I met through business activities,” he said.

But he denied any involvement with victims of Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial for sex trafficking underage girls.

“I did nothing illicit. I saw nothing illicit,” Gates told the town hall.

# Ex-NNPC GM Okoronkwo bags 87 months jail over \$2.1m bribery scheme

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

A United States District Court has sentenced Paulinus Okoronkwo, a Nigerian-American and former General Manager of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (now NNPC Limited), to 87 months in prison for his role in a \$2.1 million bribery scheme involving Addax Petroleum.

Addax Petroleum is a subsidiary of Sinopec, a Chinese state-owned oil and gas conglomerate.

In a statement issued on Monday, US authorities said District Judge John Walter also ordered Okoronkwo to pay \$923,824 in restitution to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In addition, the court directed the forfeiture of \$1,039,997 — representing the net proceeds from the sale of a property owned by the former NNPC executive.

Okoronkwo was convicted in August 2025 on charges of transactional money laundering, tax evasion and obstruction of justice.



Prosecutors told the court that while serving as general manager of NNPC’s upstream division, Okoronkwo abused his office by accepting a \$2.1 million payment from Addax Petroleum, the Switzerland-based subsidiary of Sinopec.

According to the prosecution, the funds were wired in October 2015 to his law firm’s trust account in Los Angeles and were falsely labelled as consultancy fees. Authorities maintained the payment was, in fact, a bribe intended to secure favourable drilling rights in Nigeria.

Evidence presented in court showed that Addax executives allegedly falsified documentation to portray the transfer as legitimate legal fees, dismissed employees who questioned the transaction, and misled auditors.

Okoronkwo, who later practised immigration, family and personal injury law in Koreatown, Los Angeles, was said to have used nearly \$1 million from the illicit funds as a down payment on a home in Valencia, California. Prosecutors noted that he failed to declare the income in his 2015 tax filings.

In October 2025, the court approved a government forfeiture request targeting the property located at 25340 Twin Oaks Place, Valencia, California 91381.

# UK woman took her own life after being raped by husband

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

**U**K woman killed herself after being raped by her husband; the couple had been married for over a decade

Tarryn Baird, 34, was found dead at her home in Swindon, Wiltshire, on November 28, 2017. Prosecutors say her death followed a prolonged period of violent assaults and what they described as “extensive and escalating controlling, coercive and manipulative behaviour” during her marriage.

Her husband, Christopher Trybus, 43, has appeared at Winchester Crown Court accused of unlawfully killing his wife, two counts of rape and one count of coercive and controlling behaviour. He denies all the charges.

Opening the case, prosecutors alleged that the sexual abuse and violence Trybus “meted out” to his wife caused a severe deterioration in her mental health and ultimately led her to take her own life. They argue that while the abuse may not have been the sole cause, it was a significant factor in her death.

The court heard that Ms Baird, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, felt trapped in the marriage and unable to escape. Prosecutors said she believed ending her life was the only way to stop her husband’s control.

Tom Little KC, opening for the prosecution, told jurors that Trybus controlled many aspects of his wife’s life. He allegedly isolated her from her family, placed tracking devices in her car, restricted her access to money, demanded passwords to her phone and monitored her internet search history.

Mr Little said the abuse included physical and sexual violence, as well as constant threats that left Ms Baird living in fear.

“It was the control and physical violence, including sexual violence, and the ongoing fear of such violence, that led to a deterioration in her already fragile mental state,” he said. “That, we say, was a cause of her decision to take her own life.”

The court heard that although Ms Baird seriously considered leaving her husband and contacted domestic abuse services,



she ultimately felt unable to go through with it. Prosecutors say she feared the consequences of trying to leave.

“She could never bring herself to do it,” Mr Little told jurors. “Instead, she stopped his control over her in the only way she felt she could.”

In diary entries written before her death, Ms Baird described a disturbing change in her husband during sex. She wrote that “something was unleashed” when he first put his hands around her neck.

“The more I fight back, the more he enjoys it,” she wrote. “It is like there was a side of him hidden all these years.”

Jurors heard that Ms Baird left a note addressed to her family, but not to her husband. In it, she wrote: “I am so sorry but I just couldn’t take it any more. I can’t explain the dark cloud that is over me. Please don’t let this break you, but know I am now free.”

Initially, her death was not treated as suspicious. Wiltshire Police began an investigation months later, but the case was dropped before being reopened after Ms Baird’s phone was returned to her mother.

On the device, her mother discovered an audio recording allegedly capturing an assault. The court heard sounds of slaps, a woman crying out in pain, and a calm

male voice believed to be Trybus.

The case was later transferred to another police force, leading to Trybus being charged.

The court was told that Ms Baird moved to the UK from South Africa with Trybus in 2007. They married in 2009 and settled in Wiltshire. Jurors also heard that she had struggled with her mental health after witnessing several violent car-jackings in South Africa as a young woman.

Medical evidence showed repeated injuries over time, including black eyes and facial swelling, which Ms Baird often explained away as accidents. Doctors and counsellors raised concerns, but she repeatedly denied being abused.

In October 2016, Ms Baird told her GP that her husband had raped her after she said she wanted to leave him. She alleged he strangled her, pinned her to the bed and had sex with her against her will while beating her.

Prosecutors say a second rape followed weeks later.

Trybus, a software consultant who frequently travelled abroad for work, denies all allegations.

The trial, expected to last up to eight weeks, continues.

# Drug dealer stamps woman to death after she gets off bus in Leicester

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



**A** 23-year-old drug dealer stamped a woman getting off a bus in Leicester city centre to death while high on cannabis.

Chukwuemeka Ahanonu, from Leicester, is accused of killing Nila Patel, 56, after crashing his car near Leicester Royal Infirmary on June 24 last year and launching a brutal assault in broad daylight.

Opening the case at Leicester Crown Court on Monday, prosecutor Mary Prior KC told jurors that Ms Patel, a mother who stood 5ft 4in tall, was attacked without warning as she walked home after getting off a bus in Leicester city centre.

“She was viciously attacked by this defendant,” Ms Prior said. “He was a complete stranger to her. She was walking along the road, talking on the telephone to a dear friend, when she was pulled from behind.”

The court heard that Ahanonu punched Ms Patel in the face with such force that she fell to the pavement. He then kicked and stamped on her as she lay defenceless on the ground, repeatedly stamping on her face.

Ms Patel was rushed to hospital with severe brain and facial injuries but died two days later despite what the prosecutor described as “valiant attempts” by paramedics and doctors to save her life.

“The defendant killed Nila Patel by punching her, by kicking her and by stamping on her,” Ms Prior said. “She did nothing to cause the attack and could not defend herself.”

Ahanonu denies murder but has pleaded guilty to manslaughter, claiming diminished responsibility.

Jurors were told that at the time of the killing, Ahanonu was running what the prosecution described as a “significant” drugs operation while claiming Universal Credit. The court heard that his drug-dealing business funded his flat, a BMW car, his living expenses and his regular use of cannabis.

According to the prosecution, Ahanonu earned as much as £10,000 a month supplying cannabis to more than 250 customers. Ms Prior said he even used special packaging designed to prevent the smell of cannabis so he could post drugs to buyers.

“That is a significant business and he ran

it successfully,” she told the court.

The jury heard that shortly before the attack, Ahanonu had smoked large amounts of cannabis and had been driving dangerously through Leicester before crashing his car, which overturned. He was not injured in the crash.

After getting out of the vehicle, he ran along the middle of the road towards Ms Patel and attacked her, the court was told. Part of the assault was captured on the body-worn camera of a security guard from Leicester Royal Infirmary who had gone to assist at the crash scene. The final moments of the attack were filmed by a member of the public on a mobile phone.

Ms Prior said the defence was expected to argue that Ahanonu was developing schizophrenia at the time of the killing.

However, she told jurors that voluntary intoxication was not a defence to murder. “The voluntary consumption of a substance which causes you to act in a way that you would not act when sober is not a defence,” she said. “An intoxicated intent is still an intent.”

The trial, expected to last up to a month, continues.

# Pope Leo lines up trips to Central Africa, Algeria, Spain, Monaco

By New Daily Prime



**P**ope Leo XIV will visit four African nations in April, the Vatican said Thursday, including Algeria — the first time a pope will travel to the North African Muslim nation.

The Vatican announced a series of international trips in the months ahead for the Catholic pontiff, who was elected last year, including to Spain and Monaco.

But the official trip to Algeria, which will see Leo visit Algiers and Annaba from April 13 to 15, will be particularly symbolic.

Algeria is the birthplace of the fifth-century St Augustine and the pope belongs to the Augustinian order, which was founded in the 13th century.

Islam is the state religion but the constitution guarantees freedom of worship, subject to approval by the authorities for the place of worship and the preacher.

Leo's visit, which is expected to focus on interfaith dialogue, comes 30 years after the beheading of seven French Trappist monks from a monastery during the 1990s civil war.

The head of the Catholic Church will then

visit Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea.

Leo will visit Yaounde, Bamenda and Douala from April 15 to 18, then Luanda, Muxima and Saurimo between April 18 and 21, before travelling to Malabo, Mongomo and Bata between April 21 and 23.

The pope is likely to appeal for peace and dialogue while in Angola and Cameroon, where long-running separatist struggles continue to kill civilians.

Monaco, Spain

Before his trip to Africa, the pontiff will visit Monaco for a day, the Vatican said.

The visit to the principality on the French riviera will take place on March 28 and will be the first papal trip to the city state in modern times.

A statement from the principality in the name of Prince Albert II and Princess Charlene said it would be "a historic moment for Monaco and stand as a strong sign of hope, in a spirit of dialogue, peace, and shared responsibility".

Leo will also visit Spain from June 6 to 12.

The Vatican News website said he would first visit the capital Madrid, and then travel to Barcelona, where he will inaugurate the newest and tallest tower of the Sagrada Familia Basilica.

The visit marks 100 years since the death of its Catalan architect, Antoni Gaudi, who was declared "venerable" by the Catholic Church in 2025, the first step on the path to sainthood.

Leo will then travel to the Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago off the coast of West Africa, a key point on the migration route to Europe.

The American pope, who became head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics in May, is a vocal defender of migrants, an issue which was also dear to his predecessor Pope Francis.

While in the Canary Islands, Leo will visit Tenerife and Gran Canaria, Vatican News said.

The announcements of the trips follow news the pope will visit a series of areas within Italy in the coming months, including the island of Lampedusa.

AFP

# Vinicius scores as Real Madrid beat Benfica to reach Champions League Last 16

By New Daily Prime

**V**inicius Jr scored as Real Madrid secured their place in the last 16 of the Champions League with victory over Benfica at the Bernabeu.

The forward had been the centre of focus in the build-up to the game, having alleged he was racially abused by Gianluca Prestianni during the first leg, in which Vinicius Jr scored the game's only goal.

Prestianni was subsequently handed a one-match ban, meaning he missed Wednesday's return leg, while support was shown for Vinicius Jr by the home fans as a banner with the words "no to racism" in Spanish was displayed in the stands before kick-off.

Vinicius Jr then ensured football was the focus during the game as he scored the winner, driving a clinical finish across the goalkeeper with 10 minutes to go to wrap up a 3-1 victory on aggregate.

Benfica, to their credit, had put up plenty of fight before then and had taken the lead in the 14th minute when Rafa Silva turned in a loose ball after Thibaut Courtois had prevented Raúl Asencio's attempted



clearance from going into his own net.

That lead lasted just two minutes, however, as Aurelien Tchouameni curled home a fine strike from the edge of the box for his first Champions League goal.

Real were without the injured Kylian

Mbappe and they missed his talent in attack, as Benfica instead looked a threat to score again and level up the tie on aggregate.

But Vinicius Jr continued his excellent recent form with his sixth goal in five games to ensure Real Madrid can look forward to facing either Manchester City or Sporting in the last 16.

# FIFA President 'very reassured' about World Cup in Mexico despite violence

By New Daily Prime

**F**IFA President Gianni Infantino told AFP on Tuesday he was "very reassured" about Mexico's hosting of games in the football World Cup, in his first comments on the violence triggered by the killing of a drug cartel leader.

"Very reassured, everything's good. It's going to be spectacular," Infantino said in the Colombian city of Barranquilla, two days after cartel members went on a rampage — including in host city Guadalajara — over the army's killing of their leader Nemesio "El Mencho" Oseguera.

Mexico is one of the three host countries for the June 11-July 19 World Cup, along with the United States and Canada.

The country as a whole, but particularly Guadalajara, was shaken by the violence that followed the killing of the leader of the powerful Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG).



At least 74 people were killed during the operation to capture him at a ranch near Guadalajara and subsequent clashes between the security forces and suspected cartel members.

Only one was a civilian, according to the government, but residents and tourists alike were left scurrying for cover as cartel gunmen blocked roads in 20 of Mexico's 32 states and torched vehicles and businesses.