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# FCC explores digital collaboration with UAE investment delegation

By Gbenga Olaleye



The Federal Character Commission (FCC) has commenced discussions with an international investment delegation on potential collaboration to strengthen its digital systems and enhance service delivery across the federation.

The delegation, led by Mr Michael Gale, Founder and Group CEO of Al Liwan Group Limited, was received at the FCC headquarters in Abuja by the Commission's Executive Chairman, Motunrayo Omidiran.

According to a statement released on Thursday by the FCC's spokesman, Ademola Lawrence, the engagement centred on exploring practical partnership models that could support the commission's digital upgrade, improve institutional efficiency, and enhance public service delivery.

Omidiran emphasised the critical role of technology in effective governance. She noted that strengthening the commission's digital infrastructure would improve monitoring, ensure better compliance with the Federal

Character principle, and promote transparency in the execution of its constitutional mandate.

"Strengthening our digital infrastructure will help the commission improve monitoring, ensure better compliance with the Federal Character principle, and enhance transparency in carrying out our constitutional responsibilities," she said.

In his remarks, Gale commended the FCC's reform efforts, stressing that institutions that embrace modern digital systems are better positioned to deliver measurable results. He added that his delegation was encouraged by the commission's vision and looked forward to exploring sustainable areas of collaboration.

The proposed partnership aligns with the FCC's ongoing efforts to modernise operations, strengthen accountability, and deploy technology to support fair and equitable representation of Nigeria's diverse groups across federal public service appointments and resource allocation.

Since her appointment, Omidiran has pursued institutional reforms aimed at reinforcing transparency, compliance monitoring, and accountability, with an increasing emphasis on digital transformation to improve efficiency and service delivery.

Observers say that the engagement with the UAE delegation underscores a growing recognition within Nigeria's public institutions of the strategic importance of technology in governance, particularly in ensuring equitable representation and the effective execution of statutory mandates.

The FCC, constitutionally mandated to guarantee fair representation across Nigeria's diverse ethnic and regional groups, appears poised to leverage digital innovation to modernise its operations, improve citizen trust, and strengthen compliance monitoring across federal appointments and resources.

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10X6	261,585.50
10X5	255,238.00
10X4	206,890.50
10X3	179,608.00
9X6	254,977.00
9X5	225,738.00
9X4	193,500.00
9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
5X2	42,916.50
4X4	60,166.50
4X3	36,499.50
4X2	29,333.50
3X3	28,000.00
3X2	17,400.00
2X2	13,000.00
2X1	8,600.00
1X1	4,400.00

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QUARTER PAGE	100,000.00
14X2	109,500.00
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10X5	237,500.00
10X4	192,500.00
10X3	171,000.00
9X6	232,500.00
9X5	206,000.00
9X4	177,500.00
9X3	150,000.00
8X6	216,000.00
8X3	98,500.00
7X4	164,002.00
6X4	94,010.50
6X3	78,500.00
6X2	47,500.00
5X5	100,000.00
5X4	61,500.00
5X3	57,819.00
5X2	40,379.50
4X4	55,000.00
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2X2	12,945.00
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FULL PAGE	315,777.50
HALF PAGE	184,700.00
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QUARTER PAGE	80,706.50
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10X6	217,830.00
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10X4	142,787.50
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1X1	2,795.50

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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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CENTRE SPREAD HALF COLOUR	575,000.00
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#### CONTACT US

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

E-mail Address:  
[info@newdailyprime.news](mailto:info@newdailyprime.news)  
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# Tinubu denies one-party agenda

By **Damilola Olufemi**

President Bola Tinubu has rejected allegations that he is undermining opposition parties or steering Nigeria toward a one-party system.

The president made the remarks on Wednesday during an interfaith breakfast with senators at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, where he addressed concerns about the shrinking space for opposition politics.

Responding to claims that his administration is weakening rival parties, Tinubu said criticism comes with public office.

“What they call you, any name, any nickname, critics must talk. When they accused me of killing opposition, I didn’t have a gun. I could have given myself a licence seeing as I have the authority,” he said.

He stressed that the country’s pressing security challenges — including terrorism and banditry — demand unity rather than political fragmentation. According to him, national cohesion aligns with the vision of Nigeria’s founding fathers.

“But I can’t blame anybody for jumping out of a sinking ship. What we have faced in the challenging period of this country, the terrorism and banditry, is causing us havoc,” he added.

“And we should pull together, unite in a way that our forefathers contemplated to bring about a constitutional democracy and pull us together. They didn’t say we should fight. It’s a good thing that we are working in harmony.”

Tinubu also used the occasion to defend his administration’s



economic policies, describing them as bold reforms implemented through collective effort to curb corruption.

“I have a lot of credit for bold reforms. Without your collaboration and inspiration, those reforms would not be possible. We are reformists together,” he said.

“What we gave up and what we stopped is monumental corruption in the subsidy system. We don’t want to participate in monumental corruption and arbitrage foreign exchange.”

He maintained that the measures have stabilised the economy and laid the groundwork for recovery.

“You don’t have to chase me for dollars; you can see what Nigeria is today. You should be proud of this great moment, and I am glad you are,” the president said.

“What we are enjoying is a stable economy, and prosperity is beckoning us. We need to work hard, and this attendance means a lot to me.”

Tinubu’s comments follow earlier jabs at opposition parties. In his 2025 Democracy Day address before a joint session of the National Assembly, he said he was pleased to see the opposition “self-immolate.”

Major opposition parties — including the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), and New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) — have been battling internal crises, leading to defections to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

The opposition has accused the APC of fuelling divisions within their ranks as part of a broader plan to entrench a one-party state — an allegation Tinubu has consistently denied.

At the APC National Executive Committee meeting in late July, the president again mocked the opposition and encouraged governors elected on other platforms to defect.

“It is not a bad idea to abandon a sinking ship and be absent from a coalition of confusion,” Tinubu said.

# Umahi denies deploying police against woman over campaign debt dispute

By Gbenga Olaleye



**T**he Minister of Works and former Governor of Ebonyi State, David Umahi has denied allegations that he deployed policemen against Mrs Tracy Ohiri to resolve a disagreement over unpaid campaign materials.

Umahi described the claims as inconsistent, contradictory, and lacking coherence—a position widely noted by members of the public who have followed the matter. The minister's office clarified the situation in a statement signed by his Senior Special Assistant on Media, Francis Nwaze, obtained on Thursday.

According to the statement, the police, acting within their constitutional mandate to maintain law and order, responded to a petition submitted by the minister's lawyer. Ohiri was subsequently arrested, and Umahi was invited for questioning, all in accordance with standard procedure.

“The Media Office of the Honourable Minister of Works, Senator Engr. David Umahi, CON, has taken note of a video currently being circulated by Omoyele

Sowore, in which he attempts to publicly confront and provoke the Minister over a matter already before the appropriate authorities,” the statement read.

“For clarity and public record, the allegations referenced by Mr Sowore were made by Mrs Tracy Ohiri and have been in the public space since last year. These claims, which relate to alleged assault and unpaid campaign materials, have been repeatedly published through social media videos and writings. It is important to state that her accounts have been inconsistent, contradictory, and lacking coherence, a fact that has been widely observed by members of the public who have followed the matter over time.”

The minister's office emphasised that contrary to the narrative being circulated, Umahi did not deploy the police to settle any personal score. “The Nigeria Police Force, acting within its constitutional mandate, acted on a petition submitted by the minister's lawyer, arrested her, and invited the Honourable Minister in line with standard procedure for statements,” the

statement said.

The office also criticised Sowore's public confrontation, describing it as “performative activism aimed at gaining attention rather than seeking truth.” Umahi, it added, “declined to be drawn into theatrics and calmly disengaged. As it stands, the matter is under police investigation, where facts will determine the outcome.”

The controversy stems from a viral video shared on Wednesday, showing Sowore confronting Umahi over Ohiri's allegations of assault and non-payment for campaign materials. In the footage, Umahi appeared composed and refused to engage in a prolonged exchange, while Sowore framed the encounter as a demand for accountability.

The video has generated mixed reactions online, with supporters of both sides offering contrasting interpretations. Meanwhile, the police continue their investigation into the matter.

# INEC moves 2027 presidential poll to January 16

By Damilola Olufemi



The Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC), Thursday night said the 2027 presidential election would now hold on January 16, next year from the initial February 20 date earlier scheduled.

In a statement in Abuja, the Commission explained that the new legal framework necessitated a complete review of the previously announced dates.

National Commissioner and Chairman of the Information and Voter Education Committee, Malam Mohammed Kudu Haruna, stated that the agency has now “reviewed and realigned the Schedule to ensure full compliance with the new legal framework” introduced by the 2026 Act.

Under the revised timetable, the Governorship and State Houses of Assembly Elections have also been rescheduled to take place on Saturday, February 6, 2027.

The dates represent a notable departure from the Commission’s earlier plan,

which had originally fixed the presidential ballot for late February and the state-level elections for March.

The shift in the general election calendar has also impacted off-cycle polls.

The INEC confirmed that the Osun State Governorship Election, which was initially slated for August 8, 2026, has been moved to Saturday, August 15, 2026.

Regarding the ongoing preparations for the Ekiti and Osun polls, the Commission noted that while some activities have already been concluded, “the remaining activities will now be implemented strictly in accordance with the Electoral Act, 2026.”

Beyond the election days themselves, the new timetable sets an accelerated pace for political parties. The conduct of party primaries, including the resolution of any arising disputes, is scheduled to begin on April 23, 2026, and must be concluded by May 30, 2026.

The window for official campaigning is also clearly defined, with Presidential and National Assembly campaigns set to kick off on August 19, 2026, followed by Governorship and State House of Assembly campaigns on September 9, 2026.

Malam Haruna emphasised the necessity of discipline among political actors during this transition, warning that “political parties are strongly advised to adhere strictly to these timelines” and affirming that “the Commission will enforce compliance with the law.”

He clarified that all campaigns must end exactly 24 hours before their respective election days, as mandated by the new statutes.

According to the INEC, these drastic changes remain “consistent with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) and the Electoral Act, 2026.”

# Tinubu urges Senate to amend constitution for creation of state police

By Damilola Olufemi



President Bola Tinubu has called on the leadership of the 10th Senate to initiate constitutional amendments that would pave the way for the establishment of state police across the country.

The President appealed on Wednesday during an interfaith breakfast with senators at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, according to a statement issued by his Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga.

President Tinubu said the time has come to create a legal framework for state police, describing it as a necessary response to Nigeria's shifting security landscape and a step toward strengthening grassroots policing.

He argued that decentralising law enforcement would enhance the current federal security structure and encourage intelligence-driven, community-based policing.

"We are facing terrorism, banditry, and insurgency. But we will never fail to make the right response to this cause," the President said.

"What I will ask for tonight is for you (Senators) to start thinking how best to

amend the constitution to incorporate the State Police for us to secure our country, take over our forests from marauders, and free our children from fear."

President Tinubu also lauded the harmonious working relationship between the executive and the Senate, stressing that unity among political leaders is crucial to overcoming terrorism and banditry.

"It is a good thing that we are working in harmony, we are looking forward to a country that evolves, a country that takes care of its citizens and protects all," he added.

The President further expressed appreciation to the Senate for backing major economic reforms introduced by his administration, including the removal of fuel subsidy and tax policy adjustments.

"I have a lot of credit for bold reforms. Without your collaboration and inspiration, those reforms would not be possible. We are reformists together," he said.

"What we gave up and what we stopped is monumental corruption in the subsidy system. We don't want to participate in

monumental corruption and arbitrage foreign exchange.

"You don't have to chase me for dollars; you could see what Nigeria is today. You should be proud, and I am glad you are.

"What we are enjoying is a stable economy, and prosperity is beckoning us. We need to work hard, and this attendance means a lot to me."

Senate President Godswill Akpabio commended the President for hosting the interfaith gathering and praised his leadership. He noted that the administration's reforms have boosted revenues available to states, enabling greater investment in infrastructure.

He also offered prayers for the success of the administration and for enduring peace and prosperity in the country.

President Tinubu has consistently identified the creation of state police as a core objective of his administration. At a recent meeting with state governors on February 23, he reiterated his resolve to address the country's insecurity challenges through the establishment of state-controlled policing structures.

# Finance minister sets out 10-year plan for \$1tn Nigeria economy

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Nigeria must post annual economic growth of between 10 and 12 per cent for the next decade to achieve its ambition of becoming a \$1 trillion economy, the minister of state for finance, Doris Uzoka-Anite, has said.

Speaking on Wednesday at the 2026 annual general meeting of the Finance Correspondents Association of Nigeria (FICAN) in Abuja, Uzoka-Anite described the target as bold but attainable if ongoing reforms are sustained.

Addressing the theme, “Actualising President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s \$1 Trillion Economy Agenda,” she said Nigeria’s current gross domestic product stands at about \$375 billion. Bridging the gap to \$1 trillion, she noted, requires consistent double-digit growth over the next 10 years.

“That is an ambitious target, and this administration is not shy about saying so,” she told finance journalists.

Uzoka-Anite said the government of Bola Ahmed Tinubu inherited what she called “structurally distorted” economic fundamentals in 2023. She cited annual fuel subsidy payments exceeding N5 trillion and a multiple exchange rate system that encouraged rent-seeking and weakened investor confidence.

According to her, two early policy decisions defined the administration’s reform path: the removal of the fuel subsidy and the unification of the foreign exchange market.

“Both decisions imposed short-term pain. Neither decision has been reversed. Today, those reforms are being vindicated by the data,” she said.

She pointed to a January 2026 update by S&P Global Ratings, which revised Nigeria’s outlook to positive while affirming its B-/B sovereign credit ratings. The agency, she said, cited measurable improvements in the country’s fiscal, monetary and external positions.

On public finance, the minister said the federal government has restructured its



budget framework to separate investment expenditure from recurrent spending. The move, she explained, is designed to protect capital spending and improve long-term productivity.

Uzoka-Anite disclosed that the second phase of reforms is being driven by a joint initiative between the ministry of finance and the Central Bank of Nigeria. The programme, known as the disinflation and growth acceleration strategy (DGAS), is structured around nine pillars.

She said DGAS aims to deliver non-inflationary growth above 7 per cent by 2027, laying the groundwork for sustained expansion beyond that period.

A key concern, she noted, is Nigeria’s heavy reliance on imported inputs. About 70 per cent of raw materials used in domestic industrial production are sourced from abroad, leaving the economy exposed to exchange rate pressures and global supply shocks.

Uzoka-Anite referenced the Dangote Refinery as proof that domestic value addition can alter the country’s cost structure. By refining crude oil locally rather than exporting it and re-importing finished products, she said, Nigeria can retain value, create jobs and expand its tax base.

“Our goal under DGAS is to replicate

that model across agriculture, mining, health and manufacturing,” she said, arguing that deeper local processing would generate employment, raise household incomes and strengthen fiscal revenues.

On trade integration, the minister confirmed that Nigeria has submitted its ECOWAS tariff offer to the African Continental Free Trade Area secretariat. The offer establishes zero duties on 90 per cent of goods traded within the continent.

She said the move positions Nigerian businesses to compete more effectively across African markets, while also attracting investment into export-oriented industries.

Uzoka-Anite, a medical doctor and financial analyst by training, previously served as minister of industry, trade and investment before assuming her current role in November 2024. She also held office as commissioner for finance and co-ordinator of the economy in Imo State.

For the administration, the \$1 trillion ambition is more than a headline figure. It is a long-term benchmark tied to structural reform, industrial expansion and fiscal discipline. The next decade, she made clear, will determine whether the target remains aspirational or becomes reality.

# ADC, NNPP reject Electoral Act 2026, allege plot to undermine multi-party democracy

By Damilola Olufemi

The African Democratic Congress (ADC) and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) have rejected the newly amended Electoral Act 2026, warning that the legislation threatens Nigeria's democratic framework and could entrench one-party dominance.

President Bola Tinubu signed the Electoral Act 2026 into law on February 18 after its passage by the national assembly. However, opposition leaders say the process and substance of the amendment raise serious concerns.

Addressing journalists in Abuja on Thursday, NNPP National Chairman, Ajuji Ahmed, spoke on behalf of a coalition of opposition parties. He accused the ruling Bola Tinubu-led administration and the All Progressives Congress (APC)-dominated national assembly of rushing the legislation through with the intent to weaken political competition.

According to him, the amendment was passed with "contemptuous haste" to "weaken opposition, corrupt the electoral system, compromise democratic institutions and foist a totalitarian one-party rule on Nigeria."

Ahmed said the opposition would pursue all lawful and constitutional mechanisms to resist the implementation of the Act.

"We therefore state unequivocally that the new Electoral Act is anti-democratic, and its implementation will undermine electoral transparency and sanctity of the ballot which are fundamental to free, fair and credible elections and the bedrock of participatory democracy," he said.

He further described the legislation as part of a broader strategy by the APC to erode democratic safeguards.

"This obnoxious Electoral Act, 2026 is without doubt enacted to undermine democracy in Nigeria and it is part of the on-going design by the Tinubu-led



APC to disorganize and weaken opposition, corrupt the electoral system, compromise democratic institutions and foist a totalitarian one-party rule on Nigeria.

"Therefore, we, as patriotic leaders, standing shoulder to shoulder with Nigerians, reject the new Electoral Act for the following reasons.

"We demand that the national assembly immediately commence a fresh amendment to the Electoral Act 2026, to remove all obnoxious provisions and ensure that the Act reflects only the will and aspiration of Nigerians for free, fair, transparent and credible electoral process in our country. Nothing short of this will be acceptable to Nigerians."

The NNPP chairman also faulted the national assembly for allegedly disregarding stakeholder input during public hearings on the bill. He said "well-thought-out and well-considered clause-by-clause recommendations from stakeholders and citizens across the country" were ignored, adding that "the will of the people were eventually subverted and their views rubbished."

Ahmed praised opposition lawmakers who resisted what he termed anti-

democratic provisions, while cautioning others whom he accused of prioritising personal interests over public good.

He warned that "the people are watching and taking note" and that "at the appropriate time, the people would remember those who stood in defence of their democratic aspirations and those who sold the will of the people for a mess of pottage."

Beyond the Act itself, the opposition leaders also alleged that the recent Federal Capital Territory (FCT) area council elections served as a rehearsal for broader electoral manipulation ahead of 2027, describing the exercise as a "test-run of 2027 APC rigging plan."

Among prominent figures present at the press conference were former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar; Peter Obi, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Labour Party; and Rotimi Amaechi, former minister of transportation.

Also in attendance were David Mark, national chairman of the ADC, and Rauf Aregbesola, the party's national secretary.

# 'I didn't have a gun': Tinubu fires back at claims of crushing opposition

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has rejected claims that he is working to weaken opposition parties, declaring that he cannot be blamed for internal crises rocking rival political platforms.

Speaking on Wednesday at an interfaith breakfast with senators at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, Tinubu addressed growing accusations that his administration is steering Nigeria towards a one-party state.

"What they call you, any name, any nickname, critics must talk," the president said. "When they accused me of killing opposition, I didn't have a gun. I could have given myself a licence seeing as I have the authority."

His remarks come amid a wave of defections from opposition parties to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), prompting speculation about the future of multi-party competition in the country.

Tinubu dismissed suggestions that the APC is orchestrating instability within rival parties. Instead, he said opposition groups must confront their own internal divisions.

"I can't blame anybody for jumping out of a sinking ship," he said, in a pointed reference to defections. The comment underscored his view that political realignments are driven by survival instincts rather than coercion.

Nigeria's opposition landscape has been unsettled in recent months. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Labour Party, and the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) have all faced leadership disputes and factional tensions. Tinubu argued that these internal struggles cannot be attributed to the presidency.

Beyond politics, the president used the occasion to reflect on the country's security and economic challenges. He acknowledged that terrorism and banditry continue to strain national stability, describing them as threats that require unity rather than division.

On the economy, Tinubu defended his reform agenda, including the removal of the fuel subsidy and changes to the foreign exchange regime. He said the measures, though painful at the outset, are laying the groundwork for long-term recovery.

"We are reformists together," he told lawmakers, crediting the National Assembly for supporting the administration's policy direction. According to him, curbing fuel subsidy payments and ending foreign exchange arbitrage have improved transparency and reduced systemic leakages.

The president insisted that Nigeria is on a firmer footing, pointing to signs of macroeconomic stabilisation. "You don't have to chase me for dollars; you can see what Nigeria is today," he said. "You should be proud of this great moment."

Tinubu's remarks mark one of his clearest responses yet to accusations that his government is shrinking the political space. By framing defections as voluntary decisions by politicians seeking safer ground, he sought to distance his administration from the turbulence within opposition ranks.

For now, the debate continues. While critics warn of creeping dominance by the ruling party, the president maintains that democratic competition remains intact — and that opposition parties must put their own houses in order.

# Olumide Akpata explains defection from Labour Party to ADC in support of Peter Obi

By Gbenga Olaleye

Former Labour Party governorship candidate in Edo State, Olumide Akpata, has revealed that his decision, alongside other party members, to defect to the African Democratic Congress (ADC) was driven by the need to support former Anambra State governor, Peter Obi.

Akpata made the disclosure during an appearance on Politics Today, a current affairs programme on Channels Television, monitored on Wednesday. His comments come days after he was formally received into the ADC at a ceremony that reportedly referenced an alleged assassination attempt on Obi and other party chieftains.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, Akpata said he belonged to a group of political actors committed to what they describe as the vision of a better Nigeria. According to him, members of the group had previously operated within the Labour Party before deciding to chart a new course.

“I moved to the ADC because I belong to a group who believe that a better Nigeria



is possible,” Akpata stated. “We were members of the Labour Party. On 31 December 2025, the leader of that group moved to the ADC.”

He explained that members of the Labour Party in Edo State deliberated

extensively before concluding that their political aspirations would be better realised on the ADC platform. The objective, he said, was to strengthen Obi’s chances of securing a presidential ticket under the party.

“Those of us in the Edo State Labour Party sat down and decided that the journey to a better Nigeria that we think is possible would be best travelled on this platform to continue to support Peter Obi,” he said.

Akpata argued that remaining within the Labour Party could ultimately undermine their broader political goals. “We recognised that supporting him at the level of the Labour Party will come to nought if we are not able to help him achieve the objective of becoming the presidential candidate of the ADC,” he added.

The development signals a fresh realignment within opposition politics, as key figures reposition themselves ahead of future electoral contests.

# Kogi secures licence for Ajaokuta economic city free trade zone

By Gbenga Olaleye

Kogi State has taken a major step in reviving Nigeria’s industrial ambitions with the official licensing of the Ajaokuta Economic City Free Trade Zone. The certificate was presented in Abuja by Dr Olufemi Ogunyemi, Managing Director of the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA), following President Bola Tinubu’s November 2025 approval for the establishment of the 4,000-hectare industrial city.

Governor Usman Ododo described the development as a “historic turning point” that positions Kogi as a major economic hub in West Africa. He highlighted the state’s strategic location, bordering around 10 commercial centers including the Federal Capital Territory, and its rich deposits of over 30 solid minerals, such as coal, iron ore, lithium, gold, and beryllium.

Ododo said the free trade zone would serve as a catalyst for economic transformation, attracting both local and foreign investors and complementing the



revival of the long-stalled Ajaokuta Steel Company. He also revealed plans for an international airport to support the zone and leverage its proximity to Abuja.

Dr Ogunyemi described the licence as the

beginning of a “long journey,” stressing NEPZA’s role in supporting, regulating, and facilitating investment into the zone. He noted that the free trade zone model is internationally recognised, designed to attract investment, promote exports, and create jobs.

The Ajaokuta Free Trade Zone is expected to stimulate downstream industries such as steel fabrication, mining, manufacturing, and logistics, while strengthening Nigeria’s industrialisation, boosting export earnings, and generating employment. With this addition, NEPZA has now licensed approximately 46 Free Trade Zones nationwide, expanding the country’s special economic zones framework and enhancing efforts to attract investment.

Governor Ododo emphasised that the project would form a key part of his administration’s legacy, ensuring that Kogi State capitalises on its natural resources and strategic location to drive sustainable economic growth.

# Ahead of 2026 poll, Oyebanji seeks royal backing across Ekiti

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Governor Biodun Oyebanji has stepped up consultations with traditional rulers across Ekiti State's 140 towns as he prepares for the June 20, 2026 governorship election.

The governor made his latest appeal in Ijero Ekiti on Monday during the commissioning of the new Owa Ajero Palace built for the Ajero of Ijero Kingdom, Oba Joseph Adewole.

Represented by his deputy, Monisade Afuye, Oyebanji told monarchs that his administration would not drag the traditional institution into partisan politics. He said the government remained committed to respecting royal authority and protecting the independence of kingmakers.

With less than four months to the election, the governor urged traditional rulers to use their influence to maintain peace before, during and after the polls. He warned that violence could slow down development and unsettle communities.

He described the forthcoming election as another chance to strengthen democracy in the state. He called on eligible voters to turn out in large numbers and fulfil what he termed their constitutional duty at the ballot box.

According to him, his administration has recorded steady progress in infrastructure, governance and public service delivery over the past three and a half years. He said continuity would allow ongoing projects to be completed and new reforms to take root.

"We have witnessed good governance through collective effort and sacrifice," he said. "Let us renew the mandate so that development can continue until 2030."

Oyebanji stressed that his government had not interfered in the selection of traditional rulers. He noted that 11 monarchs had been installed across the three senatorial districts since 2022 without state intrusion into the process.

"The choice of a king rests with kingmakers," he said, adding that non-



interference had strengthened trust between the government and royal fathers.

He praised Ijero Kingdom for its record of stability and cooperation, describing it as one of the most orderly communities in Ekiti. He also commended Oba Adewole for promoting unity and safeguarding the cultural identity of his people.

In his remarks, Oba Adewole traced the palace project back three decades. He said the vision began about 30 years ago but faced funding setbacks. He thanked the governor for financial support that sped up its completion.

The monarch said he ascended the throne in 1991 during a turbulent period but made a promise to build a befitting palace for the kingdom. He described the new structure as a symbol of endurance and collective effort.

Oba Adewole also expressed confidence in the governor's re-election bid. He predicted victory at the polls, saying traditional rulers had offered prayers that contributed to Oyebanji's emergence as candidate of the All

Progressives Congress.

"He respects us and has shown leadership," the monarch said. "I believe he will win again."

The royal father used the occasion to sympathise with residents affected by the February 11, 2026 rainstorm that damaged hundreds of houses in Ijero. He urged victims to remain thankful that no lives were lost.

Dignitaries at the event included the lawmaker representing Ijero Constituency in the State House of Assembly, Hon. Ademola Ojo; Ijero Local Government Chairman, Abayomi Folowosele; commissioners; political leaders; members of the Ajero-in-Council; and community representatives.

As the 2026 race gathers pace, the governor's outreach to traditional rulers signals a strategy built on consensus and grassroots support. In Ekiti politics, royal endorsement carries weight. Whether that backing will translate into votes will be decided on June 20.

# Fubara appoints new SSG, Chief of Staff, signals fresh push for stability in rivers

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



**R**ivers State Governor Siminalayi Fubara has appointed a new Secretary to the State Government (SSG) and Chief of Staff (CoS), a move widely seen as part of efforts to stabilise governance after months of political tension in the state.

The appointments were announced on Thursday in Port Harcourt in a statement issued by the governor's Chief Press Secretary, Onwuka Nzeshi. According to the statement, Dagogo S. A. Wokoma was named Secretary to the State Government, while Sunny Ewule, a legal practitioner, was appointed Chief of Staff. Both appointments took immediate effect.

The statement added that the new appointees would be sworn in at 2:00 pm on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at the Executive Council Chamber, Government House, Port Harcourt, before formally assuming their duties.

Governor Fubara had earlier relieved several senior aides of their positions, including the former Chief of Staff, Edison Ehie, and the former SSG, Benibo Anabraba, following the prolonged

political crisis in the state and the Abuja-brokered peace agreement.

Political observers say the latest appointments mark a reset in the governor's inner circle as he seeks to rebuild trust and ensure smoother coordination within the executive arm of government.

The development comes a day after Governor Fubara publicly reaffirmed his willingness to work with members of the Rivers State House of Assembly, including newly elected lawmakers from the opposition.

"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 said while congratulating winners of recent bye-elections.

Fubara was reacting to the emergence of Ukalikpe Napoleon and Loolo Bulabari Henrietta, who won the February 21 bye-elections conducted by Independent National Electoral Commission. The polls filled vacant seats in Ahoada East State Constituency II and Khana State

Constituency II.

Both lawmakers were elected on the platform of the All Progressives Congress, with Napoleon clinching victory in Ahoada East and Henrietta emerging winner in Khana.

Describing their victories as well deserved, the governor urged the new legislators to justify the confidence placed in them by their constituents. "It is the beauty of democracy," Fubara said. "When the people believe in your capacity, they will give you their votes."

He also commended residents of Ahoada East and Khana for maintaining peace before, during and after the elections, describing their conduct as a sign of democratic maturity.

With the appointment of a new SSG and Chief of Staff, and a public olive branch extended to the state legislature, analysts say Governor Fubara appears to be laying the groundwork for a more cooperative political environment as Rivers State moves beyond its recent turmoil.

# Over 24 killed as gunmen raze Adamawa village — Amnesty International

By Yunusa Umar

At least 24 people were killed and hundreds injured on Tuesday evening when gunmen attacked Kirchinga village in Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, according to Amnesty International.

In a statement condemning the assault, Amnesty International said the attackers razed the entire community, leaving homes, shops and places of worship in ruins. The rights group added that many residents remain missing, while bodies were reportedly seen scattered across the village after the attack. Most of those killed, Amnesty International noted, were older persons.

Although no group has claimed



responsibility, Amnesty International said its analysis of the attack pattern and

accounts from survivors indicate it bears the hallmarks of Boko Haram operations, which have frequently targeted rural communities in northern Nigeria.

The organisation warned that gunmen and armed groups are increasingly attacking villages across the region, killing residents and forcing mass displacement “with utter impunity.”

Amnesty International urged Nigerian authorities to urgently step up measures to protect civilians and ensure that those responsible for the attack — and similar incidents — are thoroughly investigated and brought to justice.

# Meeting with Makinde was personal, not political — Kwankwaso

By Damilola Olufemi

National Leader of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), Rabiu Kwankwaso, has dismissed suggestions that his recent private meeting with Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde was aimed at forging a political alliance, describing it instead as a friendly visit.

The NNPP’s 2023 presidential candidate met Governor Makinde on Wednesday at the Governor’s Office in Ibadan. The closed-door discussion reportedly lasted about two hours.

Kwankwaso was in Oyo State to inaugurate the NNPP’s new state secretariat and to hold consultations with key party stakeholders, including NNPP National Chairman Ajuji Ahmed, Publicity Secretary Ladipo Johnson, and Board of Trustees Secretary Buba Galadima.

Addressing journalists after the meeting, Kwankwaso played down speculations that the visit was connected to possible cross-party alignments ahead of the 2027 general elections.

“This visit is more about personal



friendship than party politics,” he said.

“Governor Makinde and I have known each other for a long time. Before proceeding to our party engagement in the state, I felt it was proper to pay him a courtesy call.”

Neither camp disclosed details of what was discussed during the session.

Nonetheless, the meeting has drawn attention from political watchers, particularly in light of recent developments in Kano State.

Kwankwaso’s political base in Kano suffered a setback after Governor Abba Yusuf, widely regarded as his protégé, formally defected from the NNPP to the All Progressives Congress (APC) on January 26, 2026.

# INEC conducted BVAS mock trial in 289 FCT polling units ahead of area council elections

By **Gbenga Olaleye**

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has disclosed that it carried out a mock trial of the updated Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in 289 polling units across the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) prior to the recently concluded Area Council elections.

The Deputy Director of Information and Publicity at INEC, Wilfred Ifogah, made the revelation on Thursday during an appearance on Sunrise Daily, a breakfast programme on Channels Television. He spoke while reacting to issues raised following the FCT polls.

According to Ifogah, the mock exercise was designed to test new updates introduced to the BVAS, particularly its enhanced result verification capability.

“Prior to the FCT elections, we did a mock trial for the update that was done on the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System, BVAS, in 289 polling units all around the FCT,” he said.

He explained that under the upgraded system, once results are collated at the



polling unit level, the presiding officer inputs the data directly into the BVAS device. The system then performs an internal validation process before accepting the submission.

“If the scanned image of the EC8A form,

containing tabulated results, does not align with the accredited voter numbers and figures already recorded in BVAS, the system will not process the submission until accuracy is verified,” Ifogah stated.

The EC8A form is the official result sheet used at polling units to record votes cast. The new feature, he noted, ensures that discrepancies between recorded accreditation figures and submitted results are flagged immediately.

He emphasised that the update represents a significant improvement in the functionality of the BVAS. Unlike the previous configuration, which primarily focused on capturing and transmitting images of result sheets, the enhanced version now cross-checks scanned data against pre-recorded accreditation figures before transmission.

The development comes amid broader public scrutiny of the electoral process following the FCT Area Council elections, with INEC maintaining that technological improvements remain central to strengthening transparency and credibility in Nigeria’s elections.

# Court admits more exhibits against Ex-NHIS boss Yusuf

By **Yunusa Umar**

Justice Chinyere E. Nwecheonwu of the Federal Capital Territory High Court, Kuchiako, Kuje, Abuja, on Wednesday, February 25, 2026, admitted in evidence more documents tendered by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, against former National Health Insurance Scheme, NHIS, boss, Professor Usman Yusuf.

The documents were brought before the court by the Second Prosecution Witness, PW2, James Balam, Director Procurement, NHIS, at the January 5, 2026 proceedings on the matter.

Ruling on the admissibility of the documents, on Wednesday, February 25, 2026, following their presentation and oral application to tender them in evidence by prosecution counsel, Francis Usani, Justice Nwecheonwu, held that the admission of the document was in accordance with the law, noting also that the documents did not face any objection by the defence counsel, O.I. Habeeb, SAN.

The judge further admitted and marked the Certified True Copies, CTC of letters,



dated November 11, 2016 as E1-32. Also admitted was the CTC of the Procurement Plan of NHIS 2016, marked F1-F4, the CTC of NHIS Procurement Plan 2017, marked G1-G5 and the CTC of NHIS Procurement Act 2016, marked H1-H2.

Led in his testimony by the prosecution counsel, the witness informed the court on what transpired between him and the EFCC upon his invitation by the

Commission.

“After I took those documents to the Commission, I made statements. The statements were not made in one day. I can recognize the statements. There are five,” he said.

The effort of the prosecution counsel to tender the extra-judicial statements of the witness in evidence was objected to by the defence counsel.

Following counter-arguments by both the prosecution and defence counsel on the admissibility of the extra-judicial statements, Justice Nwecheonwu adjourned the matter till May 13 and 14, 2026, for ruling on the admissibility of the statements and continuation of trial.

Yusuf is being prosecuted by the EFCC on a five-count charge, bordering on embezzlement, conferring undue advantage, and fraud to the tune of N90,439,178.00 (Ninety Million, Four Hundred and Thirty Nine thousand, One Hundred and Seventy Eight Naira, only).

# 15 Adamawa lawmakers, speaker quit PDP amid Fintiri defection rumours

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



The political landscape in Adamawa State shifted sharply on Wednesday as 15 members of the state house of assembly, including the speaker, resigned from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), deepening uncertainty over the future of the ruling party in the state.

The mass resignation was announced during plenary by the speaker, Bathiya Wesley, who confirmed that he and his deputy, Buba Jijiwa, had also quit the party.

According to Wesley, the decision was driven by the lingering crisis at the national level of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He said the lawmakers had formally communicated their resignations in separate letters, but with identical concerns about instability within the party's leadership structure.

"All the letters contained the same message," Wesley told the assembly. "The PDP members cited the crisis at the national level of the party as the main reason for their decision to quit."

Despite their departure, the lawmakers acknowledged the role the PDP played in

their political careers, thanking the party for the opportunity to contest and win elections on its platform.

Those who resigned include Kefas Calvin, Bulus Geoffrey, Haruna Jilantikiri, Kefas Emmanuel, Ahmed Belal, Moses Zah, Kate Mamuno, Pwamwakeno Mackondo, Adun Alaba, Bulus Kantom, Musa Kallamu and Japhet Hammanjabu. Abubakar Abdullahi, who represents Girei constituency, had resigned from the party a day earlier.

Though the lawmakers did not immediately declare their next political destination during plenary, sources within the assembly said many of them are expected to align with the All Progressives Congress (APC). The development comes amid reports that Governor Ahmadu Fintiri is also weighing a possible defection to the ruling party at the federal level.

If confirmed, such a move would mark a significant realignment in Adamawa politics, where the PDP has held sway in recent electoral cycles. Analysts say the defection of the speaker and a large bloc of lawmakers signals more than routine

party switching. It suggests deeper fractures within the PDP's national leadership, with ripple effects at state level.

Political observers in Yola say the resignations could alter the balance of power within the state assembly and reshape alliances ahead of future elections. The PDP's ability to maintain cohesion in Adamawa may now depend on how quickly it addresses the grievances cited by the departing lawmakers.

For the APC, the development presents an opportunity to consolidate influence in the north-east state. A formal announcement of defection, if made, would further strengthen the party's foothold.

As events unfold, attention will focus on whether Governor Fintiri follows the lawmakers' path. For now, Adamawa stands at a political crossroads, with party loyalty, internal crises and strategic calculations reshaping its legislative map.

# Kogi state hails Tinubu's commitment to state police as "generational reform"

By **Gbenga Olaleye**



**T**he Kogi State Government has described President Bola Tinubu's commitment to establishing state police as a transformative reform capable of reshaping Nigeria's security architecture.

In a statement on Thursday, the state Commissioner for Information and Communications, Kingsley Fanwo, commended the President for reaffirming his administration's resolve to decentralise policing during a high-level meeting with governors at the Presidential Villa.

According to the statement, Tinubu emphasised that state police has become necessary to confront evolving security challenges, noting that decentralised law enforcement would enhance community-based responses, improve intelligence gathering, and strengthen internal security nationwide.

The Kogi State Government noted that the President's position coincides with ongoing deliberations at the National Assembly on the constitutional and legislative frameworks required to establish state police, describing the initiative as a bold and strategic step towards long-term national stability.

Fanwo stated that the administration of Governor Ahmed Ododo fully aligns with the President's vision and remains committed to reforms aimed at bringing security closer to the grassroots.

"The state police initiative represents a decisive intervention capable of significantly dismantling insecurity in Nigeria," the statement said. It further commended Tinubu's broader economic and financial sector reforms, noting that the decentralisation of policing is a natural progression of the administration's national renewal

agenda.

"As a government, we fully align with Mr President's position and assure him, as well as the leadership of the National Assembly, of our readiness to cooperate with all relevant authorities to make state police a reality," Fanwo added.

The statement emphasised that sustained collaboration between federal and state authorities would not only tackle immediate security threats but also lay the foundation for enduring peace, stability, and development across the country.

PUNCH Online had reported that Tinubu, on Monday, reiterated his firm commitment to establishing state police as a means of curbing incessant security challenges. In response, the Kogi State House of Assembly pledged to give the state police bill accelerated consideration once it is brought before the House.

# Olu of Warri honours first lady with prestigious Itsekiri title

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

The ancient Warri Kingdom stood still in celebration as Oluremi Tinubu was honoured with one of the highest traditional titles in Itsekiri land.

In a ceremony marked by colour, ritual and royal pageantry, Ogiame Atuwatse III, the Olu of Warri, conferred on the First Lady the revered chieftaincy title of Utukpa-Oritse of Warri Kingdom.

The investiture was more than a formal decoration. It was a homecoming.

Mrs Tinubu traces her maternal ancestry to the Itsekiri ethnic group. By tradition and bloodline, she is a daughter of the soil. Saturday's ceremony formally reconnected her to her ancestral roots in a public affirmation of identity and heritage.

Addressing guests at the palace, the monarch praised the First Lady's public service record and the dignity with which she has represented Nigeria both at home and abroad. He said the honour reflected the pride of the Itsekiri people in one of their own who has risen to national prominence.

The title Utukpa-Oritse carries weight within the Warri Kingdom. It is reserved for individuals whose lives and service align with the values of leadership, integrity and commitment to community.

Beyond the chieftaincy title, the First Lady was also decorated with the Royal Order of Iwere (ROI), the second-highest honour in the kingdom. The decoration is rarely bestowed and is limited to distinguished sons, daughters and allies who have brought recognition to the Itsekiri nation.

The ceremony drew a cross-section of Nigeria's political and traditional leadership, underlining its national importance.

Among those present was Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwo. Also in attendance were the Ooni of Ife, Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, and the Dein of Agbor,



Benjamin Ikenchukwu Keagborekuzi I, alongside other respected royal fathers, senior government officials and guests from across the country.

Their presence signalled unity among Nigeria's traditional institutions and reinforced the continued relevance of royal stools in the nation's public life.

Warri Kingdom, one of the oldest monarchies in the Niger Delta, has long been regarded as a custodian of Itsekiri culture and tradition. Saturday's event blended heritage with modern statecraft, showing how royal institutions continue to shape identity and influence national discourse.

For many in attendance, the moment carried emotional weight. Palace grounds echoed with songs, traditional dances and prayers as chiefs in ceremonial attire performed age-old rites to seal the

honour.

Observers said the investiture strengthens the bond between the Warri throne and the Nigerian state, while affirming the role of ancestry in public life.

In his closing remarks, the Olu of Warri offered prayers for continued unity and progress for both the Itsekiri nation and Nigeria. He expressed hope that the renewed link between the First Lady and her ancestral homeland would foster development and shared prosperity.

For Mrs Tinubu, the day marked a return to her roots. For Warri Kingdom, it was a statement of pride.

In the meeting point between tradition and national leadership, history was written once again in the palace of the Olu.

# Outrage in Anambra over alleged N100 million transfer to Ex-IGP's son

By Gbenga Olaleye



There is widespread concern among citizens of Anambra State following reports that N100 million was allegedly transferred from the state government's account to the bank account of Victor Egbetokun, said to be the son of former Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun.

Investigations by Sahara Reporters revealed that the sum was transferred in four tranches of N25 million each.

Reacting to the development, Force Public Relations Officer, Benjamin Hundeyin, confirmed that the allegation was accurate. He stated that the former IGP's son acknowledged the receipt and was advised to instruct his bank to reverse the funds, which was promptly done.

Despite the reversal, the revelation has caused alarm among Anambra residents, many of whom questioned the management of the state's finances under Governor Charles Chukwuma Soludo. Critics noted the unusual nature of the transfer, questioning why

the funds would end up in the account of someone with no official business in the state rather than an indigene or contractor.

Public affairs analyst and critic of the state government, Kingsley Ubani, said: "The question now on the lips of Ndi Anambra is, who approved the transfer of the sum of N100 million to the IGP son's account and why? If such an error can occur unnoticed, how much money has been transferred in error in the past? This is an indictment on Professor Soludo, and citizens deserve an explanation."

Another resident, Peter Ndukaike, expressed concern over the government's silence: "What is worrisome is that the Anambra State Government has refused to comment on the matter since it broke. If such an amount can be transferred out in 'error', who knows how much of Anambra funds have been moved without a trace?"

Journalist Fisayo Soyombo criticised

the situation on social media, highlighting the symbolic implications of the transfer: "The Anambra State Government was going to make an erroneous N100 million transfer, but instead, it went to the son of Nigeria's number one internal security official. Nigerians are not fools, and they know it."

Responding, the Press Secretary to the governor, Christian Aburime, insisted that the transfer had nothing to do with the state government. He stated that the incident was an "honest error" unrelated to Anambra finances and had already been reversed months ago. "Governor Soludo is a renowned finance manager; he is not one to throw away money. The matter has been settled," Aburime added.

The episode has reignited debates over transparency and accountability in the management of public funds in Anambra State, with citizens demanding clearer explanations despite assurances from the governor's office.

# PDP chieftain demands probe into alleged attack on ADC members in Edo

By Gbenga Olaleye



**A**chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Emmanuel Ogidi, has called for a thorough investigation into the recent attack on members of the African Democratic Congress (ADC) in Edo State.

Speaking to journalists on Thursday, Ogidi described the reported hostilities involving prominent political figures as a “bad omen” for Nigeria’s democracy, particularly as the country prepares for the 2027 general elections.

He said it was deeply troubling that the 2023 presidential candidate of the Labour Party, Peter Obi, alongside former National Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC), John Odigie-Oyegun, and other ADC leaders, were allegedly subjected to such an attack.

Ogidi urged Bola Tinubu to direct security agencies to immediately investigate the reported threats to the lives of ADC members and ensure that anyone found culpable is prosecuted in accordance with the law.

According to him, decisive measures must be taken to prevent a recurrence and safeguard Nigeria’s political environment from avoidable violence.

“It is unfortunate that we have reduced political contests to this level. First, it was attacks by bandits and herdsmen; now, politicians are going after one another,” Ogidi said.

He also referenced disruptions during the recent Area Council elections in Abuja, alleging that sponsored political thugs interfered with the electoral process in Abaji Area Council.

“I call on Mr President to investigate these incidents. The matter must be investigated and the culprits brought to book,” he added.

The PDP chieftain emphasised the need for political tolerance among stakeholders, warning that the prevailing climate could discourage citizens from participating in future elections.

“What is happening now will make many people afraid of coming out for future elections. We must not allow this to happen,” he said.

Ogidi further advised Nigerians not to succumb to fear or intimidation, stressing that the country belongs to all its citizens and that democratic participation must be protected at all costs.

# Rivers intensifies fight against maternal mortality

By Boluwatife Kehinde



The Rivers State Primary Health Care Management Board has stepped up efforts to reduce pregnancy-related deaths with the inauguration of a specialised committee to review and respond to maternal and child mortality cases across the state.

The State Sub-Committee on Primary Health Care Maternal, Perinatal and Child Death Surveillance and Response (PHC-MPCDSR) was inaugurated recently as part of a broader strategy to strengthen accountability and improve health outcomes for women and children.

The meeting was chaired by the Board's Executive Secretary, Dr Chituru Adele, the committee draws members from key institutions, including the National Population Commission, the National Primary Health Care Development Agency, among other significant bodies.

Dr Adele who spoke during the inauguration noted that a large proportion of maternal deaths can be prevented through timely intervention, improved quality of care and reliable data.

The Board's Executive Secretary stressed that accurate documentation and systematic review of each case would help authorities identify gaps in service delivery and implement targeted solutions.

It has recorded that Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios globally, and Rivers State is not exempt from the challenge.

Health officials disclosed that six of the state's 23 Local Government Areas account for a disproportionately high number of maternal deaths, underscoring the need for focused action.

Dr Adele charged members of the committee to move beyond routine reporting and prioritise practical steps that would lead to measurable improvements.

She said the panel is expected to thoroughly examine every reported maternal death, determine contributory factors and propose recommendations to enhance the quality of care at primary health care facilities.

The doctor also emphasised the importance of strengthening data systems, surveillance mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation processes to support evidence-based planning and policy decisions.

Dr Adele added that collaboration with partners and community stakeholders, would be essential for implementing effective interventions, particularly in high-risk areas.

# Simi can't be prosecuted without proof - Lagos DSVAs

By Boluwatife Kehinde



**E**xecutive Secretary, Lagos State Domestic And Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA), Lola Vivour-Adeniyi, has said it will be difficult to prosecute singer and songwriter Simisola Kosoko, better known as Simi, for alleged assault without a victim showing up.

Simi recently made headlines and faced backlash after her old tweets from 2012 about minors resurfaced online.

Netizens had raised concerns over the sensitivity of her tweets, which she posted at the time she was working at her mother's daycare. Many interpreted them as sexualizing minors, calling for her prosecution.

Reacting to the development, Vivour-Adeniyi said while the DSVAs has a duty investigate the matter, prosecuting the singer might be "very difficult".

"The truth of the matter is that it's going to be very difficult to prosecute the lady without a survivor being present, a victim of whatever it is, whether it's sexual abuse, rape, defilement, or sexual assault by provocation," she said on Thursday's edition of the breakfast show.

"It's to start the process, encourage anybody who has allegedly been sexually assaulted by Simi to please come forward and ensure that their statement is taken, and then we know where we are going on the matter," the DSVAs scribe said.

According to her, the task force on safeguarding and child protection has been briefed on the matter.

"The task force that comprises top-level representatives, relevant government offices, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Social Development, basically all the relevant institutions of government.

"They assist with the responsibility of ensuring safety and protection of children, especially the child's centered institutions," Vivour-Adeniyi added.

However, she stated that the singer's mother's daycare might not be visited because it is unclear if it still exists.

## Tweet Controversy

Following controversy and backlash from her old tweet, the singer reacted in a statement on her X handle, saying, "I haven't been on Twitter today - but

someone brought a few of my old tweets to my attention, and I can't address them.

"14 years ago, I was 23, so I was definitely not a child. I'm not here to make excuses because I don't have anything to make excuses for. What I can't let anyone do is twist my story to fit false narratives."

According to her, she lived and helped out at her mom's daycare in 2012, while she was hustling for her music career.

"I tweeted everything that happened in my life, as we all did at the time. Kids can be mischievous. If a child did something I found funny, I tweeted about it.

"Kids are cute and lovable. I want to hug, kiss, and cuddle them. I tweet about it. Nothing I tweeted was from perversion," Simi explained.

The move followed Simi's comment in an alleged rape case by a TikTok influencer, Mirabel.

"I'm sick of this. STOP RAPING WOMEN. They need to castrate rapists and burn them," the singer wrote following Mirabel's claims.

# US embassy to hold passport services in West Bank settlement

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The United States will, for the first time, provide on-site consular services in two Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, a move that breaks with long-standing US policy and has drawn sharp criticism from Palestinian officials.

In a post on X, the US embassy in Jerusalem said it would offer routine passport services to American citizens in the settlement of Efrat on Friday, describing the move as part of activities marking the 250th anniversary of US independence. The service will be available “for one day only”.

Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, are considered illegal under international law. Efrat lies about 12 kilometres South of Jerusalem and has a population of roughly 12,000 Israeli settlers.

The Palestinian Authority’s Colonisation and Wall Resistance Commission condemned the initiative, calling it “a clear violation of international law” and accusing Washington of favouring Israel’s occupation policies.

The head of the commission, Mu’ayyad Shaa’ban, said the move entrenched the settlement enterprise and undermined prospects for an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

Hamas described the decision as “a

dangerous precedent”, saying it amounted to practical recognition of the legitimacy of Israeli settlements and control over the West Bank.

The US embassy said similar consular services would be offered in the coming months in another settlement, Beitar Illit. It also plans to provide services in the Palestinian city of Ramallah and in three cities inside Israel.

Israel’s foreign minister, Gideon Saar, welcomed the decision, thanking the US for extending services to Efrat and referring to the West Bank by its biblical name, Judea and Samaria.

Hugh Lovatt, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said the wider political context of the move was significant. He noted that the US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, has publicly supported the idea of a “Greater Israel” stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

“This signals that the US will not treat settlements in the West Bank any differently from towns inside Israel,” Lovatt said.

The announcement comes a week after Israel’s cabinet approved measures aimed at tightening control over the West Bank and easing land purchases by settlers, steps Palestinians have described

as a de facto annexation.

Donald Trump has said he opposes formal Israeli annexation of the West Bank, in line with long-standing US policy. However, his administration has not taken action to curb settlement expansion, which has increased since he returned to office last year.

Violence in the West Bank has risen sharply since the war in Gaza began in October 2023. Settler attacks and Israeli army raids have become more frequent.

Last week, Israeli settlers shot and killed a Palestinian American man during an attack on a village, according to the Palestinian health ministry and a witness. On Tuesday, arson attacks were reported on Palestinian homes in Masafer Yatta and nearby villages in the south Hebron Hills.

The US currently offers passport and consular services at its embassy in Jerusalem and at a branch office in Tel Aviv. Tens of thousands of dual American-Israeli citizens are believed to live in the West Bank.

More than 500,000 Israeli settlers live in the territory, alongside around 3 million Palestinians. Most settlements are fortified towns, surrounded by fences and protected by Israeli soldiers.

# Summers to leave Harvard teaching role amid Epstein scandal

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**



**L**arry Summers, the former president of Harvard University, will step down from teaching at the end of the academic year, a university spokesperson has confirmed.

A Harvard spokesperson, Jason Newton, said Summers's formal resignation is linked to an ongoing university review of documents related to Jeffrey Epstein that were recently released by the US government.

Summers has also resigned as co-director of the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, a role he has held since 2011. He will remain on leave until the academic year concludes.

The development was first reported by the Harvard Crimson, the university's student newspaper.

Summers, a prominent economist and former US treasury secretary, announced in November 2025 that he would stop teaching while Harvard carried out its investigation.

In a statement shared with the Guardian,

Summers said the decision to leave was "difficult".

"I will always be grateful to the thousands of students and colleagues I have been privileged to teach and work with since coming to Harvard as a graduate student 50 years ago," he said.

He added that, as president emeritus and a retired professor, he looked forward to continuing work on research, analysis and commentary on global economic issues.

Scrutiny of Summers intensified after emails released by the US House oversight committee in 2025 renewed questions about his relationship with Epstein, who died in jail in 2019 while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges involving minors.

The emails suggest a friendship that continued until shortly before Epstein's arrest in July 2019. In the correspondence, the two discuss politics, philanthropy and personal matters, including women.

In several messages, Epstein refers to

himself as Summers's "wingman" and offers advice on Summers's romantic pursuits. In one exchange, Summers described himself as an "economic mentor" to a woman he was interested in.

Summers, 71, was a leading figure in Democratic policy circles for decades. He served as US treasury secretary under President Bill Clinton and later as director of the White House National Economic Council during Barack Obama's first term, helping to steer the administration through the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis.

He was president of Harvard from 2001 to 2006. During that period, Epstein donated more than \$9m to the university and its affiliated programmes.

Epstein was also appointed a visiting fellow in Harvard's psychology department. The university later said he lacked the academic qualifications normally required for the role and was unqualified to pursue the proposed research.

Harvard stopped accepting donations from Epstein after he pleaded guilty to child sex offences in 2008.

# Melania Trump to preside over UN security council meeting

By New Daily Prime

Melania Trump will preside over a UN Security Council meeting next week, her office has announced, in the first such appearance by a US first lady.

“First Lady Melania Trump is set to make history at the United Nations, taking the gavel as the United States assumes the Security Council Presidency to emphasise education’s role in advancing tolerance and world peace,” her office said in a statement Wednesday.

The meeting at 3:00 pm (2000 GMT) on Monday will focus on education, technology, peace and security and marks the first time a sitting US first lady presides over the Security Council, the statement added.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general, said Thursday that the visit represents “a sign of the importance that the United States feels towards the Security Council and the subject” of education.

“I can confirm that, according to our records, this will be the first time a First Lady, or first gentleman, for that matter, has ever presided over a Security Council meeting,” he added, noting that the spouses of heads of state have previously



participated on behalf of non-members of the Council.

During his State of the Union address Tuesday, President Donald Trump boasted: “No one cares more about protecting America’s youth than our wonderful first lady.”

Melania’s visit comes as the president spearheads his “Board of Peace” initiative, which some critics have said is a way to circumvent the UN Security Council.

Since returning to the White House last year, Trump has withdrawn support from several major UN agencies, such as the World Health Organization.

Nevertheless, the United States recently paid \$160 million to the cash-strapped UN’s general budget, of which it owes roughly \$2 billion in contributions, in addition to \$2 billion in outstanding payments for the UN peacekeeping budget.

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# Hillary Clinton quizzed on Epstein, calls for Trump to testify

By New Daily Prime

Hillary Clinton used her forced appearance on Thursday before a Republican-led panel probing Jeffrey Epstein to go on the offensive and demand President Donald Trump testify about his own links to the sex offender.

Clinton told the congressional committee she had no information about Epstein's crimes, never recalled encountering him, and had never visited his island or flown on his plane, accusing the panel of trying to "protect one public official" — Trump.

James Comer, who chairs the committee that will also grill former president Bill Clinton on Friday, said "the purpose of the whole investigation is to try to understand many things about Epstein" — the deceased convicted sex offender.

Clinton challenged the panel saying "if this committee is serious about learning the truth about Epstein's trafficking crimes...it would ask (Trump) directly under oath about the tens of thousands of times he shows up in the Epstein files."

The top Democrat on the committee, Robert Garcia, also called on Trump to testify "to answer the questions that are being asked across this country from survivors."

"That should happen immediately," he said later.

Democratic committee member Suhas Subramanyam said that "missing FBI files" omitted from the Epstein documents disclosures contain "serious accusations around sexual abuse" against Trump.

The Republican-led House Oversight Committee is probing those who were linked to Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial.

The Clintons had initially rejected subpoenas ordering them to testify in the panel's probe, but the Democratic power couple agreed to do so after House Republicans threatened to hold them in contempt of Congress.

Hillary Clinton said in her opening statement to the panel that it "justified its subpoena to me based on its assumption that I have information regarding the investigations into the criminal activities of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine



Maxwell."

"Let me be as clear as I can. I do not."

Epstein's Network

The hearing was dramatically paused for a brief time after a photo of Clinton in the deposition was posted online — an apparent breach of the closed-door arrangement.

"What is not acceptable is oversight Republicans breaking their own committee rules... by releasing photos," Subramanyam said.

Democrats say the investigation is being weaponised to attack political opponents of Trump rather than to conduct legitimate oversight.

Trump and Bill Clinton, both 79, feature prominently in the recently released trove of government documents related to Epstein, but said they broke any ties with the financier before his 2008 conviction in Florida as a sex offender.

Mere mention in the files is not proof of having committed a crime.

The Clintons called for their depositions to be public but the committee insisted on questioning them behind closed doors, a move Bill Clinton denounced as akin to a "kangaroo court."

The depositions are being held in Chappaqua, New York, where the Clintons reside.

Dozens of journalists have converged on the wealthy hamlet and the Secret Service erected metal barricades around the arts center where the deposition is happening.

One elderly couple picketed with a sign demanding Comer depose Trump.

Local shopper Bernie Hunt, 74, said "Congress is investigating, they have the right to do so."

Jim Levine, 34, who lives nearby to Chappaqua said "what a privilege" that the Clintons were deposed near their home. "Lock her up, that's what I say."

Bill Clinton has acknowledged flying on Epstein's plane several times in the early 2000s for Clinton Foundation-related humanitarian work, but said he never visited Epstein's private Caribbean island.

Epstein's accomplice Maxwell, 64, is serving a 20-year prison sentence for sex trafficking.

She appeared via video-link before the House Oversight Committee earlier this month but refused to answer questions, invoking her Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate herself.

Epstein cultivated a network of powerful business executives, politicians, celebrities and academics.

The release of the Epstein case files has had repercussions around the globe,

# Iran, US hold talks in push to avert war

By New Daily Prime

Iran and the United States held talks in Switzerland on Thursday in a last-ditch bid to avert war under the shadow of the biggest American military buildup in the Middle East in decades.

The Oman-mediated discussions follow repeated threats from Donald Trump to strike Iran, with the US president last Thursday giving Tehran 15 days to reach a deal.

While Iran has insisted the discussions focus solely on its nuclear programme, the US wants Tehran's missile programme and its support for militant groups in the region curtailed.

The US and Iranian delegations held a morning session at the Omani ambassador's residence amid tight security and then paused ahead of resuming at around 1630-1700 GMT, according to the foreign ministry in Tehran.

Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said after discussions began that the two sides expressed "unprecedented openness to new and creative ideas and solutions".

UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi joined the negotiations, a source close to the talks told AFP, with an Iranian state TV journalist also reporting he was attending.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian insisted ahead of the talks that the Islamic Republic was not "at all" seeking a nuclear weapon.

As part of the dramatic US build-up, the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, sent to the Mediterranean this week, left a naval base in Crete on Thursday, an AFP photographer said.

Washington currently has more than a dozen warships in the Middle East: one aircraft carrier — the USS Abraham Lincoln — nine destroyers and three other combat ships.

It is rare for there to be two US aircraft carriers, which carry dozens of warplanes and are crewed by thousands of sailors, in the region.

The developments follow massive protests in Iran that rights groups say saw thousands of demonstrators killed.



In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Trump accused Iran of "pursuing sinister nuclear ambitions", though Tehran has always insisted its programme is for civilian purposes.

Trump also claimed Tehran had "already developed missiles that can threaten Europe and our bases overseas, and they're working to build missiles that will soon reach the United States of America".

The Iranian foreign ministry called these claims "big lies".

The maximum range of Iran's missiles is 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles), according to what Tehran has publicly disclosed.

However, the US Congressional Research Service estimates they top out at about 3,000 kilometres — less than a third of the distance to the continental United States.

Trump's State of the Union accusations in Congress were delivered in the same forum in which then-President George W. Bush laid out the case for the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Ahead of Thursday's talks, Secretary of State Marco Rubio warned that Iran must also negotiate on its missile programme, calling Tehran's refusal to discuss ballistic weapons "a big, big problem".

He followed up by saying, "The president wants diplomatic solutions."

US Vice President JD Vance told Iran to take Trump's threats "seriously", saying the US leader had a "right" to use military action.

"You can't let the craziest and worst regime in the world have nuclear weapons," Vance told "America's Newsroom" on Fox News.

'People Would Suffer'

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is leading the Iranian delegation at the talks, has called them "a historic opportunity", adding that a deal was "within reach".

The US was to be represented by envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who is married to Trump's daughter Ivanka.

The two countries held talks earlier this month in Oman, then gathered for a second round in Geneva last week.

A previous attempt at negotiations collapsed when Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran last June, beginning a 12-day war that Washington briefly joined to bomb Iranian nuclear sites.

In January, Tehran launched a mass crackdown on nationwide protests that posed one of the greatest challenges to the Islamic republic since its inception.

Protests have since resumed around Iranian universities.

Tehran residents who spoke to AFP were divided on whether there would be renewed conflict.

"There would be famine and people would suffer a lot. People are suffering now, but at least with war, our fate might be clear," 60-year-old homemaker Tayebbeh said.

AFP

'Sinister Nuclear Ambitions'

# Ronaldo buys stake in Spanish second-division Almeria

By New Daily Prime

Cristiano Ronaldo announced on Thursday that he had acquired a 25 per cent stake in Saudi-owned Spanish second-division club Almeria.

“This strategic investment in UD Almeria reflects Ronaldo’s long-term commitment to professional football ownership,” said a statement from his new sports holding company CR7 Sports Investments which gave no financial details of the deal.

“It has been a long-time ambition of mine to contribute to football,” the statement quoted Ronaldo as saying.

Almeria, who were last in the Spanish top flight in 2024, are third in the Spanish second division, one point out of the automatic promotion places.

“Almeria is a Spanish club with strong foundations and clear potential for growth.”

The club is owned by Saudi group SMC.

“I look forward to working alongside the leadership team to support the club’s next phase of growth,” said Ronaldo, who has



played in the Saudi Pro League for Al Nasser since 2023.

Almeria’s president, Mohamed Al Khereiji, suggested the player would be particularly be involved in the club’s youth programme.

“He is considered the best on the pitch,” Al Khereiji said. “He knows the Spanish leagues very well and understands the potential of what we are building.”

Ronald, who also owns a stake in his

Saudi club, last October became the first footballer included in Bloomberg’s ‘Billionaire Index’.

He recently returned to the Al-Nassr first team after a spat over the way Public Investment Fund (PIF), the national sovereign wealth fund which controls four clubs in the league, handled the winter transfer window.

He has scored four times in the last three games.

# Barcelona’s De Jong out for up to six weeks

By Damilola Olufemi

Barcelona announced on Thursday that their Netherlands midfielder Frenkie de Jong will be out for up to six weeks with a leg issue.

De Jong will miss the Champions League last 16 against Paris Saint-Germain or Newcastle as well as La Liga fixtures with Villarreal, Athletic Bilbao, Sevilla and Rayo Vallecano.

The 28-year-old will also be absent for next Tuesday’s Spanish Cup semi-final second leg as the Catalans look to overturn a 4-0 deficit against Atletico Madrid.

In a short statement on their website, Barcelona said De Jong had injured his “right hamstring during training this morning and will be out for five to six weeks”.



Barca are just a point clear of Real Madrid atop the La Liga table before hosting Villarreal on Saturday.

De Jong is set to be sidelined for the March international window as the Oranje face Norway and Ecuador in pre-World Cup friendlies.