



INEC records 1.38m pre-registrations in one week as physical voter registration opens **Pg 2**

Africa cannot remain merely a consumer of technology; we must be creators - Shettima **Pg 5**



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PDP zones presidential slot to South, confirms Damagum as national chairman **Pg 6**



Jordan, Kobe card sets \$12.9m auction record **Pg 39**



Nigeria, Brazil seek stronger economic ties in bilateral meeting **Pg 4**

WORLD

Pg 29

Trump signs executive orders to end cashless bail



WORLD

Pg 33

Tories warn Starmer's asylum reforms will speed up migrant arrivals



INEC records 1.38m pre-registrations in one week as physical voter registration opens

By Ismaeel Aleem



The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has announced that 1,379,342 Nigerians completed online pre-registration for the Continuous Voter Registration (CVR) exercise within just one week, between 18 and 24 August 2025.

The milestone coincides with the official commencement of in-person registration today, 25 August, across INEC's 811 state and local government offices nationwide.

In a statement issued by Sam Olumekun, INEC's National Commissioner and Chairman of the Information and Voter Education Committee, the breakdown of online registrants shows a near gender balance: 661,846 males (47.96%) and 717,856 females (52.04%).

Young people aged 18 to 34 form the largest group, accounting for 860,286 (62.37%), while students represent 374,534 (27.15%) of the total. Persons with disabilities make up

27,089 (1.96%) of those registered.

INEC noted that detailed figures, disaggregated by state, gender, age, occupation, and disability status, are available on its website and official platforms.

The physical registration phase, which opened today, caters both to new applicants who prefer face-to-face registration and to those who pre-registered online but must now complete the process in person.

The Commission stressed that the CVR is strictly for Nigerian citizens aged 18 and above who are not already registered voters.

INEC warned against double or multiple registrations, which remain illegal. However, voter transfers within and across states, including the FCT, as well as replacements of lost or damaged voter cards, are permitted during the exercise.

The CVR will run for a full year, ending on 30 August 2026.

INEC urged eligible citizens to take advantage of the extended window and avoid the last-minute rush that has traditionally overwhelmed registration centres and prompted calls for deadline extensions.

To foster transparency and sustain public confidence, INEC has committed to publishing weekly progress updates.

As Nigeria looks ahead to forthcoming elections, the Commission's dual-track system of online pre-registration and physical enrolment highlights its determination to expand access, strengthen participation, and uphold the integrity of the democratic process.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

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PRODUCT COLOUR

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10X4	206,890.50
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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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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
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5X4	61,500.00
5X3	57,819.00
5X2	40,379.50
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PUBLIC NOTICE BLACK & WHITE

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9X4	137,875.00
9X3	112,875.00
8X6	179,368.00
8X5	143,500.00
8X4	93,500.00
8X3	82,434.50
7X4	111,173.50
6X4	82,434.50
6X3	59,250.00
6X2	40,000.00
5X6	98,749.50
5X4	65,833.00
5X3	49,375.00
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10X4	103,963.00
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9X5	168,191.50
9X4	N/A
8X6	N/A
8X3	N/A
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6X4	65,000.00
6X3	41,124.50
6X2	29,858.00
5X6	71,378.00
5X4	42,825.00
5X3	29,858.00
5X2	22,841.00
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3X2	14,923.00
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Nigeria, Brazil seek stronger economic ties in bilateral meeting

By Friday Omosola

Nigeria's Finance Minister, Wale Edun, and Brazil's Vice President, Geraldo Alckmin, presided over a ministerial meeting in Brasília focused on strengthening bilateral economic relations.

Both leaders emphasised the immense potential for partnership between the two countries, particularly in an evolving global economic landscape.

Sunday Dare, Special Adviser, Media and Public Communication to President Bola Tinubu disclosed this in a statement on his X page on Monday.

Alckmin expressed a belief that the vast opportunities between the two nations must be fully exploited.

He noted that their shared vision for a "new world" extends beyond traditional economic and political ties.

On his part, Edun highlighted the need for greater multilateral action among countries of the "Global South."

He stated that with a "withdrawal from global funding" and the rise of new tariff



regimes, it has become essential for nations like Nigeria and Brazil to increase trade with each other.

Edun pointed to the economic reforms implemented under Tinubu, which he said have brought about macroeconomic stability and created an environment for the private sector to thrive.

He claimed that the reforms have led to a stabilised exchange rate and an increase in foreign reserves.

This meeting is part of a series of engagements between the two nations, aiming to deepen cooperation across various sectors including trade, agribusiness, security, and culture.

Matawalle calls for unified African response to rising security threats

By Friday Omosola

Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle, has warned that Africa is confronting increasingly complex and serious security challenges.

He urged for stronger collaboration among nations to address them.

Matawalle stated that the continent's security must be guided by African-led solutions, leadership, and unity.

During his address at the opening of the Africa Chiefs of Defence Staff Conference in Abuja, Matawalle highlighted the transnational and asymmetric nature of these threats.

He emphasised that tackling them requires more than just resilience—it demands robust continental cooperation.

The Minister noted Nigeria's prominent role in regional peace and security, citing



the Nigerian armed forces' involvement in various peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and humanitarian missions both within Africa and internationally.

He reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to strengthening defense partnerships to

foster peace, development, and democratic values across the continent.

Matawalle also called on African nations to embrace modern technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI), to combat terrorist organisations like Boko Haram, ISWAP, Al-Qaeda, and Al-Shabaab.

He stressed the need for digital solutions to protect the territorial integrity of African countries, stating that the future of warfare is digital and requires significant investment in cyber defence and indigenous military technologies.

"No single country can go it alone," Matawalle told conference participants, urging them to work together to share intelligence and build trust among their defence institutions.

He encouraged African leaders not only to keep pace with global trends but to take a leadership role in shaping them.

Africa cannot remain merely a consumer of technology; we must be creators – Shettima

By Oluwatosin Ologun



Vice President Kashim Shettima has called for home-grown solutions to address the multifaceted security challenges, including terrorism, bedevilling the African continent.

Shettima stated that the continent faces numerous forms of insecurity, which required concerted efforts by African nations.

He said that Africa must invest in cyber-defence, artificial intelligence, and indigenous military innovation, as it could not remain merely a consumer of technology.

“The nature of warfare has evolved. The traits of today are asymmetric, digital, and often invisible. Our response must not be less dynamic.

“We must invest in cyber defence, artificial intelligence, and indigenous military innovation. Africa cannot remain merely a consumer of technology. We must be creators, innovators, and owners of the tools that secure our tomorrow,” Shettima said at the 2025 African Chiefs

of Defence Staff Summit in Abuja on Monday.

He said that the summit provided an opportunity to reassess Africa’s military objectives in the collective aspirations to make the continent safe.

The Vice President also said it was a time to forge a new doctrine of continental defence, one rooted in trust, shared intelligence, and coordinated strategy.

Addressing the gathering military chiefs, he stated, “The enormity of threats across our continent compels us to pause and reflect, from the deserts where insurgency passes to the high seas where piracy prowls, from the silent corridors of cybercrime to the ruthless networks of transnational criminals.

“None of these tragedies respects borders, and neither should our response. What is true of our challenges must also be true of our resolve. We cannot neutralise these threats in isolation.

According to him, security is the foundation upon which the pieces of

progress must stand.

He urged participants to explore avenues for defence industrial cooperation, collaboration, research partnerships, and African-led solutions to African security challenges.

The Vice President also called on the organised private sector to be the continent’s ally, to invest in the future of defence as an investment in the survival of nations.

“That is why we must use this summit, not merely as a meeting, but as a component to deepen cooperation through joint training, harmonised doctrines, and interoperable systems. For this to endure, we must build a framework where our defense institutions speak with one voice and act with one purpose.

“We are bound as a family, sharing not just borders, but destiny. And in this family, defence is the first expression of love each member can promise the other,” Shettima said.

PDP zones presidential slot to South, confirms Damagum as national chairman

By Damilola Olufemi



The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has zoned its presidential slot to the southern part of the country, ahead of the 2027 presidential election.

The PDP also noted that the position of chairman would be retained by a northerner.

In the same vein, it has officially ratified Umar Damagum as its substantive national chairman.

The decision was reached on Monday during the party's 102nd National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting held at its Abuja headquarters.

Damagum has been steering the party in an acting capacity since March 2023, following the suspension of former chairman, Iyorchia Ayu — a move later validated by the courts.

Prior to taking over the leadership, he served as the PDP's deputy national

chairman for the northern region.

The New Daily Prime earlier reported that the party has officially launched the zoning process that will determine the region to produce its 2027 presidential candidate.

Bayelsa State Governor Douye Diri, who heads the PDP national zoning committee, confirmed the development after a meeting in Abuja on Monday.

He explained that the decision was first agreed upon during the PDP Governors' Forum meeting held on Saturday in Gusau, Zamfara State, with input from the Board of Trustees (BoT), former governors, ministers, and other organs of the party.

"One of the decisions that was arrived at in that meeting is that we should not only zone the party offices, but as a national zoning committee, we should equally zone the presidency. So that arose from that meeting," Diri

said.

PDP convention scheduled for November

The PDP National Executive Committee (NEC) had earlier fixed November 15 and 16 for its national convention to elect new members of the National Working Committee (NWC). Ahead of the convention, a 44-member zoning committee was set up to distribute NWC offices across the geopolitical zones.

Last week, some PDP leaders from the South-East and South-South criticised the committee over a Lagos meeting they described as "secret," alleging that several key stakeholders were sidelined. The aggrieved members, including state chairmen, vowed to reject any outcome "reached in secrecy."

In response, Oyo State Governor Seyi Makinde assured that the party would engage with those who felt excluded.

APC says PDP in ruins, claims bye-election results show Nigerians' support for Tinubu

By Gbenga Olaleye

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has declared that the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has collapsed politically, pointing to the results of the recently concluded bye-elections as evidence of the public's growing rejection of the opposition party.

In a strongly worded statement issued on Monday, APC's National Publicity Secretary, Felix Morka, said the outcome of the bye-elections reflected the popularity of President Bola Tinubu's policies among Nigerians.

"The PDP has since fallen into ruins, and stands rejected by Nigerians," Morka said. "When its governors gather in their scanty numbers, one would expect them to have some shame and concentrate on how to resuscitate their terminally ailing party."

According to Morka, rather than focus on internal reform, the PDP leadership has continued to make what he described as "frivolous and senseless allegations" against the ruling APC.



He noted that the APC's strong showing in the bye-elections served as a clear endorsement of President Tinubu's Renewed Hope agenda and a demonstration of voters' confidence in the ruling party.

"It is infantile and irresponsible for PDP governors to hail democracy where they won and decry democracy where they lost," he added.

Morka further stated that the electoral process cannot be judged by the PDP's performance alone, asserting that the credibility of Nigeria's democracy must be measured more broadly.

The APC's comments come in the wake of several hotly contested bye-elections across the country, where the ruling party claimed significant victories.

JAMB wants candidates to re-upload 2025 WAEC SSCE results

By Alade Adisa

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, JAMB, has directed all candidates who uploaded their O-level results before the release of the final 2025 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC SSCE) results to revisit accredited centres and re-upload their results.

According to JAMB, all previously uploaded results have been cleared from its system to prevent discrepancies and ensure that only the official WAEC final results are used for admission processing.

The Board explained in its weekly news bulletin on Monday that "some candidates who sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination,



UTME, with 'awaiting results' had prematurely uploaded incomplete WAEC records before the final release."

"To address the issue, JAMB has mandated a fresh upload for every candidate, irrespective of whether the new results differ from those uploaded

earlier.

"All UTME candidates are advised to urgently re-upload their 2025 SSCE results on the JAMB portal to remain eligible for admission consideration," the bulletin read.

Resign if Tinubu ignores your advice, Ozekhome tells AGF Fagbemi

By Gbenga Olaleye

Prominent constitutional lawyer, Chief Mike Ozekhome (SAN), has called on the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi (SAN), to resign if President Bola Ahmed Tinubu refuses to heed his legal advice.

Ozekhome made the call in reaction to the Federal Government's decision to withhold funds meant for local governments in Osun State, describing the move as a politically motivated action that undermines democracy.

According to him, the President may not be receiving sound legal counsel from the AGF, citing Fagbemi's recommendation in a letter to the Ministry of Finance that allocations be channelled to sacked All Progressives Congress (APC) officials in the state.

"This action is not good for democracy," Ozekhome warned, recalling that Tinubu himself faced a similar situation as Lagos State Governor when former President Olusegun Obasanjo withheld local government allocations.

"The Supreme Court held then that the Federal Government could never withhold funds meant for local



governments in Lagos State," he reminded the President.

The human rights lawyer stressed that he doubts President Tinubu would reject credible legal advice if it were presented.

"If he did give the advice and the President ignored it, then he ought to resign," he said, urging Fagbemi to demonstrate integrity.

Drawing from history, Ozekhome pointed out that former AGF Mohammed Bello Adoke once advised ex-President Goodluck Jonathan against removing the Plateau State Governor during a state of emergency, and Jonathan respected the guidance.

He argued that the principle of separation of powers and adherence to Supreme Court rulings must remain sacrosanct, warning that anything contrary would weaken democratic institutions.

Rural residents pay premium for reliable power, says REA head

By Friday Omosola

The head of Nigeria's Rural Electrification Agency (REA), Abba Aliyu, has stated that residents in many rural areas willingly pay high electricity tariffs, in some cases, exceeding the rates charged to "Band A" customers, to receive consistent power.

During an interview on Channels Television's "The Morning Brief", Aliyu noted that some rural communities are paying as much as ₦250 to ₦280 per kilowatt-hour, a price he attributed to the overall cost of the infrastructure installed by the REA.

"They pay for their electricity and they enjoy it," he said, adding that other communities have lower tariffs depending on the project's expenses.

He explained that the agency's strategy involves using solar energy as a cost-effective method to provide electricity.



Aliyu also highlighted the agency's work in deploying mini-grids and interconnected power systems at universities and hospitals nationwide.

Nigeria has long struggled with persistent power outages, a problem that has hampered economic productivity.

Despite the privatisation of the electricity sector, issues such as inconsistent policies, low investment, and operational difficulties continue to plague power generation and distribution.

Earlier in 2024, the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) approved a significant increase in electricity tariffs, raising the price from ₦66 to ₦225 per kilowatt-hour for certain customers.

This decision was met with widespread public criticism, particularly given the country's difficult economic conditions.

The high costs of alternative fuels like petrol and diesel have further complicated matters for consumers.

Benue assembly: Speaker resigned on personal grounds, not governor's influence

By Gbenga Olaleye

The Benue State House of Assembly has firmly denied claims that Governor Hyacinth Alia played any role in the recent resignation of Speaker Aondona Dajoh, stressing that the move was based solely on personal principle and not the result of political interference.

Speaking during an appearance on The Morning Brief, a Channels Television programme, Assembly spokesperson Elias Audu stated that the lawmakers of the Benue Assembly are "independent-minded" and cannot be influenced or coerced, either by the executive or external forces.

"The Speaker made his decision based on personal principle," Audu said. "If the governor had an interest—whatever it might be—it is not within the knowledge of the Assembly. We don't know. The Speaker was doing his job, and after some time, maybe due to certain decisions or reflections, he thanked the people for



their support and said it was time to go."

Audu emphasised that despite operating within a political context, the Assembly has remained united and peaceful. "This is a political dispensation; we are playing politics. But even if there are political undertones, there is no fighting in the Benue Assembly. The members are

independent-minded. You can't coerce them."

The statement comes amid growing speculation that Dajoh's resignation, which was submitted in a letter on Sunday, may have been influenced by pressure from political actors, possibly including the governor. In his resignation letter, however, Dajoh stated clearly that his decision was made "in good faith and in the best interest of the state."

Elias Audu's comments appear aimed at reinforcing the Assembly's autonomy and dispelling rumours of a rift between the legislative and executive arms of government in Benue State.

The resignation of Speaker Dajoh marks a significant development in the state's political landscape, but the House insists it remains stable and focused on its legislative duties. No successor has been officially announced as of the time of reporting.

Mortgage banker sentenced to 20 years for N31m property fraud

By Friday Omosola

Lagos State High Court has sentenced a mortgage banker, Sulaiman Gbajabiamila, to 20 years in prison for property fraud totalling N31 million.

Justice I. O. Ijelu delivered the judgment on Monday, following a full trial initiated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Gbajabiamila was arraigned on September 19, 2023, on a seven-count charge that included stealing, obtaining by false pretences, forgery, and retaining proceeds of crime.

According to one of the charges, he was accused of stealing and converting N31 million belonging to a man named Lateef Ayo Adeyemo in 2021.

Another charge alleged that he forged a Sterling Bank manager's cheque for N10 million.

The defendant pleaded not guilty, leading to the prosecution presenting two witnesses and various documents as



evidence.

The court found him guilty on all counts.

In his ruling, Justice Ijelu handed down varying prison sentences for each count, with some offering a fine as an alternative.

He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for stealing, with an option of a N1 million fine.

He received seven years' imprisonment for obtaining by false pretence.

For each of the three counts of forgery, he was given two years' imprisonment, with an option of a N1 million fine per count.

He was also sentenced to two years' imprisonment for using false documents, with an option of a N200,000 fine.

Additionally, he was given four years' imprisonment for retaining the proceeds of crime, with an option of a N500,000 fine.

The case stemmed from a transaction in which Gbajabiamila was introduced to the victim, Lateef Adeyemo, who wanted to purchase a two-bedroom apartment.

Adeyemo paid Gbajabiamila N31 million for the property, but the banker never delivered the flat and instead used the funds for his personal benefit.

Benue gov congratulates Emberga as new Assembly speaker

By Ismaeel Aleem



Governor Hyacinth Alia of Benue State has extended heartfelt congratulations to Honourable Alfred Aondover Emberga, the newly elected Speaker of the 10th Benue State House of Assembly (BSHA).

Emberga, representing Makurdi North State Constituency, was elected during an emergency sitting on Sunday, August 24, 2025, following the voluntary resignation of the former Speaker, Hyacinth Dajoh.

In a statement released by his Chief Press Secretary, Tersoo Kula, Alia praised the swift and transparent process that led to Emberga's emergence, describing it as a testament to the confidence his colleagues have in his leadership abilities and commitment to democratic principles.

The governor expressed optimism that under Emberga's leadership, the BSHA would continue to prioritise the formulation and enactment of laws and policies aimed at improving the welfare of Benue citizens.

Governor Alia emphasised the importance of collaboration among the state's three arms of government, executive, legislative, and judiciary, for sustainable development and effective delivery of democratic dividends. He urged the legislative arm to maintain a strong, cordial relationship with the executive and judiciary to ensure progress and prosperity for the state.

The governor also acknowledged the contributions of the outgoing Speaker, Aondona Dajoh, during his tenure, commending his dedication to the state's legislative progress. He assured Hon. Emberga and all BSHA members of his unwavering

support, pledging to work closely with the assembly to advance the collective interests of Benue's people.

Emberga's election marks a new chapter for the BSHA, with expectations high for his leadership to drive impactful legislation and foster unity within the assembly. As Benue navigates its developmental challenges, the governor's call for cooperation underscores the need for synergy to address critical issues such as infrastructure, education, and economic growth.

The people of Benue State await the positive outcomes of this transition, hopeful that the new Speaker's tenure will bring meaningful progress. Governor Alia's administration remains committed to supporting the legislative arm in its efforts to serve the state effectively.

“You’ve failed yourselves, party, citizens” – APC to PDP govts

By Friday Omosola

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has accused governors under the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of failing their citizens, their party, and themselves through what it described as disgracefully poor governance in their respective states.

APC disclosed this in a statement on Monday issued by its National Publicity Secretary, Felix Morka.

The statement followed PDP’s governors meeting in Zamfara State on Saturday.

The APC said the PDP governors displayed “rank hypocrisy” by accusing the ruling party of undemocratic conduct.

The party claimed PDP lacked vision and agenda, and predicted the party’s electoral defeat in 2027.

The APC stressed that Nigeria would not return to what it called the “dark era” of PDP-led federal administration, when many state governments were left virtually bankrupt and unable to pay even basic wages.

According to the party, President Bola Tinubu has set Nigeria on a “clear and new path of prosperity” and will not be derailed by what it described as “mischievous distractions” from the PDP and its “floundering governors.”

The APC added that Nigerians are fully aware of the party that is working diligently to deliver renewed hope and national renewal.

“They are highly discerning and know what is best for them and our dear country. They will not be hoodwinked by opposition parties that cannot manage their own internal affairs, who have failed to drive progress in their small states as Governors but boast vainly and deceptively about doing better for Africa’s most populous country”, said APC.

The party urged Nigerians to disregard what it described as the empty and misleading rhetoric of PDP governors, whom it labelled as “detractors.”

The party urged Nigerians to remain steadfast with Tinubu and the APC in



their march towards a confident future of genuine development and shared prosperity for all.

The APC further described it as laughable that PDP governors—presiding over a party it said was in deep coma, savagely crippled by self-inflicted crises, and reduced to a shadow of its former self—would issue statements that more accurately mirror their own doomed fate, both now and in the lead-up to 2027.

According to the APC, the PDP has collapsed into ruins and been rejected by Nigerians.

It added that when the governors of the opposition party gather in such meagre numbers, the least expected of them would be to show some humility and focus on reviving their terminally ill party with urgency and responsibility.

The statement further read: “Instead, they prefer to waste their time making frivolous and senseless allegations and innuendos against our great Party. The APC’s dominant victory in the just-concluded bye-elections attests loudly to the level that President Bola Tinubu’s administration’s Renewed Hope policies and programmes are resonating with Nigerians, and underscores the electorate’s solid confidence in our Party.

“It is infantile and irresponsible for PDP Governors to hail democracy where they won in the bye-election and decry democracy everywhere they lost. The victory or defeat of the PDP or other

opposition parties is not, and cannot become, the barometer for measuring the credibility of our country’s electoral process or performance. That would be invidiously anti-democratic and unacceptable.

“APC’s decisive win in non-APC states like Zamfara, Adamawa, and Kano flies in the face of PDP Governors’ baseless allegations of undemocratic dealings by our Party. Quite to the contrary, the electorate in those states voted hugely in support of our candidates despite the state-sponsored thuggery and violence unleashed against our candidates and loyalists by opposition state governments.

“The PDP Governors should eat the humble pie and accept the by-election verdict as a categorical declaration of loss of confidence and rejection of their party by the voting public. Wallowing in denial of the party’s expired political vitality and relevance is a reckless betrayal by PDP Governors of their highly disillusioned members still hanging hopelessly on straws of hope for an elusive miracle to turn the tide for their party.

“These inept governors are in no position to suggest to Nigerian voters what their disposition to the 2027 elections should be. The PDP has nothing of value to offer Nigerians now, and hasn’t had any credible alternative ideas or policies to offer in the last three general election cycles in which Nigerians have handed it scathing verdicts of merited failure.

Rainy season, funding hurdles stall federal road repairs in Ekiti – FERMA

By Gbenga Olaleye

The Director of the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA) in Ekiti State, Engr. Simon Adeniran Adeniyi, has addressed the persistent concerns surrounding the deteriorating state of federal roads in the state, attributing the delays in maintenance to the ongoing rainy season and funding challenges.

Speaking in Ado-Ekiti, Engr. Adeniyi explained that the heavy and consistent rains have rendered it nearly impossible to carry out any meaningful maintenance work. “The rainy season has been a major obstacle. It is difficult to achieve substantial progress on road projects under such conditions,” he said.

He clarified FERMA’s specific mandate, noting that the agency is primarily responsible for the maintenance of existing federal roads, while larger reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts fall under the purview of the Federal Ministry of Works.

Engr. Adeniyi reassured citizens that the Federal Government remains committed to improving road infrastructure across the state, but emphasised that weather conditions have continued to pose a significant challenge.

According to the FERMA Director, several key federal roads in Ekiti are currently undergoing various stages of construction and rehabilitation. These include the Ado-Aramoko-Itawure road, the Ado-Ikere-Akure road, and the Ifaki-Ikole-Omuo road—routes that are vital to the state’s transportation network.



He urged residents to remain patient, stating that full-scale maintenance and construction activities will resume as soon as the rainy season subsides. “We are ready to move as soon as the weather permits. Our teams are on standby,” he said.

Funding constraints have also contributed to the delays, Engr. Adeniyi disclosed. He noted that many contractors working on federal road projects are currently facing difficulties accessing the necessary funds to proceed. He explained that FERMA’s policy does not allow for advance payments; contractors are only paid upon the successful completion of their work.

“While this ensures accountability and quality assurance, it does mean that contractors often have to mobilise with their own resources,

which can be a challenge,” he added.

Despite the setbacks, Adeniyi maintained that FERMA is fully committed to maintaining road infrastructure in the state and that efforts are ongoing to improve efficiency and address bottlenecks in project execution.

His assurances may come as a relief to many Ekiti residents who have expressed frustration over the poor state of several major roads, which have worsened due to seasonal weather and prolonged neglect.

With the Federal Government’s continued commitment and once the rains subside, residents of Ekiti can expect renewed progress in road maintenance and infrastructure development across the state.

Ambode breaks silence: Why I'm backing Tinubu's 2027 re-election

By Clement Abayomi



Nigeria's political atmosphere is teeming with bold declarations, strong alliances, and intense speculation as the 2027 general elections draw closer. Akinwunmi Ambode, former Governor of Lagos State, has become one of the latest political figures to make headlines by affirming his loyalty to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, clarifying his political stance.

Ambode immediately set the record straight after rumours spread that he was planning a political comeback under the African Democratic Congress (ADC). On Monday, August 11, 2025, a report on Flip TV revealed that he strongly denied claims he intended to run for governor under the ADC. He dismissed the reports as false publications and used the opportunity to boldly reaffirm his support for President Tinubu.

Ambode, who governed Lagos State between 2015 and 2019 under the APC, reiterated that his support for Tinubu is based on loyalty and conviction. He described the president as his leader, mentor, and a strong supporter of

Nigeria's development, stressing that his loyalty to both Tinubu and the ruling party is non-negotiable.

Outlining his reasons for supporting Tinubu's re-election in 2027, Ambode praised the president's leadership style as "results driven." He cited reforms in pensions, improved student loan accessibility, youth empowerment programmes, and national economic growth as examples of Tinubu's performance in office. He also highlighted major achievements such as the elimination of fuel scarcity, enhanced security measures, and policies aimed at easing the daily struggles of ordinary Nigerians.

According to Ambode, these accomplishments form the foundation of his confidence in Tinubu's ability to secure re-election in 2027. He stressed that the president's focus and inclusive style of governance are already "restoring hope and delivering tangible results," adding that Nigerians would have "even greater reason to celebrate" if Tinubu is given another four years.

He declared:

"I am convinced that, given another four years, Nigerians will have even greater reason to celebrate."

For Ambode, Tinubu's re-election is not just about continuity of reforms but also about laying a pathway to national progress.

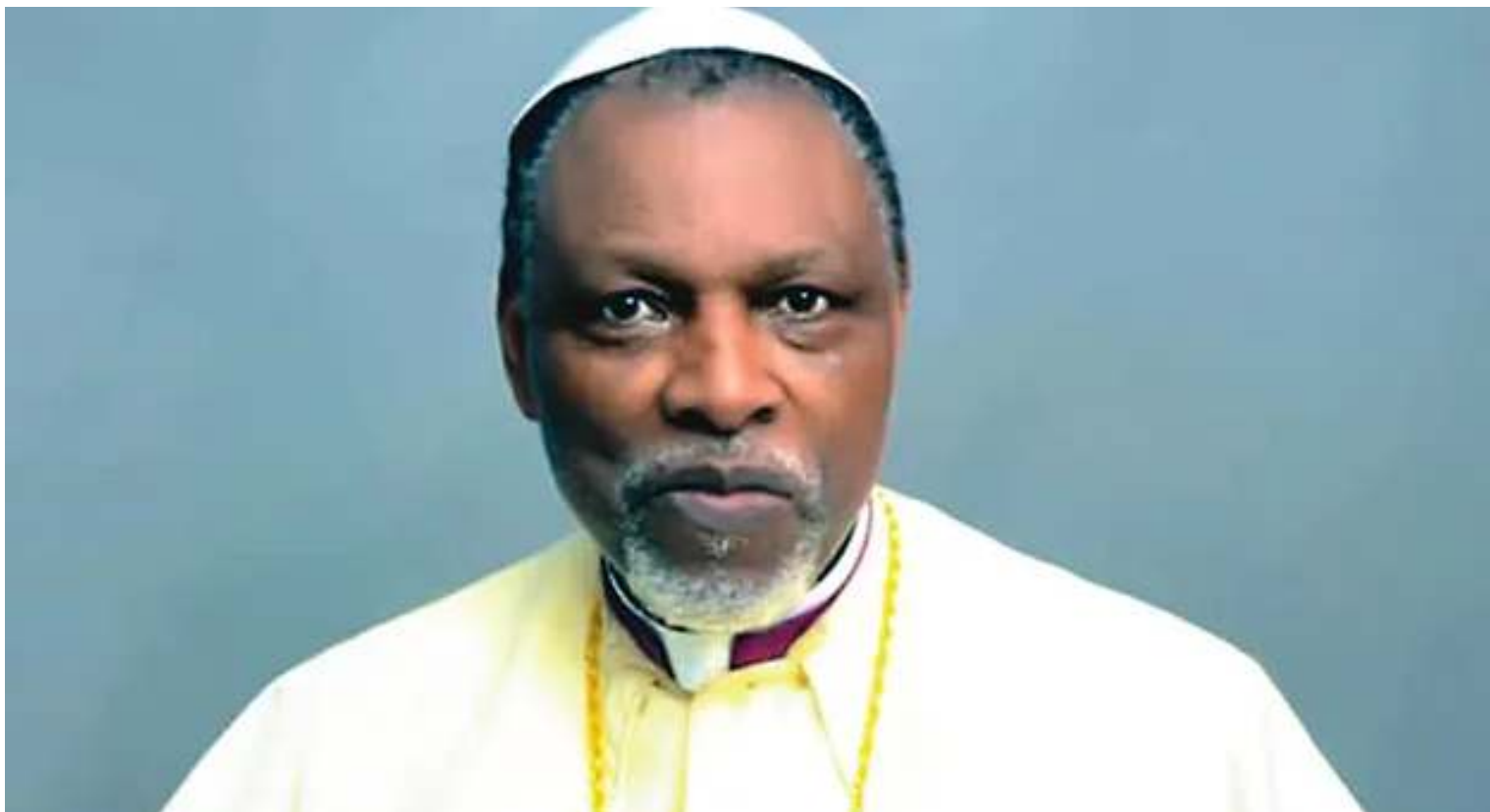
In conclusion, Ambode urged APC members and Nigerians in general to remain focused and ignore political rumours. He pledged unwavering support for Tinubu and the APC as the 2027 elections approach.

"Let it be clear: I stand solidly with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the All Progressives Congress. We will work together to ensure victory in 2027 and continue delivering the dividends of democracy to all Nigerians," he said.

This firm declaration underscores APC's readiness for the upcoming elections. Ambode's statements demonstrate that his motivations remain deeply tied to loyalty to the APC and recognition of Tinubu's policy achievements.

Security: Regional, community policing essential – Ositelu

By Damilola Olufemi



The Primate of the Church of the Lord Worldwide, Dr. Rufus Ositelu, has stressed the essence of regional and community policing as steps to ensuring peace and security in the country.

Ositelu called on the government to strengthen intelligence gathering and security institutions during the 2025 and 89th edition of the annual Tabieorar programme themed “Marvellous God” held on August 22, in Ogere-Remo, Ogun State.

According to him, this sacred festival (Tabieorar) reminds us of God’s unchanging love, His mercies that endure forever, and His power to renew our strength like the eagle’s.

He noted that for effective security operations, the government should foster better coordination and collaboration among security agencies.

“Government should address the root causes of conflict; foster better coordination and collaboration among security agencies, which is vital for effective security operations; and

improve border security to prevent the flow of weapons and the entry of criminal elements into the country,” the President of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Africa, said.

While addressing the nation’s youth empowerment, Ositelu noted that Nigerian youth are vibrant and should be empowered as future leaders, saying, “they should therefore be equipped with skills, resources and opportunities they need to thrive and contribute to the society.”

The Doctor in Philosophy and Computer stressed that appointments and opportunities should be based on competence, not on ethnicity or favouritism.

Ositelu advocates for inclusivity

To foster national unity in Nigeria, Ositelu noted that government at all levels should promote inclusivity through education and public discourse; strengthen institutions that encourage interaction and understanding; and address systemic inequalities.

“Leaders at all levels must ensure that every ethnic group and faith feels included in national development and governance.”

Ositelu urged Christian faithful to continue to walk in holiness, love one another sincerely, and let your lives shine as a light to the world in righteousness and truth.

Ositelu also prayed for peace in Nigeria, for unity among Nigerians, for prosperity, an improved economy, and wisdom for all Nigerian leaders as the Church celebrates its 100 years of existence in November 2025.

He prayed, “In the name of Jesus, I declare and decree that 2025 Tabieorar shall mark a turning point for good for you, your families, the Church, Nigeria and the world at large. May peace and prosperity reign in our land, and joy overflow in our homes. May you continually enjoy the marvellousness of God unto great testimonies in the mighty name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

NDLEA nabs Kano airport drug syndicate

By Helen Okechukwu

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has dismantled a criminal network at the Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport (MAKIA), Kano, after uncovering how its members planted illicit substances on unsuspecting Nigerian pilgrims who later faced detention in Saudi Arabia.

Speaking at a press briefing in Abuja on Monday, the Agency's Director of Media and Advocacy, Femi Babafemi, flanked by the Director of Assets and Financial Investigation, Dr Abdul Ibrahim, and the Director of Prosecution and Legal Services, Theresa Asuquo, confirmed that six members of the syndicate, including its ringleader, 55-year-old Mohammed Abubakar, also known as Bello Karama, were in custody. Four of them have already been charged to court.

According to the NDLEA, the arrests followed a petition from three Nigerian families whose relatives were apprehended in Jeddah during their lesser hajj pilgrimage earlier this month.

The detained pilgrims, Mrs Maryam Abdullahi, Mrs Abdullahi Aminu and Mr Abdulhamid Saddiq had travelled aboard Ethiopian Airlines flight ET940 from Kano to Jeddah via Addis Ababa on 6 August.

Investigations revealed that although each of the pilgrims checked in only their personal luggage, additional bags belonging to the syndicate were fraudulently tagged to their names by corrupt airport handlers.

Three of those bags were later intercepted in Saudi Arabia and found to contain narcotics.

Babafemi explained that the luggage



was traced back to Abubakar, who masterminded the operation. While the pilgrims flew with Ethiopian Airlines, Abubakar travelled separately on Egypt Air after ensuring that the illicit bags were planted against the names of the unsuspecting passengers.

Members of staff of the Skyway Aviation Handling Company (SAHCO) were implicated in the scheme, having allegedly received payments to facilitate the fraudulent tagging.

"...the evidence gathered by the Agency in the course of our investigation, it is clear that Mrs. Maryam Abdullahi and two others who are being detained in Saudi are victims of circumstance, implicated by the activities of a criminal syndicate operating at the Mallam Aminu Kano International Airport," Babafemi said.

The NDLEA disclosed that some of the arrested suspects had confessed to their roles, admitting they were paid to check in the drug-laden luggage. Bank transfer records showing payments totalling N200,000 were also recovered as part of the evidence.

In light of these findings, the Agency has opened dialogue with the General Directorate of Narcotics Control (GDNC) in Saudi Arabia to secure the release of the innocent pilgrims.

The NDLEA Chairman, Brig Gen Mohamed Buba Marwa (Rtd), is expected to meet Saudi counterparts during an international drug conference and has pledged, if necessary, to personally travel to the Kingdom to pursue justice for the detainees.

While commending the Ministry of Aviation, the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), Aviation Security (AVSEC) and the Department of State Services (DSS) for their cooperation, the NDLEA assured the public that measures have already been introduced at MAKIA to prevent a repeat of such incidents.

The Agency reaffirmed its commitment to combating drug trafficking and substance abuse, stressing that while it will spare no offender in its enforcement duties, it equally has a responsibility to ensure that innocent citizens are not made to suffer unjustly.

Zamfara APC youths slam PDP govts over insensitive meeting

By Ismaeel Aleem



The Zamfara State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) Youth Forum has criticised governors of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for convening a political meeting in the state on Saturday, 23 August, only days after a series of violent attacks left dozens dead, injured, or kidnapped.

The forum branded the gathering as “insensitive” and a flagrant disregard for the victims of Zamfara’s worsening security crisis.

In a statement issued on Monday, 25 August, the group’s publicity secretary, Muhammed Ibrahim, expressed outrage at the timing and optics of the PDP governors’ visit.

He drew attention to the latest wave

of attacks by armed groups across several Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the state, where reports confirmed that 144 people were abducted, 24 killed, and 16 others wounded.

The APC Youth Forum accused the PDP governors of placing partisan politics above the lives of ordinary citizens.

“Rather than rally round their embattled colleague to help stem the tide of killings, they chose to stage a political rally at the very scene of mass murder, trampling on the memory of the victims,” the statement declared.

The group also condemned the conduct of the governors during the event, describing photographs of them in “full ceremonial attire,

smiling for the cameras” as grossly inappropriate in a community still grieving and traumatised.

According to the forum, the episode underscored the governors’ lack of empathy and responsible leadership at a time when Zamfara is battling one of its gravest security challenges.

The state has long been a hotspot of banditry, with frequent raids on villages resulting in mass killings, abductions, and widespread terror among residents.

The APC Youth Forum urged political leaders to put the welfare and security of citizens above partisan considerations, stressing the need for unity and urgent action to tackle the spiralling violence.

Lagos, Afreximbank trains 253 entrepreneurs for export

By Friday Omosola



In a move to boost its non-oil export sector, the Lagos State Government, in partnership with the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), has trained 253 entrepreneurs as part of the Lagos State Export Readiness Programme (LASERP).

From this group, 20 “Trade Champions” were chosen to represent the state at the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) 2025 in Algiers.

At the programme’s closing ceremony, Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who was represented by his Special Adviser on Works, Adekunle Olayinka, hailed the graduates as a “new generation of exporters.”

He emphasised that the initiative’s goal is to diversify the state’s economy beyond oil and solidify Lagos’s position as a major African trade hub.

The governor stated that Lagos currently contributes over 60% of

Nigeria’s non-oil exports, which totalled US\$5.3 billion in 2024.

He projected that the newly trained cohort of SMEs will add an extra US\$1 billion in foreign exchange inflows annually over the next five years.

The Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun, praised the collaboration between the Lagos State Ministry of Commerce, Afreximbank, and ImpactHER.

He noted that the programme aligns with the federal government’s broader agenda to increase non-oil exports and enhance Nigeria’s global competitiveness.

Also, Folashade Ambrose-Medebem, the Lagos State Commissioner for Commerce, Cooperatives, Trade and Investment, described the graduates as a “movement of exporters, innovators and pioneers.”

She asserted that through programs

like LASERP, Lagos is transforming its SMEs from “local champions” into “global competitors.”

The Regional Chief Operating Officer of Afreximbank, Allain Thierry Mbongue, echoed this sentiment, calling the entrepreneurs “future exporters” who will contribute to Africa’s economic story under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The CEO of ImpactHER, Efe Ukala, highlighted the training’s focus on digital transformation, with participants receiving support for website development, digital marketing, and access to single-digit interest loans.

Kofo Akinkugbe, Managing Director of SecureID, and Weyinmi Eribo, Managing Partner at Zenforte Partners, also provided advice to the graduates on the importance of quality, resilience, and collaboration in securing their place in the global market.

Three dead, 17 rescued in Borno boat accident

By Helen Okechukwu



Tragedy struck in Borno State on Monday when a boat ferrying farmers across the River Kubo in Shani Local Government Area (LGA) capsized, claiming three lives.

The incident, which occurred in the early hours of the day, involved about 20 farmers who were heading to their farmlands with harvested yams.

According to the North-East zonal office of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), 17 passengers were rescued, while three bodies were retrieved from the water.

The Chairman of Shani LGA, Abdu Labaki, NEMA disclosed that the mishap was caused by overloading.

“Honourable Chairman of Shani LGA said the incident occurred in the early hours of today, 25th August,

2025, involving 20 farmers in their effort to be conveyed to their farms located over the river site.

“The boat capsized due to overloading. Seventeen people were rescued alive, but 3 died and their bodies were recovered.”, the agency stated.

A resident, Audu Abu, who spoke with Punch confirmed the accident, noting that community members had joined the rescue operation.

He suggested that the number of passengers could have been higher than reported, saying, “The canoe, which was carrying over 27 people, met with an unfortunate accident, leaving three people dead.”

Abu added his condolences to the bereaved families, expressing prayers for the safety of others still

unaccounted for.

The accident comes at a time when parts of Borno have been grappling with heavy flooding, which has destroyed homes and farmlands, further complicating the plight of rural dwellers.

The incident occurred after 30 persons were reportedly involved in a boat mishap on Friday in Garin-Faji, Sabon-Birni Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

Meanwhile, according to the NEMA report shared on Sunday, out of the 30 persons who boarded the boat, 21 survived, including the canoe operator; three persons were yet to be found, and six bodies were recovered. Rescue operations were still underway.

Lagos unveils Health Festival, showcases creativity as tool for healing, wellness

By Helen Okechukwu



The Lagos State Commissioner for Health, Prof. Akin Abayomi, has highlighted the value of art in promoting recovery, mental wellbeing and public health, stressing that creative expression is increasingly being recognised as a catalyst for positive change in healthcare.

In a document shared on Monday, it was noted that the health commissioner underscored this on Sunday during the opening of the inaugural Lagos Arts and Health Festival, held at the Soto Art Gallery in Ikoyi.

Read Also: Diri calls on politicians to improve Nigeria's healthcare

According to him, the state is taking a holistic approach to healthcare by weaving art into hospital design, patient treatment and health promotion campaigns.

Prof. Abayomi recalled how art personally sustained him during his medical training in the United Kingdom (UK), and later informed his intervention during the Ebola crisis in West Africa, where survivors only felt able to donate plasma after engaging in art therapy.

He said a similar model proved effective during the COVID-19 outbreak when Lagos introduced the "Art for Life" initiative at its isolation centres.

"It was so amazing what Art for Life did during COVID-19, patients found hope in music, murals and poetry when human contact was cut off," he explained, noting that art gave them hope and resilience.

The Commissioner added that new health facilities such as the Massey Children's Hospital were now being designed with artistic and architectural flair. He also revealed that Lagos was investing in visual storytelling, animation and graphics to strengthen public health messaging.

Festival Director, Mrs Iniabasi Leye, described the event as a milestone for Lagos, pointing out that other cities including London, Rio de Janeiro and Harare had staged similar gatherings. She encouraged participants to explore the week-long programme, which runs from 24 to 30 August across both physical and online platforms.

Advisory Board Chair, Ms Aduke

Gomez, praised Lagos for hosting the first edition, saying the city's dynamism made it an ideal choice. She explained that arts-based interventions, from music and dance to journaling and gardening, have been proven to reduce anxiety, support dementia care and improve the lives of people with chronic illnesses.

The festival line-up features an art exhibition, dialogues on men's and women's health, therapy sessions on drug abuse, a blood donation drive, creative ageing workshops, academic presentations and a children's disability awareness programme.

Organisers said the festival, jointly hosted by the Lagos State Government and Global South Arts and Health, aims to show how creativity can be integrated into healthcare as a therapeutic and developmental resource.

With its mix of cultural showcases, research forums and therapy initiatives, the event is expected to establish Lagos as a leading voice in arts-in-health innovation on the continent.

Rising obesity rates threaten to push UK health services to breaking point

By Helen Okechukwu

Britain's growing obesity crisis is draining more than £100bn from the economy each year and placing unprecedented strain on the NHS, new research has revealed.

More than a quarter of adults are now classed as obese – double the proportion recorded in the 1990s – with overall levels of excess weight now surpassing many European nations.

Analysts warn that, without urgent action, the number of overweight or obese adults could climb to 43 million by the middle of the century, while childhood obesity is projected to increase by half.

The consequences are already being felt in the workplace and the health system.

Economists at Frontier Economics, working with the social think tank Nesta, estimate that around 266,000 jobs are lost annually through obesity-related illness, early death, and unemployment, costing the economy £24bn in productivity alone.

The combined financial impact, including welfare and care services, is thought to reach £126bn – a figure that could rise to £150bn within the next decade.

NHS budgets are being hit particularly hard. Obesity is now linked to soaring rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, with more than 1.2 million hospital admissions in 2023 tied to weight-related illness.

Current spending on obesity care is calculated at £11.4bn annually, nearly double government estimates from just two years ago.

Experts believe new weight-loss drugs could help ease the burden. Around 1.5 million people are already thought to be using the jabs, which NHS medical director Prof Sir Stephen Powis has



suggested could soon rank among the most commonly prescribed medicines.

The NHS plans to offer them to 220,000 eligible patients over the next three years, but Nesta argues expanding this by a further 150,000 people could save £1.4bn in costs each year, even after accounting for the £500m price tag.

While speaking to Independent newspapers, Nesta's director of healthy life, Hugo Harper averred the country could not afford to delay, noting that "Obesity is at the root of many of the UK's health problems, including increasing the risk of cancer and diabetes, while costing our economy billions in lost productivity and NHS spending. This is only going to get worse without intervention, as obesity rates are set to rise."

The crisis also mirrors wider social inequalities. Obesity rates are significantly higher among people in deprived areas, those with disabilities, and groups with fewer educational qualifications.

Children in poorer communities are more than twice as likely to be obese compared with those from wealthier households, while access to healthier food and fitness opportunities remains limited.

Campaigners have urged ministers to pair medical solutions with stronger policies on food retail and advertising.

Suggestions include restrictions on price promotions for products high in fat, salt, and sugar, and tighter rules on supermarket checkouts.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said the government was determined to make modern treatments available to all who need them, not just those able to pay privately.

The move, they said, was part of a wider strategy to shift the health service from "sickness to prevention".

17-year-old Emma shares struggle with rare stomach paralysis, calls for awareness

By Helen Okechukwu

A 17-year-old girl identified as Emma has drawn global attention after revealing her lifelong struggle with gastroparesis, a rare and often misunderstood medical condition that leaves her unable to eat food in the traditional sense.

Emma, who posted her story on TikTok under the username emmakok, explained that she was born without a functioning stomach and has relied on feeding tubes since infancy.

Her video, uploaded in July but gaining traction on Monday, highlights both the physical and emotional challenges of living with a condition that remains unfamiliar to many.

“Hi, my name is Emma. I am 17 and I have a chronic illness called gastroparesis. Gastroparesis simply means my stomach is paralysed, it doesn’t work. Because my stomach is paralysed, it can’t digest any food. Which also means I’m not able to eat any food and that is why I have two feeding pumps.”

“These are the two, they’re for my intestines and stomach. I have had these two feeding pumps since I was a baby so I have never eaten anything in my life.”

While Emma can occasionally sip tea, water, or tiny amounts of honey, she has never tasted everyday meals such as chocolate, spaghetti, or burgers. She admitted that this makes social situations more difficult, as food plays a central role in most people’s lives.

Beyond the physical restrictions, Emma also spoke about the stigma faced by many gastroparesis patients, pointing out that their symptoms are often dismissed in medical settings. “Doctors sometimes put it down to anxiety or stress, which makes us feel ignored,” she added.

Her video ended with a plea for wider recognition of the illness: “I want to spread awareness and help others understand what living with this condition really means. Please just listen.”



What is gastroparesis?

Cleveland Clinic defines gastroparesis as a paralysis of the stomach with a functional disorder that affects the stomach nerves and muscles.

Symptoms include indigestion, bloated stomach, feeling full very quickly or for a long time, upper abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, and regurgitating (spitting up) whole pieces of undigested food.

Other symptoms include loss of appetite, acid reflux and heartburn, blood sugar fluctuations, and constipation.

Though treatment options—such as dietary adjustments, medications that stimulate stomach contractions, or surgical procedures—can help manage symptoms, there is currently no cure. Globally, gastroparesis remains underdiagnosed, leaving many patients feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Other patient speak out

For some who face similar challenges, Emma’s story resonated deeply, bringing hope. Her experience has since spread widely, sparking conversations online about invisible illnesses and the

urgent need for greater medical awareness.

Another user, Sackarias Persson, a 48-year-old who drew strength from her story, shared how he felt after listening to Emma. He said, “I know exactly how it is. I have gastroparesis, epilepsy, and chronic kidney failure stage 5, which means no urine production. Which is very difficult because I get almost only liquid, some biscuits sometimes I can get in me.”

“Like you said, you don’t get taken seriously by doctors. I have dialysis three times a week, four hours at a time. This is due to my chronic kidney failure. I’ve been like this for about 10 years, I’m 48 years old. I suffer with you.”

Another TikTok user, Aoife, responded to the question of whether they get the taste of what they eat as a gastroparesis patient: “I have gastroparesis and for me my mouth doesn’t water from the smell of food. My stomach is mostly paralysed so it doesn’t send my brain any hunger cues or signals. It’s like smelling food while being full and nauseous except for the fact that my stomach is empty. I don’t know if it’s the same for Emma though since everyone with this condition is different.”

“I have nothing to prove to anyone” – Ayra Starr

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian singer and songwriter Oyin Kànsola Sarah Aderibigbe, better known by her stage name Ayra Starr, has revealed that she no longer feels the pressure to prove herself in the music industry.

The Grammy-nominated artist, popularly called “Sabi Girl,” said her only focus now is living up to her own standards.

In a candid interview with BBC Radio 1Xtra in London, the 22-year-old star shared how her new mindset has shaped her latest creative process. She explained that her recent single “Hot Body” was born from a place of self-assurance and personal growth.

“I’m in a very comfortable place where I don’t see the need to prove myself to anybody other than myself,” Ayra Starr said. “I released my song ‘Hot Body’ because I feel like this is the right time. I’m in the right headspace. I feel good. Right now, my body is better than I have ever felt.”

She added that her latest music goes beyond making hits for the charts. “I didn’t just release it because it sounds good. Look what the hot body can do that’s exactly how I feel,” she explained.

Ayra Starr, signed to Mavin Records, has grown into one of Africa’s most influential young voices. Since bursting onto the scene in 2021 with her self-titled debut EP, she has consistently pushed boundaries with her sound, which blends Afropop, R&B, and soul.

Her breakout single “Away” first announced her arrival, but it was her 2021 debut album “19 & Dangerous” that cemented her status as a rising star. With hits like “Bloody Samaritan,” “Fashion Killer,” and “Rush,” she built a strong fan base at home and abroad.

In 2023, her global reach expanded even further when “Rush” earned her a Grammy nomination for Best African



Music Performance, the first time the category was introduced. The nomination placed her alongside some of the continent’s biggest names and marked a significant milestone in her young career.

Despite these achievements, Ayra Starr said she has learned to focus inward rather than outward. For her, the pressure to constantly prove herself to the public has given way to a healthier outlook.

“This is me embracing who I am, without waiting for anyone’s approval,” she said in the interview. “I know my worth, and I’m making music that reflects exactly how I feel in this moment of my life.”

Her declaration comes at a time when many young artists face heavy expectations from fans, critics, and the industry. Yet Ayra Starr seems determined to break free from those pressures.

Known for her bold style and youthful confidence, Ayra Starr has also become a voice of inspiration for her generation. Fans often call her the “Sabi Girl,” a nickname she has embraced to represent her fearless and

unapologetic approach to life.

Her message during the interview resonates with many who see her as more than just an entertainer. By choosing to create music from a place of self-belief rather than external validation, she hopes to encourage others to do the same in their own lives.

As Ayra Starr continues her journey, she shows no signs of slowing down. With international tours, collaborations, and new projects lined up, she remains focused on expanding her artistry while staying true to herself.

Industry watchers believe her approach could make her one of the defining voices of the Afrobeats generation. By choosing authenticity over pressure, she is carving out a path that many young artists may seek to follow.

For Ayra Starr, the future is not about proving critics wrong but about proving herself right. And as her star continues to rise, one thing is clear: she is doing it entirely on her own terms.

EFCC distances self from dismissed staff seen on matchmaking show

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has distanced itself from the actions of one of its dismissed staff members, Olakunle Alex Folarin, who recently appeared on a matchmaking programme hosted on the social media platforms of comedian Lege Miami.

In a statement released on Monday on the EFCC's official facebook page, the anti-graft agency said it "condemns in the strongest terms" Folarin's appearance, warning the public not to associate his conduct with the Commission.

According to the EFCC, Folarin was a driver attached to its Ibadan Zonal Directorate. He was dismissed from service after investigations revealed that he gained employment with forged certificates.

The Commission explained that the disciplinary process that led to his dismissal was thorough and followed all due procedures. His exit, it said, was part of an ongoing effort to rid the EFCC of dishonest or unqualified personnel.

Despite being formally dismissed, Folarin allegedly held on to certain items belonging to the EFCC, including an official identity card. This, the Commission stressed, is a violation of established rules that require dismissed staff to surrender all property of the organisation immediately.

The Executive Chairman of the EFCC, Mr. Ola Olukoyede, has since ordered Folarin's arrest for having these items. The Commission added that steps are already being taken to recover every EFCC property unlawfully retained by him.

The EFCC urged members of the public to exercise caution and avoid linking Folarin's post-dismissal activities to the Commission. It stressed that his appearance on a matchmaking show, or any other personal venture he may undertake, has no connection to the agency's work or image.



"The public is strongly advised not to be misled into thinking that his actions or representations reflect the EFCC," the statement read.

The development follows clips of Folarin's appearance on a matchmaking programme hosted by entertainer Lege Miami. In the video, Folarin allegedly introduced himself as an EFCC officer, a claim that quickly went viral and sparked public debate.

Many viewers, shocked by his introduction, assumed that the anti-graft agency had authorised or sanctioned his participation. The Commission's statement, however, made it clear that this was not the case.

Observers say the EFCC's swift response underscores its concern about protecting its institutional image. With the agency at the forefront of Nigeria's anti-corruption fight, maintaining credibility and discipline among staff remains central to its operations.

A senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Commission treats cases of misconduct with utmost seriousness. "Once you compromise the integrity

of the organisation, you cannot remain in the system," the official said. "That is why the Chairman himself is taking this matter personally."

This incident highlights broader issues facing government agencies in Nigeria, including the need for strict vetting processes in recruitment and stronger enforcement of disciplinary measures after staff exit.

Analysts argue that cases like Folarin's could erode public trust if not addressed firmly. By moving quickly to disown him and order his arrest, the anti-graft agency hopes to send a clear signal that misconduct, past or present, will not be tolerated.

For the anti-graft agency, the case of Olakunle Alex Folarin serves as a reminder of the importance of safeguarding its reputation. The agency insists that its fight against corruption will not be derailed by the actions of former staff members acting outside the law.

As the investigation into Folarin's possession of EFCC property continues, the Commission has vowed to update the public on the steps being taken.

“Naira Marley was not in same house Mohbad died,” late singer’s Dad

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

The father of the late Nigerian singer Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba, popularly known as Mohbad, has raised new concerns about the ongoing investigation into his son’s death.

In a recent statement, Mr. Aloba alleged that the police were overlooking “very important points” in their probe. He insisted that Mohbad died inside a house, contrary to earlier speculation that he may have collapsed outside.

“Naira Marley was not in the same house Mohbad died,” the grieving father said. “Mohbad died inside the house, not outside. I personally saw blood inside the house. The police are ignoring very important points.”

Mohbad, a former signee of Marlian Music owned by Azeez Fashola, popularly called Naira Marley, died on September 12, 2023, under controversial circumstances. He was 27.

The singer’s sudden death shocked fans across Nigeria and the world, sparking protests, candlelight processions, and calls for justice. His passing also triggered debates about the pressures of the music industry, alleged bullying, and unresolved disputes between Mohbad and his former record label.

While an autopsy was ordered following his exhumation, the full details have not yet been released publicly, leaving room for speculation and competing narratives.

Mr. Aloba’s fresh claims add a new layer to the controversy. By stating that there was blood inside the house, he suggests that the circumstances surrounding his son’s death may not have been properly examined.

Family members and close associates have repeatedly questioned the handling of the case, with some accusing investigators of negligence or deliberate cover-up.

Mr. Aloba’s insistence that the police are ignoring “critical details” echoes a



broader frustration among fans who have demanded greater transparency and accountability in the investigation.

Naira Marley, once Mohbad’s mentor and label boss, has consistently denied any involvement in the singer’s death. He has also maintained that he was not present at the scene when the tragedy occurred.

Mohbad’s father appeared to confirm this in his latest statement, noting that Marley was not in the house at the time. However, he expressed worry that the police had not fully examined the role of others who may have been present with Mohbad before his passing.

The Lagos State Police Command had earlier set up a special investigative team to look into the circumstances of the singer’s death. Several individuals, including Naira Marley and music promoter Sam Larry, were questioned and briefly detained before being released on bail.

Despite assurances that the investigation is ongoing, critics argue that progress has been slow and communication from authorities has been limited.

Legal analysts note that Mr. Aloba’s statement could put fresh pressure on investigators to clarify inconsistencies in witness accounts and physical evidence.

While the search for answers continues, Mohbad’s music has remained a rallying point for fans. Songs such as Peace, Feel Good, and Beast & Peace continue to dominate playlists and streaming platforms, serving as a reminder of his talent and potential.

Tributes from colleagues, including Davido, Olamide, and Bella Shmurda, have kept his memory alive, with many describing him as a voice for the streets whose career was cut short too soon.

For Mohbad’s father, the fight is personal. His latest comments reflect the pain of a parent still searching for closure.

As he continues to speak out, the pressure mounts on authorities to ensure that the full truth about Mohbad’s death is uncovered.

Until then, the calls for justice grow louder, echoing the words of his father: “The police are ignoring very important points.”

Ned Nwoko confronts Regina Daniels over work stress, reports her to mother

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Senator Ned Nwoko has stirred conversations online after publicly confronting his wife, Nollywood actress Regina Daniels, over her work schedule and alleged lack of rest.

The lawmaker and businessman visited his wife on a movie set, where he expressed concern that she was overworking herself and not paying enough attention to her health.

In a video shared by Regina Daniels on Instagram, Nwoko was seen addressing members of the film crew, insisting that the actress needed more rest.

“My point is from her not resting,” the senator told the production team, making it clear that he was worried about his wife’s welfare while balancing family responsibilities and acting commitments.

The exchange took a more personal turn when Regina’s mother, veteran actress Rita Daniels, intervened. She advised Nwoko to settle the matter privately with his wife instead of raising it in public.

However, the senator responded by revealing a recurring issue at home. According to him, Regina often reminded him during arguments that he was “not her father.”

“Oh, she will now tell me, look, you are not my father,” Nwoko said in the video. “I swear to God. She said you are not my father. And I said, I’m your husband.”

His statement drew laughter from some crew members but left Regina visibly embarrassed.

In the video, Regina Daniels quickly went down on her knees to apologise to her husband. She promised to make amends and assured him that she would find a way to balance work



with rest.

Sharing the video with her fans, the actress jokingly described her husband as “so petty,” a remark that added a lighthearted twist to the otherwise serious exchange.

The clip has since sparked wide reactions online. Many fans praised Nwoko for showing concern for his wife’s well-being, while others felt he should have handled the matter privately, as Rita Daniels suggested.

Some viewers also focused on the senator’s revelation that Regina had told him, “you are not my father,” with many finding the comment humorous.

On Instagram, one user wrote: “This is such a relatable couple’s quarrel. At the end of the day, he just wants her to rest.”

Another added: “Regina is right, but she should listen to him too. Health first before work.”

Regina Daniels, 24, has been married to Senator Ned Nwoko since 2019. The couple share two children. Despite being a mother and wife, Regina has remained active in Nollywood, taking on multiple acting projects and endorsements.

Her ability to balance family life with a thriving career has often been admired by fans, but the latest incident highlights the challenges of managing both worlds.

While Regina’s Instagram caption suggested she viewed the incident as playful, the underlying concern remains real. With her husband’s public complaint and her mother’s attempt to mediate, the moment captured on camera reflects the everyday realities of marriage, even for high-profile couples.

For Regina Daniels, the episode serves as both a public embarrassment and a gentle reminder: her husband wants her to slow down and rest, even if he had to “report her” to her mother to make the point.

Tragedy strikes as Seyi Vibe fans die in car crash after concert

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



A night of music and celebration ended in tragedy as several fans of Nigerian singer Seyi Vibe reportedly lost their lives in a fatal car accident.

The incident occurred late Saturday night while the victims were returning from the artist's concert on Lagos Island.

According to eyewitness accounts, the crash happened on an expressway and involved more than four vehicles. Videos from the scene surfaced online shortly after the accident, sparking grief and outrage among Nigerians.

An eyewitness identified on X (formerly Twitter) as @alli_ya7 shared details of the crash, warning others about the dangers of reckless driving.

"They left the show and started racing on the express, trying to overtake other cars," she wrote. "Why race on the highway? May their souls rest in peace. SPEED KILLS."

Her account suggested that the victims were engaged in a car race when the accident occurred. While the full number of casualties has not been confirmed, social media reports indicate that multiple lives were lost.

The news quickly spread across social media platforms, where fans of Seyi Vibe and the general public expressed their shock and sadness. Many described the incident as heartbreaking, especially as it came after what was meant to be a joyful evening.

"People left their homes to enjoy music and never made it back," one user lamented. "This is beyond painful."

Others echoed calls for caution, urging young people to avoid speeding and reckless behaviour on highways.

As of press time, Seyi Vibe, born Balogun Afolabi Oluwaloseyi, had not publicly reacted to the incident. The fast-rising Afrobeats singer is known for his passionate fan base, many of whom call themselves the "Seyi Vibe Army."

The tragic accident has thrown his community of supporters into mourning, with many awaiting his response to the heartbreaking development.

The incident also highlights Nigeria's growing challenge with road safety. Reckless driving, speeding, and disregard for traffic rules have been linked to hundreds of fatalities across the country

each year.

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) has repeatedly warned motorists about the dangers of overspeeding, describing it as one of the leading causes of road crashes in Nigeria. Saturday's tragedy adds to a growing list of accidents tied to excessive speed and dangerous driving habits.

In the wake of the accident, Nigerians on social media have been calling for greater awareness campaigns targeting young people. Some suggested that event organisers and artists should also play a role by reminding fans to drive safely after shows.

What began as an evening of entertainment ended in sorrow for families who have now been plunged into mourning. Instead of returning home with memories of the concert, they are left with devastating loss.

As investigations continue, the incident serves as a painful reminder of the consequences of reckless driving. For many Nigerians, the words shared by the eyewitness remain a sobering truth: "SPEED KILLS."

Victory, Gigi Jasmine, evicted from BBNaija season 10

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Two housemates, Victory and Gigi Jasmine, have been evicted from the Big Brother Naija (BBNaija) Season 10 reality show. Their exits were announced during Sunday's live eviction show, marking a turning point in the competition.

The pair received the lowest votes from fans during the week, which sealed their fate in the house. With their departure, they now become the sixth and seventh contestants to leave the game this season.

Before this latest eviction, the show had already seen several housemates exit. Danboskid, Ibifubara, Kayikunmi, and Otega were shown the door in earlier rounds of voting.

Sabrina, another contestant, also left the house, though hers was not through eviction. She withdrew on medical grounds after health concerns made it impossible for her to continue.

The back-to-back exits have left viewers with fewer contestants as the show edges closer to its final weeks.

Victory, 28, is a psychologist from Akwa Ibom State. He describes himself as "deviant," a personality who does not

conform to societal norms simply because they exist. During his time in the house, he tried to project this identity, often standing out with unconventional opinions.

Although he had his share of supporters, it was not enough to save him from eviction. His exit has sparked mixed reactions among fans, with some praising his boldness while others argue that his strategy failed to connect with wider audiences.

Gigi Jasmine, whose real name is Nicole Simon Ogun, is a 31-year-old DJ and content creator, also from Akwa Ibom. She stood out among the female housemates for her versatility and her flair for entertainment.

Beyond DJing, she revealed that she had played the flute for 15 years, a skill she often mentioned as a source of personal pride. She also claimed she could DJ without using headphones, an unusual feat in her craft.

In the house, Gigi Jasmine was known for her free-spirited energy and for trying to connect with fellow contestants through music and lively conversations. Her eviction, however, shows that personality alone was not enough to keep

her in the competition.

BBNaija continues with a reduced lineup of contestants who now face the pressure of edging closer to the record-breaking grand prize of N150 million. This prize remains the highest in the show's history, and with every eviction, the tension grows inside and outside the house.

For the remaining BBNaija housemates, each week presents both a chance and a risk: an opportunity to impress fans and an ever-present threat of being voted out.

As always, Sunday's BBNaija eviction show generated heated debate among fans on social media. Some viewers expressed disappointment at losing Victory and Gigi Jasmine, while others said the eviction was expected.

With the show moving into its decisive phase, the competition is expected to grow more intense, with alliances shifting, strategies tested, and new rivalries unfolding.

For Victory and Gigi Jasmine, their BBNaija journey has ended, but their time in the spotlight may just be beginning.

Pere Egbi mourns friend who died by suicide after cyberbullying

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Former Big Brother Naija housemate and Nollywood actor, Pere Egbi, has opened up about the loss of a close friend who died by suicide after facing cyberbullying.

The reality star made the revelation in an emotional post on his X handle on Monday. Without disclosing the identity of the victim, Pere wrote: “I lost a friend today due to online bullying. Committed suicide. Smh. RIP champ. It is well.”

The actor did not specify whether the tragic incident occurred in Nigeria or in the United States, where he currently divides his time.

Pere’s disclosure has once again drawn attention to the dangers of cyberbullying, an issue that continues to claim lives worldwide. Social media platforms, while serving as outlets for expression and connection, have also become spaces where harassment and abuse thrive.

Experts have repeatedly warned that constant exposure to online bullying can lead to depression, anxiety, and in extreme cases, suicide. Pere’s statement is a painful reminder of the devastating effects of unchecked online behaviour.

Fans and fellow celebrities quickly

reacted to his post, offering condolences and sharing their own experiences with cyberbullying. Many urged social media users to adopt more empathy in their interactions, while calling for stronger measures to hold online abusers accountable.

The development comes just weeks after Pere found himself at the centre of online criticism. He stirred debate when he claimed that South Africa’s film industry is ahead of Nollywood in areas such as storytelling, filmmaking, and work ethics.

“Nigeria’s film industry still has a lot to learn from South Africa,” he had said, sparking heated reactions from Nollywood loyalists who disagreed with his assessment.

The backlash highlighted how quickly public figures can become targets of online attacks, a reality Pere himself is familiar with as both an actor and former reality star. His revelation about losing a friend adds a deeply personal layer to the ongoing discussion around cyberbullying.

Since leaving the Big Brother Naija house, Pere Egbi has steadily built a career in acting. He has featured in Nollywood and international

productions, including Gem of the Rain Forest, Pound of Flesh, and Blood Vessel.

His versatility as an actor and his outspoken nature have made him a well-known figure, both admired and criticised by fans.

With Pere’s revelation, conversations around mental health and social media responsibility have resurfaced. Advocacy groups and fans alike have stressed the need for stronger campaigns to educate young people on the dangers of cyberbullying and the importance of kindness online.

Mental health experts also urge individuals facing online abuse to seek help early, whether through counselling, trusted friends, or professional support networks.

For Pere, the loss of his friend is a personal tragedy, but it also mirrors the experiences of many who have been silently suffering under the weight of online harassment.

His message, short but heavy with grief, has struck a chord with thousands of Nigerians and fans abroad: online bullying is not just hurtful, it can be deadly.

Trump signs executive orders to end cashless bail

By Eniola Amadu



President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to eliminate cashless bail nationwide, threatening to cut federal funding for jurisdictions that use the system.

The decision is part of White House strategy to put crime control at the forefront of the national agenda.

A separate order specifically targets Washington, D.C., directing police to charge suspects with federal crimes and detain them in federal custody to bypass cashless bail.

“Cashless bail—we’re ending it. But we’re starting by ending it in D.C., and that we have the right to do through federalization,” Trump said.

The president has also taken temporary control of Washington’s police force, and authorized NatCarry Guard troops to carry weapons on city patrols, warning that he could extend military presence to Democratic-led

cities such as Baltimore and Chicago.

The order specific to D.C. calls for further measures, including potential limits on federal funding, services, and approvals. Trump initially previewed his stance earlier this month when he announced the temporary federalization of D.C.’s police force, describing the city’s cashless bail policy as a “disaster.”

Cashless bail allows defendants to be released from jail while awaiting trial based on a promise to appear in court, rather than posting a cash bond.

Critics, praises trail Trump actions

However, critics have condemned the administration’s actions as federal overreach, while supporters see it as part of Trump’s “tough on crime” strategy, which is expected to play a key role in Republican efforts to maintain control of Congress in next year’s midterm elections.

Also, opponents argue it reduces defendants’ incentive to return for trial and jeopardizes public safety. Advocates say it prevents low-income individuals from being unfairly detained simply because they cannot afford bail.

The nationwide directive instructs the U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi to compile a list of states and localities with cashless bail policies and identify federal funds that could be “suspended or terminated,”.

Washington, D.C., was among the first U.S. cities to significantly abolish cash bail in the 1990s, opting instead for judicial risk assessments to determine pretrial release.

Illinois has fully abolished cash bail entirely, while states such as New York, California, and New Jersey have implemented significant reductions to the practice.

European postal services halt parcels to US amid tariff uncertainty

By Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi



Postal services across Europe have suspended most parcel shipments to the United States, citing confusion and a lack of clarity over new import tariffs introduced by President Donald Trump.

On Monday, France's La Poste confirmed it had joined Germany's Deutsche Post, Spain's Correos, Poste Italiane, and postal operators in Belgium, Sweden and Denmark in halting the majority of shipments bound for the US. Austria's Österreichische Post and the UK's Royal Mail said they would stop accepting parcels on Tuesday, to allow packages already in transit to arrive before the tariffs come into force at the end of August.

The move follows an executive order signed by President Trump last month, abolishing from 29 August a long-standing tax exemption that permitted small packages worth less than \$800 to enter the US duty-free. The exemption, known as the "de minimis" rule, has been heavily used by small European businesses to export lower-value goods across the Atlantic.

According to US Customs, 1.36 billion packages worth \$64.6 billion were

imported under the scheme last year. From the end of August, such parcels will be subject to a 15 per cent tariff, in line with most other imports from the European Union.

Analysts have warned that the change could hit small and medium-sized European exporters hardest, many of whom rely on lower-value shipments to reach US customers.

European operators said they would continue to deliver letters and small parcels sent by individuals containing gifts worth under €100, but warned these would face stricter checks to prevent the system from being used for commercial goods.

What DHL, owner of Deutsche Post, said. The companies blamed both the lack of time to prepare and uncertainty over how the tariffs would be applied. "Key questions remain, particularly regarding who will have to pay the tariffs and how, what additional data will be required, and how data will be transmitted to US Customs," DHL, which owns Deutsche Post, said. The logistics group added that it was no longer accepting or transporting goods sent by business customers to the US.

La Poste, which sends around 1.6 million parcels to the US each year, said 80 per cent came from businesses and 20 per cent from individuals. It noted that confirmation of the new rules had only been received from US authorities on 15 August, leaving "an extremely limited timeframe to get prepared".

Poste Italiane said it had been "forced to temporarily suspend acceptance of all shipments containing merchandise destined for the US". Nordic logistics company PostNord described its own pause as "unfortunate but necessary".

The Dutch postal operator PostNL warned that while Washington was pressing ahead with the tariffs, US authorities had yet to put in place a system to collect them. Royal Mail expressed hope that the suspension would last only a few days.

PostEurop, which represents 51 European public postal operators, said that unless a workable solution was found before 29 August, all members would be likely to suspend the bulk of parcel shipments to the US.

UK patients warned against bulk buying Mounjaro ahead of steep price rise

By Fatimah Idera



People using the weight-loss injection Mounjaro are being urged not to bulk buy or turn to unlicensed sellers after its manufacturer, Eli Lilly, confirmed prices in the UK will rise sharply this autumn.

From September, the cost of Mounjaro is set to increase by up to 170%, although the NHS will be protected from the rise. Since only a small number of patients are eligible for NHS prescriptions, most people buy the drug privately at around £200 a month — a figure expected to soar.

Henry Gregg, chief executive of the National Pharmacy Association (NPA), said the rising costs had created understandable anxiety but warned against unsafe practices.

“Bulk ordering can affect supply and put patient safety at risk. We’d also urge patients not to buy from unlicensed sellers, who may be offering counterfeit or unsafe medication,” he said.

“Instead, people should speak to their prescriber for safe advice and support.”

Some patients have already begun stockpiling.

The looming rise has prompted growing interest in Wegovy, a rival weight-loss drug made by Novo Nordisk, which has no plans to increase prices in the UK. Some online pharmacies have already reported a surge in patients switching.

Graham Thoms, chief executive of Pharmadocor, said Mounjaro currently accounts for 98% of weight-loss treatments across its pharmacy network. He confirmed demand for guidance on switching to Wegovy had spiked.

However, he stressed that stockpiling was not clinically appropriate because patients need monthly reviews to check progress and receive support. Thoms also suggested the price increase might be softened by a rebate scheme allowing pharmacies to claim back discounts if

they pass savings on to patients.

Meanwhile, Chemist4U warned against the growing TikTok trend of microdosing Mounjaro, saying it could undermine treatment and increase health risks. The company said it saw a 5,000% surge in Mounjaro prescriptions and a 1,500% increase in Wegovy requests immediately after the price rise was announced.

But pharmacists remain worried about patients who cannot easily switch drugs. Sukhi Basra, a London pharmacist and vice-chair of the NPA, said many were mid-treatment and had already seen major physical and emotional benefits.

“Some of my patients are already struggling with the current cost. For them, this sudden rise will be very difficult to manage,” she said. “They’ve benefited hugely from the medication, but don’t fall within the NHS funding criteria.”

Torbay Council under fire, charging families up to £12,000 for memorial benches

By Fatimah Idera



Families in one of England's most deprived areas are being asked to pay as much as £12,000 to dedicate a memorial bench to a loved one, the highest charge in the country.

Torbay Council has been criticised for introducing the steep new fees without public consultation or a council vote. Under the scheme, families can sponsor a bench for either five or 25 years, with the most expensive prices reserved for premium locations such as Torquay seafront.

A 25-year dedication in one of these areas costs £12,000, while the same period in a less prominent location is priced at £8,000. For five years, the cost is £2,400 in premium spots or £1,600 elsewhere.

The charges far exceed those set by neighbouring councils and even London's Royal Parks, where the most expensive memorial benches cost £10,000. Westminster Council, for

example, charges £1,625 for 10 years, while Teignbridge and South Hams councils charge around £1,700.

Residents say the policy unfairly penalises grieving families. Kevin Shenton, who is fundraising for a bench in memory of a family friend, accused the council of creating a two-tier system.

He said, "They told me it's not-for-profit, but if you want a bench in the most prestigious address, you have to pay more. How can it be that a bench costs so much less in Westminster? Nobody has been able to explain why it's £12,000."

Local politicians have also expressed anger at the lack of transparency. Darren Cowell, leader of the council's independent group, said: "These prices are a fundamental shift. Even if they were £5,000, people would think it was steep.

The majority of residents simply cannot afford this, especially in an area with

some of the highest poverty levels in the country."

Torbay is the most deprived local authority in the South West and among the 15 most deprived in England.

The council has defended the policy, saying its benches are high-quality and not standard timber garden seats. The price includes maintenance, insurance against vandalism, and replacement if a bench is damaged beyond repair.

Families can also choose to buy plaques for shared benches, costing £550 for a standard location or £850 for a premium spot.

However, critics argue the charges are bizarre and out of touch with local reality. One councillor said even wealthy residents would struggle to justify paying £12,000 for a bench.

Torbay Council is yet to comment.

Tories warn Starmer's asylum reforms will speed up migrant arrivals

By **Fatimah Idera**



Migrants will enter Britain more quickly despite Labour's new asylum reforms, the Conservatives have claimed.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has announced plans for a fast-track appeals system to reduce long delays in asylum cases, arguing that it will speed up deportations and ease pressure on the asylum system.

For Chris Philp, the shadow home secretary, said the reforms would have the opposite effect, with judges still using human rights laws to block removals. He warned the new tribunals would simply deliver faster rulings that allow migrants to stay.

"These tweaks go nowhere near far enough," he said. "The Government is too weak to do what's really needed repeal the Human Rights Act for immigration and deport illegal immigrants immediately on arrival."

Labour under pressure

The reforms come amid growing pressure

on Sir Keir Starmer to take a tougher stance on migration. Lord Blunkett, Labour's former home secretary, has urged ministers to consider a temporary suspension of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the UN Refugee Convention, describing the situation as toxic and at risk of spiralling out of control.

Ms Cooper defended the plans, insisting the current system is completely unacceptable, with around 51,000 appeals pending and cases taking a year on average. She said delays were leaving failed asylum seekers in the country for years, driving up costs and prolonging the use of hotels.

"We are determined to substantially reduce the number of people in the asylum system," she said. "Already we've cut the backlog of initial decisions by 24 per cent and increased returns of failed applicants by 30 per cent. But the appeals system must be fixed if we're to restore control."

Under the new scheme, asylum appeals will be given a 24-week deadline in an

attempt to prevent foreign offenders and failed applicants from remaining in the UK indefinitely.

Official figures this month showed 111,000 people applied for asylum in the UK in the year to June 2025 – the highest since records began in 2001. While the backlog of initial decisions has fallen to just over 90,000, more than 32,000 asylum seekers are still being housed in hotels. Labour has pledged to end the use of hotels by 2029.

A YouGov poll by the media found that 71 per cent of voters think the Prime Minister is handling the asylum hotel issue badly, including over half of Labour supporters.

Immigration and asylum were rated as the most important issue facing the country, ahead of the economy and the NHS.

Protests and counter-demonstrations over asylum hotels erupted in towns and cities last weekend. In Bristol, mounted police clashed with protesters and a woman was arrested on suspicion of assaulting an emergency worker.

Kilmar Ábrego García detained again in Baltimore

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



Kilmar Ábrego García, whose case has become indicative of the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies, was taken into custody on Monday after reporting to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers in Baltimore.

Speaking outside an ICE field office, Ábrego's lawyer, Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, accused officials of acting vindictively. "The only reason he was taken into detention was to punish him," he told supporters gathered at the scene.

Earlier that day, Ábrego had filed a fresh lawsuit challenging both his detention and the prospect of deportation to Uganda. Court

documents filed over the weekend revealed that he had previously refused an offer to be deported to Costa Rica in exchange for remaining in prison and pleading guilty to human smuggling charges.

Ábrego released from custody pending trial

Ábrego, 30, entered the United States without authorisation in 2011 after fleeing gang violence in El Salvador. He was later granted a federal protection order barring deportation to his home country.

In March, he was deported by immigration authorities in what officials later admitted was an "administrative error". While in El Salvador, Ábrego was detained at the government's high-security Terrorism Confinement Centre,

where his lawyers allege he suffered both physical and psychological torture.

The Trump administration faced mounting pressure to return him, including from the Supreme Court, which ordered officials to "facilitate" his repatriation. In June, he was flown back to the US, but was immediately charged with human smuggling offences, accusations his legal team dismisses as "preposterous". His criminal trial is due to begin in January.

Despite being cleared for return, officials have continued to portray Ábrego as having links to the MS-13 gang, claims strongly denied by both him and his family.

Russia accuses Ukraine of nuclear plant drone strike

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



Moscow has accused Ukraine of launching dozens of drone attacks across its territory, including one that sparked a fire at a nuclear power plant, as Kyiv marked 34 years since declaring independence from the Soviet Union.

Russian authorities said a drone strike on the Kursk nuclear power plant, about 37 miles (60km) from the Ukrainian border, damaged an auxiliary transformer and forced one reactor to halve its output. The blaze caused by the downed drone was quickly extinguished, with no casualties or rise in radiation levels reported. The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that radiation readings near the plant were “normal”. However, it has repeatedly warned of the dangers posed by fighting around nuclear facilities since Russia’s full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

Russia’s defence ministry said its forces had intercepted at least 95 Ukrainian drones across more than a dozen regions on Sunday, the anniversary of Ukraine’s independence. Strikes were reported far from the frontline, including near St Petersburg, where a fire broke out at the Ust-Luga port fuel terminal after drone debris ignited the site. Officials in the Leningrad region said around 10 drones were destroyed in the attack.

Ukraine, which has increasingly used drones to target oil and energy infrastructure in Russia, did not immediately comment on the alleged strike on the Kursk facility. Kyiv said Russian forces, in turn, launched a ballistic missile and 72 Iranian-made Shahed drones, 48 of which were shot down. A separate Russian drone strike killed a 47-year-old woman in the Dnipropetrovsk region, Ukrainian

officials reported.

Both sides claimed battlefield advances over the weekend in Donetsk, the eastern region that has become central to the ongoing conflict and discussions of peace. Russia said it had captured two villages on Saturday, while Ukraine’s commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskiy, said his forces had retaken three others.

Speaking at a ceremony in Kyiv to mark the independence anniversary, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine had secured its sovereignty despite the ongoing war. “This is how Ukraine strikes when its calls for peace are ignored,” he said. “Today, both the US and Europe agree: Ukraine has not yet fully won, but it will certainly not lose. Ukraine has secured its independence. Ukraine is not a victim; it is a fighter.”

Labour to scrap short prison sentences

By **Fatimah Idera**

Labour will abolish most prison sentences of under 12 months and bring in tougher community punishments under plans to ease the overcrowding crisis in England and Wales.

A sentencing bill due next month will mark the biggest shake-up in three decades, with Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood warning prisons could run out of space again by summer.

Thousands of inmates were released early after Labour took office last year to free up capacity.

The reforms will end almost all short jail terms, which ministers say drive reoffending. Recent figures show 62% of offenders released from sentences of less than a year go on to commit new crimes.

Prisoners serving fixed terms will instead be able to earn early release for good behaviour under a progression scheme modelled on a system in Texas. Those convicted of terrorism and the most dangerous offenders will be excluded.



Community punishments will be toughened, with judges able to impose larger fines, asset seizures and bans on driving, travel and football matches. More offenders will be put to work on local projects such as filling potholes and cleaning graffiti.

Other measures include longer suspended sentences of up to three years, tighter monitoring of violent and sexual offenders through tagging and "restriction zones", and the immediate

deportation of most foreign criminals on conviction. A pilot scheme for chemical castration of sex offenders could also be extended.

A government spokesperson said ministers had "inherited a prisons system days away from collapse" and warned that without action, courts could be forced to halt trials and police to cancel arrests.

England and Wales have the highest prison population per capita in western Europe.

Three dead, one injured after helicopter crash on Isle of Wight

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Three people have been reported dead and another seriously injured when a helicopter crashed into a field near Shanklin during a flying lesson on Monday morning.

The aircraft, carrying four people, went down around 9:20 a.m., according to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Police.

One person was airlifted to University Hospital Southampton's Major Trauma Centre and remains in critical condition.

Police confirmed the fatalities but withheld details pending family notifications.

"At this time, we are unable to provide further information about the people involved, as efforts continue to contact and support their families.



"We will not be commenting on the circumstances of the incident but continue to work alongside the Air Accident Investigation Branch."

However, the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) has launched an inquiry,

deploying a team to examine the crash site and collect evidence.

Helicopter identified G-OCLV Northumbria Helicopters, which operated the aircraft, identified it as helicopter G-OCLV and confirmed it was on a flying lesson with four people onboard, including the pilot.

They expressed their full cooperation during the investigation.

"Northumbria Helicopters is giving its full cooperation to the authorities investigating this incident," the company said in a statement.

Meanwhile, emergency services, including the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance, have responded quickly to the scene.

Virginia Giuffre memoir to be published posthumously October

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A memoir by Virginia Giuffre, one of Jeffrey Epstein's most high-profile accusers, will be published later this year following her death in April.

She died on 25 April, a month after suffering serious injuries in an accident. She had lived in Australia for several years with her husband and children.

Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Surviving Abuse and Fighting for Justice, written with journalist Amy Wallace, is due to be released on 21 October by Alfred A Knopf. The 400-page book was completed before Giuffre took her own life at her farm in Western Australia.

Giuffre, who alleged she had been trafficked for sex to Prince Andrew, settled with the Duke of York in 2022 after suing him for sexual assault. The prince has consistently denied her claims.

In an email sent to Wallace on 1 April, 25 days before her death, Giuffre expressed



her wish that the memoir be published regardless of her circumstances. "The content of this book is crucial, as it aims to shed light on the systemic failures that allow the trafficking of vulnerable individuals across borders," she wrote. "It is imperative that the truth is understood and that the issues surrounding this topic are addressed, both for the sake of justice

and awareness."

About Giuffre memoir

Knopf said the book contains "intimate, disturbing, and heartbreaking new details" about her experiences with Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell and their associates, including Prince Andrew. It will also mark the first time Giuffre has spoken publicly about the prince since the settlement.

Jordan Pavlin, editor-in-chief at Knopf, described the memoir as "raw and shocking", calling it "the story of a fierce spirit struggling to break free".

Knopf stressed that *Nobody's Girl* had been "vigorously fact-checked and legally vetted". The publisher declined to provide further details about which associates of Epstein are named in the book, but confirmed Giuffre made "no allegations of abuse against Donald Trump".

Colonial-era Gokteik bridge destroyed in Myanmar

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A historic bridge in northern Myanmar that was once the world's tallest railway trestle has been destroyed amid the country's ongoing civil war.

The Gokteik bridge, which opened in 1901 during British colonial rule, partly collapsed on Sunday following clashes between junta forces and pro-democracy fighters in Shan State.

Both sides have accused each other of responsibility. Military spokesperson Zaw Min Tun claimed that the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and allied people's defence forces had "bombed and destroyed" the structure, saying it was "exploded with mines". The TNLA rejected this version of events, accusing the army of hitting the bridge during drone strikes



aimed at rebel positions.

TNLA Spokesman reacts to Gokteik bridge "[The] Myanmar army tried to bomb our bases this morning by using drones. They bombed our troops, but their bomb also hit the Gokteik bridge," TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo said.

The bridge spans 300 metres and rises 102

metres above a gorge. It remains Myanmar's tallest bridge and was considered the highest railway trestle in the world when completed. Situated on the border of Nawnghkio and Kyaukme townships, it forms part of the Mandalay-Lashio railway line and has long been a tourist attraction.

The destruction comes after weeks of renewed fighting in the area, where clashes between the TNLA and the military have intensified. The junta claimed to have recaptured the nearby town of Nawnghkio in July.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the military seized power in a 2021 coup, ousting the elected government. Fighting has since spread across much of the country, with ethnic armed groups joining pro-democracy forces against the junta.

MPs warn of surge in online abuse amid immigration tensions

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



Members of the parliament (MPs) have warned of a sharp rise in online harassment and threats linked to debates over immigration, with some saying the level of abuse is now worse than during the Brexit years.

The concerns follow a weekend of protests at hotels housing asylum seekers, where 15 arrests were made. Demonstrations continued on Sunday, including at the Castle Bromwich Holiday Inn in Birmingham and outside the Britannia Hotel in Canary Wharf.

One female MP said she had reported an online rape threat to police after speaking up for asylum seekers. Labour's Anna Dixon, MP for Shipley, revealed she had received death threats after Conservative MP Robbie Moore shared what she called misleading claims about her stance on grooming gangs.

MPs react

Other MPs, including Tonia Antoniazzi, Labour's member for Gower, described the abuse as frighteningly polarised, with women in particular targeted by misogynistic attacks. Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer said the threats against her had escalated in recent months, including violent messages linked to her support for refugees and LGBTQ+ rights.

Several MPs who spoke out asked not to be named, fearing further abuse. A recent Speaker's Conference survey found that only 52% of MPs felt safe in their role, with online abuse cited as the biggest concern.

The heightened tensions have coincided with far-right campaigns, including "Operation Raise the Colours", which has encouraged the display of Union Jack and St George's Cross flags across the country. Anti-extremist groups say known far-right

activists are involved.

Police have made arrests in Essex and Hertfordshire after incidents linked to the campaign, including racist graffiti and a reported petrol bomb attack in Stevenage.

Brendan Cox, widower of murdered MP Jo Cox, warned that violent or extreme rhetoric from mainstream politicians risked fuelling hostility. "Threats to MPs don't come from nowhere," he said.

The government, meanwhile, is pushing ahead with a fast-track asylum appeals process to speed up deportations. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said Labour was determined to end the use of asylum hotels by 2029. Security minister Dan Jarvis condemned the threats, saying: "While there will always be a place for robust debate, there will never be a place for fear in our democracy."

Jordan, Kobe card sets \$12.9m auction record

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

A rare basketball card jointly signed by NBA legends Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant has sold for a record-breaking \$12.9 million (£9.56m), making it the most expensive sports trading card in history.

The 2007-08 Upper Deck Exquisite Collection Dual Logoman Autographs Jordan & Bryant card went under the hammer at Heritage Auctions in the United States, attracting a flurry of global interest before eventually being purchased by an anonymous bidder.

The extraordinary sale has eclipsed the previous card record, held by a 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle card, which fetched \$12.6m (£10.8 million) at auction in August 2022. While Mantle's iconic baseball card retains cultural significance, the unique nature of the Jordan-Bryant collectable ensured it claimed the top spot in the trading card market.

Heritage Auctions revealed that the Jordan-Bryant card had been privately held for more than a decade before entering the public auction. Initially expected to sell for at least \$6m (£4.4m), the bidding quickly escalated as collectors recognised the rarity and prestige of the piece. A total of 82 bids were recorded, more than doubling its pre-auction valuation.

Chris Ivy, director of sports auctions at Heritage, described the card as "the pinnacle for modern card collectors." Speaking to ESPN, he explained: "Another one can't be created. It has always been considered a holy grail by modern basketball enthusiasts. The pre-auction estimate was \$6m-plus. So sometimes if a piece is unique like this, it's really beneficial to let it have its day."

Although the \$12.9 million winning bid shattered card records, the Jordan-Bryant collectable ranks second on the all-time list of most expensive sports memorabilia. The most valuable remains Babe Ruth's "called shot" jersey, worn



during the 1932 World Series, which sold for \$24.12m (£18.1m) in August 2024.

The dual autograph card carries enormous symbolic value. Michael Jordan, widely regarded as the greatest player in NBA history, won six championships with the Chicago Bulls between 1991 and 1998. His dominance helped transform basketball into a global sport and cemented the NBA as a premier international brand.

Kobe Bryant

Kobe Bryant, who tragically passed away in a helicopter crash in 2020, remains an enduring icon of determination and excellence. Over a 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers, Bryant won five championships and inspired countless fans with his relentless "Mamba Mentality." His signature alongside Jordan's makes the card uniquely powerful, bridging two generations of basketball greatness.

The surge in high-value sports memorabilia reflects a broader trend in alternative investments. Wealthy collectors are increasingly drawn to rare, one-of-a-kind items that hold both cultural and financial value. Trading cards, once viewed as a niche hobby, have

emerged as blue-chip assets commanding multimillion-dollar sums.

For basketball enthusiasts, however, the record-breaking sale represents more than financial speculation. The card is a tangible connection to two players who defined eras, transcended the sport, and left legacies that continue to shape the NBA.

"Cards like this remind us why collecting is so meaningful," Ivy added. "It's not just about ownership—it's about preserving history. When you look at a piece like the Jordan-Bryant card, you're looking at two of the greatest players ever, together on one card. It's irreplaceable."

As the market continues to grow, analysts predict that rare basketball cards could soon rival baseball in both cultural and financial importance. With stars like Jordan and Bryant continuing to inspire new generations, their collectables are expected to remain at the heart of the industry.

For now, the Jordan-Bryant Dual Logoman card stands as the ultimate symbol of modern basketball collecting: a fusion of artistry, rarity, and legendary greatness that has rewritten the record books.

FA probes Palace banner targeting Marinakis

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

The Football Association has opened an investigation after a banner displayed by Crystal Palace supporters at Selhurst Park depicted Nottingham Forest owner Evangelos Marinakis holding a gun to the head of midfielder Morgan Gibbs-White.

The controversial banner was unfurled during Sunday's 1-1 draw between Palace and Forest, overshadowing the Premier League encounter. Alongside the illustration of Marinakis pointing a firearm at Gibbs-White, the banner carried the words: "Mr Marinakis is not involved in blackmail, match-fixing, drug trafficking or corruption!"

The display has sparked outrage at the City Ground, with senior Forest sources describing themselves as "hugely disappointed" that such material was allowed into the stadium. They regard the imagery as inflammatory, xenophobic, and defamatory.

Forest officials are said to be particularly frustrated that Palace and their ownership group — consisting of Steve Parish, Woody Johnson, Josh Harris and David Blitzer — have not publicly condemned the banner. A Palace spokesperson confirmed the club has been contacted by the BBC for comment, while the FA is assessing whether the south London side could face disciplinary action.

Under FA regulations, banners and messages deemed to contain offensive, defamatory, political or discriminatory content are strictly prohibited. The governing body is expected to determine whether Palace breached these rules by failing to prevent supporters from displaying the imagery.

For Marinakis, the incident represents the latest in a long line of controversies surrounding his name. The Greek shipping magnate, who took control of Forest in 2017, has faced repeated allegations of corruption and wrongdoing — all of which he has consistently and vehemently denied. Despite the serious nature of the accusations referenced in the banner, Marinakis has never been found guilty of any criminal offence in relation to them.



The matter also threatens to inflame already strained relations between Palace and Forest, following a turbulent summer in which Palace were removed from the Europa League due to UEFA's multi-club ownership rules. The south London club, which had secured qualification on sporting merit, were relegated to the Europa Conference League, while Forest took their place in the Europa League.

Palace chairman Parish branded UEFA's decision "the biggest injustice in the history of football," a statement that caused tensions to simmer between the two clubs well before Sunday's fixture. The provocative banner now risks widening the rift further.

From Forest's perspective, the incident is seen as an unacceptable escalation. Sources close to the club argue that more should have been done by Palace stewards and officials to prevent the banner from being displayed, particularly given its potentially defamatory message directed at their owner and the unsettling nature of its depiction of Gibbs-White.

The midfielder himself has endured a tumultuous summer. Gibbs-White appeared close to leaving Forest after Tottenham Hotspur activated his £60m release clause, but a deal failed to

materialise. Instead, the 24-year-old England international signed a new contract at the City Ground and gave a joint interview with Marinakis to underline his commitment to the club.

The FA investigation will now examine the timeline of events around the banner, including whether Palace staff were aware of its presence before kick-off and how it was allowed into the ground. Should the governing body determine that Palace breached regulations, the club could face fines or other sanctions.

For Palace, the incident could not have come at a worse time, with supporters already voicing frustration over UEFA's handling of their European expulsion. For Forest, meanwhile, it has turned what should have been a routine early-season fixture into a flashpoint highlighting broader issues of governance, fan conduct, and inter-club rivalries.

As the investigation unfolds, the incident serves as a reminder of the fine line between supporter expression and behaviour that crosses into offensive or defamatory territory. With Gibbs-White's welfare, Marinakis's reputation, and Palace's responsibilities all under scrutiny, the FA's verdict will be closely watched across English football.

Saka sidelined, Odegaard doubtful for Anfield clash

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Arsenal have been dealt a significant blow ahead of their showdown with Liverpool on Sunday, with Bukayo Saka ruled out for up to four weeks after sustaining a hamstring injury in the 5-0 demolition of Leeds United at the Emirates. Club captain Martin Odegaard is also a major doubt after suffering a shoulder injury during the same match, leaving Mikel Arteta with big selection questions as the Gunners prepare for one of the season's toughest away trips.

Saka, 23, was withdrawn early in the second half after scoring Arsenal's second goal on Saturday. Initial scans suggest the winger could miss around a month of action, sidelining him for key fixtures against Liverpool, Newcastle and Aston Villa, as well as England's upcoming World Cup qualifiers against Andorra and Serbia next month.

The injury is especially concerning given Saka's history; the England international missed three months of last season with a similar hamstring issue. However, Arsenal sources remain cautiously optimistic that this setback is not as severe and that he will return to full fitness before the busy festive period.

Odegaard, meanwhile, was forced off midway through the first half after falling awkwardly in a duel with Leeds midfielder Archie Gray. The 26-year-old left the stadium with his arm in a sling, though the club is hopeful that the problem is not serious. Medical staff will continue to monitor the Norway playmaker over the next few days before making a final decision on his availability for Anfield.

Despite the double setback, Arsenal are in a stronger position to absorb injuries than in recent years. The summer arrivals of Viktor Gyökeres from Sporting Lisbon, Noni Madueke from Chelsea and Eberechi Eze from Crystal Palace have added depth and versatility to Arteta's attacking options. Alongside Gabriel Martinelli, Leandro Trossard, teenage prodigy Ethan Nwaneri and



academy graduate Max Dowman, the Gunners now boast a forward line capable of adapting to the absence of key figures.

Arteta will be forced into reshuffling his side, but the Spaniard remains confident that Arsenal's improved squad depth can keep momentum intact. "We never want to lose players of Bukayo and Martin's quality," he said after the victory over Leeds. "But this is why we strengthened the squad. It's a chance for others to step up, and I believe in the group we have."

Sunday's clash with Liverpool presents an early test of Arsenal's resilience. Jürgen Klopp's side, reigning Premier League champions, remain unbeaten this season and boast one of the division's strongest home records. Last season's corresponding fixture saw Liverpool edge a 3-2 thriller at Anfield, and the absence of Saka and potentially Odegaard will make the task even more daunting.

Yet there is reason for optimism among the Arsenal faithful. Eze, who has impressed since his summer switch, could be handed a central role in Odegaard's absence, while Madueke offers pace and directness on the flanks. Gyökeres, a proven goalscorer in

Portugal, is pushing for his first Premier League start and could provide a physical presence against Liverpool's backline.

England manager Gareth Southgate will also be keeping a close eye on developments. With qualifiers looming, Saka's absence leaves a void in England's attack, though Southgate will be reluctant to risk the forward given his importance ahead of next summer's World Cup in the United States.

For Arsenal, the immediate focus remains on navigating the coming weeks without their two most influential attackers. While there is relief that neither injury appears to be long-term, the timing is far from ideal. With matches against top-four rivals on the horizon, Arteta's men will need to showcase both their depth and their character to stay in touch with the league leaders.

As the Gunners prepare to travel to Merseyside, all eyes will be on how Arteta reshapes his side to meet the challenge. Whether Arsenal can cope without Saka and Odegaard could prove a defining subplot in their title ambitions this season.

Lawal backs Eagles squad to beat Rwanda, South Africa

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Former Nigerian international Dimeji Lawal has expressed strong confidence in the Super Eagles squad released for next month's decisive 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, stating that the team has enough quality to secure vital victories over Rwanda and South Africa.

Super Eagles head coach Eric Chelle unveiled a provisional 31-man list on Friday, with Nigeria set to host Rwanda in early September before travelling to Bloemfontein to face South Africa on September 9. The two fixtures are being widely described as make-or-break games for Nigeria's World Cup qualification hopes.

Currently, Nigeria sits fourth in Group C with seven points, trailing leaders South Africa, second-placed Rwanda, and the Benin Republic. With only the group winner guaranteed a place at the World Cup, the Eagles must collect maximum points to avoid leaving their fate hanging in the balance.

Speaking with Completesports.com, Lawal praised the composition of the squad, noting its balance of experience and youthful energy. He insisted that if the players rise to the occasion, they can defeat both opponents.

"I am delighted with the list of players invited to face Rwanda and South Africa for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers," said Lawal. "It's a full-package squad capable of beating any team on a good day. This is a squad full of talents, and I expect the players to do everything possible to ensure they pick the six points."

Lawal, who represented Nigeria at youth and senior levels during his career, emphasised the importance of determination and unity. "We have the quality, but quality alone does not win games. The players must show hunger, discipline, and focus. These two games are crucial if we are to qualify for the 2026 World Cup. I expect nothing but victory against Rwanda and South Africa."

The provisional squad features some of Nigeria's most reliable performers, including Victor Osimhen, Ademola



Lookman, Wilfred Ndidi, and Alex Iwobi. Rising talents such as Victor Boniface and Gift Orban have also been named, giving Chelle attacking options capable of troubling any defence on the continent. In defence, stalwarts like Calvin Bassey and Semi Ajayi are expected to provide stability, while Stanley Nwabali and Maduka Okoye will battle for the number one goalkeeping spot.

Nigeria's World Cup qualifying campaign has so far been disappointing, with draws against Zimbabwe and Lesotho and a shock defeat to Benin Republic leaving the three-time African champions in a precarious position. The upcoming matches represent an opportunity for redemption, but they also carry the weight of expectation from millions of fans.

Chelle, who took over as head coach earlier this year, is under pressure to deliver immediate results. Critics argue that anything short of six points from the two fixtures could severely damage Nigeria's chances of qualifying for the World Cup, set to be staged across the United States, Mexico, and Canada next year.

The importance of the Rwanda clash cannot be overstated, as a win would set the tone for the showdown in

Bloemfontein against South Africa. Bafana Bafana currently lead the group and boast one of the best defensive records in the qualifiers. However, Lawal believes Nigeria's attacking depth gives them the edge.

"With Osimhen, Boniface, and Lookman, we have strikers who can score at any time," he noted. "It is about taking our chances and staying solid at the back. South Africa will be tough, but they are not unbeatable."

As the countdown to the matches begins, Nigerian supporters are cautiously optimistic. The memory of missing out on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar remains fresh, and fans are desperate to see the Eagles soar back onto football's grandest stage.

For Lawal, the message is clear: "The players must know what is at stake. It's not just about qualifying; it's about pride, history, and giving Nigerians hope again. I have confidence that this squad can get the job done."

With the squad named and preparations underway, all eyes will soon turn to the pitch. Whether Chelle's men can deliver the six points that Lawal and millions of Nigerians demand will be revealed in September.

Rampage Jackson's son in wrestling attack probe

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Former UFC champion Quinton "Rampage" Jackson has expressed his concern after his son, Raja Jackson, was involved in a shocking incident at a wrestling event in California which left performer Stuart Smith, better known by his ring name "Syko Stu," in critical care.

The incident occurred during a Knokx Pro Wrestling show, where Raja, a 25-year-old professional mixed martial artist, unexpectedly intervened in a match. What was initially billed as a scripted stunt between Jackson and Smith spiraled into real violence, leading organisers to condemn the act as "irresponsible and reprehensible."

According to video footage streamed live on the platform Kick, tensions had already flared earlier in the evening when Smith, a US army veteran, struck Raja on the head outside the venue. The situation appeared to escalate once inside. During Smith's scheduled bout, Raja entered the ring unannounced, lifted the wrestler, and slammed him forcefully to the canvas. The impact appeared to render Smith unconscious.

Shockingly, Raja continued to rain blows on Smith before being pulled away by other wrestlers and staff members.

Knokx Pro Wrestling, who organised the event, issued a strongly worded statement condemning the attack. "What was supposed to be a planned and agreed upon wrestling spot turned into a selfish, irresponsible act of violence against Mr. Smith. This egregious act is reprehensible and never should have occurred," the promotion said.

They added: "In the 17 years of operation of KnokX Pro Wrestling Academy, there has never been anything as heinous take place. Our thoughts and prayers are with our brother Mr Stuart Smith (Syko Stu) as he remains a priority and we are monitoring his well-being. We also apologise to our patrons and fans."

Smith's brother later confirmed that the wrestler was "stable but in critical care" as he received treatment for his injuries. The Los Angeles Police Department has since launched an investigation into the incident, which has now garnered significant



attention across the combat sports community.

Quinton "Rampage" Jackson, who held the UFC light-heavyweight championship from 2007 to 2008 and competed in 13 UFC bouts before his retirement in 2015, broke his silence following the incident. The 46-year-old said he was "deeply concerned" and "very upset that any of this happened."

Speaking on social media, Jackson attempted to frame the confrontation as a "work gone wrong" – using professional wrestling terminology where a "work" refers to a staged or scripted fight. His comments suggest that the altercation may have initially been planned as part of the entertainment, only for Raja's actions to spiral beyond control.

Despite this explanation, critics have pointed out that the line between performance and real aggression was clearly crossed. For many fans who witnessed the shocking moment live, the attack raised broader concerns about safety at wrestling events and the blurred boundaries between scripted entertainment and genuine hostility.

Raja Jackson, who has been building a career in MMA, now faces intense scrutiny not only from law enforcement but also from the broader sporting community. His actions may jeopardise his professional career, with disciplinary measures from combat sports organisations likely to follow

depending on the outcome of investigations.

Meanwhile, Smith's health remains the central concern. Known in the independent wrestling circuit for his resilience and theatrical style, the 38-year-old veteran has earned respect from both fans and peers. Messages of support have poured in online from fellow wrestlers and supporters hoping for his full recovery.

The situation has also cast an uncomfortable spotlight on the Jackson family name. Quinton Jackson remains a celebrated but controversial figure in mixed martial arts, with a career defined by spectacular knockouts, charisma, and occasional disciplinary issues outside the octagon. This latest controversy, involving his son, risks overshadowing his legacy.

As the LAPD investigation continues, questions remain unanswered: was this truly a scripted segment that went disastrously off course, or an unprovoked act of violence with serious consequences? For now, the wrestling and MMA communities wait anxiously for updates on Smith's recovery and on whether Raja Jackson will face legal repercussions.

One thing is clear: what should have been a night of entertainment turned into a disturbing spectacle that may change the course of several careers, and left a performer fighting for his health in a California hospital.