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INEC screens 78 associations seeking registration as political parties

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has disclosed that 78 associations have submitted applications to the commission, seeking to be registered as political parties ahead of the 2027 general elections.

According to a senior management staff of the commission, who pleaded not to be named, relevant departments within the commission are already sieving the applications to determine those that meet up the commission's requirements for eligibility for registration as political parties.

He also declined to disclose the names of the organisations.

The source said, "It is after that rigorous examination of their applications that the commission would select the ones that meet up with its template for registration."

Checks revealed that the requirements that the applicants must fulfill include national spread; an existing National Executive Committee of the association that reflects the Federal Character principle; the constitution and manifesto of the association must align with the fundamental objectives and directive principle of state policy, as enshrined in the Constitution.

The name, acronym, symbol and motto of the association seeking to transform to a political party must not be toxic as to offend provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act.

According to the INEC Guidelines and Provisions for Political Parties, some of the claims to be verified by its relevant departments ahead of an association registration as party are: "The commission, in verifying the claims of an association, shall, among other things, ascertain whether: The



National Executive Committee of the association reflects the Federal Character Principle which requires that members of the National Executive Committee must come from at least 24 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory.

"The constitution and manifesto of the association comply with the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022 and these Regulations and Guidelines.

"The name, acronym, motto, or symbol does not offend the provision of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), the Electoral Act 2022 and these Regulations and Guidelines.

"The constitution and manifesto of the association conform to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principle of State Policy as contained in Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)."

The regulation further stated that

"Where, at any stage of the registration process, it is discovered that the same set of persons submitted more than one application, or that any aspect of the submission is false, such an application shall be invalidated."

NEW DAILY PRIME reports that 19 political parties are currently operating in the country.

The number swelled from 18 to 19 in July last year, when INEC had to reverse itself on the deregistration of the Youth Party, in compliance with judgement of the Supreme Court.

With the growing internal dissension within the dominant opposition parties, multiple sources revealed that gladiators within the dominant political parties have since opened discussions to form a formidable coalition against the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) in forthcoming general elections.

One of the options is to coalesce under a political party, outside the three dominant opposition parties which are now heavily fractured.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

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Eliminate terrorists, kidnappers by 2025, Tinubu orders security agencies

By Dave Oludare Oso



President Bola Tinubu has ordered security agencies to eliminate insecurity, banditry, insurgency, and all forms of criminality in the country by 2025.

The Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle, disclosed this while addressing the gathering of All Progressive Congress supporters that welcomed him in Gusau on Saturday.

Matawalle said the President, had at all the opportunities given the security agencies the marching orders and full mandate to rid the country of terrorism, banditry, vices, insurgency, and all acts of criminality by non-state actors who make life unbearable for Nigerians.

He said government was determined to provide all that was required for security operatives to

get the job done without further delay.

The minister said, “The President has declared a total war and zero-tolerance for insecurity, and he had repeatedly told us to get rid of all criminals, insurgents, separatists and non-state actors who trouble peace-loving Nigerians.

”I have gone to many countries in regard to the purchases of security gadgets, some already received and deployed to Sokoto.

“We are encouraging communities to expose informants who live either in the bush or within the community as part of their support to operatives in tackling the security issues.

“We are committed to arresting all notorious bandits and their collaborators, so intelligence information is very crucial to

succeed in our target.”

Matawalle, who was a former governor of Zamfara State urged affected communities to be bold in exposing criminals and their collaborators so that the war against insurgency can be won much quicker and easily.

The minister said that within the seven days he would be in the state, he would go round some communities to review security challenges for further action.

He commended President Tinubu for constructing the Zaria to Sokoto dual carriageway, saying it would enhance security, transport and other economic activities in the axis.

The minister enjoined citizens to continue to pray for the president to succeed in his administration.

Atiku slams FG's 2025 budget as inadequate to address Nigeria's challenges

By Friday Omosola

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar has criticised the federal government's (FG) 2025 budget, labelling it insufficient to address Nigeria's pressing economic challenges.

The New Daily Prime earlier reported that President Bola Tinubu presented an N49.7 trillion budget to the National Assembly last week, tagged the "Budget of Restoration: Securing Peace, Building Prosperity."

In a statement on his X page today, Atiku, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), expressed concerns over the budget's dependence on excessive borrowing, poor allocation priorities, and the absence of structural reforms.

He warned that the proposed budget would exacerbate Nigeria's fiscal crisis, noting that it projects revenue of N35 trillion while leaving a deficit of over N13 trillion—approximately 4 per cent of the country's GDP.

Atiku condemned the budget as a continuation of "business-as-usual" practices under the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led administration, a trend he argued has persisted since 2016.

He also criticised the government's plan to borrow over N13 trillion, comprising N9 trillion in direct loans and N4 trillion in project-specific financing.

He described this strategy as perilous, warning it would inflate public debt and expose the economy to risks, including rising interest payments and foreign exchange pressures.



The Adamawa-born politician further cited the underperformance of the 2024 budget as a red flag, urging the government to rethink its fiscal strategy.

"By the third quarter, less than 35 per cent of allocated capital expenditure for ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) had been disbursed, despite government claims of 85 per cent budget execution.

"This raises doubts about the 2025 budget's potential to deliver on its promises, particularly in the critical area of capital spending, which is essential for economic transformation", he said.

He further pointed out that a substantial portion of the 2025 budget, amounting to N15.8 trillion (33 per cent of total expenditure), has been allocated for debt servicing—nearly equivalent to the N16 trillion designated for capital expenditure (34 per cent).

Atiku emphasised that, alarmingly, debt servicing now surpasses the combined spending on vital sectors such as defence (N4.91 trillion), infrastructure (N4.06 trillion), education (N3.52

trillion), and health (N2.4 trillion).

He warned that this disproportionate allocation would stifle necessary investments, creating a vicious cycle of borrowing that threatens fiscal stability.

Atiku also criticised the government's excessive recurrent expenditure, which exceeds N14 trillion per cent of the budget), predominantly directed toward maintaining a bloated bureaucracy and inefficient public enterprises.

He lamented the administration's inability to curb wasteful spending and improve operational efficiency, resulting in constrained resources for crucial development initiatives.

"After accounting for debt servicing and recurrent costs, the allocation for capital spending—between 25% and 34% of the budget—is insufficient to address Nigeria's massive infrastructure deficit. Atiku estimated this translates to just N80,000 (approximately \$45) per capita, which is inadequate for a country grappling with slow growth and widespread infrastructural underdevelopment."

FG lifts mining ban in Zamfara

By Friday Omosola

The Federal Government has officially lifted the ban on mining exploration in Zamfara State, signaling a significant shift in its approach to economic development and security in the region.

This decision follows a comprehensive review of the security situation across the state, which has long grappled with issues of banditry and instability.

In a statement issued on Sunday by Segun Tomori, the Special Assistant on Media to the Minister of Solid Minerals, Dele Alake, the government announced that the prohibition on mining activities, which had been in place since 2019, has been rescinded.

This comes after an assessment by President Bola Tinubu and the National Security Adviser, who determined that the security environment in Zamfara has improved sufficiently to allow for the resumption of mining operations.

The ban on mining in Zamfara was first imposed in 2019 under former President Muhammadu Buhari's administration.

The measure was aimed at curbing the escalating insecurity in the state, as mining activities were believed to be fueling banditry and violent crime. Two years later, in 2021, the government declared Zamfara a "no-fly zone," further restricting movement and economic activities in an effort to combat the crisis.

However, the latest evaluation by security agencies has led to the conclusion that conditions in the state have improved, prompting the Federal Government to reverse its earlier stance.

Dele Alake emphasized the economic



potential of Zamfara, describing the state as a treasure trove of mineral resources, including gold, lithium, and copper. The resumption of mining activities is expected to not only boost the local economy but also contribute significantly to Nigeria's overall revenue generation.

The statement read, "The Federal Government has lifted the ban on mining exploration activities in Zamfara State, citing significant improvements in the security situation across the state.

"This decision underscores the government's commitment to revitalizing economic activities in a state endowed with vast mineral wealth. The proper harnessing of these resources will provide jobs, stimulate local businesses, and increase the country's foreign exchange earnings."

Industry stakeholders and experts have welcomed the decision, describing it as a long-overdue step that could unlock the state's economic potential.

Many believe that Zamfara, with its abundant gold and other valuable minerals, could emerge as a key

player in Nigeria's mining sector if the industry is properly regulated and security challenges remain under control.

Nevertheless, concerns linger about the security implications of resuming mining in the state. Critics argue that unless strict monitoring and regulatory measures are implemented, mining activities could once again attract criminal elements, undermining the progress made.

In response, Alake assured that the Federal Government has devised a robust framework to ensure that mining in Zamfara is conducted safely and transparently. He stated that collaboration with local communities, security agencies, and stakeholders in the mining sector would be a cornerstone of the new approach.

The lifting of the ban represents a crucial test of Nigeria's ability to balance economic development with security concerns, especially in resource-rich regions like Zamfara. As the state prepares to welcome mining companies back, the hope is that this move will not only rejuvenate its economy but also sustain the hard-won stability that made it possible.

2 bn jobs to disappear due to automation by 2030 – World Bank

By Alade Adisa

A report by the Global Partnership for Education, GPE, under the auspices of the World Bank, has predicted that over 2 billion jobs may be lost globally due to automation, as technology is rapidly changing the labour market and the demand for skills required to be productive.

The report was titled “Teachers and technology: What can we do to support educators to prepare students for the future?”

It added what as new technological innovations occur, including Artificial intelligence, AI, 44 percent of workers’ skills are likely to be disrupted in the next five years.

“Technology is rapidly altering the labor market and the demand for skills required to be productive. Half of today’s jobs—around 2 billion—are expected to disappear due to automation by 2030.

“As new technological innovations occur, including artificial intelligence, 44% of workers’ skills are likely to be disrupted in the next five years, underlining the need for learning to keep up with changing market demands.

“Amid these transformations, education systems shoulder a significant responsibility: equipping students with the skills they need to navigate their future, find a job, and contribute to the prosperity of their countries.”

The report, however, added that “unfortunately, education systems are



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struggling to equip teachers with the skills they need to help children navigate their future.

“Good teachers are the cornerstone to providing quality education and ensuring children are learning. Yet, two-thirds of teachers feel they do not have the skills to design and facilitate digital learning (UNICEF, 2020). Further, there is a shortage of 44 million teachers globally to meet the SDG 4 by 2030.

“This discrepancy poses risks for future economic dividends, especially considering the increasing demand for digital proficiency in job markets.”

GPE is responding to a demand for more direct support to apply technology to help transform education systems to improve access,

learning and management. This means seizing the potential of Tech4Ed for better leveraging countries’ most important assets – human capital – to expand opportunities for growth and stability.

GPE will soon launch an approach for action to identify the key challenges and opportunities in implementing technology-based distance learning solutions, and what lessons can be learned from countries’ responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the challenges faced in the classroom, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 saw an “unprecedented drop in student performance” across the OECD regions.

Boy convicted of fowl theft: 'Why I was sentenced to death'

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

When the news broke on social media on Tuesday that an only child, Segun Olowookere, has been sentenced to death in Osun State for stealing a fowl, Nigerians were as enraged as they were stunned, leading to wide criticism of Nigeria's justice system.

Even though the true or correct versions of what truly transpired were unknown, many believed, regardless, that a person should, under no circumstance be killed over the mere theft of a fowl, saying that the punishment was too harsh for the offence.

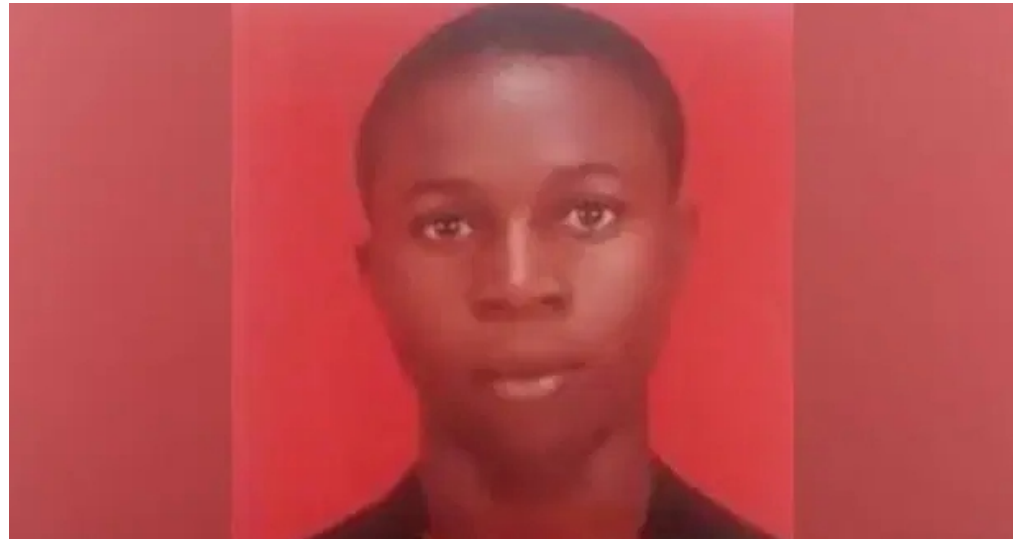
What many people did not know was that the alleged offence was committed in 2010 and that Olowookere has been in detention since then (2010), when he was barely 17 years old.

Olowookere, in an interview with PUNCH explained the actual circumstances of his sentencing, noting that the complainant in the matter was a family member of the convict.

Olowookere was arrested alongside another convict, Sunday Morakinyo, in Oyan, Odo-Otin Local Government of Osun State, in November 2010.

They were accused of robbing a policeman attached to the Divisional Police Headquarters, Okuku, Tope Balogun, of two fowls and eggs.

On January 30, 2013, the police arraigned them before Justice Jide Falola of the state High Court in Ikirun



for robbery and stealing.

Olowookere and Morakinyo were said to have conspired in November 2010 to rob one Oguntade Faramade of his fowls and eggs worth N20,000.

They were also accused of robbing Balogun Taye of his two mobile phones and attempting to rob another person, Alhaja Umani Oyewo, in her house.

According to the charge sheet, the convicts were armed with cutlasses and a Dane gun to rob one Elizabeth Dare of a gallon of vegetable oil.

Both Olowookere and Morakinyo pleaded not guilty to the charges.

However, Olowooke was said to have made a confessional statement to the police in which he admitted to committing the crime.

The state counsel, Biola Adewemimo, called six witnesses, including Alhaja Oyewo, Elizabeth Dare, Oguntade Faramade and three policemen, who testified against the convicts.

Olowookere's counsel, Ayo Omolesho, argued that he was innocent as he was not arrested at the scene of the crime, maintaining that the prosecution failed to prove the case beyond reasonable doubt.

However, Justice Falola convicted and sentenced Olowookere and Morakinyo to death (for conspiracy to commit armed robbery); life imprisonment (for robbery), and three years imprisonment (for stealing) on December 17, 2014.

By the time of the judgement, Olowookere was 21 years old.

However, Falola recommended that the state governor could decide to commute the death sentence to 10 years imprisonment, considering the age of the convicts.

Olowookere, who is now a death row inmate in one of the custodial centres in the country spoke on his ongoing travails.

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According to him, the police would have released him had his parents raised the N30,000 demanded for his bail on time.

Recounting his journey to death row, the inmate said he surrendered himself to the police when they came looking for him in April 2010.

He said, "I was at my father's shop in Oyan after returning from school. My dad and I were discussing my university admission and suddenly, we heard gunshots, and everybody ran away except my dad and a few others.

"My father was taken to a police van where there were some children. I was peeping out and could hear and see what was going on. The police asked my dad where I was and he asked them what my offence was. When they couldn't give him a satisfactory response, my father shouted at the top of his voice that I should run away because the police wanted to arrest me.

"But I was wondering what my offence was. So, I came out and went to meet them. I was detained at the police post in Oyan, and was taken to Okuku Divisional Police Headquarters the following day. I met the children who were in the police van when they came for me sitting on the ground and eating rice."

He explained that when he got to the station, the DPO asked the children if he was Segun Olowookere and they said yes.

According to him, the DPO said one of the children arrested mentioned his name as their gang leader.

He said, "The DPO told me that one of the children confessed to stealing two broilers and some crates of eggs. I met the broilers and the eggs at the station.

The children were eight in number. He told me the children said I was their gang leader, which I denied.

"The children he was talking about were around 12 and 13 years old, while I was 17 then. I told him I knew the children but I didn't have anything to do with them other than greeting them in the community."

Olowookere explained that he was tortured after his denial, noting that another suspect, Morakinyo, whom he met at the station with the children, also suffered the same fate.

"I met Sunday Morakinyo at the station and he told the police that he didn't know me, nor had anything to do with me. I don't even know where he was arrested. All the children were released but Morakinyo and I were not.

"We were seriously tortured from the first day I got to the Okuku Police Station under the supervision of the DPO. The children who allegedly committed the crime were not beaten. He repeatedly asked me to admit and confess to a crime I didn't commit.

"After some days, we were given cutlasses to cut the grass at the police station premises despite having injuries on every part of our body as a result of the torture."

According to Olowookere, the police wanted to release him on bail on the condition that his father would pay N30,000, which he did not have.

"My father could only raise N20,000 out of the N30,000 they demanded. The police rejected it and insisted on the N30,000.

"My dad left the station to look for the money. But before he returned the following day, we had been moved to the SARS office in Osogbo. The cutlasses that were given to me and

Morakinyo to cut the grass were presented to SARS as exhibits and they were told we were armed robbers.

"After 17 days in the SARS cell, we were taken to a magistrate's court and charged with robbery, and from there to the High Court, where we were sentenced to death," he added.

According to him, the poultry farm where the broilers were reportedly stolen from belonged to his uncle.

"We are from the same Ajerotutu compound in Oyan. He was summoned to a family meeting where he said I was not among those who stole the fowls, but my name was mentioned by the children who were arrested.

"He told the family that he would discontinue the case. But he later came to court to testify against me," the inmate narrated.

Olowookere denied making any statement to the police.

He dismissed the report that he was living in a six-bedroom apartment when the crime was committed, stating that he never lived alone as he was living with his parents when he was arrested by the police.

"I never wrote any statement to the police. My parents never had a flat, not to mention a six-bedroom flat. I lived with my parents until I was arrested," he stated.

Asked why his lawyer didn't object to the statement during the trial, Olowookere said, "I didn't know anything, but I am sure I didn't write any statement."

The convict claimed that the second convict, Morakinyo, suffered mental illness while in detention.

Gov Makinde denies land grabbing accusations, says acquisitions lawful

By Olamilekan Botti

Oyo State governor, Seyi Makinde, has addressed allegations of land grabbing linked to the Circular Road project and other developmental initiatives across the state.

Speaking to journalists in Ibadan on Sunday, Makinde dismissed the claims as baseless, attributing them to misinformation and misunderstanding of his administration's intentions.

Responding to growing public concern, the governor clarified the rationale behind the state's ongoing infrastructural expansion, emphasizing his commitment to transparent governance and sustainable development.

He highlighted that the accusations were unfounded and likely fueled by those resistant to change or lacking a full understanding of the government's vision.

Makinde said, "Take the Circular Road project, for example. Some people are describing me as a land grabber. Let me make it clear: I am not a land grabber. I am a firm believer in the idea that one cannot achieve different results by doing the same thing repeatedly. Our leaders in the past did their best, but we must approach development differently to move Oyo State forward."

Makinde argued that the ongoing projects, including the Circular Road, were designed to open up previously inaccessible areas, attract investment, and boost economic growth.

He stated that these developments were part of his administration's larger agenda to modernize the state and improve the quality of life for its residents.



The Circular Road project, which has been a focal point of the allegations, is a major infrastructural undertaking aimed at easing traffic congestion and facilitating trade across Oyo State. Critics have accused the government of acquiring land through questionable means, but Makinde insists that all acquisitions have been lawful and guided by the state's best interests.

"Every action we have taken is in line with the law," the governor stressed. "Our goal is to make Oyo State a hub of economic activity. The lands in question are being used to create infrastructure that will benefit generations to come, not for personal enrichment."

Makinde also took the opportunity to call for public cooperation and trust in the government's vision. He noted that while change often comes with resistance, it is necessary for progress. He assured residents that the administration was working to ensure that all affected parties are compensated fairly and that the projects will ultimately benefit everyone in the state.

"It is easy to misunderstand intentions when faced with change," Makinde

said. "I urge the people of Oyo to look at the bigger picture and see the long-term benefits these projects will bring to our state. We are committed to creating a legacy of growth, not division."

Observers have pointed out that Oyo State has witnessed significant infrastructural progress under Makinde's administration, including improvements in road networks, healthcare, and education. However, as with any ambitious development agenda, the projects have not been without controversy.

Makinde concluded by reaffirming his administration's dedication to transparency and accountability. "We will continue to listen to the people and address their concerns," he said. "But let it be clear: we are here to build, not to take."

The governor's remarks have sparked a broader conversation about land use policies and the balance between development and community rights in Oyo State. As the projects move forward, many are watching closely to see how the administration navigates these challenges.

Lagos – Calabar Coastal Highway for commissioning May 2025 – Umahi

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Minister of Works, Senator David Umahi, has announced that the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway is being constructed with safety and economic benefits in mind, noting that the first 20 kilometers will be set for commissioning by President Bola Tinubu in May 2025.

Confirming that the contractor is on course to complete the initial phase by the deadline, the minister told journalists on Saturday that the 10-lane road, comprising six major and four service lanes, will include 24-hour lighting, security posts, medical facilities, and other infrastructure to enhance its economic value.

Umahi added that the Federal Government is acquiring land along the corridor to support infrastructure development aimed at generating returns on investment beyond tolling.

Umahi said: “We are going to be reviewing this contract to accommodate what is not there. There are places like that Landmark where we have to build a retaining wall.

“We want to make sure that we enhance economic activities along the corridor, travel time at night, secure lives and properties of our people.”

Speaking on the commissioning date, the Minister said: “Here in section one of the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, we are very sure that we will commission the first 20 kilometers and 10 kilometers in section two.”



His words: “The good thing is that in this first session of the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway, Hi-Tech has divided the entire 47 by six lanes into five sessions and every session is doing a similar work.

“This is what gave us the conviction to say that we can complete session one by May 2025.

“That is why we divide the completion into two phases, the section one, we will be commissioning the first 20 kilometers before the end of May 2025 even though another 10 kilometers would have been done by the end of the job.

“But continuously, we have 20 kilometers to commission and we will have the road continuously sand filled totally waiting settlement and of course the completion of the remaining 17 kilometers before the end of next year.

“And of course, we will also by May

2025, would be able to complete 10 kilometers in session two, which is 25 kilometers, which is going to stop at the border between Lagos and Ogun states.

“We have been written by the NNPC about their gas pipeline along the Ondo and Ogun axis. So we are doing a meeting with the to look at it.

“The people whose properties are involved, we have fully paid them compensation. The last time I saw the papers, we had a total of N18 billion compensation to pay.

“Generally, we have directed the controllers to concentrate on a number of projects, at least a minimum of five projects must be commissioned.

“And if we have funding challenges, we have decided to do commissioning in sections. Some of our roads like the Sokoto-Zamfara-Kastina-Kaduna Highway is a total of 375 kilometers by two, which is 750 kilometers.

“So we may not have all the money in 2025 to complete, there are four sections and we are going to be completing a minimum of 50 per cent of that road.

“Other roads we are going to give adequate attention is the Kano-Kastina Road and the Northern bypass. We are going to give some of these projects a very big push. So, we have decided to concentrate about five projects per zone.”

TikToker, Seaking arrested for asking Nigerians to attack police

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Popular TikToker Seaking has been arrested by policemen after he was accused of inciting violence against the Nigerian Police.

Seaking, who was taken into custody on Saturday, had posted a video shortly before his arrest, in which he criticized President Bola Tinubu, Lagos State governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kayode Egbetokun.

In another video, he called on Nigerian youths to unleash violence on the police whenever they encountered them should the officers “pass their boundaries.”

It was his subsequent call for violence against the police, as gathered, that



prompted his arrest.

A video circulating on social media shows Seaking being questioned by

security personnel at an undisclosed location.

Following Seaking's arrest, Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Benjamin Hundeyin, responded to human rights lawyer Inibehe Effiong, who had called for information regarding Seaking's whereabouts.

Effiong had written, “Anyone with useful information about his family or the police station he was taken to should kindly contact me.”

In a reply to Effiong, Hundeyin questioned whether inciting violence was not a crime, writing, “Please enlighten us @InibeheEffiong. Is it a crime or not to incite members of the public to violence/anarchy?”

Anambra stampede's death toll rises to 22

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Nigeria Police have confirmed that the death toll in the unfortunate stampede incident in Okija, Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State has risen to 22.

The tragedy occurred on Saturday at the scene of a palliative distribution organised by a philanthropist in Okija.

Police spokesman, SP Tochukwu Ikenga, who gave an update on the development in a statement on Sunday in Onitsha, said that the Commissioner of Police, CP Nnaghe Itam, visited the hospital where the victims of the tragic stampede are receiving treatment.

He said that Itam sympathised with the families and friends of the deceased while he wished those injured quick recovery.

He said an investigation into the unfortunate event was ongoing, adding that the command remains dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of the people during and after the festive period.

Similarly, 10 people died in the federal capital territory, Abuja, during a church-organized charity event.

The two incidents happened only days after another stampede in Ibadan, Oyo State, in which several children were killed.

Africa's most populous country is seeing a growing trend by local organizations, churches and individuals to organize charity events ahead of Christmas to ease economic hardship caused by a cost-of-living crisis.



The stampedes have prompted growing calls for authorities to enforce safety measures at such events. Nigerian police also mandated that organizers obtain prior permission.

Dangote hails Tinubu on naira-for-crude swap deal impact

By Dave Oludare Oso

Foremost entrepreneur and President of the Dangote Industries Limited, Aliko Dangote has commended President Bola Tinubu for the positive impact of the naira for crude swap deal on the Nigerian economy, which has led to reduction in prices of petroleum products in the country.

In his statement on his X platform on Saturday, the business magnate wrote, "To provide succour to Nigerians, Dangote recently reduced the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) from N970 to N899.50 at its refinery loading gantry and provided generous credit terms to marketers.

"To ensure that this price reduction gets to the end consumer, we have signed a partnership with MRS to sell petrol from its retail outlets nationwide at N935 per litre.

"This price has already commenced in Lagos, and it will be offered nationwide from Monday."

In the statement, he called on other oil marketers such as the NNPC Retail and all other marketers, "to work with us to ensure that Nigerians enjoy high-quality petrol at



discounted prices."

According to him, "The Dangote Refinery is for the benefit of Nigeria and Nigerians. We will therefore continue to work with various value chain players to deliver high quality petrol at cheaper prices. Our aim is for all Nigerians to have ready access to high quality petroleum products that are good for their vehicles, good for their health, and good for their pockets.

"Recall that in September, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) under the leadership of

Mr. President approved the sale of crude to local refineries in Naira and corresponding purchase of petroleum products in Naira.

"The move, which commenced on October 1, led to reduced pressure on the dollar and ensured the stability of the local currency."

Dangote thanked Nigerians for their unwavering support and the government for creating an enabling environment for the domestic refining industry.

Kwara prioritises works, education in N540.3bn 2025 budget

By Friday Omosola

Kwara State Governor Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq has presented the 2025 budget proposal valued at N540.37 billion to the State House of Assembly.

In a statement yesterday, Rafiu Ajakaye, the governor's Chief Press Secretary said he emphasised his administration's commitment to completing ongoing projects, initiating new ones, and supporting vulnerable populations.

The budget tagged the "Budget of Economic Stability and Sustained Prosperity," allocates 62.1 per cent to capital expenditure and 37.9 per cent to recurrent costs, with a focus on infrastructure development, social protection, and economic growth across the state.

The governor outlined key projects, including the construction of 250 mass housing units and inner roads in the Kwara Smart City, the completion of the International Conference Centre, Innovation Hub, Patigi Motel, Kwara Hotel, and several road projects, and the reconstruction of stadia in Offa and Lafiagi.

He also announced plans to begin work on a multi-story CourtHouse and the upgrade of the Metropolitan Square.

Kwara
Kwara State Governor Abdulrahman Abdulrazaq has presenting the 2025 budget proposal valued at N540.37 billion to the State House of Assembly. The Ministry of Works and Transport received 17.51 per cent of the budget to further road construction and maintenance efforts across the state.

The social sector was allocated 32.5 per cent, focusing on youth and women empowerment and poverty alleviation initiatives.

Education received 16.2 per cent, with



plans to operationalize the new university of education and strengthen existing institutions, while the health sector was allocated 10.56 per cent to improve medical services statewide.

Governor Abdulrazaq also highlighted efforts to strengthen mechanized agriculture with the procurement of modern equipment.

In reviewing the administration's achievements in 2024, the governor noted that 171,649 farmers benefited from irrigation systems and N2.2 billion worth of farm inputs, while funding was provided for 180,920 candidates across major exams, including WAEC and NECO.

READ ALSO: Kwara announces temporary closure of 'struggling' HTSL

He said over 70,000 vulnerable people benefited from social protection programs, including those affected by the urban renewal initiative, and 15,000 indigent residents received free medical care.

The governor celebrated the urban renewal programme's success in transforming Ilorin into a modern city

and noted a significant reduction in the state's debt profile from N109.16 billion in December 2023 to N58.87 billion by the third quarter of 2024.

Governor Abdulrazaq appreciated stakeholders for their support and assured them that the 2025 budget stands on solid economic projections, including an oil price benchmark of \$75 per barrel, daily oil production of 2.06 million barrels, and a GDP growth rate of 6.4 per cent.

He outlined the funding sources as FAAC receipts, which constitute 48.1 per cent, and internally generated revenue, capital receipts, and an opening balance of N62 billion, making up 51.9 per cent.

The governor emphasised that the budget is not just a ritual but reflects a commitment to delivering on promises as resources permit.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the House, Yakubu Danladi-Salihi, commended the governor's transparency, accountability, and commitment to completing legacy projects, promising a thorough and swift review of the budget proposal.

Remi Tinubu donates N95m, 22,800 bags of rice to northern Christians

By Dave Oludare Oso

The wife of the president, Senator Oluremi Tinubu on Saturday donated 22,800 bags of rice as a form of palliatives to vulnerable Christians in the North ahead of Christmas celebration.

The First Lady also provided N5 million for each of the 19 states for ease of transportation of the items.

With the way it is, each of the states will get 1,200 bags of rice.

The First Lady made the donations at an event attended by Governors Dikko Radda (Katsina); Hyacinth Alia (Benue); Mai Mala Buni (Yobe) and the host Uba Sani (Kaduna) in Kaduna.

Commending the Northern Christian Political Forum for their warm reception, Tinubu recalled a similar initiative she and the Vice President's wife, Hajiya Nana Shettima undertook in Imo State.

She said, "I thank you for believing in this journey even when political challenges arose. We, as Christians know that ingratitude is a great sin. When Jesus healed the 10 lepers, only one returned to give thanks, and Jesus asked, 'Where are the other nine?'"

The First Lady also acknowledged several key figures, including the wife of the Vice President, the wife of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hajiya Fatima Abbas; the wife of the Deputy Senate President, Hajiya Miriam Barau; the Minister of Agriculture Sen. Abubakar Kyari and his wife; the wife of the Minister of Transport; wife of Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Mrs. Rachel Owan-



Enoh and the wife of the Inspector-General of Police, Mrs. Elizabeth Egbetokun.

Reacting, Governor Sani described the First Lady as a caring and compassionate mother of the nation.

He praised her for her dedication to humanity, highlighting her social intervention programmes during her time as Lagos State's First Lady and her impactful legislative work in the 9th Senate.

"Her life is one devoted to the service of humanity. Her generosity knows no bounds," he said.

The governor added that as First Lady of Nigeria, Senator Tinubu has continued her efforts to uplift the underprivileged through initiatives like the Renewed Hope Schemes for the Elderly and Women.

He also noted that the distribution of

palliatives aligns with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's commitment to alleviating hardship.

"Our dear President is a listening leader who hears the cries of the people and takes steps to address economic challenges. The future looks bright," he added.

Governor Sani highlighted his administration's efforts to support the vulnerable through financial inclusion programmes, social intervention initiatives, and the Kaduna Peace Model, which has become a reference point for conflict resolution in other states.

He urged the people of Kaduna State to use the festive season to foster peace and unity, adding, "Our dear state has bounced back to reckoning. Let us consolidate the prevailing peaceful atmosphere."

Ondo issues order to prevent stampedes

By Friday Omosola

To check the growing cases of tragic stampedes in Abuja, Anambra and Oyo, the Ondo State Government has issued crowd control directives aimed at preventing similar incidents within its jurisdiction.

These guidelines, announced by the State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Olukayode Ajulo, outline measures to ensure public safety during events and gatherings.

Stampede during events such as funfairs and palliative distributions have recently claimed lives in Oyo, Anambra and Abuja, heightening concerns over crowd management.

In a statement issued by Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa's Chief Press Secretary, Ebenezer Adeniyani, the government unveiled "Directive No. 01-1224", a document designed to regulate public gatherings and safeguard lives and property.

Ajulo emphasised that the new measures, grounded in the Nigerian Constitution and state laws, aim to balance public safety with citizens' rights to peaceful assembly.

The directives cover critical areas such as risk assessments, notification requirements for organisers, the deployment of security personnel, and the use of technology for real-time crowd monitoring.

Ajulo stated that law enforcement agencies must conduct thorough risk assessments for planned gatherings, taking into account attendance, location, and the potential for unrest.

More so, the Commissioner added that event organisers are required to



notify local authorities of their plans, providing details such as the event's date, time, venue, and expected number of attendees.

Furthermore, Ajulo noted that adequate security personnel must be deployed to maintain order and respond to incidents, with crowd management teams overseeing event safety.

He added that clear communication protocols must be established between organisers and law enforcement to enable swift responses to emergencies.

Similarly, Ajulo noted that surveillance tools, including drones and CCTV cameras, are encouraged for real-time monitoring.

"Public awareness campaigns will educate citizens about safety protocols and promote peaceful assembly", said the commissioner.

Moreover, he said events with over

300 participants must have medical teams, ambulances, and emergency response personnel on-site.

"Organisers are also required to provide drinking water, mobile toilets, and sanitation teams to ensure comfort and hygiene. Venues must have multiple access points to facilitate smooth crowd movement", he added.

More so, he added that all directives must comply with existing laws, and any violations will result in legal action.

Ajulo highlighted the importance of collaboration between event organisers, law enforcement, and local authorities.

He urged all stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the directives and ensure compliance to avoid legal repercussions.

International oil cabal blackmailing Tompolo, Kyari, Otuaro – Ijaw Youths

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Ijaw Youths Network (IYN) has raised the alarm over the intensified blackmail of huge international proportion against the Chairman of Tantita Security Services, High Chief Government Ekpemupolo, the Group Chief Executive Officer of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation Limited, Mr Mele Kyari, and the Chairman of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, Dr Dennis Otuaro.

The IYN, in a statement by its President, Frank Ebikabo, and the Secretary, Federal Ebiaridor, on Sunday called attention to what they call "a well-funded blackmail by a ruthless cabal of oil thieves who are uncomfortable with gains of the campaign against oil theft being spearheaded by Tantita Security Services and the security outfits."

The IYN leadership was reacting to a video of a sponsored protest in front of the UN headquarters in New York, United States by a rogue group making outright false criminal allegations against Tompolo, Kyari and Otuaro.

The IYN called on the National Security Adviser, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, and others entrusted with the nation's security to ensure a thorough investigation of those behind the blackmail and bring them to justice in the interest of national security.

Ebikabo and Ebiaridor also urged President Bola Tinubu to be resolute in sustaining the reversal of the evils of oil theft against Nigeria and her citizens.

The IYN stressed that oil thieves and their operatives who are armed with billions of ill-gotten resources are funding this persistent attack on the Tompolo, Kyari and Otuaro.



The duo insisted that "a virulent cabal of oil thieves with a vast network across international boundaries is on the rampage to orchestrate this campaign which attacks the economy of the country and its leadership."

The IYN stated further that the oil thieves are pulling resources together with their international collaborators to undermine the President, national security and the nation's economy.

The group in the statement said, "It is not unexpected that the deadly cabal that almost ruined the economy of the country by stealing billions of petro dollars from the country would not give up their lucrative crime without a fight."

The IYN said that the achievement of the Tinubu administration, which has been able to attain 1.8 million barrels of crude oil per day, after serious efforts into the battle against oil thieves should be protected from this influential, deadly gang.

The IYN stated that, "Some of those fighting Tompolo, Kyari and Otuaro are those who pressed to be appointed Administrator of the Presidential Amnesty Programme without success."

The Ijaw youth group said the antecedents of Otuaro and his capacity to deepen consultations and sustenance of peace in the Niger Delta might be hurting those behind the campaign of calumny in the region.

The group called on all sister organizations in the Niger Delta to support the campaign against oil theft, Tantita Security Service Limited, the NNPC and the PAP leadership.

The statement added, "We are shocked at the extent to which this deadly cabal of oil thieves can go to orchestrate a campaign of calumny against hardworking people carrying out their lawful responsibilities in the Niger Delta.

"Of course, nobody expects a group of extremely wealthy, connected and influential people who has been involved in oil theft, stealing billions for years to go away without resistance.

"The show of shame in front of the UN headquarters is a most reprehensible attack on the country image, the President, national security and our economy."

Orji Kalu canvasses support for Tinubu

By Emmanuel Nwagboniwe

In a show of solidarity, Senator Orji Uzor Kalu, yesterday called on Nigerians to support the President Bola Tinubu -led administration, echoing that he was a caring President

Kalu, the former governor of Abia State who also represents Abia North in Senate, made the plea in a Facebook post yesterday after his visit to Tinubu's residence in Lagos.

Kalu wrote: "I had to pay my friend and brother of the class of 1999 Governors, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu GCFR, a friendly private visit to commend his courageous



strides in sailing the course of the nation and also give him the benefit

of an independent assessment of the areas that require his urgent attention.

"He was so appreciative of the thoughtfulness of the visit and promised that I would, within a short while, see improvements on the issues I pointed out to him.

"Honestly, one thing I want Nigerians to know and appreciate, is the fact that we have a listening President, who is running a responsive and pragmatic Government and hence, the need to be supported by all well meaning Nigerians."

Ex-Akwa Ibom gov, Godwin Abbe dies at 74

By Dave Oludare Oso

General Godwin Abbe, a former Minister of Defence and Interior during the administration of late President Umaru Yar'Adua, has died at the age of 74.

The retired Major General passed away on Saturday in Abuja after a prolonged illness.

Abbe, who was born on January 10, 1949, was set to celebrate his 75th birthday in 2025. A distinguished military officer and politician, he served as the military governor of Akwa Ibom State (1988-1990) and Rivers State (1990-1992).

An alumnus of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, where he earned a Postgraduate Diploma in International Relations, Abbe also trained at prestigious institutions including the United States Army Infantry School, Fort Benning; Ghana Armed Forces Staff College;



and the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru.

During his military career, he held key positions such as General Officer Commanding (GOC), 2 Division of the Nigerian Army; Commander of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC); and Commander at the National War College. He retired from the

Nigerian Army in 1999 with the rank of Major General.

Abbe, a member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), served as Nigeria's Minister of Defence from 2007 to 2009 and as Minister of Interior during the same administration.

Customs auctions seized petrol at N630/litre in Oyo

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) has auctioned about 20,000 litres of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), commonly known as petrol, at N630 per litre in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital.

The Service seized the product from smugglers, and sold them to the public at Afoo Filling Station, Masfala area of the ancient city on Saturday.

Comptroller Hussein Ejibunu, the National Coordinator of Operation Whirlwind, who flagged off the sale, revealed that the tanker carrying the petrol was seized alongside 30 kegs containing 25 litres each during a smuggling attempt.

The Comptroller said the total duty-paid value of the seized 30,750 liters was estimated at N42.75 million.

According to him, the auction followed a court condemnation order after the items remained unclaimed. He noted that the Comptroller General of Customs, Bashiru Adeniyi, directed the sale to improve public access to fuel during the festive season.

Comptroller Ejibunu explained the government's commitment to ensuring that citizens receive



their entitlements promptly, highlighting that auctioning seized goods to Nigerians aligns with government policy.

He cautioned smugglers to abandon their illegal activities, warning that offenders would face prosecution.

Comptroller Ejibunu reflected on a similar operation two months earlier, noting that seized petrol was sold to the public in Yola, Adamawa State at the regulated price. Specifically, 25-litre kegs of petrol were auctioned at N10,000 each.

He added that legal proceedings against a suspect apprehended during that

operation were already underway.

Ejibunu urged Nigerians to support the Nigeria Customs Service by providing information on economic saboteurs, pledging the agency's dedication to curbing smuggling under the directive of the Comptroller General.

The Comptroller further explained that there is an ongoing collaboration between the Oyo/Osun Area Command and the Commander of Operation Whirlwind to enhance security, strengthen the economy, and deter smuggling.

Agency charges Nigerians on HIV/AIDS status

By Helen Okechukwu

A call has been made by the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) to Nigerians to always be conscious of their Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) status.

The NACA made the appeal in a statement signed by its the Director General, Dr. Temitope Ilori.

According to agency's Head of Public Relations and Protocol, Toyin Aderibigbe, Ilori advised citizens to visit the nearest health facility located in their communities, adding that the festive seasons were the right period to take such action.

Ilori also charged members of the public to prioritise their health and protect others via safe sex or ensure abstinence, stating that HIV remains a significant public health concern.



“We urge everyone to take advantage of the free and confidential HIV testing services available across the country.

The NACA's chief explained that early detection of aids helps improving people's living conditions.

She noted that there is access to

educational materials to prevent contacting the virus.

She stressed the agency's commitment and goal in reducing the spread of HIV and declaring Nigeria AIDS-free.



Blockbuster films from movie giants put Nollywood box-office in overdrive

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Movie buffs are relishing the festive season, with multiple top-notch Nollywood films from A-class producers and super thespians competing for nationwide attention in cinemas.

NEW DAILY PRIME reports that with so many big-budget films to choose from at the cinemas, there can be no dull moment for movie buffs all through the holidays.

First to open the floor was the big masquerade, Funke Akindele, one of Nollywood's very best, who recently released the highly anticipated "Everybody Loves Jenifa."

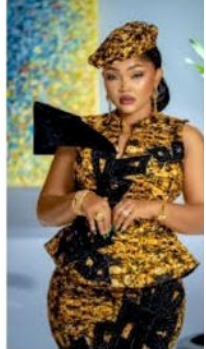
The "Jenifa" franchise, which debuted in 2008, has become a household name, and fans are in the cinema to see what is in store for the lovable and quirky Jenifa.

Following in quick succession were Mercy Aigbe and Toyin Abraham, who both hit the cinemas in a matter of days.

Aigbe, a veteran producer, is making waves with her latest film, "Thin Line", which is also currently showing in cinemas.

Delectable and clownish actress, Toyin Abraham has also released the fifth instalment of her hit comedy franchise, "Alakada", titled "Alakada Bad and Boujee."

Abraham's "Alakada" franchise has become a staple of Nollywood comedy, and fans are eager to see what is new and exciting in this latest instalment.



However, that is not all, as many other movies are also vying for a place of pride at the box office.

Popular comedian-turned filmmaker, AY, originally named Ayo Makun's new film "The Waiter", is also currently showing in cinemas.

"The Waiter" features a star-studded cast, including Regina Daniels, Deyemi, Williams Uchemba, and promises to deliver plenty of laughs and entertainment.

Also, the arguably best producer in town, Jade Osiberu is showcasing "Christmas in Lagos", a holiday romance movie set against the backdrop of Lagos' vibrant 30th December culture, at the cinemas.

This heartwarming film is perfect for the festive season and promises to leave audiences feeling uplifted and inspired.

"Seven Doors", produced by 'Jagun Jagun' actor, Femi Adebayo, would keep those who prefer to stay home and avoid the stress of going to the cinema, enthralled on Netflix.

'Seven Doors' parades a star-studded cast featuring the likes of Chioma Akpotha, Gabriel Afolayan and Jide Kosoko, among others.

According to Femi Adebayo, "Seven Doors" is a love letter to Nigerian culture, and promises to deliver a captivating and unforgettable viewing experience.

For an industry that has overtaken America's Hollywood to become the second biggest film industry in the world, behind only India's Bollywood, the release of these films is a testament to the growth and development of the Nollywood film industry, which continues to produce high-quality content that entertains and inspires audiences nationwide.

Lateef Adedimeji celebrates wife on their 3rd wedding anniversary

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Nollywood actor, Lateef Adedimeji and his wife, Mo Bimpe (Adebimpe Adedimeji) are celebrating a remarkable milestone in their relationship as they mark their 3rd wedding anniversary.

To honour the special occasion, Lateef Adedimeji took to Instagram to share a heartfelt tribute, accompanied by stunning photos of the couple.

In his post, the actor expressed profound gratitude to his wife, recognizing her as a pillar of strength and motivation in his life. He thanked her for her unwavering support, love, and companionship, emphasizing the transformative impact she has had on him.

The couple's celebration of love and partnership has warmed the hearts of fans and followers, who have flooded the comment section with congratulatory messages and good wishes for their continued happiness.

He wrote:

“The most amazing woman ever @mo_bimpe my love, my baby, my best friend, you practically see me before I see myself. Thank you for all you do, and thank you for always pushing me to get it done. When it's tough, I just need to look back to see you are there,



and I am good to go.

Thank you for all you do, thank you for always making me see who I am, thank you for loving me wholeheartedly, thank you for making life easy.

Even when it's tough, knowing you are there just brings peace. Adebimpe Omo oba, Ade aya Ade, my obim.

It's even how you will wake me up with Iya PÈJÙ costume for me when ideas pop up in your head.

Life gets better each day with you.

It's a double celebration you know. May Allah never forsake us.

I love you, Rahmah, and I will

always be here.

Happy wedding Anniversary my love.”

The actor had assured his wife, Mo Bimpe on their 3rd ‘tradiversary’ of his loyalty.

On Instagram, Adedimeji Lateef shared a video clip from their 2021 pre-wedding photoshoot, accompanied by a love note. The actor called his wife many sweet names, thanking her for being there and assuring her things can only get better.

NEW DAILY PRIME reports that the celebrity Nollywood couple got married in Ikeja, Lagos on December 22, 2021.

Trump vows to 'stop transgender lunacy' on 1st day in office

By Dave Oludare Oso

Incoming US President, Donald Trump has vowed to “stop the transgender lunacy” on day one of his presidency, in fulfillment of his campaign pledges against LGBTQ rights.

Trump’s declaration on Sunday comes as Republicans are set to control both chambers of Congress and the White House continue their push against transgender rights.

“I will sign executive orders to end child sexual mutilation, get transgender out of the military and out of our elementary schools and middle schools and high schools,” the president-elect said at an event for young conservatives in Phoenix, Arizona on Sunday.

He also vowed to “keep men out of women’s sports,” adding that “it will be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female.”

Speaking to the AmericaFest conference in one of the battleground states he carried in the November election, Trump further promised tough measures against “migrant crime” and doubled down on his vows to restore US control of the Panama Canal.

Transgender issues have roiled US politics in recent years, as Democratic- and Republican-controlled states have moved in opposite directions on policy such as medical treatment and what books on the topic are allowed in public or school libraries.

Last week, when the US Congress approved its annual defense budget, it included a provision to block funding of some gender-affirming care for the transgender children of service members.



In his speech Sunday, which amounted to something of a victory lap, Trump made expansive promises for his second term — and drew a dark picture of the four years preceding it, under President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the latter of whom he defeated in the 2024 election.

Day 1 promises

During his campaign, Trump and his supporters spent nearly \$60 million on eight anti-trans network-TV ads, one of them in Spanish, between Sept. 19 and Nov. 1, according to AdImpact, a firm that tracks political ad spending.

He has supported a number of policies targeting transgender people, who make up less than 1% of adults in the U.S. At campaign rallies over the summer, he promised to take at least two actions regarding the trans community on his first day in office: undo Biden administration Title IX protections that allowed trans students to use the school bathrooms that align with their gender identities, and cut

federal funding for schools “pushing critical race theory, transgender insanity and other inappropriate racial, sexual or political content onto the lives of our children.”

Trump also promised to reinstate a policy enacted during his first term that barred trans people from enlisting in the military and to institute a new policy barring transition-related care for minors nationwide.

The agenda on his website says he would declare that any hospital or clinician that provides transgender care to minors would “no longer meet federal health and safety standards for Medicaid and Medicare — and will be terminated from the program immediately.”

The president-elect’s agenda also includes issuing guidance to federal agencies to define sex only as one’s sex assigned at birth, which would make it harder for trans people to change the gender markers on federal documents such as passports.

Philippine arrest over 57,000 in anti-drug crack-down

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Philippine National Police (PNP) on Sunday said it arrested 57,129 people and seized illicit drugs worth 20.7 billion pesos (roughly 352 million U.S. dollars) on the black market during its anti-drug operations conducted from Jan. 1 to Dec. 15, 2024.

PNP Chief General Rommel Francisco Marbil said in a statement that 46,821 anti-drug operations were conducted by various PNP units nationwide.

Marbil said the seized illegal drugs included methamphetamine hydrochloride (locally known as shabu), marijuana, ecstasy, cocaine, ketamine, and kush, “reflecting the diverse range of narcotics targeted by the PNP’s comprehensive anti-illegal



drugs operation.”

The PNP’s anti-drug campaign “has

proven that we can dismantle drug syndicates without unnecessary loss of life,” Marbil said.

Two-thirds of French already unhappy with new PM – Poll

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

France’s new Prime Minister, Francois Bayrou, who is still scrambling to name his government before Christmas, faced a fresh challenge on Dec 22 – a historically low poll rating.

AFP reports that even before he has properly started his job, a new poll carried out by Ifop for the French Weekly Journal du Dimanche found 66 percent of respondents were unhappy with his performance.

Only 34 percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their new head of government.

Going back decades to 1959, the pollster said it had not seen such a low rating for a prime minister getting



started in the job.

They questioned 2,004 people representative of the French population between Dec 11 and 18.

Bayrou is the sixth prime minister of President Emmanuel Macron’s mandate, and the fourth of 2024. Each has served for a shorter period than the last one.

Bayrou’s predecessor Michel Barnier was France’s shortest-serving premier, lasting only three months.

Appointed on Dec 13, Bayrou has yet to submit his Cabinet choices to Macron.

But he told France 2 television on Dec 20 that he hoped his new team would be finalized over the weekend or “in any case before Christmas.”

Missing Russian An-2 plane found, all aboard alive

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The missing An-2 light aircraft, which disappeared in Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula has been found with all three people aboard alive, local authorities said on Sunday.

All three individuals on board, including two crew members and one passenger, have been evacuated by a Mi-8 helicopter from Kamchatka rescue teams and are being transported to Milkovskaya District Hospital, where their health conditions will be assessed, said the regional office of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations.

According to the Russian Federal Air Transport Agency, the missing plane and people were found near Mount Tundrovaya on early Sunday.

The plane, which was en route from Milkovo to Ossora, failed to arrive at its destination on Thursday, prompting an intensive search and rescue operation.

Earlier December 19, an An-2 aircraft operated by Fair Avia went missing over Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, local authorities said.

“At 4:45 a.m. Moscow time (0145 GMT), a distress signal was detected from the An-2 aircraft, tail number 33555, at an altitude



of 700 metres. The plane was en route from Milkovo to Ossora,” Sergei Lebedev, regional emergency minister, said on social media.

The plane with three crew members aboard presumably disappeared approximately 80 km south-southeast of the Klyuchi village. Emergency response efforts are underway.

An-2 is a single-engine plane widely used in Russia's remote areas.

Earlier on July 16, 2021, all 19 people on board a Russian Antonov An-28 passenger plane that vanished from radars in Siberia survived after the aircraft made a hard landing, the

emergencies ministry said.

The aircraft — operated by SiLA, a small airline offering regional flights in Siberia — went missing while flying from the town of Kedrovoy to the city of Tomsk.

But the aircraft was located after helicopters were dispatched to search for it.

The ministry said that all 19 people on board had survived and were now being evacuated from the site.

Russian aviation safety standards have improved in recent years but accidents, especially involving ageing planes in far-flung regions, are not uncommon.

Pope calls Gaza airstrikes 'cruelty' after Israeli Minister's criticism

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Pope Francis on Saturday again condemned Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, a day after an Israeli government minister publicly denounced the pontiff for suggesting the global community should study whether the military offensive there constitutes a genocide of the Palestinian people.

Francis opened his annual Christmas address to the Catholic cardinals who lead the Vatican's various departments with what appeared to be a reference to Israeli airstrikes on Friday that killed at least 25 Palestinians in Gaza.

"Yesterday, children were bombed," said the pope. "This is cruelty. This is not war. I wanted to say this because it touches the heart."

The pope, as leader of the 1.4-billion-member Roman Catholic Church, is usually careful about taking sides in conflicts, but he has recently been more outspoken about Israel's military campaign against Palestinian militant group Hamas.

In book excerpts published last month, the pontiff said some international experts said that "what is happening in Gaza has the characteristics of a genocide."

Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs, Amichai Chikli sharply criticised those comments in an unusual open letter published by Italian newspaper *Il Foglio* on Friday. Chikli said the pope's remarks amounted to a "trivialisation" of the term genocide.

Israel's foreign ministry said that Israel was defending itself against the cruelty exemplified by Hamas



militants "hiding behind children while trying to murder Israeli children," holding 100 hostages and abusing them.

"Unfortunately, the Pope has chosen to ignore all of this," the ministry said, adding that the "death of any innocent person in a war is a tragedy."

"Israel makes extraordinary efforts to prevent harm to innocents, while Hamas makes extraordinary efforts to increase harm to Palestinian civilians," the ministry said.

Francis also said on Saturday that the Catholic bishop of Jerusalem, known as a patriarch, had tried to enter the Gaza Strip on Friday to visit Catholics there, but was denied entry.

The patriarch's office told Reuters it was not able to comment on the pope's remarks about the patriarch being denied entry.

The Israeli military said on Saturday the patriarch's entry had been approved and he would enter Gaza on Sunday, barring any major security issues. Aid from the patriarch's office entered last week, the military said.

Israel allows clerics to enter Gaza and "works in cooperation with the Christian community to make it easier for the Christian population that remains in the Gaza Strip – including coordinating its removal from the Gaza Strip to a third country," a statement from the military said.

The war began when Hamas-led Palestinian militants attacked southern Israeli communities on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking more than 250 hostages back to Gaza, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel's retaliatory campaign, which it says is aimed at eliminating Hamas, has killed more than 45,000 people, mostly civilians, according to authorities in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. The campaign has displaced nearly the entire population and left much of the enclave in ruins.

Israel says that at least a third of the dead have been militants and says it tries to avoid harm to civilians but is battling militants who it accuses of embedding among the population in dense urban areas. Hamas rejects this.

Israeli forces attack two Gaza hospitals, school, kill 8

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Israeli forces, on Saturday night, launched more attacks on the barely functioning Kamal Adwan Hospital in besieged North Gaza, after ordering people inside and near the facility to evacuate.

According to Aljazeera, the nearby al-Awda Hospital is also under attack.

Similarly, Israeli forces have also bombed yet another school in northern Gaza City, killing at least eight Palestinians.

Vehicle in Gaza City targeted

There was also reports of an attack on a vehicle in Jalaa Street in Gaza City, with a number of casualties reported.

What we are seeing now is a deliberate attack on the health facility.

In recent days, Israeli forces have launched attacks on the Kamal Adwan Hospital's power generators, its solar panels and its ICU. These attacks have forced the hospital's essential departments out of service.

The ICU has been rendered nonoperational.

The reports said "Everyone in the hospital has gathered in one area, away from the windows, from the areas that are exposed to fire from tanks and quadcopters.

"Despite this, they experienced a difficult night, with many of the Israeli bullets penetrating the walls. Many injuries have been reported and equipment inside the hospital damaged.

"Now, the Israeli military has ordered evacuations from the hospital, but they



have also created an intimidating environment that makes people feel it's unsafe to leave."

Contact lost with journalists inside Kamal Adwan

Al Jazeera Arabic is reporting that its correspondents in Gaza have lost touch with journalists inside the Kamal Adwan Hospital as Israel's attacks on the facility continue.

Israeli forces are aiming to push Kamal Adwan Hospital out of service

The reports continue, "What we are seeing unfolding in the northern part of Gaza now, particularly at the Kamal Adwan Hospital, is the pinnacle of the relentless attacks and constant bombardment by the Israeli forces over the past week.

"They have been using heavy artillery and detonating explosive devices that had been planted in the areas surrounding the hospital, preventing and impeding the movement of ambulances, as well as that of people seeking to take the wounded from bomb sites to the medical facility.

"The most fierce attack on the hospital last night was on its laboratory. These attacks seem to be deliberate, on purpose, just to push the facility out of service.

"It started with quadcopters surrounding the facility, and telling everyone in the facility – via loudspeakers – to leave. By the way, it's only some 60 people who remain there. They include the director of the hospital, Dr Hussam Abu Safia, the medical staff working with him in these difficult conditions and the patients.

"For the past month, no one had been able to get to the Kamal Adwan Hospital given the dangers in the surrounding areas, including the quadcopter drones that are preventing people from approaching the hospital.

"There was one incident where people arrived at the gates of the hospital and were attacked and shot by the quadcopters. So everyone inside the hospital is known to the Israeli military, yet they push the narrative that the facility houses militants and members of the Palestinian resistance."

Real Madrid beat Sevilla to keep pressure on leaders, Atletico

By Dave Oludare Oso



Kylian Mbappe and Federico Valverde scored long-range stunners as Real Madrid beat Sevilla to keep up the pressure on La Liga leaders, Atletico Madrid.

First-half strikes from Mbappe, Valverde and Rodrygo put Los Blancos in control, before Brahim Diaz finished a fine team move shortly after the break to put the result beyond the visitors.

Sevilla captain Jesus Navas, 39, came off the bench to make the final appearance of his career, bringing an emotional end to his 20-year connection with the club. He is retiring mid-season due to a chronic hip injury.

Madrid took the lead in the 10th minute through Mbappe, who beat Alvaro Fernandez with a dipping 25-yard strike at the end of a swift counter-attack.

Ten minutes later Valverde doubled the lead with his own stunning effort from 30 yards following a Madrid corner.

Rodrygo swept home a Lucas Vazquez cut-back in the 34th minute to hammer home Madrid's dominance, although Sevilla immediately pulled a goal back when Isaac Romero headed home Juanlu Sanchez's cross from close range.

Mbappe turned provider eight minutes after the restart when he slipped in Brahim behind the visiting defence to lift a finish over the goalkeeper, before the Bernabeu rose to applaud Navas onto the field.

The Spaniard – the only player in history to win the World Cup, European Championship and Uefa Nations League – made his 705th appearance for Sevilla, exactly 20 years to the day since he first played

at the Bernabeu.

Navas, who also played at Manchester City, almost instantly provided an assist but Isaac's low strike rebounded off the foot of the post.

Dodi Lukebakio beat Thibaut Courtois at his near post to pull another goal back for Sevilla five minutes from time.

A 19th victory in their last 20 home games against Sevilla helped Madrid leapfrog Barcelona into second place in the table, two points ahead of their arch-rivals with a game in hand – and a point behind neighbours Atletico.

Barcelona conceded in the 96th minute to lose 2-1 to Atletico on Saturday, and have now won just two of their eight league games since thrashing Real Madrid 4-0 in October.

Bournemouth humiliate shambolic Man United 3-0 at Old Trafford

By Dave Oludare Oso

Manchester United suffered a humiliating 3-0 defeat to Bournemouth at Old Trafford for the second consecutive year.

The result leaves Ruben Amorim's United side languishing in 13th in the Premier League standings at Christmas—their lowest position during the festive period since the 1989-90 season—while Bournemouth sit fifth, potentially securing a Champions League spot given the current standings of English teams in Europe.

Dean Huijsen opened the

scoring in the 29th minute with a header, capitalizing on United's continued vulnerability at set-pieces. Things worsened when Justin Kluivert converted a penalty after being fouled by Noussair Mazraoui, and Antoine Semenyo added a third just two minutes later, finishing a Dango Ouattara cross following a mistake by Kobbie Mainoo.

For United, it was another grim display, compounded by the absence of Marcus Rashford, who was omitted from the matchday squad for the third time under Amorim. Rashford was present at Old

Trafford to witness the defeat, but the team desperately needs him back in form alongside other improvements if they are to turn their season around.

The performance bore troubling similarities to last season's defeat to Bournemouth, which occurred under Erik ten Hag. A managerial change has not solved United's set-piece frailties or defensive lapses, raising serious questions about the team's direction as they head into the new year.

