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MISCONDUCT: Police axe 19 senior officers, demote 19 others

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Police Service Commission (PSC) has announced the dismissal of 19 officers for “gross misconduct,” in violation of the Commission’s rules and regulations. The dismissal of the officers announced on Friday was sequel to the decision made during the PSC’s plenary in Abuja, led by Chairman Hashimu Argungu, a retired Deputy Inspector-General of Police (DIG). The commission also downgraded the ranks of 19 other officers found guilty of various offenses.

The dismissed officers include 10 Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs), six Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs), two Chief Superintendents of Police (CSPs), and one Superintendent of Police (SP). Their dismissal followed investigations into several petitions against them, which were reviewed by the commissioners.

PSC spokesperson, Ikechukwu Ani, also revealed that two Assistant Inspectors General (AIGs) were penalised for failing to carry out lawful orders.

One AIG received a reprimand, while

the other was issued a warning for negligence of duty.

In addition, 19 senior officers had their ranks reduced.

These include one Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), one Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP), two Superintendents of Police (SPs), two Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSPs), and 13 Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs).

Ani stated that other officers found guilty received various penalties, ranging from severe reprimands to letters of warning. He also noted that the officers who were dismissed would face prosecution by the police.

Ani confirmed that three disciplinary cases are currently on hold pending further information from the Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun. Furthermore, Ani mentioned that the commission reviewed 23 appeals, petitions, and nine legal matters or court judgments.

Chairman Argungu emphasized that the PSC would handle police



disciplinary matters swiftly to allow officers who are not found guilty to continue their career progression, while those found at fault would face appropriate consequences.

He also cautioned that officers involved in civil matters such as land disputes, marital issues, or rent conflicts would not be tolerated.

Argungu stressed that the courts should handle these matters, while the police should focus on criminal cases and threats to public safety.

Third bomb explosion rocks Zamfara in one week

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Zamfara State has been hit by yet another bomb explosion, the third such incident reported within the span of a week.

Two explosions occurred on the road between Dansadau and Malamawa, and another on Malele Road, causing significant damage and escalating fears among residents.

Intelligence sources told Zagazola Makama, a security expert, that the explosion inflicted severe destruction, though details about casualties or injuries remain unclear

at the time of this report.

The affected area, a key route in Zamfara State, has been a hotspot for violent activities, including banditry and other security challenges.

No bandit group has come forward to claim responsibility for the attack, though the Police Commissioner, Zamfara Command, has attributed it to the Lukurawa group.

This claim has, however, been disputed by several residents in the area and security analysts.



4 arrested for rape of minors in Osun

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Operatives of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Osun Command, have arrested four suspects who allegedly raped two minors in the state.

The suspects Sadiq Opeyemi, 30, Afeez Olalekan 26, Ismail Ibrahim 30 and Abdulahi Garba 33, were arrested on December 3 in Iwo, Iwo Local Government Area of the state.

The NSCDC Commandant in Osun, Mr Igbalawole Sotiyo, while parading the suspects on Thursday in Osogbo, said the suspects defiled the two minors who were 13 years of age respectively.

Sotiyo said that the suspects lured the girls with N500 and slept with them on many occasions.

The corps commandant said that the perpetrators confessed to the crime.

Sotiyo, who noted that the girls were living with their grandparents, said that they fell to the tactics of the suspects while looking for survival.

“These minors are living with their grandparents but have not been well taken care of.

“It was in the course of looking for



survival that they were abused by the four suspects.

“Discreet investigation revealed that the suspects committed the crime.

“I want to assure members of the public that the perpetrators of this offence will be made to face the full wrath of the law to serve as a deterrent to other criminally minded people in the society,” he said.

The suspects while speaking with newsmen admitted that they actually slept with the girls at different times and places after giving money.

Similarly, Sotiyo also said that his men

also recovered seven pumping machines, rubber rug, digger and other tools from illegal miners at Igun-Ijesa area of the state

According to him, on December 3, his men acted on intelligence that some illegal miners were operating in the area.

Sotiyo said when his men arrived at the place at about 1:48 p.m, the illegal miners took to their heels and abandoned their working tools.

“Illegal mining is an economic sabotage and NSCDC will always wage war against saboteurs,” he said.

Renowned Islamic cleric Muyideen Ajani Bello ,dies at 84

By Friday Omosola

A prominent Islamic scholar and cleric, Sheikh Muyideen Ajani Bello, has died at the age of 84 years.

According to a report, the deceased's colleague who resides in Ibadan, Sheikh Akewugbagold Taofeek, announced the passing away of the Oyo state-born fiery preacher in a Facebook post today

According to Akewugbagold, Ajani Bello died today, he prayed that God will be pleased with his soul.

His post reads: “Today is one of my saddest day! My father and mentor has returned to his creator. Sultonul

Wahizeen of Yorubaland, Sheikh Muhyideen Ajani Bello. May Allah be pleased with your soul. Aljannah fridaos for you. Our heart is full of grief and our eyes full of tears but we will say nothing but what will please our Creator the sole commander of life and death –Allah.”

Meanwhile, the deceased son, Alhaji Basit Olanrewaju Katibi Bello, popularly known as Aponle Anobi, confirmed his father's demise, in a social media post today.

Aponle Anobi posted crying emojis with a picture of the Sheikh, but did not provide any other details.



FG begins payment of pension arrears to retired military personnel

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Federal Government has commenced the payment of pensions and other entitlements to retired military personnel, including three months' arrears.

This announcement was made by the Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle, in a statement issued on Thursday, December 6, in Abuja by the Director of Information and Public Relations, Ministry of Defence, Henshaw Ogubike.

The move follows protests from retired military personnel, who had gathered at the Federal Ministry of Finance in Abuja earlier that day to express their frustration over the non-payment of their entitlements.

The retirees had been particularly vocal about the government's failure to fulfil a promised salary increment of 20% to 28% from January to November 2024.

Their demands also included overdue palliative payments for the period of October 2023 to November 2024, a N32,000 increase to their pensions, the bulk payment of Security Debarment Allowance, and the refund of pension deductions made from the salaries of medically boarded soldiers.

In response, Minister Matawalle confirmed that the government had begun the payment of the military salary increases and that many retired personnel had already received payment alerts. He

further clarified that President Bola Tinubu had released funds on Thursday for the settlement of pension arrears and other entitlements.

The Defence Minister commended President Tinubu for his unwavering commitment to the welfare of both serving and retired military personnel, noting that the government would continue to prioritise the payment of arrears. He expressed gratitude for the President's decisive action, which he said demonstrated a firm dedication to improving the living standards of those who have served the nation.

Matawalle also acknowledged the support of the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr Wale Edun, for his significant contribution to ensuring the payments were processed.

In his remarks, Matawalle urged the Nigerian military to remain steadfast in their duties, reassuring them that the President was fully committed to boosting their morale and providing the necessary support in the fight against insecurity. "Despite initial



setbacks, President Tinubu will do everything within his power to uplift our military forces as they confront the challenges of insecurity," he said.

The Minister concluded by emphasising the crucial role of both retired and serving military personnel in safeguarding Nigeria's security, particularly in the ongoing battle against insurgency. He assured them of the President's continued support to eradicate insecurity and uphold the resilience of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

Jigawa approves N117m for pilot CNG centre

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Jigawa Government has approved N117 million for the establishment of a pilot Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) conversion centre in Duste, the state capital.

The Commissioner for Information, Youths, Sports and Culture, Sagir Musa, made this known in a statement on Friday. Musa said the money was approved during the Executive Council meeting on Thursday. The commissioner said the centre

would also serve as a CNG training facility.

He said, "This is in line with the administration's commitment to reduce the hardship caused by the removal of the fuel subsidy."

Earlier in September, Governor Umar Namadi pledged to establish 27 CNG conversion centres across the state.

Namadi said the establishment of the CNG centres would reduce fuel cost by 60 per cent and would provide relief to residents.

The council also endorsed the

2025 Proposed Budget Estimate of the State and the 27 Local Government Councils appropriation bills, for Gov. Namadi, to present to the Jigawa House of Assembly.



We're against student loan, it should be grant – ASUU

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has kicked against the federal government's student loan programme.

Recall that the loan is being administered through the Nigerian Education Loan Fund.

ASUU President, Professor Emmanuel Osooke said the introduction of student loans has prompted higher institutions to hike tuition fees, making education even less accessible for many Nigerians.

He stated this on Thursday when he appeared on Channels Television.

The varsity don said, "Our issue with NEFUND is that in a country like Nigeria, it should be grants; and not a loan.

"All the universities are increasing their fees now; jerking up their fees so that the students will borrow more loans from this NEFUND, encumbering the children of the poor.

"In my university, in my department, I now have less than 10 students in the department, many have dropped out. Apart from some of these big courses like Medicine, Law and what have you, students are dropping out. The children of the poor are dropping out."

Osooke explained that the student loan

scheme had failed on two occasions because students were not able to pay back upon graduation.

He explained many graduates may not get work because of the economic situation of the country. He emphasized that the students may be morally demoralized upon graduation.

The ASUU chieftain said, "We are the

academia, we do our research, we have searched all over the world, we have not seen. In most countries where you are having student loans when they graduate, they become problems in society. Some of them are demoralized.

"Imagine a student graduating from the university with a loan of five million naira. Even me as a professor, I can not pay back such a loan in 20 years' time. Then student who graduates you have a loan of 5 million



and you are getting a job in next 20 years.

"And we are saying if you look at what happened in the 60s and 70s you can go to that level. The children of the poor assist them, increase budgetary allocation to education and this issue of loan will not come out.

"This is the third time they are introducing it, the last two times it collapsed, nobody benefitted. Those that benefitted didn't pay back because it collapsed. So how are we sure this one will survive?"

Yemi Solade: Payment for plaque not mandatory – Award organizers

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Organizers of an upcoming award ceremony have denied allegations made by veteran Nollywood actor, Yemi Solade that they demanded payment in exchange for an award plaque.

The 64-year-old actor took to Instagram on Wednesday to share a purported message from the organizers, claiming they asked him to pay for the award plaque.

In the message, the organizers allegedly stated:

"Good morning sir, trust you had a good night rest. I did revert your response regarding sponsorship to the management. However, I think it doesn't sit well with them as they also disclosed how much the plaques cost. Hence, you can pls attend but the

award plaque may not be presented in order to save cost. Thank you for your kind understanding sir."

The award ceremony is scheduled to take place on December 6 at the Oriental Hotel in Lagos.

Reacting to the claims in a conversation with *TheCable Lifestyle*, a spokesperson for the event dismissed the allegations, clarifying the process for handling nominees.

"It is not true. His name has not been removed. What we do is when we nominate people, our contract staff reach out to them to confirm their attendance. And then, whoever is in charge of that is given permission to contact their nominees," the spokesperson explained.

The spokesperson further noted that while nominees may be asked for



sponsorship support, such contributions are not mandatory.

Alleged defamation: PDP chieftains threaten to sue Deji Adeyanju

By Dave Oludare Oso

Acting National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Umar Damagun, has threatened to sue Deji Adeyanju, lawyer and a human rights activist, over allegations bordering on defamation.

Also, Senator Samuel Anyanwu, the Acting National Secretary of PDP, has said disclosed plans to drag Adeyanju to court on civil and criminal litigation over alleged defamatory remarks.

Damagun and Anyanwu, through their counsel, Johnson Usman, SAN, asked Adeyanju to retract the statements and tender apology in national dailies and other social media platforms to avert the looming legal tussle.

The PDP chair and secretary made this known in two separate letters and the acknowledged copies made available to newsmen on Thursday in Abuja.

While Damagun's letter was dated and received on December 4 by Adeyanju, Anyanwu's letter was dated and received on December 5.

One of the letters was titled: "Demand for the Immediate Retraction of the Defamatory Statements Made Against Amb. Umar Iliya Damagun, the Acting National Chairman of PDP on Social Media Platforms: With A Call for a Corresponding Apology."

The letter, signed by Israel Ujah, a lawyer in the law firm of Usman, had alleged that Adeyanju intentionally made some inflammatory and derogatory remarks against the persons of Damagun and Anyanwu.

The lawyer said it was done, particularly with the underhanded motive of disparaging and assassinating the duo's reputation before their teaming supporters, party members and other members of the society whose estimation of them was very high and



Ujah accused Adeyanju of describing the PDP national chair on a podcast interview as a "Tea man who goes to serve tea in Femi Gbajabiamila's House."

The lawyer equally alleged that Adeyanju described Anyanwu as a "Kilishi Man" who goes to serve "Kilishi" at the residence of the Chief of Staff to the President, Femi Gbajabiamila, in the interview.

Ujah said Adeyanju, in the interview, said: "This current PDP is in the pocket of Nyesom Wike at the national level.

Ujah further accused Adeyanju of alleging that Damagun and Anyanwu had failed to lead PDP as credible opposition party in the country.

"By the tenor of your unsubstantiated and defamatory publication, you went on to discourage the members of the public from patronising and holding our client in trust.

"You clothed him with a toga of being a 'tea server' and infantile personality who is not worthy of any political validation and patronage.

"We wish to remind you that your right to freedom of speech does not extend to the prism of your catalog of the unwarranted verbal onslaught against the person of our client.

"Your narrative regarding the PDP National Chairman 'serving tea' at Femi Gbajabiamila's residence is a figurative critique of the perceived lack of strong opposition from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to the current government.

By necessary implication, all these statements were intentionally made by you to drop our client's popularity amongst his teaming supporters and party members, and to also stain his political career ambition.

Your defamatory statements have exposed our client to serious political embarrassment, psychological trauma, and unquantifiable humiliation.

"We are not unmindful of the fact that your distasteful remarks were sponsored by our client's political opponent and bearing in mind your selfish interest.

"It is against the above background that we hereby demand an immediate retraction of the above defamatory statements — Podcast interview made against our client on various social media within three days of the receipt of this letter.

"We further demand that your retraction should be accompanied by a statement of apology to be published in the national dailies and other social media.

"Failure on your part to toe the path of honour in this regard, we shall be left with no option but to explore the available remedies in protecting our client's constitutional rights within the legal parameters.

"This shall include both civil and criminal litigations.

"Take final notice, that this last resort shall be without further notice to you and shall be done with all the attendant publicity.

"A word is enough for the wise!" Ujah concluded in one of the letters.

Remi Tinubu donates N50m to best female graduates at JABU

By Dave Oludare Oso

The wife of President Bola Tinubu, Oluremi, has instituted an endowment fund of N50 million for the best graduating female students of Joseph Ayo Babalola University (JABU), Ikeji Arakeji, Osun State.

Nigeria's First Lady made the donation to the university following her conferment with an honorary doctoral degree during the 15th convocation ceremony of the institution.

According to the president's wife, who was represented by the First Lady of Ekiti State, Dr. Olayemi Oyebanji, the endowment fund will further spur female students in their mission of academic excellence and innovation.

While expressing her belief in empowering women through education, she stated, "Education has always been a critical pillar in the

development of individuals and the nation as a whole. Therefore, I am deeply honoured by this recognition, which inspires me to continue serving both humanity and our nation.

"In line with my commitment to supporting education, I am pleased to announce a donation of 50 million Naira. This fund is intended to further their mission of academic excellence and innovation.

"This fund will serve as an encouragement and reward for outstanding academic achievement. I trust that the university management will administer this fund judiciously for the benefit of the students and the institution."

Meanwhile, the pro-chancellor of the institution, Prof. Josh Amupitan, disclosed that the endowment fund will be awarded annually for the next 10 years, stressing that the best graduating female student will receive N5 million.

"The recipient will receive 5 million Naira, a generous initiative sponsored by Senator Oluremi Tinubu. This



award, aptly named the Senator Oluremi Tinubu Prize for Academic Excellence, underscores our dedication to recognizing and rewarding outstanding achievement.

"I am pleased to announce that this year, the overall best graduating student is a female—a testament to the remarkable strides women are making in education. Furthermore, I must commend the First Lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who has already credited the university's account with an impressive 50 million Naira to support this noble cause."

Nigeria acquires 12 Alpha jets from French Air Force

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Nigeria has procured 12 pre-owned Alpha Jets from the French Air Force, Olusegun Dada, special assistant to President Bola Tinubu has said in social media.

The jets were acquired through SOFEMA, a French military and aeronautics company.

"All the 12 aircraft are ready for shipping," Dada posted on X on Thursday, adding, "As of 2023, the Nigerian Air Force has 11 Alpha Jets in service."

Developed through a Franco-German collaboration, the Alpha Jet is a versatile military aircraft designed for light attack missions and advanced training. It can carry a variety of weapons, including bombs, rockets, and missiles, and is equipped with a gun pod for close air support.

Dada also noted that the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) is expecting the arrival of 24 M-346FA light attack aircraft ordered during former President Muhammadu Buhari's administration. These aircraft are expected to be delivered early next year.

Hasan Abubakar, the Chief of Air Staff (COAS), praised the ongoing renewal of the NAF's aircraft fleet and the enhanced operational readiness achieved under President Tinubu's administration.

"This remarkable turnaround is evident with the president's support," Abubakar said.

The announcement of the Alpha Jets acquisition closely follows President Tinubu's state visit to France from November 27 to November 30 at the



invitation of President Emmanuel Macron. The president departed France on December 1.

In October, Abubakar disclosed that Nigeria expects 24 Leonardo M-346FA aircraft from Italy, with six already in production. The initial batch of three units is set for delivery in early 2025, with the entire fleet scheduled to arrive by 2026.

Abubakar stressed the importance of establishing a maintenance hub in Nigeria to ensure long-term support for the new aircraft.

Nigeria's criminal justice system weak, needs overhaul – IGP

By Dave Oludare Oso



The Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, has described Nigeria's criminal justice system as "weak, sick, and in need of a complete overhaul."

Egbetokun made this statement on Thursday during the 2024 Annual Lecture and Award Ceremony organized by the Crime Reporters Association of Nigeria (CRAN). He likened the justice system to a sick person in dire need of medical intervention.

The IGP emphasized that the police alone cannot be held responsible for the failings of the criminal justice system, urging Nigerians to consider the broader challenges involving other stakeholders.

"Police is not the only pillar or stakeholder in the criminal justice system in this country. We have challenges, we accept, but we will try our best to make sure we have a better system," Egbetokun stated.

He reiterated the commitment of the Nigerian Police Force to improving its operations and ensuring justice delivery, while calling for collaborative

efforts to address the shortcomings of the entire system.

"All of us must come together to help perfect criminal justice or justice system administration in Nigeria. If this system is working well; it is going to affect you, it is going to us.

The IGP was represented at the event by the Force Public Relations Officer (FPRO), ACP, Muyiwa Adejobi.

Also speaking, the Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Dr Musa Adamu Aliyu, SAN, opined that corruption remains one of the most persistent challenges affecting all sectors and institutions of the Nigerian society, undermining policy-decision making.

Aliyu said: "Corruption remains one of the most persistent challenges affecting all sectors and institutions of the Nigerian society, undermines policy-decision making, resource mobilisation and utilisation, policy execution and service delivery.

"Our experience at the ICPC in partnership with key stakeholders, has shown that tackling corruption

effectively, across sectors and institutions, requires a proactive, multi-faceted approach. This approach should focus not only on enforcement but also on prevention, deterrence, and systems reform."

According to Aliyu, the Justice System Administration faces institutional, funding, infrastructural, human resources, and socio-cultural challenges.

He added: "The widespread corruption within the justice system, including bribery, influence peddling and attitudinal challenges are more fundamental and daunting. I dare say that the justice sector remains a focal point of concern, particularly regarding bribery involving stakeholders in the justice sector, and despite limited public contact, judicial officials exhibit relatively high bribery prevalence, hence the need for targeted anti-corruption measures in this sector."

Ogun to partner AfDB on sustainable development

By Friday Omosola

Poised to boost development in Ogun State, Governor, Dapo Abiodun, today held a strategic meeting in Morocco with Dr Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), on how drive sustainable development in the state.

In a statement shared on the Ogun State Government's X page, G Abiodun lauded the AfDB for its role in fostering connections between sub-national governments and potential investors, as well as providing critical financial backing for major infrastructure projects.

During the meeting, the governor outlined a series of transformative projects aimed at bolstering the state's economy.

These include initiatives in livestock value addition, timber processing, and renewable energy investments in the power sector.

He also proposed plans to establish an automotive assembly plant and extend Lagos' red and blue rail lines into the state, a move he said would enhance regional connectivity and stimulate economic growth.

"This engagement highlights our unwavering commitment to leveraging strategic partnerships and innovative financing solutions for the sustainable development of Ogun State," the governor stated. He further reaffirmed his administration's dedication to create a prosperous future for the



state through forward-thinking policies and initiatives.

The collaboration underscored the state's ambition to position itself as a hub for industrial and infrastructural development in Nigeria, setting the stage for long-term economic progress.

Military recover stolen crude oil worth N57bn in 2024

By Friday Omosola

In a major crackdown, the military have recovered over 53 million litres of stolen crude oil and refined petroleum products valued at N57 billion in 2024.

This was disclosed yesterday by Edward Buba, the Director of Defence Media Operations, during a press briefing in Abuja.

He stressed the military's commitment to combating oil theft, protecting national assets, and improving security across the country.

Buba said the reports from the Defence Headquarters stated that the recoveries included 53,101,430 litres of stolen crude oil, 9,179,181 litres of illegally refined diesel, 90,595 litres of kerosene, and 156,095 litres of petrol.

"The total estimated value of these recoveries stands at N57 billion," Buba stated.

Beyond the crackdown on oil theft, Buba provided an overview of the military's broader operations in 2024, highlighting significant successes in the fight against terrorism and other security threats.

He added that since the beginning of the year, troops have neutralized 8,034 terrorists, arrested 11,623 suspects, and rescued 6,376 hostages.

He noted that the troops also seized a large cache of weapons, including 4,053 AK-47 rifles, 1,123 locally fabricated guns, 731 dane guns, and 240 pump-action guns.

Buba maintained that the the

ammunition recovered includes 120,247 rounds of 7.62mm special ammunition, 41,515 rounds of 7.62mm NATO ammunition, 5,373 cartridges, and 25,664 rounds of assorted ammunition.

He added that the military's successes spanned the five active theatres of operation across the North-East, North-West, North-Central, South-South, and South-East regions. These areas have been the focus of efforts to counter various security challenges.

Buba stressed that the military remains on high alert to neutralize terrorist threats and secure the nation.

Tax reform: South-South senators support bill, Senate denies suspending debate **By Dave Oludare Oso**

Senators from the South-South region of the country have backed President Bola Tinubu's proposed tax reform bills, which are currently being debated at the national assembly.

On Wednesday, the South-South caucus of the Senate held an emergency meeting to bolster support for the Tax Bills which had divided the National Assembly following contentions over the VAT provisions in the proposed tax reform bills.

The development comes as the highly contentious bills continue to generate widespread attention nationwide.

The senators announced their decision in a communiqué on Thursday after the Wednesday meeting. They hailed the landmark tax reform bills, stating that they would enhance national revenue and foster economic stability.

Part of the communiqué signed by Senator Seriake Dickson (Balyesa West) read, "We, the Senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from the South-South geopolitical Zone, met on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, to deliberate on key national issues and the role of the Senate in advancing the collective interest of the country.

"Recognizing the importance of tax reforms in enhancing national revenue and fostering economic stability, we resolved to support the Tax Reforms Bills.

"This support will be anchored on a comprehensive study and thorough evaluation of the content of the Bills to ensure they align with the overall interest of Nigerians, particularly the well-being of the South-South region."

The caucus called for restraint "on the part of those bent on introducing sentiments, whether regional, ethnic or tribal to a national dialogue and looks forward to robust interactions and consultations as already commenced by the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria."

"We remain committed to working collaboratively with our colleagues

across the Senate and all stakeholders in fostering a legislative agenda that guarantees the peace, prosperity, and progress of our beloved nation," the southern senators assured.

The communiqué was signed by 15 other Senators, including:

Senator Jarigbe A. Jarigbe (PDP, Cross River North), Secretary of the Forum;
 Senator Barinada Mpigi (PDP, Rivers South East),
 Senator Adams Oshiomhole (APC, Edo North),
 Senator Neda Imasuen (LP, Edo South),
 Senator Munir Ned Nwoko (PDP, Delta North),
 Senator Thomas Joel-Onowakpo (APC, Delta South), Senator Aniekan Bassey (PDP, Akwa Ibom South),
 Senator Asuquo Ekpenyong (APC, Cross River South),
 Senator Allwell Onyeso (PDP, Rivers East),
 Senator Ipalibo Banigo (PDP, Rivers West),
 Senator Benson Agadaga (PDP, Bayelsa East),
 Senator Konbowei Benson (PDP, Bayelsa Central),
 Senator Eteng Jonah Williams (APC, Cross River Central),
 Senator Ekong Sampson (PDP, Akwa Ibom South),
 Senator Ede Dafinone (APC, Delta Central).

Meanwhile, there was confusion in the Senate on Thursday as Akpabio denied that the public hearing on the Tax Reform Bills had not been suspended

This clarification is on the heels of the directive from Deputy Senate President Jibrin Barau during Wednesday's plenary.

Barau had instructed the Senate Committee on Finance to halt activities related to the bills and constituted a



special committee to liaise with the Attorney-General of the Federation.

"Consequently, the Senate Committee on Finance has been directed to pause further actions on public hearings and other matters related to the tax reform bills until the issues are resolved," he stated.

Barau also named a 10-man committee including the entire leadership of the Senate and specifically named the chief Whip, Tahir Monguno (APC, Borno South) as one of the members.

Senate Leader, Senator Opeyemi Bamidele further dismissed rumours of the bill's withdrawal, emphasizing that the decision of the Senate was misunderstood.

He said, "It was a misunderstanding of the legislative process for anyone to suggest that the bills were withdrawn. These are executive bills, and only the executive arm can withdraw them. The Senate remains committed to deliberating and addressing any concerns in the public interest.

"The bills were executive bills transmitted to us by the executive arm of government through the office of Mr. President. It's only the executive arm that can withdraw these bills. They are not private member bills sponsored by any senator.

"So, no senator is going to withdraw the bill. And there is no reason for this bill to be withdrawn. In the legislative process, it is normal that some people have concerns."

France not taking over Nigeria's mining industry – FG

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

The Special Adviser to President Bola Tinubu on Media and Public Communication, Sunday Dare, addressed the rumours in a statement on his official X account on Thursday night.

Recently, the governments of Nigeria and France signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop joint projects aimed at promoting and diversifying the critical minerals value chain in the solid minerals sectors of both countries.

The MoU, signed during President Tinubu's official visit to France, focuses on collaboration in research, training, and student exchange programmes between Franco-Nigerian institutions to facilitate knowledge and skills transfer.

The agreement, however, led to speculations on social media that France was strategizing to take over Nigeria's mining and solid minerals industry.

Reacting to these claims, Dare explained that nowhere in the document was it agreed or suggested that Nigeria had signed away mining rights to France.

He said that the MoU does not connote anything detrimental to Nigeria's economic and security interests, as has been maliciously circulated.

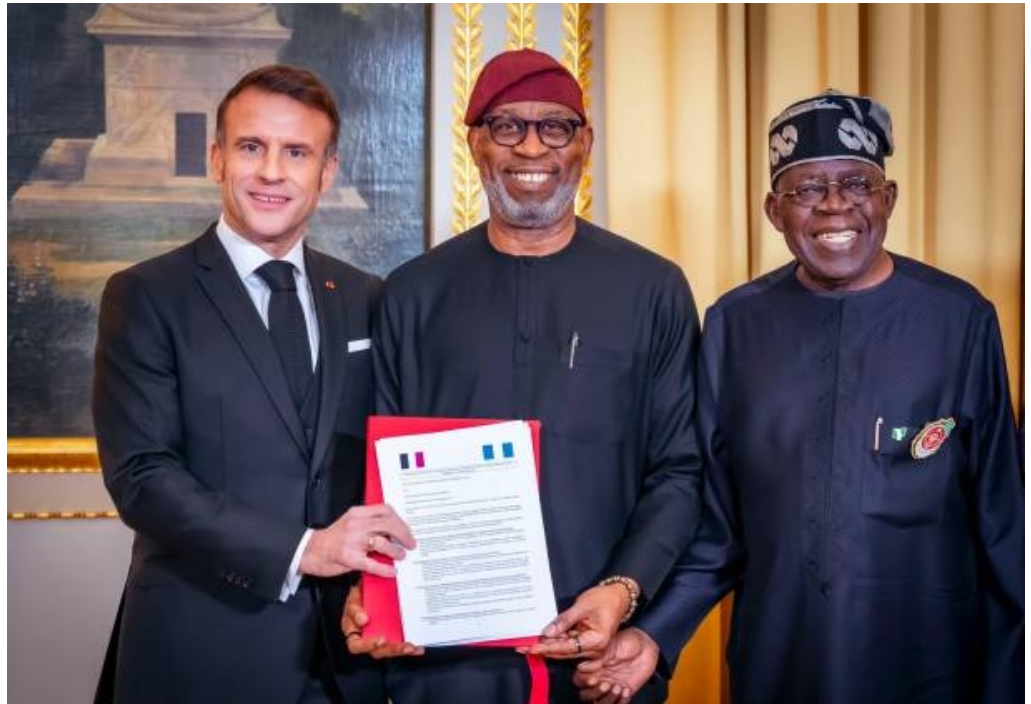
He clarified that MoUs are not legally binding, allowing either party to exit the agreement or fail to meet the outlined requirements without consequences.

According to him, the MoU adheres to international global standards, with which Nigeria is compliant, and all procedures will be followed.

Dare, in a post titled "The Facts: Nigeria-France MOU on Critical Minerals," provided further explanation:

"Nigeria and France have agreed to develop joint projects to promote and diversify the critical minerals value chain in the solid minerals sector of both countries," he said.

"Critical minerals such as copper,



lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements are essential to clean energy technologies.

"In the Memorandum of Understanding signed by both countries on the sidelines of the official visit to France by President Tinubu recently, both countries agreed to collaborate on research, training, and Franco-Nigerian student exchanges for knowledge and skills transfer.

"A key component of the Memorandum of Understanding is the promotion of sustainable mining activities by executing projects and programs that reduce the environmental impact of mining on carbon emissions, water consumption, and climate change."

Dare added that the MoU includes the establishment of joint extractive and processing projects through co-financing by public and private entities to diversify and secure the supply of critical minerals and decarbonise energy projects critical to the value chain.

He explained that both parties agreed to adopt international best practices in executing programs and projects to improve the conditions of local communities affected by mining and to ensure transparency.

The MoU is also expected to open

opportunities for remediating over 2,000 abandoned mining pits in Nigeria through its plans for environmental rehabilitation and post-mining projects.

Through regular bilateral and multilateral training, seminars, and events, Dare noted that administrators in the critical metals sector are expected to enhance their capacity to manage the sector's value chain effectively.

Regarding the nature of MoUs, Dare, a former Minister of Sports and Youth Development, explained that they allow for the establishment of mutual intentions, ensuring clarity in each party's goals and objectives.

"The finalization of an MOU allows for having a paper trail or records of the terms negotiated toward finalisation," he said.

"MOUs reduce levels of uncertainty between the involved parties because the document highlights the expectations and objectives, preventing possible future disagreements."

He added that an MOU provides ease of exit, allowing any party that finds the objectives and goals unmet to end the agreement easily. Additionally, the document serves as a foundation for a possible future contract.

Cultist who killed Rivers couple, four cops gunned down

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A kidnap kingpin and notorious cult leader, identified as Nkem ThankGod, who allegedly killed four policemen, a couple and committed sundry other crimes has been killed by men of the Rivers State Police Command.

The 42-year-old murder suspect nicknamed 2man, who hailed from Ogbologbolo Community, Ahoada West Local Government Area of the state was also fingered in the murder of a youth leader.

The state Commissioner of Police, Mustapha Mohammed, disclosed this during a news briefing where he paraded the lifeless body of the miscreant at the command's headquarters along Moscow Road in Port Harcourt on Thursday.

While noting that his crimes ranged from murder, kidnap and attacking oil pipelines and government facilities, Mohammed said the criminal met his Waterloo following an intelligence-led operation while attempting to abduct a target with his gang in Ahoada East Local Government Area of the state on Thursday afternoon.

The CP disclosed that the hoodlum had been on the wanted list of the police since 2021 for sundry crimes, including the murder of a man and his wife, saying he had been running from one place to the other to evade arrest.

He stated, "Men of the Rivers State Police Command have successfully neutralized a notorious kidnap kingpin and murder suspect, Nkem ThankGod, a.k.a. "2man," aged 42, from Ogbologbolo Community, Ahoada West Local Government Area.

"This individual, a leader of the Greenlander Cult Group, had been responsible for a series of heinous crimes in Ahoada East and Ahoada West LGAs, including killing the youth



president of Okogbe Community in Ahoada West LGA, Mr. Christmas Ede, on December 21, 2021.

"He is also responsible for multiple killings in 2024, including two policemen attached to the PMF 48, three civilians, (Mr and Mrs Rex Kiriki and Mrs. Abigail Victor), and a spare parts dealer after collecting ransom.

"He also murdered two Shell staff members in Okogbe, Ahoada West LGA and stole their Toyota Hilux."

On attacks on the police personnel, the state police boss said, "2man shot SP Bello during a rescue operation in 2022 and killed two Rapid Response Team officers in early 2023.

"Kidnapping and carjacking a red Toyota Camry from Dare Shola in October 2024. Orchestrating several kidnappings and extorting ransoms before killing victims.

"He was involved in frequent vandalism of oil pipelines and government installations in Ahoada West.

"Nkem ThankGod met his end during an intelligence-led operation while attempting another kidnapping. His gang members managed to escape with injuries, and efforts are underway to apprehend them," the CP disclosed.

He listed the items recovered from him as two AK-47 rifles, five magazines and 22 rounds of live ammunition.

The CP reaffirmed the commitment of the command to protect the lives and property of people and residents of the state, pointing out that the police under his watch would make the state a living hell for criminal elements.

Mohammed, however, solicited the cooperation of the public to give useful information concerning suspicious activities in their neighbourhood for prompt action, saying the police would continue working to dismantle criminal networks.

No plans to suspend tax reform bills

-Bamidele **By Friday Omosola**

Senate Leader, Senator Opeyemi Bamidele (APC-Ekiti Central), has refuted report claiming that the Senate may have suspended or withdrawn deliberations on the 2024 Tax Reform Bills.

Bamidele spoke during plenary yesterday, restating that the upper chamber remains fully committed to addressing the bills and warned against the misrepresentation of its legislative process.

The lawmaker explained that the Senate had, on Wednesday, constituted a special committee led by Minority Leader Senator Abba Moro to address concerns surrounding the bills.

He said the committee is tasked with engaging key stakeholders, including the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi to resolve issues and ensure smooth legislative consideration.

He emphasised that such procedural step does not imply suspension or withdrawal, stating, "Nowhere in our votes and proceedings was it stated that deliberations on the Tax Reform Bills were suspended or withdrawn. Such claims reflect a misunderstanding of legislative processes."*

Bamidele added that the Senate's decision to temporarily pause the Committee on Finance's public hearing on the bills until all "grey areas" are resolved was misinterpreted by some media outlets as a suspension of the legislative process.

According to him, these bills were transmitted by the Executive Arm of Government and can only be



withdrawn by the same body, not by individual senators.

He also invoked Senate Rules and the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to underline the Senate's authority and independence, saying, "The Senate takes guidance from the Constitution, not from any individual or external institution. Attempts to intimidate the Parliament are undemocratic and will not deter us from performing our duties."

However, Senate President Godswill Akpabio also addressed the issue, commending Bamidele's clarification and emphasising that the bills remain active.

He explained that the special committee chaired by Senator Moro is part of an internal mechanism to resolve misunderstandings and

facilitate consultations with relevant executive bodies.

"The bills have passed second reading, which means they are alive. Further legislative actions are underway, including the work of the Ad Hoc Committee. There is no suspension or withdrawal," Akpabio assured.

He further criticized the premature media reports, stating that legislative work is conducted within the chamber and not via social media or other external platforms.

He said the special committee already commenced consultations to address any confusion surrounding the bills.

Once resolved, the Committee on Finance, led by Senator Sani Musa, will resume its legislative duties, including public hearings, to gather stakeholder input and finalize recommendations.

16 Days of Activism: Prejudice against women ungodly, anti-social – Adesina

By Agency Reporter

A former Presidential Spokesperson, Mr Femi Adesina, has decried prejudice against women (Misogyny), saying that it was anti-social and ungodly.

He said this on Thursday in Lagos at the public presentation of a report titled: “Trends and Contexts of Misogyny and Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria”.

The report was presented by the Journalists for Christ (JFC), a faith-based, non-governmental media organisation.

As the JFC Board Chairman and Special Guest of Honour at the event, Adesina, said he was intrigued by the report on misogyny, and wanted to read it to see its various dimensions and recommendations.

“The Bible says, “The Lord gave the word and great was the company of those that published it.

“I want to encourage us to publish this kind of report so that those who are guilty and involved will know that what they are doing is anti-social and also ungodly.

“Since God created humanity and He loved everyone, why should some people decide to hate some other creatures?”

“We can see Africa today; we see the LGBTQ and a lot of messy things; we should not wait till those things come to our neck of the woods here in Africa.

“That is why it is important that we take this kind of report seriously,” Adesina said.

Ms. Blessing Oladunjoye, the Project Support Officer, JFC, explained that gender-based violence (GBV) had transcended physical barriers, and was now manifesting on various technological platforms.

Oladunjoye said these manifestations of GBV online were a result of advancements in the use of technology and digital devices.

“As the digital spaces for communication expand across media platforms, so has the infringement, repression and oppression of the communication rights of women and girls translated from the traditional forms of physical violence to digital spaces.

“It manifests as Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), otherwise known as Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV).

“Consequently, perpetrators now use

social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram among others, as platforms to perpetrate forms of violence against women.

“Some common forms of TFGBV include cyberbullying, doxing, online sexual harassment, sexting, trolling, and revenge porn,” she said.

The JFC project officer defined TFGBV as derived from GBV, but different in that it was perpetrated through online means and includes unwanted sexual remarks and non-consensual posting of sexual images or videos.

She said that misogyny was defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women, adding that internetmatters.org said that it was found in videos, images, and forums or comment sections.

Oladunjoye said that misogyny included name-calling or use of slur language suggesting that women are lesser than men, or use of vulgar images or photos and content that puts women down.

Also speaking at the presentation, Mr Gbenga Adefaye, the Provost, Nigerian Institute of Journalism (NIJ), expressed curiosity and interest in reading the report.

He said that he was particularly interested, “to reflect on whether he was a misogynist or not, as some of us could be unconscious and not deliberate misogynists”.

“I see women I have worked with not by the length of their trousers, but as either good reporters or great editors. I also get embarrassed when women limit themselves to the women’s desk or children’s pages.

“Furthermore, I have always been supported by women. When I was in Vanguard, a woman was the head of administration while another was in charge of finance.

“Now, in NIJ, a woman is the registrar and another woman is in charge of money.

“So, I am interested. I want the report published so I can read it and learn,” Adefaye said.

On her part, the JFC Gender and Advocacy Initiatives Expert, Mrs Funmi Falobi, said that misogyny had negative effects on women.

“It aims to reduce women’s contribution and participation in society. It causes them psychological harm, leads to a defeatist attitude, limits women’s potential, gives them low self-esteem, and destroys their ambition.

“It can also limit women to a stereotype,



leads to depression, suicidal thoughts and stigmatisation,” she said. Falobi noted that the fight against misogyny and TFGBV involved stakeholders, policymakers, lawmakers, management of institutions, and media, among others. She said that response to misogyny involved helping men understand the issues and sensitising the boy-child early on how to treat girls and the appropriate language to use on them. The gender advocate also urged victims to engage in online support networks, adding that religious leaders and media are important in the change process and in promoting counter-narratives. The Chief Host and JFC Founder, Mr Lekan Otufodunrin, appreciated the funding support of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and Bread for the World. He said that the project, entitled “Countering Misogyny and Online Gender-Based Violence through Monitoring, Digital Counter-narratives and Advocacy Actions”, was being implemented by JFC Nigeria in collaboration with WACC Africa Region. “Our projects are aimed at promoting human rights, and in these 16 Days of Activism to promote women’s rights. “It is important as journalists to find networks to belong to that share our values because it will help promote our work,” he said.

Troops kill 8,034 terrorists, rescue 6,376 hostages – DHQ

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Nigerian troops deployed for operations across the country had eliminated a total of 8,034 terrorists, apprehended 11,623 suspects and rescued 6,376 kidnapped hostages from January to December.

According to NAN, the troops had, since the beginning of the year, been confronted by different threats in five active theatres of operations across the country, Director, Defence Media Operations, Maj.-Gen. Edward Buba said while revealing achievements of the military at a press briefing on Thursday in Abuja.

He said that the troops adopted a high level of alert and an increased state of readiness to protect the country from further terrorist aggression and insecurity.

According to him, the troops also recovered 8,216 weapons, 211,459 ammunition and denied the oil thieves an estimated sum of over N57 billion in the last 11 months.

“The breakdown of the recoveries includes 4,053 AK47 rifles, 1,123 locally fabricated guns, 731 Dane guns and 240 pump action guns.

“Others are 120,247 rounds of 7.62mm special ammo, 41,515 rounds of 7.62mm NATO, 5,373 cartridges, 1,940 assorted arms and 25,664 assorted ammunitions.

“Additionally, the troops recovered 53.1 million litres of stolen crude oil, 9.1 million litres of illegally refined Automotive Gas Oil (AGO) and 90,595 litres of DPK and 156,095 litres of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) aside other items,” the director said.

In the North East, Buba said the troops of Operation Hadin Kai, neutralized 2,918 terrorists, apprehended 2,285 suspects and rescued 1,496 hostages within the period under review.

He added that 15,950 Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists’ combatants and their families surrendered during the period.

“In the North Central, the troops of Operation Safe Haven, neutralized 411 violent extremists, arrested 1,859 and rescued 927 kidnap hostages as well as arms and ammunition.

“Under Operation Whirl Stroke, the



troops neutralised 583 terrorists, arrested 916 suspects and rescued 649 kidnapped hostages and recovered a cache of arms.

“In the North West, the troops of Operation Hadarin Daji neutralized 2,646 terrorists, arrested 1,654 suspects and rescued 2,339 kidnap hostages.

“Under Operation Whirl Punch, they neutralised 732 terrorists, apprehended 1,842 suspects and rescued 569 kidnap hostages,” Buba said.

He added that in the South East, the troops of Operation UDO KA neutralized 666 terrorists, arrested 893 suspects and rescued 323 kidnap hostages during the period.

Gunmen attack Taraba Governor’s family, police escort accidentally shoots sister

By Agency Reporter

Tragedy struck along Kente Road in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State on Thursday when armed gunmen attacked the mother of the state governor, Jumai Kefas, and his sister, Atsi Kefas.

Intelligence sources told Zagazola Makama that During the attack, a police officer assigned to escort the family accidentally shot Atsi Kefas while attempting to fend off the assailants. The incident occurred as the family was traveling through the area, which has seen a rise in bandit activities.

Following the attack, troops swiftly responded to rescue the victims. Both

Jumai Kefas and Atsi Kefas were evacuated to safety using an air ambulance.

The injured sister was rushed to the hospital for treatment, and her condition remains undisclosed at the time of this report.

The vehicle was recovered by the security forces while an empty magazine and luggage of the passengers was found in the vehicle.



US court jails Nigerian eight years over \$6m scam

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

A 39-year-old Nigerian, Okechukwu Valentine Osuji, was on Thursday in New Haven, Connecticut, United States, sentenced to eight years in prison for his involvement in a large-scale business email compromise (BEC) scheme.

The suspect, operating across multiple countries, including the United States, and his co-conspirators defrauded numerous businesses and individuals by impersonating trusted entities in electronic communications.

According to a statement from the U.S. Department of Justice, Osuji and his team targeted victims across various sectors, including finance, non-profit arts organizations, and food services, using fraudulent email schemes to deceive recipients into transferring funds.

They exploited both witting and unwitting “money mules” to receive and transfer the stolen money, diverting the funds into accounts controlled by the fraudsters.

The victims of this scheme included businesses from Connecticut, Colorado, Alaska, New York, and beyond. Over the course of the operation, the conspirators were able to divert millions of dollars through fraudulent transactions, causing financial damage to their targets.

The scheme also involved the exploitation of elderly individuals through romance scams to serve as some of the unwitting money mules, including one woman who testified at trial that she was duped into sending her own personal savings and income, including Social Security checks, to an individual she believed to be her romantic partner, but who was in fact one of Osuji’s



co-conspirators.

The scam resulted in the near-total depletion of her life savings, caused her to declare bankruptcy, and led to the repossession of her house.

Meanwhile, her personal bank account was also used to facilitate the fraud against one of the companies targeted by Osuji.

Osuji was arrested in Malaysia and extradited to the United States in 2022. On May 1, 2024, a jury in New Haven found Osuji guilty of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft.

The statement stated, “As a result of the scheme, losses and intended losses totalled over \$6million.” At his sentencing hearing, Osuji was ordered to pay restitution to his victims.

Osuji’s alleged co-conspirator, John Wamuigah, remains in Malaysia and is pending extradition proceedings.

An indictment is merely an allegation, and Wamuigah is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Meanwhile, another co-conspirator,

Tolulope Bodunde, also a citizen of Nigeria, pleaded guilty and was sentenced on October 16 to two years in prison.

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Nicole M. Argentieri, head of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Vanessa Roberts Avery for the District of Connecticut; and Special Agent in Charge Robert Fuller of the FBI New Haven Field Office made the announcement.

The FBI New Haven Field Office and the Stamford Police Department investigated the case.

The Justice Department’s Office of International Affairs, Royal Malaysia Police, and Malaysian Attorney General’s Chambers provided valuable assistance in securing the arrest and extradition of Osuji.

Trial Attorney Lydia Lichlyter of the Criminal Division’s Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Neeraj N. Patel for the District of Connecticut are prosecuting the case.

Presidency allays fears over Nigeria, France solid minerals pact

By Friday Omosola

The Presidency has dismissed rumours that France is taking over Nigeria's mining sector or compromising its security and economic interests through the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the two nations.

Sunday Dare, the Senior Special Assistant to President Bola Tinubu's on Media and Public Communications, stated this in a statement posted on his X page today.

Dare said the agreement is focused on collaboration in the solid minerals sector, with particular emphasis on developing critical minerals value chains.

He stated that Nigeria did not sign away any mining rights.

"The French are not taking over. Nowhere in the document was it agreed or suggested that Nigeria has signed away mining rights to the French, nor does it connote anything against Nigeria's economic and security interests as being maliciously circulated", Dare added.

He further stressed that the MoU, signed during President Tinubu's recent state visit to France, aims to promote sustainable mining practices, diversify the critical minerals value chain, and foster joint projects between both nations.

According to him, critical minerals such as copper, lithium, cobalt, and nickel—vital for clean energy technologies—are at the heart of the agreement.

He highlighted key components of the MoU, including, environmental



sustainability—executing projects to reduce the environmental impact of mining, such as lowering carbon emissions, minimizing water consumption, and addressing climate change.

He explained that knowledge and skills transfer, collaborating on research, training, and Franco-Nigerian student exchanges to enhance expertise in the sector.

"Joint Projects include establishing co-financed extractive and processing projects to secure the supply of critical minerals and support energy decarbonization. Community Impact: Adopting international best practices to improve conditions for communities affected by mining operations and ensuring

transparency."

According to him, the agreement also outlines plans to remediate over 2,000 abandoned mining pits across Nigeria through environmental rehabilitation initiatives.

Explaining the nature of the MoU, Dare noted that such agreements are not legally binding and allow for flexibility.

"An MoU establishes a mutual intention, clarifies goals, and provides a paper trail of negotiated terms. Either party can exit the agreement if objectives are not being met, preventing possible future disagreements," he said.

Kwara gov ,AbdulRazaq seeks better deal for PLWDs

By Friday Omosola

Governor, AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara State has called for more love, care and inclusivity for People Living With Disabilities (PLWDs) in the state.

In a statement today, Rabiya Salman, Press Secretary of the Ministry of Youth, said the governor emphasised that PLWDs deserve equal opportunities to thrive and achieve fulfilment in life.

The governor made the call during a mega rally in Ilorin, organised to commemorate the International Day of People Living With Disabilities.

The event with theme: “Walk Against Stigmatization of People Living With Disabilities,” was led by skit maker Yahya Olatunji, known as Baba Kamo.

The rally, which began at the Kwara State Stadium Complex and ended at the Government House, saw massive participation from PLWDs, students under the aegis of the National Association of Kwara State Students (NAKSS), among other bodies.

AbdulRazaq

Participants displayed placards with inscriptions such as “Disability Does Not Mean Inability,” “Break the Stigma, Not the Spirit,” and “Empowerment Begins with Acceptance.”

Represented by the Commissioner for Youth Development, Sheu Ndanusa, Governor AbdulRazaq reiterated his administration’s commitment to inclusivity for PLWDs

Our administration does not discriminate. PLWDs are treated equally and are part of our government. I encourage everyone to embrace and appreciate them.



When you see them around you, show them love and care instead of discrimination,” he said.

Other officials, including the Commissioner for Environment, Nafisat Buge, and the Executive Chairman of the Kwara State Sports Commission, Bola Magaji, echoed similar sentiments.

Buge highlighted the administration’s dedication to ensuring PLWDs are included in policies and programmes, urging them to remain confident despite societal challenges.

READ ALSO: Gov Abdulrazaq approves bonus for Kwara workers

“There is no difference between you and me except physical representation. Don’t let anyone intimidate or look down on you. You have the ability to excel and achieve greatness,” Buge remarked.

In his remarks, Magaji praised the achievements of PLWDs in sports, citing an example of a Paralympian who secured Nigeria’s first medal at the last Olympics.

He urged parents to provide care and support for their children with

disabilities rather than hide them.

Baba Kamo, the convener of the event, explained that the rally was aimed at combating stigma and promote acceptance of PLWDs.

He also announced the upcoming launch of his movie, “Moyomi”, which explores the challenges faced by PLWDs and advocates for their dignity and respect.

“We want society to see abilities, not disabilities. These individuals have dreams, visions, and purposes just like everyone else. Our goal is to stop stigma and change perceptions,” Baba Kamo said.

One of the participants, Abdulkadir Bilikis Abolore, expressed gratitude for the initiative, describing it as a step toward inclusion and empowerment.

My thoughts on the controversy involving Aare Afe Babalola SAN and Dele Farotimi

By Agency Reporter

I have had the privilege of studying at Afe Babalola University, and mentored by Aare Afe Babalola SAN countless times.

In light of the recent controversy surrounding Aare & Dele Farotimi, I have come across several opinions; some from respected individuals who have now lost a part of my respect and others from those who, despite their legal education, seem to lack an understanding of the law.

While I do not claim to know much about the law, here are my submissions on this matter based on my limited knowledge below:

Defamation as a Civil or Criminal Matter

Defamation is both a civil wrong (tort) and a criminal offense, depending on the jurisdiction and the remedy sought by the complainant. A person who feels defamed can decide to pursue civil damages or initiate criminal proceedings depending on the severity of the defamation and the punishment they seek.

However, some lawyers and activists have made misleading assertions that defamation is not a crime at all. A principal partner of a law firm once boldly declared this on social media, showing either ignorance or a casual attitude toward the profession. Statements like these make me wonder what interns and associates under such leadership are learning. As one of his habitual clients often says, "You will learn the hard way."

Jurisdiction & the Locus Standi of the Ekiti Magistrate Court

Defamation cases can be prosecuted outside the place of origin of the defamatory material because the "effect" of the defamation determines jurisdiction.

In this case, the book allegedly defaming Aare Afe Babalola was written and published in Lagos but is accessible worldwide both online and offline. Aare resides in Ado Ekiti, where the effects of the defamatory statements are most deeply felt on his reputation, his family, his mentees, legal products, business associates etc It is legally valid to prosecute the matter in Ekiti since the harm occurred there.

To claim that the author cannot be arrested or prosecuted in Ekiti because the book was published in Lagos is simply incorrect. The law allows the injured party to seek redress in a location where they have suffered harm. Decriminalization of Defamation in Lagos State

The decriminalization of defamation in

Lagos State does not affect this case because the proceedings are being pursued in Ekiti, where the laws remain valid and enforceable. As stated earlier, the jurisdiction lies where the defamatory effect is felt, and Ekiti law applies in this case.

Freedom of Speech vs. Obligation to Prove Assertions

Freedom of speech is a constitutional right, but it comes with responsibilities. Anyone making allegations must be prepared to prove their claims. In this case, the defamatory statements were not casual remarks but deliberate assertions published in a book. Such statements undergo review, proofreading, and editing, showing the author's confidence in their accuracy. Dele Farotimi, as the defendant, must now prove the truth of the assertions he made in his book, *Nigeria and Its Criminal Judicial System*. If he cannot, he will have to face the legal consequences of making unsubstantiated claims that harm another's reputation.

The Arrest of Dele Farotimi

There have been claims that Farotimi was "kidnapped" or "illegally arrested," but these allegations are baseless. Aare followed due process by filing a petition. Mr. Farotimi himself admitted in a video interview that a bench warrant was issued against him after he failed to honor court summonses in Ekiti.

A bench warrant is a lawful directive issued when a defendant refuses to appear in court. Whether the matter is civil or criminal, it is the defendant's duty to appear in court or have legal representation.

Denial of Bail

The denial of bail in this case is legally justified. When a bench warrant is issued, the chances of securing bail are significantly diminished. Farotimi's failure to appear in court obviously contributed to this outcome.

Unnecessary Protests

While I respect @YeleSowore, I find his protest on this matter unwarranted. What exactly is he protesting? The enforcement of a bench warrant? Justice for a defamed individual? It seems more like an opportunity to gather crowds with unclear demands. Additionally, Sowore's media platform, Sahara Reporters, published a misleading article claiming, "King's College London In Panic Over Afe Babalola's Scandal." There is no evidence of panic, and such exaggerated claims only dilute the credibility of their reporting.

Focus on Judicial Reform, Not Character



Assassination

Aare Afe Babalola SAN is a living legend, an authority in law, and a man of immense integrity. While discussions about judicial reform are necessary and valid, this is something Aare himself has consistently championed but defaming a man who has dedicated his life to improving the legal system and Nigeria as a whole is both unjust and counterproductive. Aare has addressed the flaws in the judiciary extensively in his books, articles, and other writings, but always with dignity and without defaming anyone. He has spoken about these issues constructively, proposing actionable reforms instead of resorting to personal attacks. Similarly, I have taken a cue from his example in my recently published book on the 1999 Constitution, where I also discussed judicial reform and other systemic issues in a respectful and solution-oriented manner.

Instead of tearing down individuals with baseless allegations, let us focus on meaningful reforms that address the systemic issues within the judiciary. This is the constructive approach that can lead to real progress. It is time for all stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue about judicial reforms rather than resorting to defamation and unwarranted protests. I do respect Dele Farotimi and he was indeed one of the inspiration for my recently published book.

Why Nigeria needs National Coast Guard

— FG **By Agency Reporter**

Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Adegboyega Oyetola, says there is need to strengthen the collaboration between the ministry and the Nigerian navy in safeguarding Nigerian maritime space as it is done in other climes.

Oyetola made this submission on Thursday in Abuja at the Senate public hearing on the Nigerian Coast Guard Establishment Bill 2024.

The bill to establish Nigerian Coast Guard recently scaled second reading in the Senate.

The minister said it was important to give credit to the Nigerian Navy for its achievements in safeguarding the Nigerian maritime space and giving Nigeria a good image worldwide.

Oyetola said the collaborative effort between with the ministry and its agency—the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) in the Deep Blue Project had shown great result with zero piracy in Nigeria territorial water in the last three years.

“However, there is a need to further complement the efforts of our Navy as it is done in other climes.

“According to a 2009 publication by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 15 out of the 21 independent maritime nations in sub-Saharan Africa have dedicated coast guards, that identify themselves as such and none has our population and many of these countries do not have the length of our inland waterways or coastline.

“Also, a 2015 publication by the Institute for Security Studies of the National Defence College of Nigeria highlighted the impact of activities such as illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in the inland waters, coastal and marine fishing zone in sub-Saharan Africa.

“These illegal activities are estimated to cost the region approximately between 3 billion dollars to 5 billion dollars a year in lost revenue.

“The Lagos – Calabar Coastal Highway development is a major game changer for the entire coastline of the country.

“The project is expected to unlock the regions blue economy potential— hotels, beach resorts, water parks, eco-parks,

ferry services, hospitality industries, industrial parks and more are soon to spring up along the coastline.”

The minister said that such increase in economic activities would require a dedicated institution that would be responsible for ensuring maritime safety, search and rescue, environmental protection and the enforcement of civil maritime laws.

According to him, the spate of boats mishap within the nation’s inland waterways is also a strong justification for the need to strengthen our maritime safety and the enforcement of maritime laws and regulations in the inland waterways.

“This is necessary to boost maritime trade and trans-shipment in Nigeria.

“Also, considering Nigeria’s critical position in the maritime domain on the continent and globally, the establishment of a National Coast Guard will further increase our standing in the comity of maritime nations. This will no doubt attract foreign support and assistance.”

Oyetola said that the establishment of the Coast Guard was aimed at maritime safety—by establishing clear protocols, enforcing safety regulations, and overseeing navigation routes in our inland water ways.

He said the Coast Guard would play a critical role in safeguarding lives, property and trade within Nigeria’s coastal and inland waterways.

The minister said that the Coast Guard would respond rapidly to maritime emergencies, conducting timely and efficient search and rescue operations.

“The Coast Guard will actively work in collaboration with other relevant government agencies to prevent pollution and enforce environmental regulations within Nigeria’s waters.

“Through initiatives focused on conservation and the protection of marine ecosystems, the Coast Guard will support Nigeria’s commitment to environmental stewardship, safeguarding marine biodiversity for future generations.

“Enforcement of Civil Maritime Laws—tasked with upholding laws that govern civil maritime activities, the Coast Guard will enforce fishing laws and



regulations, conventions on pollution and other civil maritime offences.

“This function will support sustainable resource management, protect Nigeria’s waters from illegal exploitation and align with international best practices for civil maritime governance.”

He also spoke on inter-agency collaboration with military/paramilitary agencies

According to him, the ministry is cognisant of the traditional but important roles being played, especially by the Nigerian Navy and the armed forces to protect our waterways and maritime assets through their operations.

He said that National Coast Guard would ensure effective collaboration with other military and paramilitary agencies.

“To this end, we advocate the setting up of effective and coordinated machinery for seamless collaboration with the Nigerian Navy and other armed forces, as well as key agencies in the country, to further enhance the protection of our maritime resources.

“This will include technology and resource sharing, joint maritime exercises, missions and training to enhance maritime safety and foster cooperation.”

Oyetola urged the Senate and the National Assembly to lend their full support to the bill.

He said that Nigerian Coast Guard would act as a vital complement to the Navy, fostering a safe and sustainable maritime environment that was aligned with international best practices.

Tinubu approves funds for military pension arrears, others

By Dave Oludare Oso



President Bola Tinubu has authorized the immediate release of funds to settle pension arrears, salary increments, and other entitlements owed to retired military personnel.

This decision follows two days of peaceful protests by military veterans at the Federal Ministry of Finance.

Minister of State for Defence, Dr. Bello Matawalle, announced the development on Friday, expressing appreciation for the President's timely intervention.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence's Director of Press and Public Relations, Mr. Henshaw Ogubike, Matawalle confirmed that military personnel have already

started receiving alerts for the three-month salary increase.

The minister lauded Tinubu's unwavering commitment to the welfare of both active and retired military personnel, emphasizing that the administration is prioritizing the resolution of outstanding pension arrears to improve the quality of life for veterans.

Matawalle also praised the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Mr. Wale Edun, for his efforts in ensuring the prompt disbursement of funds.

He urged military personnel to remain dedicated to their duties, assuring them of the government's continued support in enhancing morale and addressing security challenges across Nigeria.

“Despite initial setbacks, be assured that Mr. President is committed to uplifting our military forces as they confront the challenges of insecurity,” he stated.

Highlighting the critical role of the Nigerian military in combating insurgency, terrorism, and other forms of criminality, Matawalle reaffirmed the government's dedication to eradicating insecurity.

He concluded by assuring the Armed Forces of President Tinubu's steadfast support and commitment to improving their readiness and resilience in securing the nation.

Patients speak out about neglect at University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital

By Helen Okechukwu

The University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), a federal health facility, recently became the focus of a viral social media post shared by a patient's relative. The post revealed alarming concerns about the quality of healthcare and the conditions within the hospital.

The complaint outlined several issues, including compulsory feeding, medical negligence, lack of essential facilities, and the financial struggles of patients.

To investigate these claims, on November 27, 2024, a reporter from The New Daily Prime visited the hospital, interviewing patients and staff regarding the allegations.

Claims of Poor Healthcare Delivery

A user on X (formerly Twitter), Baridueh Badon (@BadonB), who worked as a house officer at UPTH 12 years ago, shared his distressing experience involving his mother, who was hospitalized at UPTH for over six months.

In his post on November 17, Badon described the hospital as a place where basic healthcare services, such as food, were imposed on patients for a mandatory daily fee of ₦2,000. He claimed that patients could not opt out of this provision and that the food served was substandard, likened to meals worse than those in prisons.

Legally, hospitals cannot force patients to eat hospital food, as individuals have the right to make decisions about their care, except in cases of incapacity, court-ordered care, or specific institutional rules. None of these exceptions applied to Badon's mother, raising questions about the hospital's practices.

Badon also highlighted that UPTH's medical staff were overstretched, often requiring patients' relatives to administer intravenous fluids and medications. Despite spending over ₦6 million and leveraging connections within the medical community, his family's ordeal remained harrowing.

"If I faced all these challenges with my doctor friends and connections, imagine the plight of the common man," Badon lamented.

The situation worsened with repeated delays in his mother's surgery, which was canceled four times due to staff shortages, unpreparedness (e.g., pending medical clearances), power outages, and medical staff attending conferences.

When contacted by the reporter for further details, Badon responded curtly: "I have



shared my story. If you go to the hospital, you will see things for yourself. Good luck."

A Legacy of Financial Constraints and Unmet Needs

The hospital has faced criticism for a now-discontinued policy of compulsory feeding, where patients were required to pay significant amounts for daily meals and treatments. Similarly, in 2021, the ICIR reported that at the Enugu State University of Science and Technology Teaching Hospital (ESUTH), patients were charged ₦1,500 daily for meals they did not eat.

In one heartbreaking testimony, a 36-year-old accident victim from Obio/Akpor Local Government Area shared how financial struggles turned his life into a battle for survival over more than three years.

A sickle cell patient, he described neglect at home, where his pleas for treatment were ignored by his family. By the time he arrived at UPTH, his condition had worsened due to a prolonged infection.

The source revealed that he had to sell family property to fund his treatment but was eventually forced out of the hospital due to mounting expenses. "I rented my former house for ₦300,000 yearly," he said. "But my brother bought it just to raise funds. Now I am left with little property inherited from my late father."

"I bleed for hours unattended," he added. "I was rushed to the emergency ward and received some care."

Since being evicted from his bed space in the male ward, he now sleeps in an open passage on a wooden bench without a mosquito net, surviving with mosquito repellent. "Mosquitoes finish me here; I usually buy mosquito coils to ease the bites at night," he said.

In contrast, Chima Innocent, another patient's relative, confirmed to The New Daily Prime that the compulsory payment for feeding was stopped last year.

An ex-patient, Uche Worlu, who was transferred to UPTH in December 2023 due to

a health complication, recounted his experience. While initially required to pay for feeding during his stay, he observed that the policy ended by February 2024.

Worlu stated: "After going through antibiotics treatment, I did not undergo surgery because the site of my previous surgery got complicated and reopened. I was brought in as an emergency case, which extended my stay."

"I stayed here until February. By the third week of February, they stopped providing food. The payment was compulsory, and they counted each day you stayed in the hospital. By March, I noticed they had completely stopped serving food."

The Sickle cell patient Bedsore and Broken Hopes

Embale, a caregiver for his bedridden son Wisdom, who sustained a spinal cord injury at his workplace in Bayelsa State, shared his frustrations. He described how their funds were exhausted after being charged for bed sore treatments and a proposed ₦1.5 million surgery.

"We can no longer meet the expenses," Embale admitted, preparing to take his son home without surgery. However, he noted that since their arrival at UPTH on October 16, they had not been asked to pay for feeding. "Since we came here, we've been buying our food," he said.

Mr. Wisdom affected by bedsore Hospital's Response

UPTH's Chief Protocol Officer, Chimele Winfred, dismissed the allegations, attributing patient complaints to "ingratitude." He confirmed that the hospital had stopped serving meals due to internal policy changes unrelated to hardship or patient complaints.

Kunle Afolayan: Netflix isn't leaving Nigeria

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Kunle Afolayan clarified comments on Netflix, dismissing claims it may leave Nigeria and reaffirming a strong partnership with the streaming giant.

Misinterpretation of remarks
Afolayan noted that his comments, made during the Zuma Film Festival, were directed at encouraging Nigerian stakeholders to strengthen local distribution platforms. He explained that parts of his statement had been taken out of context, fueling false narratives.

“People can always pick things out of context and push whatever suits their narrative,” Afolayan said. He emphasised his dual role as both a beneficiary and supplier of Netflix content, reinforcing his ongoing collaboration with the platform.

Context at Zuma film festival

During the film festival, Afolayan was responding to a question from Victor Okhai, a prominent figure in Nigeria's film industry. Okhai had mentioned a rumoured “last supper meal” at a Netflix event in Nigeria, hinting at possible challenges for the platform's operations in the country.

Afolayan explained that he was absent from the Netflix event due to his mother's burial and was unaware of any discussions that occurred there. “I wasn't at that event, so I'm not privy to whatever conversation must have happened,” he clarified.

Instead, he used the occasion to call for self-reliance in the Nigerian film industry. “What I said was a wake-up call for us as a country to strengthen our own distribution platforms, regardless of Netflix's decisions,” Afolayan stated.

Netflix's structural adjustments

Afolayan also addressed Netflix's recent global strategy changes. He acknowledged that the platform has reduced its volume of original content



production but assured that it remains committed to the Nigerian market.

“The last time they were here, we had meetings. They reassured us that they're still here and will continue to work with us, but they might not be able to produce the same volume as before,” Afolayan said.

His message was clear: the Nigerian film industry must seize the opportunity to create alternative distribution platforms. “Even if Netflix isn't doing as much as it used to, why shouldn't we, as a country, build our own systems?” he asked.

Refuting negative narratives

Afolayan rejected attempts to twist his statements into claims of Netflix abandoning Nigeria. He reiterated that his comments were intended to inspire action, not spread panic.

“If you look at the video, I never said Netflix is leaving Nigeria. Dr. Okhai posed the question, and I concluded by saying, ‘If they're leaving, we need to wake up.’ It's a wake-up call for us to set up our own platforms,” Afolayan explained.

He reaffirmed Netflix's importance as a key partner for him and other Nigerian filmmakers, highlighting the platform's significant contributions to the industry.

Actor and Filmmaker Kunle Afolayan
Netflix's commitment to Nigeria

Netflix also weighed in, issuing a statement to reaffirm its dedication to the Nigerian creative scene. The company pledged to

“continue to invest in Nigerian stories to delight its members.”

This reassurance aligns with Afolayan's remarks, underscoring the company's ongoing presence in Nigeria despite its strategic shifts.

Call for industry growth

Kunle Afolayan's comments ultimately reflect a broader vision for the Nigerian film industry. While maintaining strong ties with global platforms like Netflix, he urged local stakeholders to invest in homegrown solutions.

By building robust distribution networks, the industry can reduce dependence on external entities and create sustainable growth. His message was not one of alarm but of empowerment—a call for collective effort to secure the future of Nigerian cinema.

In a fast-changing entertainment landscape, Afolayan's perspective offers a balanced approach. By embracing collaboration with global partners while developing local capacities, the Nigerian film industry can thrive both locally and globally. Why I reconciled with my brother at our mother's burial – Kunle Afolayan

Zuma Film Festival: FG calls for ‘upliftment of African cinema

By Agency Reporter



ZUMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The Minister of State, Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA), Dr. Mariya Mahmoud, has called on relevant stakeholders in the film industry to continue to celebrate and uplift African cinema.

Mahmoud made the call at the closing ceremony/ award night of the foremost Zuma Film Festival in Abuja on Thursday.

She said this would ensure that voices from our continent are heard on every stage around the world

The minister was represented by Maigida Adamu Kuku, State Coordinator on Special Investment Programmes.

Mahmoud said over the past few days, they had witnessed the remarkable talents and innovation that defined the essence of African and global cinema.

According to her, such talents and innovation emanated from documentaries to groundbreaking narratives, as well as true celebration of true storytelling.

“Our team members’ work inspires, educates and challenges perception, the voice of this generation and your creativity has illuminated our straining hearts.

“This gathering operates in line with visionaries and foreign tiers of the world, proving that the power of

cinema transcends borders, unites all and tells the stories that need to be told,” she said.

The minister thanked the sponsors, partners and organisers for their unwavering support, as well as their contributions which had made the platform possible in empowering artistes and audiences alike.

She said that the audiences were the tool that has been the cinema through supporting this film and engaging in conversation.

“You are essential in keeping this art alive, as we leave this place, let us make the stories, the lessons and the inspiration with us.

” Let us continue to celebrate and uplift African cinema and ensure that the voices from our continent are heard on every stage around the world.

” It is my sincere prayer that the spirit of the Zuma Film Festival will continue to inspire us to recreate and share.

“As an administration, we will continue to support initiatives that will not only promote art, but also things that unite us as people,” she said.

In his remarks, Dr. Ali Nuhu, Managing Director of Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC), said that the film festival has rekindled the spirit of collaboration and innovation that defined the film industry.

Nuhu, who is also the chairman of the Zuma International Film Festival Planning Committee, said that

measuring the true impact of cinema was not in the awards bestowed, applause heard or the stories being told.

According to him, it is in moments like these where we come together, transcending borders and barriers, united by our shared passion for the magic of the silver screen.

Nuhu called on stakeholders to navigate the digital renaissance and remember that while technology evolves, the essence of storytelling remains unchanged.

“Your dedication ensured that over 250 film content creators and emerging talents received invaluable training, strengthening the connection between veteran filmmakers and the next generation of digital creative minds,” he added.

Nuhu expressed gratitude to Vice President Kashim Shettima, for delivering the 2024 NFC Annual Film Lecture.

“Your insights on digital solutions for the development of African cinema have been enlightening and transformative,” he said.

He also appreciated all the ministers’ unwavering support, which has been instrumental in making this festival a resounding success.

Rebels seize Hama, threatening Bashar Al – Assad regime

By Olamilekan Botti

In Syrian conflict, the recent seizure of Hama by rebel forces has sent shockwaves through the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, escalating initial tremors into what can only be described as an earthquake.

Just days after rebels captured Aleppo, analysts and military observers predicted that Hama—located over 130 kilometres (80 miles) south of Aleppo—would pose an insurmountable challenge for the jihadist-led factions. Many believed that the forces loyal to Assad would have time to regroup and fortify their defences, quashing any rebel advance before they could reach the city's gates. However, their calculations proved to be gravely mistaken.

On Thursday, the rebels achieved a stunning victory, capturing Hama with minimal resistance, even going so far as to film their celebratory stroll through the governor's lavish marble mansion. The swift fall of this strategic city has sent ripples of jubilation among the Syrian refugees who had fled Assad's regime during the earlier years of the civil war, ushering in a wave of cautious optimism.

Following the loss of Aleppo, Assad's forces hurried to establish a defensive perimeter around Hama. This city has long been considered a critical crossroads for numerous strategic highways across Syria. Interestingly, Hama was a location that saw no significant fighting during the civil war from 2011 to 2016, primarily because opposition forces understood the futility of challenging the regime's heavily fortified positions.

The capture of Hama marks a critical juncture for the rebels, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to advance further south toward Homs. It is in Homs that the seeds of discontent against Assad were first publicly sown in 2011, a movement that ultimately spiralled into the widespread conflict engulfing the



nation today. However, if the rebels continue southward, they will likely face their most formidable challenges yet; Homs serves as a vital link to the capital, Damascus, and is entrenched within Assad's loyalist stronghold along the Mediterranean coast.

Further complicating matters, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), the chief jihadist group spearheading the rebellion, signalled a possible shift in strategy by extending an olive branch to Assad's Alawite community. HTS has pledged to protect this minority group and encouraged its members to deflect support away from the regime. This gesture reflects HTS's transformation from a jihadist faction into a shrewd player within Syria's political landscape.

Under the leadership of Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who is the target of a \$10 million U.S. bounty, HTS has been keen to distance itself from its extremist roots, even considering a rebranding to foster a more inclusive national identity. Al-Jolani, who now dons military fatigues reminiscent of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, has emphasized that various minorities including Kurds and Christians will not face persecution at the hands of his troops. Over the last four years, HTS has equipped itself with elite units and advanced weaponry, outpacing Assad's beleaguered forces.

The Assad regime is currently grappling with diminishing morale among its soldiers and a declining support network from its traditional allies, Russia and Iran. In a desperate effort to bolster troop morale, Assad raised military salaries by

50 per cent this week underscoring the precarious state of his government.

Meanwhile, in the capital city of Damascus, a palpable atmosphere of anxiety prevails. Elite units from the 4th Division maintain a vigilant presence, while the Republican Guard protects the president along with other crucial state institutions. Certain southern neighbourhoods are now patrolled by Iranian-backed militias, a sign of the escalating tensions.

Should the rebels succeed in advancing toward Homs, the future of Assad's regime will hang perilously in the balance. They may also consider strategic military actions against Russian sites such as the Tartus naval base or the Hmeimim airbase, or pivot towards securing key oil and gas fields to deny the regime vital resources.

Whatever course the rebels choose to take, the reality remains grim for Assad, as he faces an increasingly fragmented Syria and dwindling military resources. In just one week, the regime has lost a staggering six air bases across Idlib, Hama, and Aleppo, significantly constraining the operational capabilities of both Russian and Syrian air forces. With an estimated loss of 25 to 33 per cent of its military hardware, the regime is in a perilous state as momentum continues to shift away from Assad and his administration.

Trump picks Musk associate to head AI, cryptocurrency agency

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said the right-wing venture capitalist, David Sacks would become “the White House AI & Crypto Czar,” a post on his social media platform Truth Social showed.

Trump called artificial intelligence (AI) and cryptocurrency “two areas critical to the future of American competitiveness.”

Sacks, a confidant of tech billionaire, Elon Musk, will be charged with making the U.S. the clear world market leader in the AI and digital currency business.

Trump, who has long complained about what he has called a “liberal bias” from large tech companies such as Meta, also said that Sacks “will safeguard Free Speech online, and steer us away from Big Tech bias and censorship.”

Sacks will also be charged with creating a legal framework for the crypto industry so “it has the clarity it has been asking for and can thrive in the U.S.”



The multi-billionaire Sacks will also head the future president’s advisory board on science and technology.

23-yr-old Colombian hitwoman ‘The Doll’ arrested for several murders

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A sultry 23-year-old Colombian woman known as “The Doll” and labeled a “dangerous hitwoman” was arrested in connection to several targeted gangland killings — including the recent ambush murder of her ex-lover, according to local reports.

Karen Julieth Ojeda Rodriguez — known to police by the alias “La Muneca” or “The Doll” — was cuffed for her alleged involvement in several high-profile murders in the municipality of Barrancabermeja allegedly carried out at the behest of Los de la M gang, Spanish language outlet Libertad Digital reported Thursday.

Rodriguez was reportedly in the midst of a career expansion, leading a small cadre of hitmen conducting a reign of terror in the region before her arrest, according to a report from Spanish outlet Infobae.

Rodriguez was picked up by police after the July 23 ambush assassination of her ex-boyfriend in a rural area of Colombia known as Piedecuesta, according to Magdalena Medio Police.

The femme fatale called her ex, Deyvy Jesus, and beckoned him to meet so the two could supposedly resolve a money dispute, police said.

But the unsuspecting beau was riddled with bullets when two men drove by on a motorcycle and gunned him down, allegedly at the behest of “The Doll,” the report recounted.

Rodriguez was arrested alongside an accomplice Paula Valentina Joya Rueda, 24, who is known under the alias “Gorda Sicaria,” which translates to “Fat Hitwoman,” according to Libertad Digital.

Another accomplice, identified as

“Leopoldo” was taken into custody at the same time as “The Doll” — with police saying they seized a revolver and a 9-millimeter caliber pistol during the arrest

Police are working to determine if those weapons were used in any of the recent killings, according to local reports.

“With the capture of alias La Muneca and alias Leopoldo, a period of calm has been created in the region. These arrests mark progress in the dismantling of criminal structures responsible for the recent homicides,” Lieutenant Colonel Muaricio Herrera of the Magdalena Medio Police said, according to Infobae.

Why African countries are rejecting France, embracing Turkey

By New Daily Prime

The days of France's dominance in its former African colonies appear to be clearly over, as Paris is increasingly rejected in the region.

In a matter of months, an anti-French wave in West and Central Africa has seen France's once-trusted economic and military allies turn their backs against it. The latest are Senegal and Chad, who tore up security partnerships with Paris last week.

The bitterness with France has also been publicly demonstrated in scenes across major cities in the region, where crowds of protesters have waved banners emblazoned with the now-familiar rallying call of "France dégage" (France get out).

In Niger, days after the military took over last year, a hostile crowd stormed the French embassy in the capital, Niamey, and demanded that its staff leave the country. It marked a point of no return in the divorce.

COLONIAL INFLUENCE

Experts say France's refusal in recent decades to let go of its colonial influence in the so-called *Françafrique* – a term that has since become pejorative – has been largely to blame.

For instance, the CFA franc, a currency used by 14 African countries, is still printed in France. Until recently, over 6,000 French troops were spread across Africa with the African countries hoping they would help in fighting terrorist groups. However, they say the French troops have failed to convincingly assist them.

Furthermore, France's oversized economic influence, especially in mineral extraction, and perceived undue access to political leaders have led to widespread blame for local economic challenges.

"(The anti-France wave) has been guided in many ways by history and experience. The ties became less and less appealing, especially in the context of very uneven power dynamics, which made it difficult for



African countries to aspire to have more sovereignty and self-determination in a manner in which they wanted to be in control of their developmental and security agenda," Tighisti Amare, Deputy Director of African Programme at Chatham House, told TRT Afrika.

ENDING PARTNERSHIPS

Chad last week joined other Sahel countries, including Niger and Mali, in ending security and defence partnerships with their former colonial ruler. The Chadian foreign ministry said it was time for the country to "assert its full sovereignty and redefine its strategic partnerships according to national priorities."

Senegal followed suit a day later, with President Bassirou Diomaye Faye asking France to close its military bases in his country.

"Senegal is an independent country, it is a sovereign country, and sovereignty does not accept the presence of military bases in a sovereign country," he said at his presidential palace.

France's waning footprint in the region is being replaced by other powers like Türkiye, which offer diversity in relations with African nations.

"Türkiye has very quickly since 2009 become a significant actor in Africa. The approach it has taken has been quite refreshing," said Amare.

"It started with a strong diplomatic approach, which resulted in almost quadrupling the number of diplomatic

missions in Africa, followed by high-level visits, and then it all came together in 2011, when it basically put Somalia back on the map after decades of isolation due to insecurity in the country."

MUTUAL BENEFIT

The approach has been to make decisions based on mutual benefit in the fields of security, trade and infrastructure.

"African countries are looking for multiple global powers of different sizes to work with. They do not want to be pigeonholed in a single relation or in a small circle of relations. They are looking to diversify as a means of getting different things from these relationships," Amare observed.

"In the case of Türkiye, there is an opportunity for scaling the transfer of technology, focusing on the long-term aspect of development – whether it's scaling technology transfer and know-how in terms of increasing the size of their manufacturing industry, as well as industrialisation, which is a key priority for African countries."

It has led to Türkiye's trade volume with African nations increasing eightfold over recent years, surpassing £40 billion, according to figures by the Anadolu news agency.

Weeks after ceasefire: Hezbollah already re-arming, US warns

By Dave Oludare Oso

The US Intelligence has warned that the Lebanese Shi'ite terrorist organization, Hezbollah has already begun rebuilding its military capabilities and financial operations, just over a week since a ceasefire with Israel went into effect after 13 and a half months of war.

While the Israel Defence Forces (IDF's) aerial and ground offensives severely degraded, the Iranian proxy's terrorist infrastructure and forces, according to U.S. intelligence estimates, Hezbollah has started recruiting new fighters, boosting domestic weapons production and looking for ways to continue smuggling arms in via Syria.

Reuters cited a senior American official, an Israeli official, and two U.S. lawmakers briefed on the intelligence in its reporting published on Wednesday.

According to the terms of the Nov. 27 ceasefire agreement, Hezbollah is prohibited from rearming.

Hezbollah lost more than half of its weapons stockpiles and thousands of fighters during the war with Israel, according to American assessments.

However, it has not been destroyed, with the sources saying that it still has thousands of short-range rockets and will try to rebuild using weapons factories in neighboring countries with transportation routes into Lebanon.

One of the lawmakers told Reuters that Hezbollah has been "temporarily weakened" and its command-and-control capabilities diminished. However, the lawmaker notes, "This organization is built to withstand disruption."

Washington is particularly concerned about Syria, where Turkish-backed jihadist terrorist groups recently launched offensives in Aleppo and Hama, in a major



challenge to the Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian backers.

Israel continues to target Hezbollah smuggling routes in Syria and at the Syrian-Lebanon border and to disrupt Iranian weapons shipments via Syria.

A senior U.S. official revealed that Washington is urging Syrian President Bashar Assad to restrict Hezbollah's activities, with other regional countries being enlisted to assist in this effort.

Reuters reported earlier this week that the U.S. and the United Arab Emirates discussed the possibility of lifting sanctions on the Assad regime, provided, among other conditions, he halts the weapons supply routes to Hezbollah.

Hezbollah officials assert that the group will maintain its "resistance" against Israel. However, sources in Lebanon indicate that Hezbollah's primary focus at the moment is on rebuilding and restoring homes damaged by Israeli airstrikes in Southern Lebanon and Beirut.

Hezbollah's financial system Meanwhile, Saudi-owned, London-based pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat reported that Hezbollah has begun assessing repairs to its financial arm, Al-Qard al-Hassan, which was heavily damaged by Israeli attacks during the war.

The Iranian proxy plans to pay housing grants through the bank to repair the homes of families impacted by the war. Each family may receive \$12,000 for rent and home repairs.

Despite suffering severe blows in an Israeli aerial operation on Oct. 21, the bank resumed operations a week after the ceasefire.

The Saudi newspaper highlighted that "the announcement of the bank's resumed operations contradicts Israeli claims of its destruction."

However, a source close to Hezbollah confirmed that the group had suffered significant financial losses during the war.

The source further explained that the funds for rehabilitation will not come from Al-Qard al-Hassan's resources, but from recent financial transfers from Iran to Hezbollah.

Iran transferred \$1 billion via a regional intermediate on the first day of the ceasefire, which Hezbollah plans to use for its rehabilitation efforts.

Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy meet with lawmakers on DOGE plans

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, who President-elect Donald Trump tapped to lead the newly coined Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE, are meeting with lawmakers Thursday as they seek to build support for the cost-cutting initiative.

House Speaker Mike Johnson is hosting Musk and Ramaswamy on Capitol Hill to discuss ideas for reform with lawmakers, after Trump announced that the Tesla CEO and entrepreneur would spearhead the effort last month.

The president-elect outlined that the two men would “pave the way for my Administration to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure Federal Agencies.”

Johnson said in remarks to reporters ahead of the meeting that during a “historic moment” for the country, the two men “are going to help navigate through this exciting new day,” calling them “innovators” and “forward thinkers.”

“We have long lamented the size and scope of the government, that it has grown too large,” Johnson said. “Government is too big, it does too many things and it does almost nothing well. And the taxpayers deserve better.”

The speaker outlined that Musk and Ramaswamy were first meeting for a “brainstorming session” with decision-makers in Congress, including chairs of relevant committees and the leaders of the DOGE caucuses in the House and Senate.

He said that the two men were set to meet with lawmakers more broadly later in the day.

“We need to make government more efficient and that is what this whole objective is,” Johnson said, adding that it would be a bicameral effort with bipartisan support.

Last month, GOP Reps. Aaron Bean of Florida and Pete Sessions of Texas



started the DOGE caucus in the House, while Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa launched its counterpart in the Senate.

Ernst touted the effort on Fox News last week, noting that she has a decade-long track record on waste projects that she’s bringing to the initiative.

“We look forward to working with the caucus and making sure that DOGE is successful,” Ernst said.

In recent days, some Democrats have said they will join or expressed interest in the caucus as well. Rep. Jared Moskowitz, a Florida Democrat, told reporters Wednesday that he’s “not afraid of having the conversation,” saying that “staying in a safe space and not having the conversation isn’t going to help anybody.”

“I think Democrats should embrace government efficiency,” Moskowitz said, after becoming the first in his party to join the caucus. “That doesn’t mean that we’re going to start cutting services, but I think it can be more efficient.”

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, told reporters on Thursday that she’d be willing to work with Musk if he “wants to change government contracting to cut billions of dollars of waste out of the Pentagon budget.”

“We’re here to do work on behalf of the American people,” Warren said. “And if that means working with Elon Musk, I’m ready. And if it means fighting Elon Musk, I’m ready for that, too.”

Still, the DOGE initiative, with a meme-

inspired acronym, has prompted operational questions, including what authority it will have to cut spending, which is authorized by Congress, and what spending it would target.

Musk and Ramaswamy outlined that they are aiming to cut \$500 billion in annual spending. But around two-thirds of federal spending is mandatory, while large portions of discretionary spending goes to defence.

Among the areas the two men said they intended to target for cuts are The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, International organizations that receive grants and entities like Planned Parenthood.

Musk and Ramaswamy have also outlined a plan to reduce the number of federal employees.

Ramaswamy came into the Trump orbit after initially running against him in the presidential primary.

Meanwhile, Musk, the world’s richest person, became a major part of Trump’s 2024 presidential campaign, even offering ahead of the election to give \$1 million a day to sign his political action committee’s petition backing the Constitution.

He appeared with Trump at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, ahead of the election and has since been a frequent visitor to Mar-a-Lago.

I won fair and clean, Mourinho fires back at Guardiola

By Dave Oludare Oso



Jose Mourinho has responded to Pep Guardiola's apparent trophy dig, insisting that the Spaniard's Premier League title achievements will always carry the shadow of the 115 financial charges facing Manchester City.

Guardiola, recently jeered by Liverpool fans over City's struggles, responded by raising six fingers to signify his Premier League titles.

When reminded that Mourinho had previously used a similar gesture to highlight his three league titles before being dismissed, Guardiola offered in response;

"I hope that's not the case for me. But in the end, we are similar in

some ways. However, he won three Premier Leagues, and I've won six. So, it's not quite the same, is it?"

Hitting back at Guardiola's comments, Mourinho referenced the 115 charges against Manchester City for alleged breaches of the Premier League's financial regulations between 2009 and 2018, allegations the club has consistently denied.

"Guardiola said something about me... he won six trophies and I won three, but I won fairly and cleanly," Turkish outlet Hurriyet quoted Mourinho as saying on Friday, ahead of his team Fenerbahce's clash with Besiktas.

"If I lost, I want to congratulate my opponent because he was better than

me. I don't want to win by dealing with 150 court cases."

The former Manchester United manager has previously said that he hopes to add a fourth Premier League medal to his collection if City are stripped of their titles and the Red Devils, who finished second in the 2017/2018 season, are awarded the trophy.

Mourinho's Fenerbahce occupy second place in the Turkish Super Lig, and are currently on a run of four straight victories ahead of the Istanbul derby with Besiktas on Saturday.