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# 2027: El-Rufai, Al-Mustapha, Atiku's men hold 'strategic meeting' at Abuja SDP secretariat

By Dave Oludare Oso



Some prominent politicians in the country, including Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, former governor of Kaduna State, and Major Hamza Al-Mustapha, former presidential candidate, have met with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) leadership in Abuja to strategize ahead of the 2027 general elections.

The closed-door meeting, which took place at the SDP national secretariat, has sparked speculations about potential political realignments ahead of the 2027 general elections.

In attendance at the parley was People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar's former spokesman, Otunba Segun Showunmi.

-Although the specific agenda of the meeting was not disclosed, it is being described as part of a broader strategy to forge alliances among opposition figures to present a formidable challenge to President Bola Tinubu in the next election cycle.

El-Rufai, once a supporter but now a critic of President Tinubu's style of governance, did not make the ministerial list after the Senate withheld his and two others' confirmations, citing security reports from the Department of State Security Service (DSS) last year.

Two others who did not make the ministerial list at the time were Sani Danladi, a former Senator from Taraba, and Stella Okotete, a nominee from Delta State.

Showunmi confirmed the meeting in a Facebook post, describing it as a "strategic gathering" convened by SDP Chairman, Shehu Gabam, to evaluate the state of opposition politics in Nigeria.

"You must set forth at dawn! HE Shehu Gabam, Chairman of SDP, called a Strategic Meeting, with HE Nasir El-Rufai, Major Hamza Al-Mustapha, Otunba Segun Showunmi. The alternative to meet, greet, and review the state of opposition democratic engagement in Nigeria," Showunmi

wrote.

This is two days after El-Rufai denied some quarters' claim that he was planning to dump the ruling APC for an opposition party.

In a post on his X handle on Sunday, the former Kaduna governor asked Nigerians to disregard the claim.

El-Rufai posted, "Please, disregard the patent lies and rumours about my political affiliation. I have referred the lead peddlers of the fake news for further action by my lawyers."

However, prominent APC figures like El-Rufai's involvement in discussions with SDP leaders has fuelled speculation about potential cracks within the ruling party.

While El-Rufai remains a key figure in the APC, political analysts are closely monitoring his participation in opposition-related activities.

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9X3	166,223.50
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8X3	98,500.00
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6X4	94,010.50
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6X2	47,500.00
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9X3	112,875.00
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8X5	143,500.00
8X4	93,500.00
8X3	82,434.50
7X4	111,173.50
6X4	82,434.50
6X3	59,250.00
6X2	40,000.00
5X6	98,749.50
5X4	65,833.00
5X3	49,375.00
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9X5	168,191.50
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8X3	N/A
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**ALL RATES ARE VAT INCLUSIVE**

# How tax reforms will benefit Nigerians, SMEs

By Dave Oludare Oso

As Nigerians await the National Assembly's passage of the proposed tax reform bills, chairman of the Presidential Committee on Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms, Taiwo Oyedele, has listed some of the potential benefits of the reforms.

The tax bills, which include Nigeria Tax Bill, Nigeria Tax Administration Bill, Nigeria Revenue Service Establishment Bill, and Joint Revenue Board Establishment Bill, are aimed at addressing the nation's tax system's gridlocks such as multiplicity of taxes, fragmentation of revenue administration, and issues with the excessive tax burden on most vulnerable citizens, including small businesses and low-income earners.

The bills, when passed into law, are expected to exempt low-income earners from Pay As You Earn (PAYE), reduce PAYE tax for those earning a monthly salary of N1.7 million or less, and keep value added tax (VAT) on food, healthcare, education, electricity generation and transmission at zero percent.

It will also ensure VAT exemption on transportation, renewable energy, CNG, baby products, sanitary towels, rent, fuel products, tax break for wage award and transport subsidy to low-income earners. It will also provide tax incentives for employers to hire more people incrementally than in the previous three years.

"The business person does not need the tax authority's or government's permission to claim their VAT. Once you pay VAT and you have the invoice on your own at the end of the month, you deduct that VAT from the VAT that you need to pay,"



Oyedele said in a recent X Space.

Other benefits include: exemption of stamp duties on rent below N10 million, PAYE tax exemption for other rank and armed forces fighting insecurity, friendly tax rules for remote workers and digital nomads, as well as clarity on taxation of digital assets to avoid double taxation and allow deduction for losses

For small businesses, the law is expected to ensure tax exemption threshold for small businesses with annual turnover of N25 million to N50 million, exemption from company income tax for small businesses (tax at 0%), and zero withholding tax deduction on business income of small businesses.

High income earners will also benefit from the bill when passed into law, as it seeks VAT exemption on purchase of real estate, clarity on taxation of benefit in kind and limit of taxable accommodation benefit to 20 percent of annual income,

with an exemption of tax on sale of shares up to N150 million and gains not exceeding N10 million.

For the states which produce more zero-VAT-rated products, he emphasised that companies paying tax by consumption data will not affect them as the goal is to make Nigeria produce more than it consumes.

According to Oyedele, "We are collecting both consumption data and production data so that nobody is disadvantaged as a result of producing goods that are considered exempt or zero-rated."

Oyedele further said, "People are buying sugar to do all manners of things. You know, people are buying fast-moving consumer products. They are paying for electricity. So, every state in Nigeria, regardless of what you're producing, is also consuming."

## Gunmen abduct two Catholic nuns in Anambra

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Police have confirmed that two Catholic nuns have been abducted by gunmen along Ufuma Road in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State.

The nuns, identified as Vincentia Maria Nwankwo and Grace Mariette Okoli, were kidnapped on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, while returning from a vocational association meeting in Ogboji community.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the congregation to which the nuns belong, expressed sorrow over the incident and called for prayers for their safe release.

The statement read, "With sadness, we write to inform the general public of the kidnapping of our two sisters, Vincentia Maria Nwankwo and Grace Mariette Okoli."

Nwankwo serves as the principal of Archbishop Charles Heerey Memorial Model Secondary School, Ufuma,

while Okoli is a teacher at Immaculata Girls Model Secondary School, Nnewi.

"We commit our sisters to the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary for their speedy release from the hands of their kidnapers.

"We solicit your fervent prayers that they may be released unconditionally and come back to us safe and sound," the statement added.

It was learnt that the Anambra State Police Command has launched an operation to rescue the victims.

Tochukwu Ikenga, the police spokesperson, confirmed that a joint operation is underway to ensure their safe return.

Nnaghe Itam, Commissioner of Police,



who visited the scene of the abduction, said the command is following leads to rescue the nuns and apprehend the perpetrators.

As of now, no group has claimed responsibility for the abduction, and the motive remains unclear.

## Tinubu splits College of Aviation Technology into six campuses across geo political zones

By **Dr. Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi**

In a significant move to enhance efficiency and ensure nationwide accessibility, Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has announced the division of the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT), located in Zaria, Kaduna State, into six regional campuses across the country's geopolitical zones.

This decision, aimed at expanding the college's reach and improving operational effectiveness, was revealed by the Ondo State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in a statement posted on its official X (formerly Twitter) account.

The campuses will be strategically distributed across the country to reflect Nigeria's geopolitical zones. They will be located in Akure (Southwest), Osubi (South-South), Ebonyi (Southeast), Ilorin (North Central), Yola (Northeast), and Zaria (Northwest).

This restructuring of NCAT reflects Tinubu's commitment to fostering inclusive development and bridging regional gaps in aviation training. By



decentralizing the aviation college, the initiative seeks to provide more opportunities for aspiring aviation professionals across the country and strengthen Nigeria's aviation sector.

The Nigerian College of Aviation Technology, established in 1964, has long been a cornerstone of aviation training in the country. The expansion into six campuses is expected to bolster its reputation as a leading institution in the aviation industry, promoting greater accessibility and operational efficiency across Nigeria.

This strategic move underscores Tinubu's broader vision for equitable development and the modernization of critical national institutions. It aligns with his administration's emphasis on innovation, regional inclusivity, and enhanced service delivery in key sectors.

As the campuses are established, stakeholders in the aviation industry eagerly anticipate the broader impact this initiative will have on the training, development, and competitiveness of aviation professionals in Nigeria.



# UNILAG graduates 16,409, as 561 bag first class

By New Daily Prime



A total of 16,409 students are graduating during the 55th convocation ceremony of the University of Lagos, UNILAG, the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola, has disclosed.

She stated this on Wednesday while briefing the press on activities lined up for the ceremony.

Among the graduating students, 561 are in the first class category, while 3,910 are in the second class upper class and 3,763 in the second class lower category, while 1,143 are in the third class category.

This is just as two students emerged the overall best graduating students with a perfect score of 5.0 CGPA. They are from the Faculty of Science, Department of Cell Biology & Genetics, and they are Damilare Haroun Adebakin and Samuel Akinade Badekale. The university is also producing 218 Doctor of Philosophy degree graduates. The VC added that some projects would also be inaugurated by the Chairman of the Governing Council, Chief Wole Olanipekun, SAN.

,"They are the Centre for Herbal Medicine, Drug Recovery & Development, Biomedical Toxicology, Regulatory Science and Pharmacovigilance Analytical Laboratory (ACEDHARS Building) – one of the World Bank supported Centres of Excellence project which is focused on the development of indigenous plants for medical applications. We are also commissioning the new 120 bed space Moremi Hall extension and finally the new ultra-modern Learning Commons, an extension of our library services which speaks to our student-centered

ervices and provides an environment for teamwork, creative engagement, research-collaboration, and knowledge co-creation.

"The Convocation Lecture titled, "Universities as Hubs for Development and Wealth Creation" will be delivered by Dr. Tayo Aduloju, the CEO of the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (NESG) at J.F. Ade-Ajayi Auditorium. We are looking forward to a very thought-provoking lecture that will add to the discuss on funding of tertiary education and positioning them as drivers of economic and social development. We are privileged to have as Chairman, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, SAN, former Governor of Lagos State and former Minister of Works whose clarity in addressing issues was pivotal to innovative reforms and development of our country," she said.

Ogunsola added that two distinguished professors who have retired, Babajide Alo, of the Department of Chemistry and Olukayode Amund, of the Department of Microbiology, would be awarded Professor Emeritus, while Prof. Victor Ariole, of the Department of European Languages, would be awarded a Gold Medal for his contributions to the university and the nation.

"We will also be conferring honorary degrees in recognition to three personalities who have distinguished themselves in scholarship, made ground-breaking discoveries, or

contributed significantly to academic and societal development. This year we have the privilege of honouring two men and a woman, who have shown that Integrity, hard work and service to the nation work.

"They are Mr. Fola Adeola, Engr. Kolawole Adesina, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

Adeola is a co-founder of Guarantee Trust Bank, Adesina is the Group Managing Director of the Sahara Power Group and Okonjo-Iweala is the Director General of the World Trade Organization, WTO."

On some the developments that have taken place in the last one year, Ogunsola said Chief Tunde Fanimokun is donating a N4.5 billion postgraduate building to the university, while over N4 billion also came in as grants to the university from various sources.

She commended Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State for the renovation of the Ade Ajayi Hall, while Pastor Tunde Bakare helped in providing solar panels for the Faculty of Law.

On the renovation of students' hostels, the VC gave the hint that the exercise could mean students would be off campus throughout the ongoing first semester.

"It is either we renovate the hostels now or we put ourselves at the mercy of galloping inflation. For the past five years, our students have been complaining about the conditions of the hostels. We took a long time view of the situation and decided to renovate them now. If we don't do it now, there cannot be anytime when students won't be on campus.

"We decided that the students should do virtual learning this semester. If you consider the fact that not all of them are from Lagos State, and even for those in Lagos, what about the cost of transport? For somebody I living in Ikorodu for instance, the fares for commuting from there to campus in three days may be higher than the cost of data for over one month. Moreover, virtual learning is not strange to our students.

# 419, agbero, japa, 19 other Nigerian words added to Oxford English Dictionary

By **Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi**

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) has kicked off 2025 with a significant update, adding 22 Nigerian English words to its collection.

This marks another milestone in recognizing the rich and diverse linguistic contributions of Nigeria to global English.

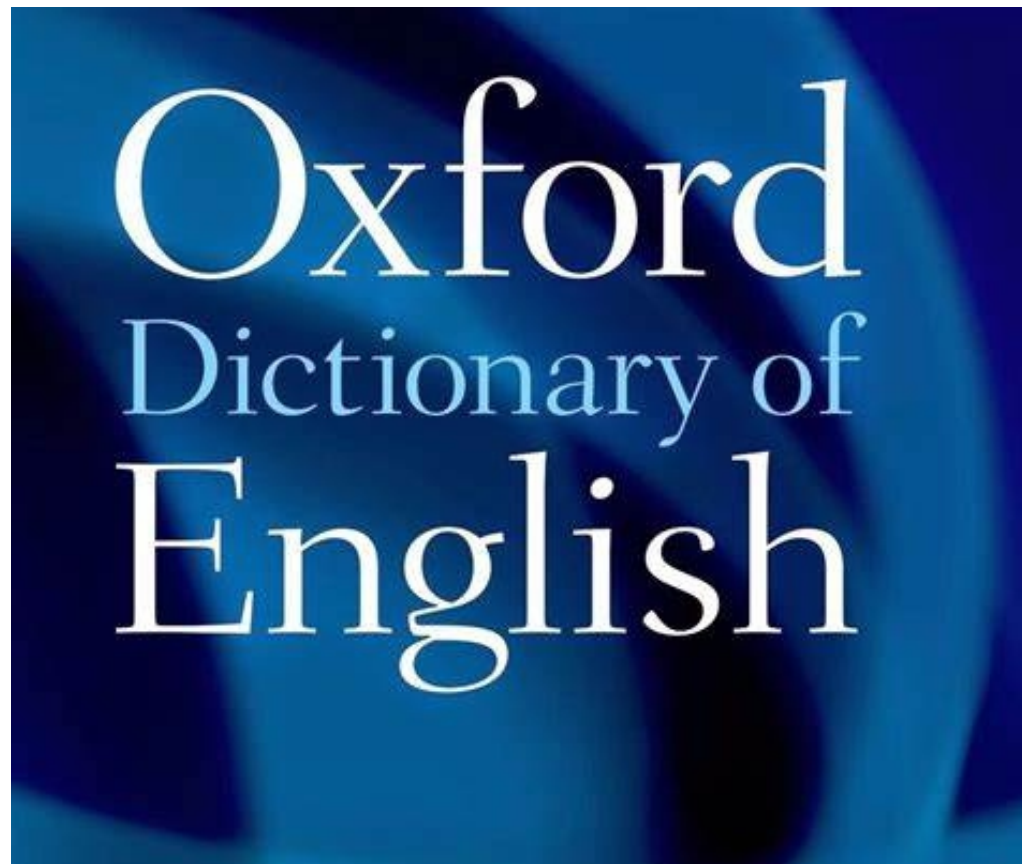
Kingsley Ugwuanyi, a lecturer at the University of Nigeria and consultant for the OED, played a pivotal role in this update.

On Tuesday, he shared the exciting news on his social media platform, X (formerly Twitter). Ugwuanyi expressed his joy and pride in a post that highlighted his involvement in the project.

“The wait is over!” he wrote. “I’m thrilled to announce that the @OED has officially published its latest updates, featuring an amazing collection of #NigerianEnglish words that beautifully reflect Nigeria’s culture, creativity, and the unique ways we express ourselves as Nigerians.”

Ugwuanyi also revealed that he was responsible for drafting most of the words added in this update. He didn’t stop there—he provided their pronunciations as well. “So, when you explore the OED online and click on the pronunciations, you’ll hear my voice bringing these words to life,” he added.

Among the new entries are “419,” a term synonymous with fraud, and “agbero,” used to describe young men working as touts in car parks and bus stops. These individuals assist passengers and collect money from drivers. Each word reflects the dynamic nature of Nigerian English and its ties to the nation’s culture and daily life.



The OED updates its database several times a year to incorporate new words and meanings from around the world. This January’s update celebrates the linguistic creativity of Nigerians and their unique influence on the English language.

A new Nigerian word added to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

A new Nigerian word added to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

Other words included in the update range from colloquial expressions to culturally specific terms that capture the vibrancy of Nigerian life. This achievement underscores the growing recognition of African English varieties in global lexicons.

Ugwuanyi’s contribution is a testament to the importance of local expertise in shaping how languages evolve. His voice, now immortalized in the OED, bridges the gap between the spoken and written word, offering users worldwide

a glimpse into the sounds and stories of Nigeria.

See full list below:

419, n.  
abi, adv.  
adire, adj. & n.  
agbero, n.  
area boy, n.  
cross-carpet, v.  
cross-carpeting, n.  
eba, n.  
Edo, n. & adj./2  
gele, n./2  
jand, n.  
jand, v.  
janded, adj.  
japa, n.  
japa, v.  
Kanuri, n. & adj.  
kobo, n./2  
Naija, adj. & n.  
suya, n.  
yahoo, n./2  
yahoo boy, n.  
yarn dust, v.



# Kano gov's aide dies 48 hours after swearing-in

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**G**overnor Abba Yusuf of Kano State's Special Adviser on Works, Engr. Ahmad Ishaq has been confirmed dead barely 48 hours after his appointment.

Bunkure died on Wednesday, January 8, 2024, in Egypt.

He was among 13 Special Advisers, seven Commissioners and six Permanent Secretaries sworn in on Monday at the Kano State government house.

Governor Yusuf in a statement on Wednesday by his spokesperson, Sunusi Bature, described his death as a tragic and irreplaceable loss to the state, his family and the wider political community.

Governor Yusuf described the death of Engr. Bunkure as a tragic and irreplaceable loss to Kano State, his



family, and the wider political community.

He prayed for Allah's mercy on the deceased and strength for his family to bear the painful loss.

"This is a heartbreaking moment for us as a government. Engr. Bunkure was a dedicated professional whose expertise

and contributions were expected to drive our administration's vision for development. His loss is deeply felt," the governor said.

Condolences have continued to pour in, including from His Excellency, Senator Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, and members of the Kano State Government.

# Bauchi gov reappoints three sacked commissioners as SAs

By Dave Oludare Oso

**G**overnor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State has reappointed three of his former commissioners to serve as special advisers less than 48 hours after their dismissal.

The appointments were announced on Tuesday in a statement issued by Mukhtar Gidado, the governor's Special Adviser on Media and Publicity. The statement described the move as part of the governor's strategy to ensure "effective leadership, inclusivity, and the attainment of his administration's developmental goals."

The reappointed officials include:

Abdulhameed Bununu, former Commissioner for Internal Security and Home Affairs, now Special Adviser on Multilateral Coordination and Regional Integration.

Usman Danturaki, former Commissioner for Information and

Communication, now Special Adviser on Labour Matters and Contributory Pension Scheme.

Madugu Yalams, former Commissioner for Agriculture, now Special Adviser on Technical and Vocational Education.

The statement added, "Governor Mohammed urges the appointees to bring their wealth of experience, dedication, and expertise in their respective fields to contribute significantly towards the attainment of the Governor's vision for Bauchi State. "He calls on them to discharge their responsibilities with diligence, transparency, and renewed focus on improving the lives of the people of Bauchi State."

Mohammed reaffirmed his administration's commitment to good



governance, accountability, and inclusive development for all citizens of Bauchi State.

Early on Tuesday, Mohammed reshuffled his cabinet and sacked five commissioners.

He said the reshuffling is to reinvigorate governance and ensure optimal service delivery to the people of the state.



# Higher calls price imminent as FG approves tariff hike

By Dave Oludare Oso



The federal government has agreed to demands for tariff hikes in the telecommunication industry. This is expected in the coming weeks, as the government aims to address sustainability challenges in the telecom sector. This implies that prices of calls, data and SMS will go up for the average Nigerian.

However, the hike will fall short of the 100 percent increase requested by service providers, with the government seeking to balance sector growth and protecting Nigerians from excessive financial burdens.

Bosun Tijani, the minister of communications, innovation, and digital economy, disclosed this during an industry stakeholder forum in Abuja on Wednesday.

“The essence of this gathering is recognizing the critical role the telecom sector plays in driving Nigeria’s economic development,” Tijani said.

“Tariff will go up. That’s the verdict. But it won’t be by 100%. We need to ensure

that as a sector, we put the right regulations in place that can ensure the growth of this sector, continue to contribute to job creation, but also enable other key sectors in the country as well.”

He disclosed that the government had commissioned a study to evaluate the financial needs of the telecom sector while minimizing the potential impact on consumers.

Aminu Maida, Executive Vice Chairman, Nigerian Telecommunications commission (NCC), noted that tariff adjustments will be accompanied by measures to simplify billing systems and increase transparency.

“We’ve revised our quality of service regulations, bringing the entire value chain into scope for compliance, from MNOs to tower codes and transmission companies.

“So when we do see these tariff

modifications, it’s also going to come with simplification. So every MNO or every service provider must comply with a simplified template. To show Nigerians what you are charging per minute, per voice, per SMS, and per megabyte of data.

“We’re moving away from a regime where you have a main rate, then a bonus at a different rate, which complicates understanding.”

Maida emphasized the need for meaningful connectivity and highlighted the government’s commitment to investing in infrastructure to ensure quality service across Nigeria.

He noted that while private sector investment had traditionally driven the sector, the government was stepping in to accelerate development.

# Dalung claims Tinubu's cabal more dangerous than Buhari's

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

**F**ormer Minister of Youth and Sports, Solomon Dalung, has claimed that the cabal surrounding President Bola Tinubu is more powerful and dangerous than the one that operated during former President Muhammadu Buhari's administration.

Speaking on Channels Television's Politics Today on Tuesday, January 7, Dalung described Tinubu's cabal as highly educated, ambitious, and refined, with a deep understanding of power dynamics, making them adept at manipulating governance and isolating the president.

Dalung compared this to Buhari's cabal, which he described as less sophisticated and made up of individuals with limited political experience.

He argued that while Buhari's cabal had narrow, self-serving motives, their influence was limited by their



lack of strategic depth.

The former minister also criticised the denial of the cabals' existence in Nigerian governance, warning that ignoring this political reality would be unfair to future generations.

Dalung questioned whether Tinubu's

administration is fulfilling its constitutional mandate to improve the well-being of citizens, highlighting growing frustration among ordinary Nigerians who are dissatisfied with the government's policies.

# Police arrests 21-year-old girl, boyfriend for staging self-kidnapping, demanding N2m

By **Helen Okechukwu**

**T**he Delta State Police Command has arrested a 21-year-old girl, Princess Okolie, and her boyfriend, Prince Atigbi, for allegedly staging her own kidnapping and demanding a ransom of ₦2 million from her parents.

The command's spokesperson, Bright Edafe, announced the arrest via his X page on Wednesday, noting that the Anti-Kidnapping Unit made the apprehension following a thorough investigation.

According to the victim's mother, the incident began on 30 December when her daughter left home to get her hair done but failed to return.

After reporting her disappearance at the Obomkpa Police Station, the mother escalated the matter to the Anti-Kidnapping Unit when ransom

demands started coming in.

Read Also: Gunmen kidnap two pastors in Adamawa

"They started calling my daddy, making demand of money. How much can he offer, the man said has N40,000 that he is a farmer and he does not have money. They ended the call. Later, they started demanding for N2 million and he pleaded with them that he has only N100,000. They said N2 million or nothing," the mother of the 21-year-old girl recounted in the interview video.

Ms. Okelu later confessed to staging the



kidnapping because her boyfriend could not provide her with transportation money to return home after visiting him.



# China Development Bank approves \$254.76 million loan for Nigeria's Kano-Kaduna railway project

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The China Development Bank (CDB) has approved a loan of \$254.76 million (€245 million) to support the construction of Nigeria's Kano-Kaduna railway project. The loan is aimed at providing financial support for the smooth progress of the project, which is expected to enhance regional connectivity and stimulate economic activity.

The Kano-Kaduna railway, with a total length of 203 kilometers, is a standard-gauge railway that will provide direct rail connectivity between Kano and Abuja. Once completed, the railway will offer residents a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation alternative, significantly enhancing regional connectivity.

According to the CDB, the loan is part of the bank's commitment to supporting Nigeria's infrastructure development. The project is being executed by the China Civil

Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), with financing provided by the CDB.

The CDB emphasized its commitment to continued collaboration with the Nigerian government to ensure the timely disbursement of funds and effective management of subsequent phases of the project. The bank noted that it will closely coordinate with Nigerian partners to ensure the smooth disbursement of subsequent loans and effective post-loan management.

The loan approval comes after the China Exim Bank withdrew its funding for the project. In 2023, the Minister of Transportation, Saidu Alkali, disclosed that China has committed to funding the Ibadan-Abuja and Kaduna-Kano sections of the Lagos-Kano railway under the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Federal Government has budgeted N44.4 billion for the completion of the Abuja-Kaduna Railway project, Lagos-Ibadan railway, and other railway

projects across the country. The government has also announced plans to construct a speed rail from Abuja to Lagos before the end of the year, with two organizations indicating interest in constructing the speed rail through a Public Private Partnership (PPP) agreement.

The Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Transportation, Mr. Adeleye Adeoye, said the construction of the speed rail would start as soon as the Infrastructure Concession Regulatory Commission (ICRC) completes its due process and gives the ministry the green light.

The completion of the Kano-Kaduna railway project is expected to have a significant impact on the region's economy and transportation infrastructure. With the loan approval from the CDB, the project is expected to progress smoothly, with completion slated for 2025.

## NNPCL CEO, Mele Kyari reflects on 60th Birthday, from Almajiri school to energy giant leader

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

**M**ele Kyari, the Group Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), has marked his 60th birthday with a heartfelt reflection on his remarkable journey from humble beginnings to heading Africa's largest energy company.

In a post shared on X (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday, January 8, Kyari, born January 8, 1965, expressed gratitude for the opportunities that led him from an Almajiri (Tsangaya) school pupil to leading one of Nigeria's most important state-owned enterprises. He also pledged to continue serving the nation with greater dedication and commitment.

Kyari, who was appointed CEO of NNPCL by former President Muhammadu Buhari in July 2019, has spent over three decades in the oil industry.

His 32-year tenure at NNPC reflects his deep roots in the sector, which

have seen him play a key role in transforming the company.

In his post, Kyari acknowledged the divine grace that has guided him throughout his journey, describing it as a life filled with both challenges and triumphs.

He said, "Allah, by His grace, spared my life to this exceptional day, making it my 60th year from birth, even much earlier on the Hijri calendar."

He expressed deep gratitude for the opportunities granted to him by the Nigerian government, particularly under Presidents Muhammadu Buhari and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to serve as both the last Group Managing Director (GMD) of the NNPC and the inaugural CEO of NNPCL.

Kyari reflected on the milestones of his career, saying, "Reflecting backwards alone can't account for the profoundly eventful life I spent to this date, walking through good and bad times, travails and triumphs, pains and happiness, fails and successes, and many more that only the



sufficiency of Allah will explain."

As he marked this significant milestone, Kyari emphasised his sense of responsibility, vowing to serve with renewed dedication and deeper conviction.

"I feel the obligation to serve with even greater conviction and with the elevated expectation of eternal recompense so deeply pleasing," he added.

Kyari also acknowledged the sacrifices made by his family, expressing gratitude for their unwavering support despite his demanding career.

## UNILAG Honors Okonjo-Iweala, Adeola, Adesina with Honorary PhDs; Graduates 16,343 Students, 561 Bag First Class

By **NEW DAILY PRIME**

**A** total of 16,343 students will graduate during the 55th convocation ceremony of the University of Lagos (UNILAG), as disclosed by the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola.

She made this announcement on Wednesday during a press briefing on activities planned for the event.

Among the graduating students, 561 will graduate with first-class honors, 3,910 with second-class upper honors, and 3,723 with second-class lower honors.

In addition, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; the co-founder of Guaranty Trust

Bank, Mr. Fola Adeola; and the Managing Director of Sahara Power Group, Mr. Kola Adesina, will be honored with honorary doctorate degrees during the ceremony.

Two distinguished professors, Babajide Alo and Olukayode Hammond, will also receive the Emeritus Professor award.

Prof. Ogunsola further announced that Chief Tunde Fanimokun is constructing a ₦4 billion postgraduate building for the university. She also commended Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State for renovating the Ade Ajayi Hall and acknowledged



Pastor Tunde Bakare's contribution of solar panels for the Faculty of Law.

Share



# Mele Kyari seeks 4-month extension amidst political intrigue, uncertainty over tenure

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

As the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), Mele Kyari, celebrates his 60th birthday today (Wednesday), attention has shifted to the expiration of his tenure and the possibility of an extension.

Legal professionals and industry insiders have raised concerns about the adherence to the rule of law and transparency surrounding the matter.

Kyari, who was appointed by former President Muhammadu Buhari in July 2019, is a veteran in the oil industry with over 32 years of experience at the NNPC.

His tenure has been marked by significant industry reforms and high-profile decisions, making him a prominent figure in the Nigerian oil and gas sector.

As he approaches the end of his term, discussions about a potential replacement have intensified, especially since he is one of the few appointees retained by President Bola Tinubu from the previous administration.

Sources close to the Presidency indicated that Kyari recently sought a four-month extension of his tenure. This request was allegedly made in a meeting with senior officials from President Tinubu's cabinet.

The rationale behind the extension is reportedly tied to ongoing projects, including the imminent operations of the Warri and Port-Harcourt refineries, which are expected to commence within the next month.

Kyari's supporters argue that his continued leadership would provide stability during this crucial phase.

However, the political landscape surrounding Kyari's future is

complex. There have been speculations about potential replacements for the NNPCL CEO, with names such as Bayo Ojulari and Ahmadu Musa Kida emerging as potential candidates. Kida, a former executive at TotalEnergies, has gained attention due to his extensive experience in the oil industry and his close ties to influential figures, including the Chagoury brothers, who are allies of President Tinubu.

Reports suggest that Kida's candidacy was discussed during President Tinubu's recent visit to France, where TotalEnergies is exploring a \$6 billion investment in Nigeria.

Despite the mounting speculation, legal experts argue that Kyari's tenure may not be subject to a fixed term limit, citing the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021.

According to Section 59 (2) of the PIA, the composition of the NNPCL board and its leadership should comply with the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) and the company's Articles of Association.

The PIA does not impose any specific age or tenure limits on the management of NNPCL, which leaves room for a potential extension or reappointment.

Kyari's tenure as NNPCL's GCEO has been marked by significant achievements, including the transition of the company from a public corporation to a limited liability company in July 2022. In this new role, Kyari has overseen the restructuring of the oil giant and has played a central role in negotiating deals that have benefitted the Nigerian economy.

Meanwhile, sources familiar with the situation reveal that Kyari has been actively lobbying for the four-month extension, utilizing unconventional



methods to garner support from key officials. His efforts are reportedly aimed at securing the necessary backing to remain in office while managing the sensitive transition period ahead.

One official close to the matter mentioned that Kyari's influence was evident in the securing of loan deals, including the use of crude oil as collateral.

This, according to the official, helped stabilize the foreign exchange market despite being outside NNPCL's official mandate as a limited company.

With Kyari's 60th birthday marking a critical juncture in his leadership, the future of NNPCL's top management remains uncertain.

As political intrigue intensifies, the decision ultimately rests with President Tinubu, who has yet to make a public stance on whether he will grant the requested extension or seek a new leader for the oil corporation.

For now, all eyes remain on the Presidency as the dynamics surrounding Kyari's tenure continue to unfold.

## Ogun State police raise alarm as cases of missing persons surge

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The Ogun State Police Command has expressed concerns over a significant surge in reports of missing persons across the state. According to Omolola Odutola, the command's spokesperson, the rise in missing persons cases is unprecedented, affecting individuals across all age

groups.

Odutola revealed that only a small fraction of missing persons have been found, while many others remain unaccounted for. This disturbing trend has prompted the police to urge residents to be more vigilant and security-conscious, prioritizing their safety above all else.

As a proactive measure, the Commissioner of Police, Lanre Ogunlowo, has outlined essential guidelines to keep residents informed and safe.

Parents are advised not to allow their children to use commercial transportation services with strangers. Additionally, restless youth are encouraged to activate digital communication and sharing features on their mobile devices, especially when traveling or in moments of distress.

To facilitate prompt assistance, the police

have provided contact numbers for the public. Residents can reach the police control room at 09164859299 and the Police Public Relations Department at 09159578888.

The Ogun State Police Command has also taken steps to provide residents with direct access to key law enforcement officials. Recently, the command released an updated list of telephone numbers for Police Area Commanders and Divisional Police Officers.

As the police continue to work towards resolving the missing persons cases, residents are urged to remain cautious and report any suspicious activities to the authorities promptly.

By working together, the community can help prevent further incidents and ensure the safe return of missing individuals.

## President Tinubu celebrates NNPC CEO Mele Kyari on 60th birthday

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

President Bola Tinubu on Tuesday extended his congratulations to Mele Kyari, the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), as he marks his 60th birthday on January 8.

In a statement signed by Tinubu's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, the President praised Kyari as a "shining example of the ideals of the Renewed Hope Agenda."

Tinubu commended Kyari's contributions to Nigeria's energy sector, emphasising his commitment to creating new opportunities and ensuring the sector's growth and sustainability.

"Kyari is a shining example and embodiment of the ideals of the Renewed Hope Agenda. I commend his commitment to creating new

opportunities and ensuring the growth and sustainability of Nigeria's energy sector," said President Tinubu.

The President also highlighted Kyari's role in transforming NNPC into a profitable organization, noting his leadership during the resuscitation of two refineries, an increase in domestic natural gas consumption, and a rise in oil production to 1.8 million barrels per day.

Tinubu expressed appreciation for Kyari's dedication to service and professionalism, not only in his current role at NNPC but also throughout his distinguished career at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation



(NNPC) and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The President also prayed for Kyari's continued health, wisdom, and strength, urging him to continue mentoring the next generation of energy sector leaders in Nigeria.



# We're not on good terms with Tinubu – Gov Mohammed

By Dave Oludare Oso



**G**overnor Bala Mohammed of Bauchi State has confirmed that he is not on good terms with President Bola Tinubu, citing disagreements over key policies.

He also criticized the president for being stubborn and failing to listen to the concerns of the people, particularly regarding the ongoing tax reforms.

The governor made these remarks during discussions National Chairman of the Ulama Council of JIBWIS, Fadilatu Ash-Sheikh Muhammad Sani Yahaya Jingir when the latter condoled with him over the passing of his stepmother, Hajja Aisha Mohammed at Ramat House, Government House, Bauchi.

In a short Hausa video that has since gone viral on social media, Mohammed openly expressed his dissatisfaction with the proposed tax bill.

“We thank God for your life, and we’re grateful that you’re able to speak to them, as they will listen to you. By now, you must have heard about the issues between us and

President Tinubu. It’s true, we are not on good terms with him, because our people, as well as the governors, are suffering.

“One of the main reasons for this is that he doesn’t listen to the people and fails to see that his harsh policies are creating problems, not just in the north, but across Nigeria. Take, for example, the tax reforms—they require careful consideration. A government can’t function without revenue, and if there are obstacles in generating that revenue, even the government itself won’t be able to operate.

“Here in the north, we recognize that we’ve neglected tax revenue. With oil revenue no longer coming in as it’s being used to service debt, continuing with the tax reforms could be disastrous for us.-

“I want you to know, it is not that we are scared or something, we only respect him because of the regard we have for you, Sheikh. We know you work for him, just as you did for us in Bauchi, Kano, and other places. Maybe if you speak to him, he will listen. Tell him this tax bill is unacceptable. If it is passed, none of us can serve our people effectively. Neither I nor my people are in support of it.”

The governor also expressed gratitude to Sheikh Jingir and his delegation for coming to condole with him over the passing of his stepmother.

Since the tax reforms bills was submitted to the national assembly in October 2024, it has faced opposition from stakeholders in the north especially the northern governors forum.

The governors particularly rejected the proposed shift to a Derivation-based Model for Value Added Tax distribution.

They claim that the proposed model would be at the disadvantage of the northern states and other less industrial regions.

However, the federal government has insisted that the tax reforms bills are not against the northern part of the country.

The maintained that the overhaul of Nigeria’s tax system was long overdue.

# Kanu opposes FG's bid to resume trial, demands new judge

By Friday Omosola

The detained leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, has rejected the Federal Government's (FG) request to resume his trial, insisting that the presiding judge, Justice Binta Nyako, must withdraw from the case.

Kanu's lead counsel, Aloy Ejimakor, disclosed this development on Tuesday in a post on X (formerly Twitter), stating that Justice Nyako's earlier decision to recuse herself remains valid and binding.

"Our position is based on the fact that Justice Nyako entered and enrolled an order recusing herself on September 24, 2024, and to date, that order remains extant and subsisting. It has not been set aside by any competent court," Ejimakor stated.

He accused the prosecution of attempting to mislead the court and maintained that Kanu no longer has a case before Justice Nyako.

"For the avoidance of doubt, as of September 24, 2024, the defendant no longer has any case to answer before Justice Binta Nyako," Ejimakor said.

Kanu is facing charges of treasonable felony and terrorism but has pleaded not guilty to all seven counts.

Kanu was first arrested on October 14, 2015, upon his return to Nigeria from the UK. He was detained at the Kuje Correctional Facility before being granted bail in 2017 on health grounds.

However, following a military raid on his home, Kanu fled Nigeria and returned to the UK. He was re-



arrested in Kenya in 2021 and repatriated to Nigeria, where he has since remained in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS).

During the last court session on September 24, 2024, Kanu requested that Justice Nyako recuse herself, citing a lack of confidence in her handling of the case.

Justice Nyako agreed to step aside and referred the matter to the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court for reassignment.

However, the Chief Judge returned the case to Justice Nyako, stating that two other judges had already recused themselves and that she, having handled the case since 2015, was best suited to conclude it.

The Chief Judge advised Kanu to formally request Justice Nyako's withdrawal by filing a motion supported by an affidavit.

Despite this directive, FG counsel Adegboyega Awomolo requested a fresh trial date in a December 5, 2024, letter, arguing that the Chief Judge's decision reinstated Justice Nyako as the presiding judge.

At the last hearing, Kanu personally objected to Justice Nyako's continued

role in the case, stating,

Kanu also accused the court of partiality, waving a document he claimed was the Supreme Court's ruling, which he said questioned the trial court's impartiality.

He clarified that his objection was not personal but a reflection of his frustration with the trial's inconsistency with constitutional provisions.

Justice Nyako ultimately reaffirmed her decision to step aside, stating, "I hereby recuse myself and remit the case file back to the Chief Judge."

In response, Awomolo urged Justice Nyako to disregard Kanu's claims, describing them as baseless. "My Lord, you should not recuse yourself on the basis of this mere observation which does not have anything to do with the Supreme Court. It is an incompetent observation. We urge this court to proceed with the hearing."

Despite the prosecution's appeal, Kanu maintained his objection, emphasising that his demand for a new judge was crucial for a fair trial.



# How Nigerians react as NFF appoints ex-Mali Coach as Super Eagles Manager

By Friday Omosola

The appointment of Éric Chelle, former Mali head coach and ex-manager of clubs such as GS Consolat, FC Martigues, Boulogne, and MC Oran, as the new head coach of Nigeria's senior men's national football team, the Super Eagles, has sparked mixed reactions among Nigerians.

The Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) announced Chelle's appointment on Tuesday, making him the third man to lead the national team since Jose Peseiro resigned in March 2024.

In confirming the news, NFF President Ibrahim Gusau stated that Chelle would immediately take charge of the home-based Super Eagles at the 2024 African Nations Championship in Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, where Nigeria will compete against 17 other countries from February 1 to 28.

Chelle has also been tasked with securing Nigeria's qualification for the 2026 FIFA World Cup finals, with the Super Eagles currently sitting in fifth place in their qualifying group ahead of the next round of matches in March.

Although Chelle has achieved some success in his career—earning five caps as a player for Mali and coaching the national team since 2022—his tenure has not been without criticism. His most notable setback was Mali's 2-1 extra-time loss to Ivory Coast in the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) quarterfinals, which led many Nigerians to question his suitability for the Super Eagles job.

However, some fans have praised Chelle for his tactical approach and near-success at AFCON, where his team came close to reaching the semifinals before conceding a last-minute goal against Ivory Coast.

Since his appointment, Chelle has been trending on social media, with a resurfaced video of him being doused with water after the AFCON loss to Ivory Coast fueling online debates.

Another talking point is his

background. Despite being born in Ivory Coast to a French father and a Malian mother, Chelle represented Mali at the international level.

His African roots have drawn mixed reactions, with some Nigerians applauding the NFF for breaking away from the trend of appointing older, foreign (often white) coaches.

While some netizens see his youth and tactical potential as assets, others remain sceptical. Under the announcement post, many Nigerians voiced their opinions.

An X user, Temitayo, said with the current Super Eagles players, Chelle is not the right choice, noting that he cannot lead the team.

“For the calibre of the present Super Eagles players, I don't think this man is the right choice! Of all the options available out there, this is our best?,” Temitayo said.

Elvis Osas Odese, another X user, stated that the appointment shows the NFF had no positive plans for Nigerians. He wrote, “It's obvious, whoever is running the Super Eagles doesn't want the Nigeria team in the next World Cup. Shame!”

Another X user, Davoo, urged Nigerians to give him a chance “Welcome bruh abeg my fellow wonderful wonderful excellent Nigerians make we give am small benefit of the doubt before we start cooking pls.”

Similarly, an X user, Fear Women, argued that Chelle deserved the same chance Nigerians gave President Bola Tinubu to lead, despite the prevailing economic challenges.

“Y'all take a chill pill. Everyone deserves a chance. Even Tinubu got his chance with all his history all over the Internet.”

More comments

Olorunjuwon wrote, “No be this man them pour water for head during AFCON omo make una dey carry ice block waka cos he go need am aje.”

Kudehinbu Oluwaponle tweeted, “15 years ago, so many coaches wanted the Super Eagles, Stephen Keshi had to go coach the Malian National team. Now the tables have turned, Nig's only option is a Malian coach that's just been sacked by



Mali, whose best profile is Ligue 2 club where he was also sacked.”

Similarly, Ikechi, another X user wrote, “In the history of a Nigerian football, Nigerian has never hired an African coach to coach the super eagles what happened to amunike or even leave Eguavoen there even Samson siasia has a better profile than this guy, this NFF is the worst set ever.”

Additionally, Nigeria must survive, another X user tweeted, “I really don't know why every sector in this country have always chose to do things that never align with the citizens...just imagine if Nigerians can react to this appointment like this, tell me what will the players do on the field? Home goals of course...unah weldone oooo.”

Duruewuru Faithful commented, “If we wanted an African coach, what happened to mosimane?”

Azeez Bolarinwa wrote, “Éric Sékou Chelle is a professional football manager and a former player who played as a centre-back. Born in Ivory Coast to a French father and a Malian mother, he made five appearances for the Mali national team.”

The debate continues as fans eagerly await Chelle's debut with the Super Eagles in the coming

## How suspended LG Chairmen remitted over N12bn to PDP leaders – Okpebholo By Friday Omosola

Edo State Governor, Monday Okpebholo, has disclosed that the 18 suspended Local Government Chairmen in the state funnelled over N12 billion to leaders of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) within 15 months.

He made this revelation yesterday while receiving the acting Chairmen and Councillors of the 18 Local Government Areas during a courtesy visit at the Government House.

Governor Okpebholo commended the acting Chairmen and Councillors for their dedication to transparency and democracy, emphasising that public funds should not be diverted for personal or partisan interests.

He said when he assumed office, he met with the Accountant-General, who showed him financial records, noting that he discovered unexplained expenses, including an item labelled 'Environmental Security Funding,' amounting to N800 million monthly.

He noted that the money was remitted to party leaders under former Governor Godwin Obaseki.

He recounted efforts to seek explanations from the suspended Chairmen, who failed to provide clarity on the questionable expenditures.

**READ ALSO: Edo LG chairmen's suspension illegal, unconstitutional —AGF**

According to the governor, he invited the Chairmen to explain these allocations, but none could, even after agreeing to submit their financial records within 48 hours.

He noted that they failed to do so for two weeks and he consequently involved the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and informed the Edo State House of



Assembly (EDHA), which led to their suspension for two months.

Governor Okpebholo also criticised the former Chairmen for neglecting essential services, such as education.

He stated that despite schools lacking adequate teachers, with some primary schools having only two or three teachers instead of 10 to 12, the local government funds were being squandered," he lamented.

Addressing the acting Chairmen, he urged them to focus on grassroots development and utilize public funds responsibly.

"The money belongs to the people, not you. Work with the resources to deliver progress at the grassroots. I recognize you as the legitimate leaders and will collaborate with you to ensure success," the governor assured.

Damian Lawani, Chairman of the Local Government Commission, pledged the acting Chairmen's commitment to supporting the administration's development agenda.

"We are fully aligned with your vision and will work closely with you to bring good governance to the grassroots," Lawani said.

Acting Chairmen, including Iradia Benjamin Osas (Uhunmwonde), Godsent Agboibo (Esan West), and Joy Ohonyon (Owan West), expressed loyalty to Governor Okpebholo's administration, promising to prioritise the welfare of the people and collaborate to deliver the dividends of democracy. The governor reiterated his administration's commitment to empowering local governments and fostering sustainable development across the state.



## Two US-based Nigerians face 40-year prison sentence over romance scam **By Friday Omosola**



**T**wo Nigerians residing in the United States, Olutayo Sunday Ogunlaja (39) and Abel Adeyi Daramola (37), could each face up to 20 years in prison after being found guilty of orchestrating a \$560,000 romance scam.

U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney Alexander Uballez and FBI Special Agent Raul Bujanda in a statement disclosed the duo's conviction following a four-day trial and less than three hours of jury

deliberation.

According to prosecutors, the scheme began in January 2016 when Ogunlaja and Daramola, along with accomplices, created a fake identity under the name "Glenn Brown" on the dating platform eHarmony.com.

Using this persona, they cultivated a romantic relationship with a victim in Albuquerque, New Mexico, deceiving the individual into sending hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The statement revealed that the victim was manipulated into believing their financial support was crucial for "Glenn Brown" to complete a construction project in Malaysia and return to the U.S. Between January 2016 and April 2017, the victim wired approximately \$560,000 to various accounts in the United States, Canada, and Malaysia.

The statement added that on September 27, 2016, the victim transferred \$28,000 to an account registered to "Daramola Cars" at Woodforest Bank, as directed by the scammers.

Furthermore, the statement revealed that from there, \$18,000 was sent to a seafood

importer in Denmark, while a \$14,000 check was issued.

Additionally, the statement added that despite Daramola's denial of involvement, evidence from text and WhatsApp messages on his phone confirmed his role in providing bank accounts for the fraudulent operations.

Further investigations uncovered that Ogunlaja used his Bank of America account to receive fraudulent funds. On two occasions in March 2016, the victim deposited \$20,000 into Ogunlaja's account, which he later withdrew and transferred to Daramola's account.

This was the two time barely three months Nigerians will be convicted, in November 2024 there was a similar case, where Anthony Ibekie and Samuel Aniukwu, were sentenced to a combined 30-year prison term for defrauding U.S. citizens of \$3.5 million under the pretext of assisting with supposed inheritances.

## Peter Obi dismisses arrest rumours, confirms he's in Onitsha **By Friday Omosola**

**P**eter Obi, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), has dismissed rumours of his alleged arrest by security operatives, stating that he is currently in Onitsha, Anambra State.

The New Daily Prime, reports that the former governor of Anambra State recently raised concerns about threats to his life.

According to Obi, the threats stemmed from a statement made by Felix Morka, the publicity secretary of the All Progressives Congress (APC), in response to his New Year message.

He revealed that Morka allegedly warned him of consequences for "crossing the line", after which he received multiple threats targeting his life, family, and associates.

In response, Morka and the APC

denied the allegations. During a recent interview on Arise TV, Morka maintained that he had been the one receiving threats to his life following Obi's accusations of being behind the threats.

In a recent development, Obi took to his official X page today to clarify the situation, describing the rumours of his arrest as baseless.

He assured his supporters that he remains at his residence in Onitsha, Anambra State.

"There is recurring fake news on me. I have been made aware of a circulating fake news about my alleged arrest. Let me state unequivocally that these claims are entirely false.

"Such fake news on my person has become a pastime for some people. Recall last September, when I was in Rwanda, similar lies had gone out that



DSS invaded my house; now, while I was in my home in Onitsha, Anambra State, they said I was arrested in Abuja", said the Anambra-born politician.

He stated that the intentions of those spreading the rumours cannot be positive, emphasising that such baseless claims should not distract his followers from the critical challenges facing the nation.

# FG reassures Nigerians of national air carrier takeoff

By Friday Omosola



**T**he Federal Government (FG) has reaffirmed its commitment to launching a national air carrier soon.

This assurance was given by the newly appointed Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Abubakar Kana, during a formal handover ceremony at the ministry.

Kana emphasised his dedication to establishing the long-awaited national air carrier and revamping airports across the country.

He noted that his mandate aligns with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda for the aviation sector.

FG Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Abubakar Kana (PHOTO CREDIT: Google)

According to Kana, achieving these goals will require strategic partnerships with the private sector

due to limited resources.

He pledged full support to the Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, in actualizing the national carrier project and upgrading Nigerian airports to meet international standards.

Kana urged ministry agencies to rally behind President Tinubu's agenda, emphasizing his belief in innovation and teamwork.

READ ALSO: FG begins direct payment of allocations to LGs next month

However, the outgoing Permanent Secretary, Emmanuel Meribole, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve the nation and contribute to the aviation sector's growth.

He assured stakeholders that the ministry's progress would continue seamlessly, even after his exit.

During their farewell remarks, key officials praised Meribole for his dedication to service delivery,

competence, and integrity.

The Director of Finance and Accounts, Udechukwu Osakwe, described Meribole as a champion of efficiency, while Mustapha Abdullahi, Registrar of the African Aviation Aerospace University (AAAU), highlighted his commitment to meritocracy.

Odugbesan, Senior Adviser to the Minister of Justice, lauded Kana as a transformative leader, citing his achievements in the Ministry of Defence and other government ministries.

He urged the aviation sector to support Kana, whom he described as a talent developer passionate about staff welfare.

The event ended with the symbolic handover of strategic documents, assets, and liabilities to Kana.



# Nigeria's Seplat moves in to fill gap as foreign oil companies retreat

By New Daily Prime

**B**uyer of ExxonMobil's assets in the west African country wants to double production within six months

The Nigerian company that took over the local operation of ExxonMobil wants to double production within six months, after moving in to take advantage of the retreat of foreign majors from the country's onshore oil sector.

London-listed Seplat completed its purchase of a range of oil and gas assets the US energy giant owned in December after Nigerian regulators delayed signing off on the deal for more than two years.

Seplat senior management said the plan was to more than double output from about 50,000 barrels a day to roughly 120,000 bpd over the six-month period.

"The assets have had very minimal investments until now," Seplat's chief financial officer Eleanor Adaralegbe told the Financial Times in an interview. "We expect that once we come in there will be an opportunity to grow that much further."

The \$1.28bn acquisition of Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited makes Seplat one of the biggest domestic producers with an asset base of 11 onshore oil blocks, 48 oil and gas fields, three export terminals and five gas processing facilities.

The combined assets mean Seplat controls 16 per cent of Nigeria's present production capacity, said chief executive Roger Brown.

Seplat will run the assets in conjunction with state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Company as legally mandated in the country's oil and gas industry.

Brown said his company was



confident it could work with NNPC to raise overall production, a stated goal of Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu. NNPC has been criticised for decades of alleged corruption and mismanagement and last year admitted it owed its suppliers money, estimated to be more than \$6bn.

"We have no concerns working with NNPC . . . There's been a massive change with President Tinubu, realising that production is a great way of getting dollars into the country and supporting the currency," Brown said.

Many of the Nigerian assets require time and investment so they can produce again after being left idle. "We have over 600 wells drilled and barely 200 of them are producing," said chief operating officer Samson Ezugworie. "We have significant idle wells that need to be rejuvenated and brought back into production within a short period of time."

Exxon's sale comes as international oil groups exit Nigeria's troubled onshore and shallow water sector, which has been beset by decades of environmental damages, and more recently by declining production. International groups such as Italy's Eni, Norway's Equinor and Addax Petroleum have all departed.

Shell, which is synonymous with Nigeria's oil industry and drilled the country's first successful well in 1956, has sold its onshore business to local consortium Renaissance for \$1.3bn. Prospects of better returns with fewer environmental concerns have attracted foreign oil companies to offshore oilfields.

Seplat is among a growing cohort of local Nigerian oil groups stepping into the gap. Nigerian companies have long sought to increase their production capacity and are betting their knowledge of the local country would serve them well as they seek to engage with local communities, who have often been at loggerheads with international groups over environmental damage.

Critics say local groups are purchasing unwanted assets with little life left in them, although Seplat rejects this assertion. Ezugworie said the company believed its new assets had "significant scope and opportunity" to produce and that there were abundant reserves left to tap.

# Do2dtun calls out Soundcity over unpaid salaries

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

**O**n Air Personality, Do2dtun raises concerns over Soundcity's failure to pay staff, accusing the station of owing employees for the past eight months.

**Viral post sparks outrage**

In a post that quickly went viral, Do2dtun took to X (formerly Twitter) on Wednesday to express his frustrations.

The OAP, who is also a prominent host on Cool FM, shared a series of tweets highlighting the situation.

His posts have since sparked conversations on social media, drawing attention to the issue of unpaid salaries in the media industry.

**Question of coping**

In his initial post, Do2dtun questioned how his colleagues at Soundcity managed despite the lack of pay. His tone was disbelief and concern, as he tried to understand how anyone could continue working in such conditions.

He wrote, "My friends and colleagues at Soundcity, how do you guys cope? No salary for 8 months? Mehn, that is crazy."

**A cruel reality**

The OAP emphasized that it is not mandatory for any company, including radio stations, to operate if they cannot afford to pay their staff.

He went on to criticize Soundcity's management for what he described as a cruel and inhumane treatment of its employees. "It's not by force to open a radio station. Owing your staff for 8 months is very cruel and inhumane. You don't need a soothsayer to tell you this," he added.

**Soundcity under scrutiny**

Soundcity, a well-known music channel in Nigeria, has long been a key player in the country's entertainment industry.

However, the recent controversy surrounding its failure to pay employees has raised serious concerns.

Many are now questioning the station's financial stability and how it has managed to operate for so long without compensating its workers.

**Broader issue**

While it is not unusual for businesses to face financial difficulties, Do2dtun's comments have highlighted the harsh reality faced by many media professionals.

Unpaid salaries are an issue that affects not only those in the entertainment industry but also workers in various sectors across the country.

The situation has sparked debates on the challenges of working in an industry where job security and financial stability are often uncertain.

**Soundcity's tarnished reputation**

In the past, Soundcity has been known for its high-profile events, music broadcasts, and collaborations with both local and international artists.

However, the recent allegations of unpaid salaries have put a dent in the station's reputation. Many fans and followers of the station have expressed their disappointment, with some even questioning whether the management is truly committed to supporting its staff.

**Support from colleagues and media professionals**

Do2dtun, known for his outspoken nature, has never been one to shy away from addressing important issues.

His comments about Soundcity's handling of its staff pay have been met with support from some quarters, especially among other media professionals who have faced similar struggles.

Some have even taken to social media to share their own experiences with unpaid salaries in the industry.

**Unpaid salaries: A wider problem**

The lack of payment for eight months is a serious issue that highlights the broader challenges within the Nigerian media industry.

It raises questions about how radio stations, music channels, and other entertainment platforms are managed.

The incident also shines a light on the broader problem of unpaid labor in the country, which has become an all-too-



familiar issue for workers in various fields.

**Do2dtun's call for accountability**

In his posts, Do2dtun did not hold back from expressing his anger at the situation. He called for more accountability from the management of Soundcity, urging them to address the concerns of their employees.

He stressed that while running a radio station or music channel may be a business venture, it should never come at the expense of the well-being of the staff.

According to Do2dtun, businesses should prioritize fair compensation for their workers if they want to maintain a positive reputation and continue operating effectively.

**The precarious nature of media jobs**  
This ongoing controversy has brought attention to the precarious nature of jobs in the media and entertainment industries.

Many workers are often left without job security or fair wages, with companies prioritizing profits over the welfare of their staff.

As a result, employees are forced to continue working under difficult conditions, leading to frustration and resentment.

**A wider call for change**

Do2dtun's bold stance on the issue has resonated with many people, particularly those who have experienced similar challenges in their workplaces.

It serves as a reminder that fair treatment and payment for labour should always be a priority in any business, especially in the entertainment industry, where workers often face high demands and low job security.



# Yhemolee: Men shouldn't resent wife's pregnancy sickness

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Socialite Yhemolee and his wife welcomed their first child, sharing heartfelt videos of their pregnancy journey that deeply resonated with fans.

While the celebrations marked a joyful milestone, Yhemolee also opened up about the challenges they faced along the way.

## Morning sickness and empathy

When fans asked if he ever felt frustrated by his wife's bouts of morning sickness, The Nation in its report stated that, Yhemolee responded with refreshing honesty. "Irritated? For something I put inside there? I don't think any sensible man should get irritated at that," he said. His response underlined the importance of empathy and patience, especially during the physically and emotionally taxing stages of pregnancy.

## Kindness as a priority

Yhemolee emphasized that being a supportive partner means offering kindness and understanding at every turn. "They are already cranky and angry by default," he said with a touch of humor. He encouraged other partners to remain patient and compassionate, even when situations become challenging.

## Adjusting to changing dynamics

Reflecting on his own experiences, Yhemolee shared how he adapted to his wife's changing needs during pregnancy. He recalled moments when she would become upset over minor issues, such as his outfit choices or videos of him enjoying a night out. Initially, he found her reactions confusing, but over time, he realized that her frustrations often stemmed from missing his presence.

"One day, she got angry because she saw a video of me in the club, dancing and drinking tequila," Yhemolee said. "At first, I yelled back, but later I understood that all she wanted was for me to be around more."



## Being Present: Emotionally and physically

This realization led Yhemolee to prioritize being there for his wife, both physically and emotionally. He made adjustments to his lifestyle, spending more time at home and offering her the reassurance she needed. "You cannot totally get it right," he admitted, "but at least be 80 percent there. Be KIND."

A particularly touching moment occurred when Yhemolee saw his wife at the airport during her pregnancy. Despite her earlier frustrations, she ran toward him with her baby bump, smiling brightly. This moment underscored the importance of being present and connected during such a transformative time.

## Advice for expectant fathers

Yhemolee's candid reflections extend beyond his own relationship. By sharing his journey, he has offered valuable advice to other expectant fathers. He stressed the need for patience, understanding, and adaptability, reminding others that pregnancy is a life-changing journey for both parents.

"It's the least we can do," he said. "They are going through so much already. We

need to be there for them, emotionally and physically."

## Resonating with fans

The socialite's honest insights have sparked meaningful conversations among fans. Many praised him for normalizing the struggles of pregnancy and encouraging men to take a more active and supportive role. His humorous yet thoughtful storytelling has made his message relatable to many.

## Cultural shift toward supportive partnerships

Yhemolee's reflections highlight a broader cultural shift. More men are stepping up as supportive partners during pregnancy, embracing their roles with love and empathy. His story illustrates that relationships thrive when both partners are willing to learn, adapt, and grow together.

## Final thoughts: Love in action

Yhemolee's journey with his wife is a reminder that love isn't about perfection. It's about showing up, making an effort, and supporting each other through life's challenges.

# Lawyers notify police to finalise Speed Darlington's bail

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Counsel for Nigerian singer Darlington Achakpo, better known as Speed Darlington, has expressed readiness to meet the bail conditions set by the Federal High Court in Abuja.

His legal team, Deji Adeyanju and Partners, confirmed they will fulfill the bail requirements at the Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB), accompanied by a surety.

This was revealed in a letter sent to the Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), FIB, DIG Galadanchi, dated January 8, 2025.

**Court order and initial arrest**

The situation stems from a December 23, 2023, order issued by Justice Liman, which directed that Darlington be charged in court within 48 hours of his arrest or released unconditionally.

This order came after Darlington was detained on November 27, 2023, during a performance in Owerri, Imo State.

His arrest was reportedly linked to an alleged verbal altercation involving Afrofusion star Burna Boy.

**Burna Boy's role in darlington's arrest**

Darlington's legal team, led by Deji Adeyanju, has confirmed that Burna Boy played a role in the arrest.

The incident reportedly followed Darlington's public criticism of Burna Boy's ties to Sean "Diddy" Combs, the U.S. rapper facing multiple allegations, including sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

Darlington had openly mocked Burna Boy, challenging his association with Combs. This eventually led to his initial detention.

Upon his return to Nigeria, Darlington promised to continue criticizing Burna Boy over his connection to the controversial figure

**Unlawful detention claim**

The law firm, however, pointed out that Darlington's continued detention was unlawful. In their letter to the DIG, they emphasized that the Federal High Court

had explicitly ordered his release unless he was charged within the stipulated time frame.

The letter, titled "Re: Unlawful Detention of Darlington Achakpo," referenced the December 23 court order. The letter states: "As you are no doubt aware, the Federal High Court, per Hon.

Justice M. S. Liman, on the 23rd day of December 2024, directed the police authorities to charge our client to court within 48 hours or release him unconditionally."

**Court's reiteration of release order**

The letter also outlined that on January 6, 2025, the court reiterated its stance and urged the police to release Darlington to his lead counsel, Marshal Abubakar.

The legal team had made arrangements to comply with the bail conditions, but despite their efforts, the FIB did not respond to their attempts.

**Challenges in meeting bail conditions**  
Despite being served with a bail term on January 6, 2025, Speed Darlington's legal team faced challenges in fulfilling the conditions.

On January 7, 2025, Marshal Abubakar and Mazi David Ihuoma, both part of the legal team, went to the FIB office with a surety to meet the required bail terms.

However, their efforts were hindered by a lack of communication from the FIB. The letter further states that calls and messages from Abubakar and Adeyanju went unanswered, leaving the situation unresolved.

**Return to FIB to fulfill bail terms**

In their latest correspondence, the legal team made it clear that they would return to the FIB on January 8, 2025, with a surety in an effort to meet the bail conditions.



They expressed hope that the DIG would respond promptly and cooperate with their efforts to secure Darlington's release.

**Legal team seeks cooperation from police authorities**

The letter concluded with a polite yet firm request for cooperation, stating: "Whilst anticipating your favourable response and maximum cooperation, please accept our esteemed professional regards."

The public's focus on Darlington's case has drawn significant attention, both due to his public feud with Burna Boy and the legal implications surrounding his detention.

His legal team's persistent efforts to secure his release have highlighted the ongoing challenges he faces as he battles both public scrutiny and legal obstacles.

Despite these challenges, Darlington's resolve to continue his criticism of Burna Boy and his association with Sean "Diddy" Combs remains unchanged.

**Implications for the Nigerian music industry**

The outcome of this legal matter will likely have wider implications for the Nigerian music industry, where tensions between prominent figures often spill into the public domain.



# GWR: Nigerian designer Sanya completes world's largest sandal attempt

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

British-Nigerian designer Liz Sanya made history by creating the world's largest sandal, breaking the Guinness World Record with her massive, innovative design.

The massive pink clog, unveiled at Pixel Park in Lekki, Lagos, measures an astonishing 8.147 meters (26 feet 8.8 inches) in length and 3.156 meters (10 feet 4.2 inches) in width.

The sandal dwarfs the previous record, held by artisans from Municipio De Sahauyo, whose creation measured 7.45 meters (24 feet 5.31 inches) long and 3.09 meters (10 feet 1.65 inches) wide.

## 72-hour challenge

Sanya began designing the colossal sandal on January 2, 2025, immediately after receiving confirmation from Guinness World Records (GWR) to proceed. Working tirelessly for 72 hours, she completed the project on January 4. The event attracted significant attention, drawing a crowd that included prominent Nigerian celebrities such as Pheelz, Mayorkun, Korty EO, and P.Prime.

Fans and supporters gathered to witness history in the making. The event turned into a celebration of art, culture, and Nigerian innovation.

## Symbol of determination

Speaking about her achievement, Sanya shared her emotional journey. "I'll never be able to put into words what any of this means to me," she said, expressing heartfelt gratitude to her supporters.

She emphasized the importance of those who believed in her vision, stating that their encouragement made her success possible.

Sanya chose to attempt the record in Nigeria as a tribute to her roots. Born in Ibadan and inspired by her experiences in Lagos, she felt it was the right place to



pursue such a significant milestone.

"Ibadan is where I was born. Lagos is where I was inspired. It was only right to come back home and prove it," she said. The designer's love for her heritage was evident in every step of the process.

## Breaking the record

The enormous sandal stands as a testament to Sanya's skill, creativity, and determination. Breaking a world record is no small feat.

The previous titleholders from Municipio De Sahauyo had set the bar high, but Sanya's innovative approach and meticulous attention to detail helped her surpass their achievement.

Her team worked around the clock to meet the 72-hour deadline. Every stitch, measurement, and cut was a step closer to making history.

The use of bright pink material not only captured attention but also reflected Sanya's vibrant personality and unique design sense.

Nigerian designer Sanya completes world's largest sandal attempt [Source: Instagram: lizsanyaa]

Nigerian designer Sanya completes world's largest sandal attempt [Source: Instagram: lizsanyaa]

## Community and celebration

The event was more than just a record-breaking attempt; it became a cultural moment. Lagos, known for its energy and creativity, provided the perfect backdrop for the occasion.

Pixel Park buzzed with excitement as onlookers marveled at the size and craftsmanship of the sandal. Celebrities mingled with fans, and the atmosphere was one of pride and joy.

Sanya's achievement resonated with many, symbolizing the power of dreams and hard work. Her journey from Ibadan to London and back to Lagos inspired countless young creatives in Nigeria and beyond.

## The road ahead

With the record attempt complete, Sanya now awaits official confirmation from Guinness World Records.

However, the excitement surrounding her accomplishment remains undiminished. The designer hinted at more ambitious projects in the future, aiming to push the boundaries of fashion and design further.

## London has the highest birth rates among over-40s But what's driving the shift? **By New Daily Prime**

**H**ousing costs, career focus and access to IVF has driven people to delay parenthood in the capital

Mothers in London are more likely to have children later on in life than elsewhere in England and Wales, as more people delay parenthood to establish careers while navigating high housing costs, say analysts

Like many advanced and developed economies, Britain is experiencing a fast decline in birth rates as the average age of mothers rises.

But the trend is particularly stark in London, where the birth rate for women aged between 40 and 44 beats all the other regions by some margin.

In 2023, it stood at 20.9 children per 1,000 women, despite falling back slightly in the previous two years.

The figure is more than double the rate in the North East, the area with the lowest fertility rate among this age group. The average across England and Wales for over 40s that year was 14.9.

“Fertility rates are lower in areas such as London, where housing costs are high and accommodation types less suited to families,” said Ann Berrington, professor of demography at the University of Southampton.

“It is not surprising then that London has a very late pattern of childbearing,” she added.

The city's large student population, which depresses the overall birth rate, was also driving the trend.

“The patterns, in part, reflect the ‘life course’ stage,” according to Berrington. “Many young adults move to major urban areas for work and then move away at later ages when they are more established in a career and want to start a family.”

Baby numbers have been closely watched as they affect the health of the economy in the face of an ageing population. Without immigration, falling birth rates add pressure on public finances and limit



economic growth.

Birth rates have been falling faster in London than in the rest of the country since the 2000s. This has contributed to the capital ageing between 2011 and 2023, in contrast with the trend in other cities, according to an analysis published on Wednesday by the Resolution Foundation think-tank.

The shift has been underpinned by the UK's departure from the EU, which triggered an increase in international immigration outside the capital, the research found.

“Changing immigration flows since Brexit, combined with falling birth rates from a ‘baby bust’ steeper than the national average, have worked together to age the capital over the past decade,” said Nye Cominetti, principal economist at the Resolution Foundation.

London has the highest fertility rate among women aged above 40

While London is an outlier for having more older mothers per population, its overall fertility rate is the lowest in the country, as younger women in the capital have fewer children than elsewhere.

The fertility rate for London was 1.35 children per woman in 2023, according to the latest data published in October, down from 1.7 in 2013 and the joint lowest with the South East.

This has resulted in a sharp decline in the number of children being born. The number of births in London fell 19 per cent in the decade to 2023 — a larger drop than the 14.6 per cent decrease in the rest of England and Wales, according to official data.

Nine of the 10 areas with the sharpest decline in primary school-aged children between 2016 and 2023 were in inner London, according to the Resolution Foundation.

Analysts point to eye-watering London house prices as a key factor. Full-time employees in the capital spend about 12 times their annual earnings buying a home — far higher than any region and more than double two decades ago.

Willem Adema, senior economist at the OECD, an international group that promotes economic growth, said housing was “a very big barrier to having children”.

However, he also noted that IVF clinics, which tend to be in larger urban centres serving a wealthier and older clientele, had helped to support higher birth rates among older mothers.

London has more fertility clinics approved by the industry regulator than anywhere else in the country, according to the Human, Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.



# UK borrowing costs hit 15-year high under Labour Govt

By Dr. Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

The United Kingdom's 10-year borrowing costs soared to their highest levels since the 2008 financial crisis on Wednesday, intensifying concerns about the Labour government's fiscal plans. The 10-year gilt yield rose by 0.13 percentage points to 4.82%, driven by a global bond market sell-off compounded by domestic economic pressures. The sell-off also dragged sterling to its weakest level against the dollar since April, falling 1.1% to \$1.234.

Market analysts attributed the spike in UK yields to concerns over heavy government borrowing requirements, sluggish economic growth, and persistently high inflation. "It's a global sell-off, but the UK's challenges are exacerbated by a toxic mix of a flatlining economy, sticky inflation, and a worsening fiscal outlook," according to analysts cited by The Financial Times.

The yield on the 30-year gilt climbed to 5.38%, marking its highest level since 1998, while the domestically focused FTSE 250 index fell 2%. These developments put additional pressure on Chancellor Rachel Reeves, who had left herself just £9.9bn of budgetary headroom after her £40bn tax-raising package in the autumn Budget. The rising bond yields threaten to erode this fiscal buffer, jeopardizing the Labour government's ability to meet its self-imposed budget rules.

## A Tight Fiscal Situation

Higher borrowing costs pose significant challenges for the government, given that the UK's annual interest bill already exceeds £100bn. Ruth Gregory of Capital Economics noted that the recent surge in gilt yields effectively wipes out the chancellor's budgetary headroom. If sustained, the higher yields may force corrective actions such as spending cuts or tax increases to maintain fiscal discipline.

Ben Nicholl, a senior fund manager at Royal London Asset Management, warned that either measure could hinder growth,



further reducing tax revenues and exacerbating the country's borrowing challenges. "The government is caught in a bind where reducing spending or raising taxes will only add downward pressure to economic growth, making the fiscal outlook even more precarious," Nicholl said.

Downing Street, however, maintained a focus on economic stability. "We are committed to delivering the largest Budget surplus in 20 years," said a government spokesperson, adding that they would prioritize sound public finances.

## Challenges Ahead for the Labour Government

Economists predict difficult decisions ahead for Chancellor Reeves. Ben Zaranko of the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggested that restoring fiscal headroom could require reducing real-term growth in departmental spending from 1.3% to just under 1% annually. The government is expected to announce a multiyear departmental spending review in June, with cuts likely to feature prominently.

Adding to the government's woes, weak GDP data is expected to influence the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) forthcoming fiscal forecasts. The OBR may lower its 2% growth projection for 2025, with significant implications for the budgetary outlook depending on whether the GDP shortfall is deemed permanent or recoverable.

"The forthcoming Spring Statement, Spending Review, and Autumn Budget will likely be painful sequels to the chancellor's historic inaugural budget," said Sanjay Raja, an economist at Deutsche Bank.

## Echoes of Past Market Crises

The current bond market slump mirrors the turbulence seen during Liz Truss's short-lived tenure as Prime Minister in 2022, when her "mini-Budget" triggered a sharp rise in borrowing costs and a dramatic sell-off of the pound. Analysts note that the simultaneous drop in gilts and sterling is unusual, with Chris Turner of ING suggesting that confidence in the UK's fiscal strategy is faltering.

"What is going on in the gilt market has undermined confidence in the pound," Turner said, noting that some investors are reconsidering their expectations for sterling's resilience compared to other major currencies.

## Looking Ahead

The Labour government's fiscal plans are under mounting pressure, with market movements and economic headwinds testing the chancellor's ability to deliver on promises of stability and growth. The next major test will come on March 26, when the OBR releases its updated forecasts, potentially forcing the government to take immediate corrective action.

As bond yields rise and economic uncertainty looms, the government faces a critical challenge in balancing

# Italian journalist, Cecilia Sala freed from Iran's Evin prison

By Dave Oludare Oso



**A**n Italian journalist detained in Iran for three weeks was released Wednesday and is returning home, Italian officials said.

Cecilia Sala was released following “intensive work on diplomatic and intelligence channels,” Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s office said.

The journalist, who contributes to the daily newspaper *Il Foglio* and hosts the “Stories” podcast for media outlet Chora Media, had been in Iran on assignment and with a journalist visa when she was arrested in the capital, Tehran, on December 19.

The state news outlet IRNA reported that Sala was being held after “violating the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

The 29-year-old journalist was held in solitary confinement at Iran’s Evin prison. While detained, she told family that she had to sleep on the floor of a cell that had lights on permanently.

Meloni is expected to greet Sala when the journalist arrives in Rome later on Wednesday. “I want to express my

gratitude to everyone who helped make Cecilia’s return possible, allowing her to re-embrace her family and colleagues” Meloni said in a statement on X.

Sala’s father Renato Sala said he was overcome when he learned that his daughter was returning home.

“I have only cried three times in my life,” he told Reuters. “During this period, I had the impression that a game of chess was being played, but there were more than just two players.”

The National Press Club in Washington welcomed Sala’s release.

“Sala’s ordeal was a brazen attack on press freedom and a reminder of the extraordinary risks journalists face to bring the truth to light,” National Press Club president Emily Wilkins said in a statement. “Her freedom is a victory for journalism and for all who stand against the silencing of the press.”

Iran’s Foreign Ministry did not

immediately reply to VOA’s email requesting comment on Sala’s release.

Sala was detained three days after Swiss-Iranian businessman Mohammad Abedini was arrested in Milan on a U.S. warrant. He is accused of allegedly supplying drone parts that Washington says were used in a 2024 attack that killed three U.S. service members in Jordan.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson told the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* that they believe Sala’s arrest was likely a response to the businessman’s arrest. But Iran has denied that accusation.

Abedini remains detained in Italy, with a court due to decide next week on his request to be released to house arrest ahead of proceedings to extradite him to the U.S.

Iran has long arrested foreigners and dual nationals, including journalists, and then used them as bargaining chips in an attempt to draw concessions from other countries, rights groups say. Iran denies the practice.



# Taliban refute Trump's claims on US financial aid to Afghanistan

By Dave Oludare Oso

Taliban leaders in Afghanistan on Wednesday denied President-elect Donald Trump's assertions that they have received billions of dollars in U.S. financial aid since regaining control of the country.

Hamdullah Fitrat, the deputy Taliban spokesperson, responded to Trump's claims by asserting that the Kabul administration neither anticipates nor seeks any assistance from the United States.

"In reality, the United States has not provided a single penny to the Islamic Emirate," Fitrat stated, referring to Afghanistan's official name under Taliban rule. "Instead, it has confiscated and frozen billions of dollars that rightfully belong to the people of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's sharp response followed Trump's news conference in Florida on Tuesday, when he was asked to comment on the alleged monthly payments of millions of dollars by the Biden administration to the de facto Afghan rulers.

"It's not even believable. Billions of dollars, not millions — billions. We pay billions of dollars to essentially the Taliban Afghanistan," Trump stated. "This can't be allowed to happen."

Fitrat claimed that the U.S. funds in question were primarily utilized for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and the relocation and resettlement of their Afghan allies.

"A portion of this money may have also been used under the pretext of 'humanitarian aid' by international organizations. The U.S. directed all this money to Afghanistan, primarily for its



own interests, and now exploits it as propaganda against the Islamic Emirate," the Taliban spokesperson alleged.

The controversy surrounding provision of financial aid to the Taliban intensified following a Jan. 2 letter by Congressman Tim Burchett to President-elect Trump, which expressed concern over foreign aid being directed to the de facto Afghan authorities.

"These cash shipments are auctioned off, and after that, they are nearly impossible to track. This is how the Taliban is being funded and plans to fund terrorism around the world," warned Burchett. "The United States of America should not fund its enemies abroad."

He cited U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken as having confirmed that non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan had paid nearly \$10 million in foreign aid to the Taliban in taxes.

The Taliban swept back to power in August 2021, prompting Washington and the West at large to

suspend development aid to the country and effectively isolate the Afghan banking sector, freezing billions of dollars of central bank assets in the United States.

The flow of humanitarian assistance, however, has primarily remained intact under the United Nations' supervision.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) refutes allegations that some of the funds it receives for humanitarian operations are being diverted to the Taliban.

UNAMA has maintained that it transports cash into the country for the use of U.N. agencies and "approved and vetted" humanitarian partners to assist millions of Afghans needing support.

The mission has emphasized that all cash is deposited in designated U.N. accounts in a private bank before being distributed directly to the United Nations and other entities. It has also clarified that none of the cash brought into the country is deposited in the Central Bank of Afghanistan or provided to de facto Taliban authorities by the U.N.

## Adepoju urges Super Eagles to back new coach Eric Chelle

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

Former Nigerian international Mutiu Adepoju has called on Super Eagles players and fans to support newly appointed head coach Eric Chelle.

Chelle, 47, was announced as the new manager by the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) on Tuesday and is set to finalize his contract in Abuja this Sunday. The former Mali international takes charge of the team amid high expectations for success.

Speaking to Brila FM, Adepoju emphasized the importance of unity in ensuring Chelle's tenure is fruitful. "I think the best thing we can do at the moment is for the Super Eagles to support the new coach, Eric Chelle, and hope all works out well," he said.

Adepoju expressed confidence in the



NFF's decision, adding, "Nevertheless, I think the NFF has taken a decision, thinking that it's the right decision."

Chelle's appointment comes as the Super Eagles aim to reclaim their dominance in African football and secure a strong run in upcoming tournaments.

## West Ham sack Julen Lopetegui after Just eight months in charge

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

West Ham United have parted ways with head coach Julen Lopetegui following a disappointing start to the Premier League season. The Spaniard, who replaced David Moyes last summer, lasted only 20 league matches, winning just six despite a transfer spend exceeding £130 million.

Lopetegui's dismissal comes after a 4-1 loss to Manchester City, leaving the Hammers in 14th place. Graham Potter is the leading candidate to replace him, with talks reportedly progressing positively between the former Chelsea and Brighton manager and West Ham officials.

West Ham's defensive frailties have been a major issue, with the team suffering six defeats by three or more goals this season, including a 5-1 Carabao Cup loss to Liverpool. Sky Sports pundit Jamie Carragher commented earlier this week that the team's poor performances reflected deeper problems, saying, "Whenever they



get beat, they get beat badly. I was expecting this three or four weeks ago."

Despite flashes of attacking promise, Lopetegui struggled to stabilize the squad, with inconsistent form ultimately costing him his position. The club's board had previously debated his future after a 3-1 defeat to Leicester in December but gave him a

brief reprieve. However, results failed to improve.

West Ham now face a critical run of fixtures, including an FA Cup clash against Aston Villa on January 10 and key Premier League matches against Fulham and Crystal Palace. The board hopes a managerial change will rejuvenate the team as they aim to climb the league table.



# AC Milan submit bid for Manchester United's Marcus Rashford

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

**A**C Milan have reportedly made an official loan-to-buy bid to Manchester United for forward Marcus Rashford, signaling a potential blockbuster move.

Sources indicate Rashford's representatives are in Italy for talks with Milan officials as the 27-year-old explores options for a "new challenge." The United academy graduate surprised fans recently by expressing his desire to leave, despite his lifelong connection to the club.

Rashford's form this season has been underwhelming, with just seven goals in 24 appearances, fueling speculation that he may benefit from a fresh start elsewhere. Pundits have long suggested that a move away from Old Trafford could help revive his career.



Italian journalist Gianluca Di Marzio reports that Milan are serious contenders, submitting a loan-to-buy proposal to United. Borussia Dortmund and Juventus are also interested in securing Rashford's signature, with his representatives

expected to meet with these clubs soon. United have yet to respond to Milan's bid, but negotiations are likely to progress in the coming days. Rashford's decision could hinge on finding the best environment to reignite his form and achieve his ambitions.

# Didier Deschamps to step down as France manager after 2026 World Cup

By Timi-Zacchaeus Oluwaferanmi

**D**idier Deschamps, the legendary coach who has led France to numerous footballing triumphs, has announced his decision to step down as manager following the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Deschamps, 56, has been at the helm of Les Bleus since 2012, making him the longest-serving coach in the history of the French national team. Under his stewardship, France has experienced a golden era, claiming the 2018 World Cup in Russia, reaching the finals of both the 2022 World Cup and Euro 2016, and winning the UEFA Nations League in 2021.

"In 2026 it will be over. In my head, it's very clear," he told French broadcaster TF1. "I've done my time, with the same desire and passion to maintain France at the highest level. One has to be able to say stop; there's a life after this."

**A Legacy of Success**

Deschamps, a former midfielder, is one of only three men—alongside Mario Zagallo and Franz Beckenbauer—to win the FIFA

World Cup as both a player and a manager. He captained France to their first World Cup victory in 1998 and led them to European Championship glory in 2000.

After taking over from Laurent Blanc following France's quarter-final exit at Euro 2012, Deschamps quickly transformed the team. He guided France to the quarter-finals of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and then to the Euro 2016 final on home soil, where they narrowly lost to Portugal.

His crowning achievement came in 2018 when Les Bleus lifted their second World Cup trophy after a scintillating 4-2 victory over Croatia in Moscow. Four years later, France reached the final once again, only to lose to Argentina in a dramatic penalty shootout after a thrilling 3-3 draw.

didier deschamps



**A Stellar Career**

Before becoming a manager, Deschamps enjoyed an illustrious playing career. Known for his defensive prowess and leadership, he earned 103 caps for France and won 14 major trophies at club level, including Champions League titles with Marseille and Juventus and an FA Cup with Chelsea.