

UAE President to visit Nigeria after Tinubu's bilateral talks

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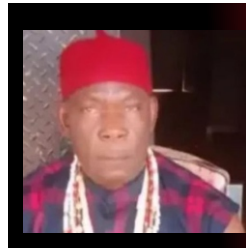
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Govs finally back tax reform bills, propose new VAT-sharing formula



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Israel kills 40, wounds 200 in Gaza despite ceasefire deal



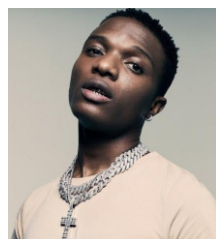
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Amad's hat-trick rescues Manchester Utd from land of the dead



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FG to give 70m poor Nigerians N75,000 each

By Dave Oludare Oso



In consideration of the prevailing economic hardship, the Federal Government has announced plans to distribute N75,000 cash to about 70 million ‘poorest of the poor’ Nigerians by 2025.

The Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Prof Nentawe Yilwatda disclosed this during his appearance on The Morning Show on Arise Television on Wednesday.

According to Yilwatda, the ministry aims to deploy the programme across 36 states of the Federation by the end of January 2025, targeting the registration of

up to 18.1 million Nigerian households through the National Identity Number (NIN) system.

“We want to deploy by the end of January across 36 states to ensure we start harvesting the NIN number of up to 18.1 million Nigerian households that we need to capture as fast as possible so that we can make payment for them,” the minister said.

“The target of the President is that we should target 15 million households. And an average household is about 4 to 5. We are discussing here roughly about 70 million households with about N75,000 per person this year,”

the minister noted.

However, a wide percentage of Nigerians are curious about the criteria the government will use to determine the status of the people.

Also, many believe that politics will eventually come into play, with party loyalists, cronies, and government officials’ relatives benefitting ahead of the poor people the money is originally intended for.

Whichever way it goes, the people will see, as the take-off of the programme is just a few days away.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

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9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
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ALL RATES ARE VAT INCLUSIVE

Govs finally back tax reform bills, propose new VAT-sharing formula

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

Governors of Nigeria's 36 states under the platform of the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) have finally thrown their weight behind the proposed tax reform bills currently at the national assembly.

The governors made this known at the end of a meeting of subnational consultations and engagement in Abuja with the Chairman of the Presidential Fiscal Policy and Tax Reforms Committee, Taiwo Oyedele,

The NGF, in a communique signed by its Chairman and governor of Kwara State, AbdulRahman Abdul Razaq, said the Forum endorsed a revised Value Added Tax (VAT) sharing formula to ensure equitable distribution of resources of 50% based on equality, 30% based on derivation, and 20% based on population.

Additionally, the NGF in the communique also resolved that there should be no increase in the VAT rate or reduction in Corporate Income Tax (CIT) at this time to maintain economic stability, just as they have called for the continued exemption of essential goods and agricultural produce from VAT as that would help safeguard the welfare of citizens and promote agricultural productivity.

The governors also recommended that there should be no terminal clause for Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni), and National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in the sharing of development levies in the bills.

The communique read, "We, members of the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) and presidential tax reform committee, convened on the 16th of January 2025 to deliberate on critical national issues, including the reform of Nigeria's fiscal policies and tax system, and arrived at the following resolutions:



"The Forum reiterated its strong support for the comprehensive reform of Nigeria's archaic tax laws. Members acknowledged the importance of modernizing the tax system to enhance fiscal stability and align with global best practices.

"The Forum endorsed a revised Value Added Tax (VAT) sharing formula to ensure equitable distribution of resources: 50% based on equality, 30% based on derivation, and 20% based on population.

"Members agreed that there should be no increase in the VAT rate or reduction in Corporate Income Tax (CIT) at this time, to maintain economic stability. The Forum advocated for the continued exemption of essential goods and agricultural produce from VAT to safeguard the welfare of citizens and promote agricultural productivity.

"The meeting recommended that there should be no terminal clause for TETFUND, NASeni, and NITDA in the sharing of development levies in the bills."

Recall that President Bola Tinubu transmitted four tax reform bills to the national assembly on October 3, 2024.

The bills are the Nigeria Tax Bill 2024, the Nigeria Tax Administration Bill, the Nigeria Revenue Service Establishment

Bill, and the Joint Revenue Board Establishment Bill.

Others are the Nigeria Revenue Service Establishment Bill, which will repeal the Federal Inland Revenue Service Act and establish the Nigeria Revenue Service, and the Joint Revenue Board Establishment Bill, which will create a tax tribunal and a tax ombudsman.

Also recall that the same day, both the Senate and the House of Representatives embarked on the hurried recess, the National Economic Council (NEC) chaired by Vice President Kashim Shettima, resolved that the tax reform bills should be withdrawn from the National Assembly by President Tinubu for wider consultation.

But President Tinubu on Thursday, 31st October, 2024, responded to the request that the bills should be allowed to pass through the required legislative processes at both chambers which according to him, will give concerned Nigerians the opportunity to get details on the bills and make their inputs, particularly at the stage of Public hearing.

Also recall that the bills were passed for second reading in the Senate on 28th of November, 2024.

UAE President to visit Nigeria after Tinubu's bilateral talks

By Friday Omosola

In a significant diplomatic development, the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has accepted an invitation from Nigerian President Bola Tinubu to visit Nigeria later in 2025.

Bayo Onanuga, Tinubu's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy in a statement on Thursday said the invitation was extended during bilateral talks held on the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) 2025.

President Tinubu, who arrived in Abu Dhabi on Sunday as a guest of the UAE leader, participated in the high-profile sustainability forum, which fosters global dialogue on addressing challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, and energy crises.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Nigerian leader delivered Nigeria's position on these pressing issues and commended the UAE for organizing a successful event.

During their meeting, both leaders expressed their commitment to strengthening economic ties between the two nations.

Sheikh Mohamed thanked



President Tinubu for attending the forum and reaffirmed the UAE's interest in expanding bilateral cooperation.

Discussions also centred on attracting investment into Nigeria, with President Tinubu emphasizing the impact of his administration's economic reforms.

Tinubu said his administration's reform policies have stabilized and grown Nigeria's economy, creating a favourable environment for foreign investment.

He added that Major international companies are now signalling renewed confidence by committing billions of dollars to Nigeria.

The Nigerian delegation included Minister of Foreign Affairs Yusuf Tuggar, Minister of Finance Wale

Edun, and National Security Adviser Nuhu Ribadu.

On the UAE side, high-ranking officials, including Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Sultan bin Ahmed Al Jaber, were present at the meeting held at the Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental.

He appreciated the UAE President for the warm hospitality extended to him and his team during their stay.

The anticipated visit of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Nigeria is expected to further enhance the bilateral partnership, particularly in economic cooperation and sustainable development.

FG to Sanusi: We don't need your approval for economic reforms

By Friday Omosola

The Federal Government (FG) has responded to recent remarks by the Emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi II, concerning the economic reforms under President Bola Tinubu's administration.

Recall that Sanusi II has said that he would not offer any advice to President Tinubu's Adkins on how to tackle the economic challenges facing the country.

Speaking at a public event in Lagos, Emir Sanusi acknowledged the necessity of the reforms but noted that he had chosen 'not to help the government' explain them.

However, the FG in a statement released by the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris on Thursday, emphasised its commitment to transformative reforms aimed at addressing Nigeria's economic challenges.

While acknowledging Sanusi's right to critique or commend government policies, FG expressed disappointment over his decision to withhold public support for reforms he has historically endorsed.

"It is deeply disappointing that reforms widely recognised as essential by global experts—including Emir Sanusi II himself—are now being subtly condemned because of a shift in loyalty. His Highness, given his background in economics, has a unique responsibility to contribute constructively rather than undermine



reforms aimed at collective progress because he feels estranged from his 'friends' in government," the statement read.

The government reiterated that its policies, including the unification of exchange rates and the removal of fuel subsidies, are necessary for long-term economic stability.

According to FG, these measures have already begun yielding positive results, such as increased foreign reserves, improved fiscal sustainability, and higher GDP growth projections from global institutions like the World Bank.

"The temporary pains currently experienced are a necessary consequence of decades of irresponsible economic management," the government said.

The government added that the freed-up resources from subsidy removal are now being directed towards critical sectors like

infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

FG called on Emir Sanusi and other leaders to prioritise national unity and the collective good of Nigerians over personal or partisan interests.

"This is a critical time for our country; what is needed is collaboration, not unnecessary distractions," said FG.

President Tinubu's administration reaffirmed its openness to constructive dialogue with all stakeholders while maintaining its commitment to economic inclusivity, sustainability, and shared prosperity.

The government appealed for unity, urging leaders and citizens alike to work together in rebuilding Nigeria.

"This administration remains resolute in its mission to deliver on the promise of renewed hope and a better Nigeria for all."

EFCC to arraign Oba Otudeko, others over alleged N12.3bn fraud

By Friday Omosola

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has filed a 13-count criminal charge against the Chairman of Honeywell Group, Chief Oba Otudeko, and a former Managing Director of First Bank, Olabisi Onasanya, for allegedly defrauding First Bank of N12.3 billion.

The arraignment of both individuals is scheduled for Monday, January 20, before Justice Chukwuejekwu Aneke at the Federal High Court in Lagos.

Joining them as defendants in the case are Soji Akintayo, a former board member of Honeywell Flour Mills Plc, and Anchorage Leisure Ltd, a company linked to Otudeko.

The EFCC prosecutor, Bilkisu Buhari-Bala, filed the charges on January 16, 2025, alleging that the accused obtained the funds in tranches of N5.2 billion, N6.2 billion, N6.15 billion, N1.5 billion, and N500 million between 2013 and 2014 in Lagos.

To establish its case, the EFCC intends to present witnesses, including representatives from First Bank, the Central Bank of Nigeria, Stallion Nigeria Limited, and V-Tech Dynamics Ltd. Individuals like Cecelia Majekodunmi, Ola Michael Aderogba, Abiodun Olatunji, Raymond Eze, Abiodun Odunbola, and Adeayo David are expected to testify about the alleged fraudulent misrepresentation.



Farida Abubakar and Adaeze Nwakoby are also listed as witnesses.

The EFCC alleges that the offences violate Section 8(a) of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006, and are punishable under Section 1(3) of the same Act.

The EFCC outlined the charges against the defendants as follows:

In Count 1, the defendants are accused of conspiring to fraudulently obtain N12.3 billion from First Bank by falsely claiming the funds were credit facilities applied for by V-Tech Dynamic Links Ltd and Stallion Nigeria Ltd.

Count 2 alleges that on November 26, 2013, the defendants fraudulently obtained N5.2 billion from First Bank, pretending it was a credit facility for V-Tech Dynamic Links Ltd.

Under Count 3, the EFCC claims the defendants secured N6.2 billion

between 2013 and 2014 from First Bank, falsely representing it as a credit facility for Stallion Nigeria Ltd.

In Count 4, the defendants are charged with conspiring to use N6.15 billion, knowing it was proceeds from unlawful activities, including obtaining funds under pretence.

Finally, Count 5 states that on December 11, 2013, the defendants facilitated Honeywell Flour Mills Plc in retaining N1.5 billion, suspected to be proceeds of their unlawful activities.

The charges also cite violations of the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act, 2011 (as amended), particularly Sections 18(a) and 15(2)(d), punishable under Section 15(3) of the Act.

The case is set to bring further scrutiny to high-profile financial dealings involving corporate executives and financial institutions in Nigeria.

High electricity bills: FG to install solar panels in universities – Tinubu

By Alade Adisa

The federal government is set to install solar power panels in public higher institutions in the country to help reduce the burden of high power bills the institutions are paying monthly.

President Bola Tinubu said this on Thursday during the 55th graduation ceremony of the University of Lagos, UNILAG.

He was represented by the Minister of Education, Dr Tunji Alausa.

“My administration recognizes that education is the cornerstone of national development. It is the bedrock upon which a prosperous society is built. This understanding is reflected in our policies and investments in the education sector.

“In the proposed 2025 Budget, we have allocated N3.52 trillion to education, the third-highest allocation, underscoring our commitment to revitalizing the sector. This “Budget of Restoration: Securing Peace, Rebuilding Prosperity” reflects our determination to stabilize the economy, improve lives, and position Nigeria for a brighter future.

“Key initiatives such as the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) have widened access to higher education, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder our youth from achieving their dreams. Thousands of students have already benefited, and we remain committed to expanding this program to benefit thousands more.

“Furthermore, we have initiated reforms to address systemic challenges in tertiary education. From removing universities from the IPPIS to approving recruitment waivers, our actions demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the quality and



stability of higher education.

“We recognize that our universities are not just centers of learning but also engines of national innovation. That is why we are fostering stronger partnerships between academia and industry, and why we are committed to resuscitating critical projects like the Rural Electrification initiative. The University of Lagos, among other institutions, will soon benefit from solar power installations, furthering our vision of a sustainable education ecosystem,” he said.

He challenged the graduating students to embrace the challenges of the time and see them as opportunities to excel.”

He commended the management of the institution led by the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola, for raising the banner of the institution to higher level.

The President also celebrated Mr Kolawole Adesina, Group Managing Director of Sahara Power Group, Mr. Fola Adeola, renowned businessman and investor, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization who were honoured with honorary doctoral degrees by the university.

“Their conferment with honorary degrees underscores the values of excellence, service, and leadership that this institution cherishes,” he stated.

The Chairman of the Governing Council, Chief Wole Olanipekun, SAN, expressed the readiness of members of the council to achieve the mandate of making the university one of the best in the world in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda of the Tinubu administration.

Olanipekun urged youths in the country to stay at home and help build the nation instead of dreaming of relocating abroad. He added that even in those foreign countries, there is no free lunch.

He acknowledged that since Alausa took office as minister, he has been doing well and hoped that the sector would have experienced a great turnaround by the time the minister completes his tenure. Prof. Ogunsola, in her speech, listed the various achievements recorded so far since she took office.

She thanked friends and benefactors of the university for keying into the vision of a future ready university she is pursuing by donating to the university.

Why I won't help Tinubu's govt – Emir Sanusi

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi has said he has decided not to offer any help whatsoever, especially concerning the economy, to the administration of President Bola Tinubu anymore.

The Emir spoke at the memorial lecture of Chief Gani Fawehinmi in Lagos on Wednesday.

The lecture, with the theme, “Bretton Woods and the African Economies: Can Nigerians Survive Another Structural Adjustment Programme?” was organised by Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Ikeja Branch.

He was the chairman at the lecture.

The former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria said, “I have decided not to speak about the economy or the reforms, nor to explain anything regarding them. If I explained, it would only benefit this government, and I don't want to aid this government.”

Emir Sanusi, who made a stunning return to the ancient and revered throne in Kano last year, four years after being deposed by the state government led then by Governor Abdullahi Ganduje, is unhappy with how the Federal Government has acted towards him.

However, his return to power under new Kano governor, Abba Yusuf is being challenged in court by the deposed 15th Emir, Aminu Ado Bayero, and there have been claims that the Federal Government favours Bayero, claims the FG has denied.

Explaining his decision, Emir Sanusi said, “I choose not to help this government. You see, they are my friends. If they fail to act like friends, I will not act like one.

“I observe their actions, and they lack credible individuals who can effectively explain their policies. However, I'm not



here to assist (them). I began by offering support, but I've decided to stop.

“I will not discuss the matter any further. Let them come forward and explain to Nigerians why the policies they have pursued have been implemented. Meanwhile, I am enjoying a nice movie with popcorn in hand.”

Although the Emir will not offer advice to the Federal Government or comment on ongoing reforms, he shared his thoughts on why the country was in the state it currently is in – unheeded warnings.

He said, “I will say one thing. What we are going through today is at least in part, not totally, at least in part, a necessary consequence of decades of irresponsible economic management.

“People were warned decades ago that if they continued down this path, this is where they would end up. They chose not to listen. Is everything being done today, correct? No.”

The Emir Sanusi said, rather than focus on the economy, it was best to focus on the late legal luminary for who the lecture was organised.

“For now, I am here to honour Chief Gani Fawehinmi,” Emir Sanusi, before going

on to call for a return to the foundational values of integrity and highlighting the lessons of the late Senior Advocate of Nigeria's life.

“What we need to do is revisit our values. Do we truly possess those values? Are we genuinely committed to our work? What is the integrity with which we approach our tasks? For someone like Gani, these are the lessons from his life.

“I am here to remind us all of what he stood for, to encourage us, and to plead with us to return, as I mentioned recently, to the distinction between who we are and what we are. Our identity is defined by those qualities that Gani embodies. They revolve around our values – what we can control and who we are,” he said.

These values, the Emir believes, matter regardless of ethnicity, religion and region.

He added, “If you are a thief, you are a thief—whether you are Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Muslim, Christian, a lawyer, or otherwise. That is your identity.

“You could be from the north or the south, wealthy or poor, a president or an emir. These are aspects of your identity. You may not like it, but that's the reality. Can we please begin to reflect and stop taking pride in superficial, misleading distinctions?”

Apart from Emir Sanusi, the Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo, (SAN), lauded the enduring legacy of the late Fawehinmi, describing him as a symbol of courage and justice.

The Minister said, “The late Chief Gani Fawehinmi left an indelible mark on human rights advocacy, public service, and the legal profession.

Court frees Igbo chief who threatened to bring IPOB to Lagos

By Dave Oludare Oso

Eze Ndigbo of Ajao Estate, Lagos, Frederick Nwajagu has been acquitted of terrorism charges by Lagos State High Court sitting at Tafawa Balewa Square.

On April 5, 2023, a Lagos State Magistrates Court in Yaba ordered Nwajagu's remand at the Ikoyi custodial centre, while subsequent efforts to secure his bail were denied by the Lagos State High Court.

Nwajagu was accused of threatening to invite members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to Lagos to protect the lives and property of Igbo people if the Federal Government failed to safeguard them against attacks.

However, the court, convicted and sentenced him to 12 months imprisonment for the offence of parading himself as a certified chief in Lagos State, contrary to the Oba and Chiefs Law of Lagos State.

Nwajagu, who was standing trial before Justice Yetunde Adesanya of Lagos State High Court since 2023, on nine counts bordering on an attempt to commit acts of terrorism, financing terrorism, participating in terrorism meeting to support a proscribed entity, was discharged and acquitted on Wednesday, January 15, 2025.

According to SaharaReporters, one of Nwajagu's lawyers, Fabian Onwughalu, president emeritus of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Lagos chapter, in a statement on Thursday said the defence team would work towards overturning the conviction.

Onwughalu said: "Eze Fred Nwajagu, Ezeigbo, Ajao Estate, Lagos State was



thrown into detention by Lagos State Government for terrorism and other offences allegedly for making a video warning MC Oluomo and other Yoruba youths to cease persecution of Ndigbo and burning of Igbo dominated markets in Lagos State, or else he would be compelled to invite IPOB to secure Igbo markets and assets in Lagos State.

"He was however convicted and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for the offence of parading himself as a certified Chief in Lagos State contrary to the Oba and Chiefs Law of Lagos State.

"Having been incarcerated for almost two years, he was ordered to be released immediately," he said.

Onwughalu said even though it was painful that Nwajagu was incarcerated, he maintained that the court victory is for Igbo people all over the world, "especially those in Lagos State who are being persecuted and dehumanised just because of their tribal leaning."

He, however, vowed that their team would appeal Nwajagu's conviction for parading himself as a chief in Lagos State, claiming that the prosecution did not prove the offence to warrant the

conviction.

He stated that the Ezeigbo institution is not recognised by the law of Lagos State, and so have nothing to do with the Oba and Chiefs Law.

"Also the conviction offends the fundamental rights of Freedom of Association of Ndigbo in Lagos State.

"I am happy to be among the Counsel in the defence team who diligently offered their services pro bono."

Backstory

On April 1, 2023, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) confirmed the arrest of the chief after a video where he made an "inciting statement" surfaced online.

In the clip, Nwajagu, dressed in his royal regalia, said Igbo indigenes in Lagos must recruit members of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) to defend their properties from looters.

On April 5, 2023, a magistrate court sitting in the Yaba area of Lagos remanded Nwajagu in prison custody.

Two sisters to die for killing, burning woman's body in Niger **By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

For the brutal killing of Hafsat Aliyu, a married woman, two siblings, Amina Aliyu and Aishat Mohammed Aliyu, have been sentenced to death in Niger State.

The third sibling, Zainab, received life imprisonment due to her age at the time of the crime.

The incident occurred in March 2021 at the family residence in Barkin Saleh, Minna.

Amina and Aishat were convicted of murdering Hafsat, who was both Amina's co-wife and the wife of Alhaji Muhammad Sani.

According to the prosecution, Aishat attacked Hafsat with a pestle before setting her body on fire in the kitchen.



The trial began at Minna Chief Magistrate Court Number One before being transferred to the High Court.

During the proceedings, which spanned

three years, four witnesses testified, including Sani, who recounted how Amina killed Hafsat.

Justice Balkisu Gambo Yusuf of Minna High Court 7 confirmed the prosecution had proven its case beyond doubt, stating, "The punishment for culpable homicide under Section 221 of the Penal Code is death."

Peter Omale, the defence counsel, urged leniency for Zainab, highlighting her status as a minor at the time of the crime.

Justice Yusuf concurred, ruling, "As of 2021, when the offence was committed, the ACJA excluded anyone below 18 from facing the death penalty."

Nigerian woman dies after savage dogs attack in Italy **By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Patricia Masithela, a 27-year-old woman of Nigerian extraction, has sadly died after a pack of starving dogs attacked her in Latina, Italy.

According to Mirror UK, the incident occurred late Monday night while Patricia was visiting a male acquaintance at his abandoned villa in the Lazio region.

The reports stated that her screams filled the night, alerting neighbours to the savage attack.

The deceased woman, who had recently moved to Lazio from Nigeria, reportedly visited the house unaware that her friend was not at home.

She was discovered critically injured, lying in a pool of blood with



deep wounds all over her body after the attack.

According to the report, the police, however, intervened, shooting two of the dogs to allow emergency responders to access the scene, while the rest of the pack fled after the gunfire.

Emergency medics provided immediate treatment and rushed Patricia to Santa Maria Goretti Hospital, but despite their efforts,

she could not survive the savage attack.

She succumbed to severe bite wounds and excessive blood loss, despite their efforts to save her.

Patricia, a devoted mother to a five-year-old daughter, has left her family and friends in unimaginable grief, Mirror UK reports.

It was gathered that investigations into the incident are ongoing as local authorities work to determine how the reportedly starving dogs came to be in the area.

The incident has, however, sparked discussions about stray animals and public safety, with residents calling for stricter measures to prevent such tragic incidents.

IGP calls for improved budgetary allocation, structural reforms for police

By Friday Omosola

The Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, has called for the removal of the force from the envelope budgetary system, advocating for increased funding to enhance its efficiency.

Egbetokun made this appeal during the 2025 budget defence session before the Joint Committees on Police Affairs and Police Institutions at the National Assembly in Abuja on Thursday.

Accompanied by the Force Management Team and senior officers, the IGP addressed key stakeholders, including Senator Abdulhamid Mallam Maidori, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Police Affairs; Honourable Makki Yalleman, Chairman of the House Committee on Police Affairs; and Senator (Dr.) Ibrahim Gaidam, Minister of Police Affairs.

In his presentation, the Egbetokun underscored the need to transition from the current envelope budgeting system, which he described as restrictive, to a more flexible funding model.

He emphasised that such a move would allow for accurate financial planning and better resource allocation for the Force.



He also proposed the creation of a Special Operations Account dedicated to addressing national security emergencies and advocated for increased allocations for Overhead and Capital Expenditure.

The IGP further outlined plans for the construction of five new zonal headquarters and the strengthening of tactical units crucial to maintaining internal security.

Additionally, the IGP stressed the importance of funding police training institutions to enhance capacity building, as well as the need for the timely and full release of appropriated funds to ensure the smooth operation of the Force in 2025.

Expressing gratitude to the Joint Committees for their support, the Egbetokun reaffirmed the commitment of the NPF to working collaboratively with stakeholders to achieve a secure and stable nation.

The session also had in attendance DIG Hashimu Argungu (Rtd.), Chairman of the Police Service Commission, alongside other distinguished members of the committees.

The proposed reforms and increased funding are expected to address long-standing challenges within the NPF, enabling the force to meet evolving security demands across the country.

Tinubu congratulates diaspora Nigerians honored with prestigious US science, engineering awards

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

President Bola Tinubu has extended his congratulations to six distinguished Nigerians in the Diaspora who were named among the 400 recipients of the United States Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE).

The award, established in 1996 by former US President Bill Clinton, is the highest honour given by the US government to early-career scientists and engineers for outstanding contributions to research and innovation.

The latest recipients were announced by US President Joe Biden on January 14, 2025.

In a statement issued on Thursday, January 16, by his Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, President Tinubu applauded the honourees for their groundbreaking achievements in science, technology, and engineering.

“This recognition of exceptional talent underscores Nigerians’ vast potential to excel both at home and on the global stage,” the President stated.

He encouraged the awardees to bring their multidisciplinary expertise to support Nigeria’s development under the Renewed Hope Agenda.

Nigerian Recipients

The Nigerian awardees include:

1. Azeez Butali, Gilbert Lilly



Endowed Professor of Diagnostic Sciences at the University of Iowa’s College of Dentistry.

2. Ijeoma Opara, Associate Professor of Public Health at Yale School of Public Health, Yale University.

3. Oluwatomi Akindede, Postdoctoral researcher at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

4. Eno Ebong, Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering, Bioengineering, and Biology at Northeastern University.

5. Oluwasanmi Koyejo, Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Stanford University.

6. Abidemi Ajiboye, Executive Vice Chair at the Case School of Engineering’s Department of Biomedical Engineering, Case

Western Reserve University.

The honourees are among scientists and engineers employed or funded by 14 US government agencies. Their achievements reflect a commitment to advancing innovation and tackling global challenges.

President Tinubu’s administration has emphasised fostering talent and leveraging expertise from Nigerians in the Diaspora to propel the nation’s progress, particularly in fields like technology and engineering.

The PECASE recipients’ success serves as an inspiration, showcasing Nigeria’s potential to produce global leaders in innovation and scientific advancement.

FG approves 30 to 60% tariff hike on calls, data

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Bosun Tijani, has said that Nigerians will have to pay 30-60 percent more for calls, data, and other services in the telecommunications sector.

Tijani disclosed this in a recent interview with Channels Television.

According to him, the telecommunications sector is entirely about investment to spur Nigeria's economic growth.

He noted that investors in the sector continuously invest in equipment to remain relevant despite inflation.

"I think the telecommunications tariff increase should not be more than 30 to 60 percent.



"The sector is about investment in infrastructure; the technologies are changing, so you have to keep investing in technology.

"Things like 3G will be decommissioned at some point because you have higher technology, so they have to keep investing in equipment. And we all know that there is inflation. For us, as we are protecting them, we want to keep importing capital in the sector.

"The foreign direct investment in our sector in the first quarter of 2024, driven by telcos, was close to \$199 million; this is bigger than the entire inflow in 2023. We can't get to a \$1 trillion economy if mobile network operators are investing at a snail's pace," he stated.

This comes days after he confirmed that Nigeria's telecom services tariff will be increased; however, not by 100 percent.

N'Assembly clears JAMB of alleged fund misappropriation

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The National Assembly Joint Committee on Finance has absolved the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) of allegations of financial mismanagement in its 2024 budget implementation.

Senator Sani Musa, Chairman of the committee, made this announcement on Thursday, January 16, following a review of documents submitted by JAMB, which dispelled accusations of reckless expenditure.

During the budget defence session with JAMB Registrar, Prof. Ishaq Oloyede, the committee raised concerns over reports that the board had spent ₦1.1 billion on meals and ₦850 million on fumigation, among other line items.

While Prof. Oloyede attempted to clarify these expenditures, the committee requested a detailed breakdown of JAMB's budgetary



appropriation and spending for 2024 and 2025.

Senator Musa clarified that a comprehensive review of JAMB's submissions confirmed there was no evidence of mismanagement or misuse of funds.

"For the purpose of clarity, the comprehensive report provided by JAMB indicated that the line items mentioned during Monday's hearing on revenue did not suggest any

mismanagement or misuse of the board's funds," Musa stated.

He commended the registrar for demonstrating financial discipline and effective resource management, emphasising that such stewardship serves as a benchmark for other public institutions.

Under Prof. Oloyede's leadership, JAMB has been recognised for its transparency and efficiency in managing its financial operations.

The committee highlighted the board's responsible use of public funds, further endorsing its accountability practices.

The exoneration of JAMB underscores the importance of thorough scrutiny in budget implementation and reaffirms the need for public institutions to maintain financial integrity.

Wike revokes land plots belonging to Imo, Bayelsa govts, Reps speaker, 565 others

By Dave Oludare Oso

Governor Hope Uzodimma of Imo State, his Bayelsa counterpart, Douye Diri, and Speaker of the House of Representatives Abbas Tajudeen are among the 568 Nigerians and companies whose land allotments in Abuja have been revoked by the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike.

The revocation includes plots held by political figures, government officials, former governors, lawmakers, and several companies.

Notably, former Cross River State governor, Ben Ayade, Senate leaders like Opeyemi Bamidele and Abba Moro, and other political figures such as Ibrahim Hadejia and Abike Dabiri-Erewa are affected.

The revocations follow a public notice by



the Federal Capital Territory Administration, (FCTA) issued on Wednesday, January 15, stating that the affected landowners failed to pay for their Certificates of Occupancy, C-of-O, by the deadline of January 15.

As a result, their rights to the plots, located in the Maitama II district of Abuja, have been withdrawn. This action is in accordance with Section 28 of the Land Use Act of 1978, which mandates that landholders must settle all bills

associated with their allotments. The notice clarified that those who completed their payments by the deadline are not affected.

This revocation is part of ongoing efforts to address land management issues in Abuja. It follows similar revocations in December 2023, which included other notable individuals like former President Muhammadu Buhari's foundation, and previous actions in August and October. In total, hundreds of plots in high-value areas of Maitama have been targeted in the latest land allocation clean-up.

Wike has emphasized his commitment to sanitizing land allocation practices in Abuja, noting that some decisions may not be popular, especially among wealthy landowners, but are necessary for public good.

NASS sets N25trn revenue target for FIRS in 2025

By Friday Omosola

The National Assembly has increased the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) revenue target for 2025 to N25 trillion after the agency surpassed its 2024 target of N19.4 trillion, as revealed by its Executive Chairman, Zacch Adedeji.

Adedeji, while presenting the agency's performance report and future projections on Wednesday, highlighted the record-breaking revenue collection.

In response, the National Assembly's Joint Committee on Finance proposed the new target, aiming to build on FIRS's momentum.

Deputy Chairman of the House Committee on Finance, Hon. Saidu Musa Abdullahi, praised the agency's achievements, calling its performance "unprecedented."

He urged FIRS to adopt elements of South Africa's tax model, which



generates higher revenue despite having a smaller population.

"We will fully support your tax reforms, but it's crucial to bring more taxable citizens, particularly from the informal sector, into the tax net," Abdullahi added.

However, Benedict Sapele expressed concerns, arguing that FIRS has the potential to set a much higher target.

He suggested that with greater effort, the

agency could aim for N60 trillion in revenue by 2025, adding, "If we perform well, we can avoid borrowing to fund our budget."

In his response, Adedeji emphasised the need for reforms, cautioning against taxing the informal sector without formalizing it.

"Multiple tax-collecting agencies often lead to revenue leakages. The progressive tax bill is essential to addressing this issue," he said.

He also stressed the importance of expanding the taxpayer base and transitioning the informal sector into the formal economy before implementing new tax measures.

The new revenue target reflects the government's push for fiscal sustainability and reduced dependence on borrowing to fund national budgets.

Dangote refinery operations have reduced Europe petrol exports – OPEC

By Dave Oludare Oso

The production of Premium Motor Spirit (petrol) by the Dangote Petroleum Refinery is having a poignant impact on the PMS market in Europe, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has said.

Before the commencement of operations in January 2024, and the production of PMS nine months later at the 650,000-capacity Dangote refinery, the country had relied solely on importation for its fuel needs.

Since it started production, the refinery has exported petrol, diesel, and aviation fuel to other countries within and outside Africa.

A report by OPEC on Wednesday stated that the emergence of Dangote refinery has reduced the importation of petroleum products from Europe to Nigeria.

The OPEC report stated, “The ongoing operational ramp-up efforts at Nigeria’s new Dangote refinery and its gasoline (petrol) exports to the international market will likely weigh further on the European gasoline market.

“Continued gasoline production in Nigeria, a country that has relied heavily on imports to meet its domestic fuel needs in the past, will most likely continue to free up gasoline volumes in international markets which will call for new destinations and flow adjustments for the extra volumes going forward.”

In the last quarter of 2024, OPEC said “imports also declined, particularly oil product imports, improving the outlook for the external sector.”



The report stated that the gasoline crack spread in Rotterdam against Brent increased slightly on healthy exports although gasoline inventories at the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp storage hub remained high.

It added that the gasoline inventory builds are expected to extend into the coming month amid a lengthening gasoline balance in the Atlantic Basin due to winter-season demand-side pressures.

OPEC maintained that the ongoing recovery in gasoline refinery output levels will likely exacerbate the already bearish market

Meanwhile, the Monthly Oil Market Report (MONR) disclosed that the average daily crude production in Nigeria hit 1.507 million barrels in December, according to data OPEC got from secondary sources.

It was said to have risen by 12,000bpd, from 1.477mbpd in November.

However, the figure supplied by the government was 1.485mbpd for December. This aligns with that of the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission.

Recall that the Dangote refinery was

ranked above the 10 biggest refineries in Europe because of its capacity, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The \$20bn Dangote refinery can refine 650,000 barrels of petroleum products per day.

The report stated that this is over 246,000bpd capacity more than Shell’s Pernis refinery located in the Netherlands.

It added that the Pernis refinery has an installed capacity of 404,000bpd the biggest in Europe. The BP Rotterdam in the Netherlands has 380,000 capacity.

Bloomberg also said the GOI Energy ISAB refinery in Italy was built with a refining capacity of 360,000bpd.

Also, the TotalEnergies Antwerp refining facility in Belgium can refine 338,000bpd.

Others listed in the report were the Orlen Plock refinery in Poland with 327,000bpd; Shell’s Rheinland in Germany with 327,000bpd; Miro refinery in Germany has 310,000 capacity and the ExxonMobil Antwerp refinery in Belgium with 307,000 capacity.

Mutfwang advances agriculture, alleviates poverty with tractors, \$250,000 fund

By Friday Omosola

In a significant move to strengthen Plateau State's agricultural sector and combat poverty, Governor Caleb Mutfwang has inaugurated 20 tractors for farming communities and distributed \$250,000 to ten communities.

Gyang Bere, Director of Press and Public Affairs to the governor in a statement said the initiative, executed in partnership with the World Bank through the Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL) Project, reflects the administration's vision for food security and rural empowerment.

At the commissioning ceremony held at the New Government House, Rayfield, Jos, Governor Mutfwang emphasised that the tractors would enhance farming activities, ensuring food security and economic growth across the state.

He disclosed plans to procure an additional 200 tractors under the Plateau Agricultural Development Programme to bolster agricultural production further.

As part of the event, the governor presented a \$250,000 Community Revolving Fund (CRF) to ten communities, with each receiving \$25,000.

The initiative, supported by the World Bank, is designed to empower rural communities financially.

Beneficiary communities include Guratop, Kerang, Zamko, Ampang



West, Dinting, Jimin, Kaler, Plateau Club/Bingham, Pishe, Yashi, and Wereh. The funds are to be repaid after a specified period, creating a sustainable cycle of empowerment for other communities.

Governor Mutfwang encouraged the beneficiaries to utilize the funds effectively, stating, "This initiative is a revolving opportunity aimed at fostering community development. By God's grace, none of these projects will fail. We are committed to ensuring that the funds and equipment uplift our people."

He further reaffirmed his administration's resolve to alleviate poverty, saying, "Our priority is to ensure that these investments translate into tangible benefits, improving the living standards of our people and reducing poverty."

He urged citizens to support government initiatives and discouraged divisive tendencies that hinder progress.

The World Bank Country Director for Nigeria, Dr. Ndiame Diop, congratulated the communities and highlighted the initiative's role in addressing the effects of climate change on agriculture.

"Desertification and climate change are major threats to livelihoods in Plateau State. Through ACR6SAL, we aim to help communities adapt to these challenges while improving their well-being," he said.

Diop also commended Governor Mutfwang for his commitment to the project's success.

Speaker of the Plateau State House of Assembly, Gabriel Dewan, ACR6SAL Task Team Leader Joy Iganya Agene, and Plateau State ACR6SAL Coordinator Garba Gowon Gonkol, lauded Governor Mutfwang for fostering partnerships that deliver direct benefits to the people.

LASG issues warning to estate residents over unacceptable practices

By Friday Omosola

Lagos State Government (LASG) has issued a stern warning to residents of government-owned estates regarding violations of rules and regulations outlined in their allocation letters.

The Ministry of Housing recently observed disturbing reports of energy theft, neglect of shared facilities, and failure to pay estate dues—practices that undermine the smooth operation of the estates.

In a statement on Thursday, Moruf Akinderu-Fatai, Commissioner for Housing, addressed these concerns following an enforcement operation at Lateef Kayode Jakande Estate in Igando, where some residents were found guilty of bypassing the installed electrical connections in their flats, engaging in energy theft.

Speaking on the matter, Akinderu-Fatai expressed the Ministry's firm stance against such unlawful practices, particularly the abandonment and alteration of essential infrastructure like water



systems, electricity, and other shared services.

He condemned residents who have installed individual solutions that disrupt the estate's intended layout.

The Commissioner also highlighted instances of residents breaking seals on apartments previously seized for violations.

Despite appeals for leniency from some culprits, Akinderu-Fatai reaffirmed that the Ministry would no longer tolerate such acts in any state government estate.

“The Lagos State Government has provided all necessary

facilities in these estates. It is the responsibility of residents, through state-appointed facility managers, to maintain these amenities,” he emphasised.

He further urged residents to cooperate with their representatives to ensure the estate's communal living standards are upheld.

The government reiterated its commitment to ensuring the sustainability of government-owned estates by promoting responsible and collaborative living among residents.

NiDCOM hails Cardoso for NRNOA

By Friday Omosola

Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Chairman/CEO of the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM), has praised Olayemi Cardoso, Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), for introducing the Non-Resident Nigerian Ordinary Account (NRNOA) and the Non-Resident Nigerian Investment Account (NRNIA).

In a statement issued by Abdur-Rahman Balogun, NiDCOM's Head of Media, Public Relations, and Protocols, Dabiri-Erewa described the initiative as a strategic move designed to strengthen diaspora engagement and fuel Nigeria's economic growth.

She underscored the critical role of



diaspora remittances, noting that they are now Nigeria's largest source of foreign exchange, surpassing even oil revenues.

The NiDCOM chairperson further emphasised the need for a united effort between Nigerians at home and abroad, stating, "We must all come together to develop Nigeria; no foreigner will do this for us."

She encouraged Nigerians in the diaspora to take full advantage of these new financial opportunities, highlighting their potential to drive further contributions to Nigeria's economy.

Dabiri-Erewa also commended the CBN's proactive approach to deepening ties with the diaspora, citing recent efforts aimed at optimizing remittance channels and enhancing the nation's financial stability.

She expressed confidence that the introduction of the NRNOA and NRNIA would significantly boost economic contributions from Nigerians worldwide.

Ondo PDP withdraws from Jan 18 LG poll

By Friday Omosola

The Ondo State chapter of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has announced its withdrawal from the local government elections scheduled for Saturday, January 18, 2025.

The Ondo State Independent Electoral Commission (ODIEC) had earlier cleared 13 political parties, including the PDP, to participate in the elections. However, the PDP's withdrawal reduces the number of parties in the race to 12.

In a statement released on Thursday by the party's Director of Media and Publicity, Mr. Leye Igbabo, the PDP cited a lack of confidence in the credibility of the electoral process as the reason for its decision.

The statement, titled "Ondo PDP Withdraws from Participating in the January 18th Local Government Election," followed consultations with party leaders, stakeholders, and the PDP



National Secretariat.

The party accused ODIEC of failing the "integrity test," alleging double standards and a lack of transparency.

"Our party fielded 15 chairmanship candidates in 15 local government areas and 131 councillorship candidates. But, from all indications, ODIEC's credibility, transparency, and impartiality have failed the integrity test. Recent observations and reports point to a troubling pattern of double standards by ODIEC, raising serious doubts about their ability to conduct a free, fair, and credible election," the statement read.

The PDP emphasized that participating in what it described as a compromised process would contradict its commitment to democracy and credible electoral practices.

"As a responsible political party committed to democracy and the rule of law, we cannot, in good conscience, confer legitimacy on this compromised process by participating in the election. We have, therefore, resolved to withdraw our participation in this exercise to uphold the integrity of our party and our unwavering belief in credible electoral practices," the statement concluded.

The withdrawal of the PDP, a major political party, raises questions about the credibility of the electoral process and poses challenges for ODIEC in its efforts to ensure a transparent election.

Ondo police restrict movement ahead of LG elections

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

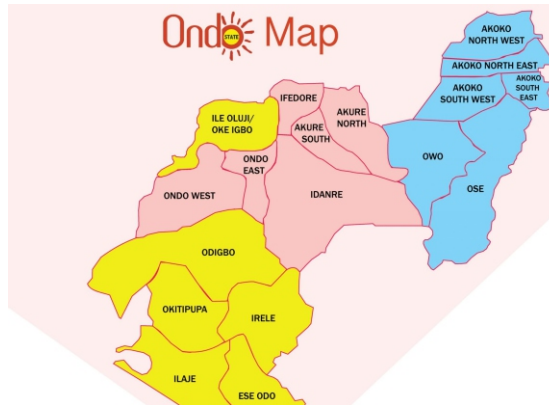
The Ondo State Police Command has announced a restriction on vehicular and motorcycle movement from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday to ensure a peaceful and secure local government election.

This directive was issued by the state's Commissioner of Police, Mr Wilfred Afolabi, in a statement released on Thursday, January 16, through the command's spokesperson, CSP Funmilayo Odunlami.

The restriction is aimed at bolstering security during the electoral process. The CP advised commuters passing through Ondo State to adjust their travel plans accordingly to avoid inconvenience.

"However, security personnel, health workers, firefighters, and other essential

service providers are exempted from the restriction and allowed free movement to carry out their duties," Afolabi said.



He added that emergency cases would also be accommodated for movement.

The police urged eligible voters to comply with electoral guidelines while

performing their civic duties. Afolabi warned against any attempts to disrupt the election, stating that robust security measures had been implemented to address any potential disturbances.

"All intending miscreants who may want to cause mayhem on election day are warned to stay clear. All machinery is in place to nip any untoward act as they raise their ugly heads," the CP stated.

The commissioner reassured citizens of the police command's readiness to safeguard human and material resources for a seamless electoral process.

The restriction highlights the state's commitment to ensuring a peaceful environment for the conduct of the local government elections.

Five soldiers, 6 terrorists killed during gunfight in Sokoto

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Troops of the Defence Headquarters Special Operations Brigade have killed at least six terrorists in a coordinated operation targeting Lakurawa terrorists in the Gudu Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

The operation, carried out under Operation Fansan Yamma, was announced in a statement on Thursday by Lt. Col. Abubakar Abdullahi, Coordinator of the Joint Media Coordination Centre.

However, five soldiers lost their lives in the fierce firefight, the statement disclosed.

During the operation the troops recovered the following items, four AK-47 rifles, 160 rounds of

7.62mm special ammunition, and one box of 12.7mm ammunition, the statement said.

While the military hailed the success of the operation, it expressed deep sorrow over the loss of the five soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty.

"Despite this success, the operation came at a heavy cost, as five gallant soldiers tragically lost their lives in the line of duty," the statement added.

In the aftermath of the operation, the military urged residents of Gudu LGA and surrounding areas to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activities related to terrorism or security threats to security agencies.

The statement reiterated the importance of public cooperation in maintaining peace and safeguarding lives, calling on communities to stay alert and proactive in supporting security operations.



Nine die of cholera outbreak in Rivers Community

By Helen Okechukwu

Nine people have died from a cholera outbreak in the Andoni and Akuku-Toru Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Rivers State.

This was confirmed on Thursday by the Commissioner of Health, Dr. Adaeze Oreh, during a media conference.

Dr. Oreh stated that three persons died in the Isiodun community of Andoni LGA while six died in Akuku-Toru LGA within 48 hours, raising the total number of suspected recorded cases to 41 on 13 January.

She acknowledged that through the Ministry of Health, adequate measures have been put in place to tackle this issue.

She said, “With the deepest sense of sympathy to victims of a suspected outbreak of acute watery diarrhoea caused by a suspected cholera outbreak, because we at the Ministry of Health are yet to confirm that those deaths were from cholera in the Isiodun community of the Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

“However, the symptoms of the cases reported are in keeping with the surveillance case definition of cholera.

“Cholera, as we all know, is an acute diarrhoeal disease that is caused by the bacteria ‘Vibrio



holerae.’ It thrives in areas with poor water, sanitation, and hygiene wash infrastructure.

While highlighting the means of transmission through consuming contaminated water, she noted that contact with contaminated surfaces from infected persons can lead to transmission.

She stressed the effect of the alarming rate of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera during the dry season, posing a threat to society due to the high mortality rate.

“It was majorly these deaths that were reported and brought to our attention that necessitate the quick response from our directorate of public health and disease control.

She added, “The state rapid response team led by the Director

of Public Health and Disease Control investigated and commenced actions to contain that outbreak.”

In collaboration with some partners, Dr. Oreh revealed that Andoni LGA authority has activated emergency response measures to strengthen surveillance.

She urged members of the public to practice preventive measures such as practicing food hygiene, hand washing with soap, and clean water, particularly before eating and after using the toilet, among others.

“Ensure the safety of drinking water; boil water or treat water with chlorine before it is used. Avoid consuming water from unverified sources and eating unsafe food.

Wizkid becomes Africa's top Spotify earner

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Nigerian music star Ayodeji Balogun, better known as Wizkid, has solidified his status as Africa's highest-earning artiste on Spotify.

This remarkable achievement was announced by music data platform Chart Masters, which tracks artists' earnings and performance on the streaming platform.

According to the latest report, Wizkid raked in an impressive \$1 million in monthly earnings on Spotify. This milestone not only highlights his popularity but also underscores his global appeal and the widespread love for his music.

The report also reveals that Nigerians dominate the list of Africa's top ten Spotify earners. Artists like Burna Boy, Davido, and Rema join Wizkid in representing Nigeria on the global stage.

The only non-Nigerian artiste on the list

is South Africa's rising star, Tyla. Her inclusion marks her as a noteworthy talent in the African music scene.

Wizkid's success on Spotify reflects his consistent effort to produce hits that resonate with audiences worldwide. Songs like "Essence" and albums such as *Made in Lagos* have drawn millions of streams, solidifying his status as a global music icon.

The dominance of Nigerian artistes on the earnings list highlights the country's significant influence on Afrobeats, a genre that continues to gain global traction. It also reflects the growing power of African music in shaping the international music industry.

As Wizkid leads the charge, he sets an inspiring example for upcoming artistes. His success proves that African talent can compete and thrive on the world stage.

With consistent effort and quality music, the global stage remains open for more

African stars to shine.

FULL LIST:

1. Wizkid – \$1 million
2. Burna Boy – \$782,148
3. Tems – \$660,210
4. Tyla – \$607,804
5. Davido – \$458,615
6. Asake – \$451,553
7. Omah Lay – \$421,123
8. Ayra Starr – \$400,972
9. Rema – \$367,973

Canadian rapper Drake and American singer, Taylor Swift are the world's biggest earners on Spotify with \$7,717,904 and \$7,713,106, respectively.

Tiwa Savage: 'I'm unworried, God watches over me'

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Afrobeat star Tiwa Savage shared how her faith in God keeps her grounded, offering peace of mind and helping her stay free from worry.

In an Instagram story, the award-winning singer wrote, "How can I even worry when the God that creates this is the same one that watches over me?"

Her words offered a heartfelt glimpse into her spiritual outlook, earning admiration from fans worldwide.

Swimming with sharks sparks concern. This revelation came shortly after Tiwa posted a daring video of herself swimming with sharks. The video, which quickly went viral, left many fans both impressed and concerned. While some applauded her adventurous spirit, others worried about her safety.

However, Tiwa downplayed their concerns in her characteristic fearless manner. She reassured fans that swimming with sharks was less dangerous than they might think.

She boldly claimed, "The music industry is far more dangerous than this." This comment shed light on the often-overlooked challenges and risks she has faced in her career.

Retirement on the horizon

Recently, Tiwa Savage hinted at stepping away from music. The singer admitted feeling a mix of exhaustion and accomplishment, which has led her to consider retiring.

She revealed that she is currently working on what could be her final



studio album, a move that has sparked speculation among fans about her plans.

For many, this news came as a surprise. Tiwa Savage has been a dominant force in Afrobeat music, consistently delivering hit songs and memorable performances.

If she retires, it will mark the end of an era for one of Africa's most celebrated music icons.

Her legacy and influence

Tiwa Savage's career has been nothing short of extraordinary. From chart-topping singles to international collaborations, she has solidified her position as a trailblazer in the music industry. Despite her fame and success, Tiwa remains humble, often crediting her faith for keeping her steady.

Her ability to maintain a calm and confident perspective, even in the face of challenges, has made her an inspiration to millions.

As she reflects on her achievements,

her words of faith and resilience continue to resonate with fans around the globe.

What's next for Tiwa Savage? While the prospect of retirement looms, fans are eagerly awaiting her upcoming album. Many believe it will be a fitting conclusion to her remarkable journey in music.

Beyond that, Tiwa may choose to explore new ventures or focus on personal growth, family, or other creative pursuits.

One thing is certain: Tiwa Savage's influence extends far beyond music. Her authenticity, courage, and unwavering faith have made her a role model for countless people.

Whether she continues in the music industry or ventures into a new chapter of her life, her legacy is firmly cemented.

Tiwa Savage stands as a beacon of strength and grace, proving that faith and resilience can carry anyone through the most challenging times.

Spyro: Banky W told me proclaiming Christ affected his career

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Afrobeats singer Spyro has opened up about the struggles he faces in the Nigerian music industry because of his public declaration of faith in Jesus Christ.

During an interview with Echoo Room, the artist shared details of a conversation with Banky W, the renowned R&B star who later became a pastor.

Spyro recounted how Banky W warned him about the obstacles that come with openly embracing Christianity. “He told me to be sure I was ready for this path,” Spyro said. “Banky explained that as a ‘bad boy,’ everything seemed smooth. But the moment he chose to follow God, the challenges started piling up.”

Discrimination in the music industry Spyro highlighted how his “Jesus boy” brand has led to significant challenges. “My biggest challenge right now is the lack of support,” he stated. “Once I declared my faith, I noticed a shift. People started treating me differently. It’s as if the system is set up to pull you down when you stand for Christ.”

The singer expressed frustration over the minimal recognition and promotion he receives compared to other artists. “If you’re honest with yourself, how many media moguls support me or post my songs?” he asked. “They promote others who are not performing as well as I am. But when it comes to me, it’s crickets, except for the blogs I pay to post my work.”



Facing criticism as a ‘Jesus Boy’

Spyro acknowledged that his faith-driven brand has sparked backlash. “I’ve received the biggest criticisms just for being a ‘Jesus boy.’ It’s tough to navigate an industry that doesn’t seem to favor those who openly declare Christ,” he said. “Sometimes, I ask myself why this is happening. The answer is clear—it’s because I chose to stand for something bigger.”

The ‘War’ of declaring Christ

The singer reflected on Banky W’s perspective, emphasizing the challenges of public faith. “Banky told me the moment you declare Christ, you’re stepping into a battlefield. It’s not just about making music anymore; it’s about standing firm in your beliefs despite the opposition,” Spyro explained.

He also shared how Banky W’s shift from a “bad boy” persona to a more godly image triggered resistance in the industry. “Banky said the war started when he decided to follow God,”

Spyro recalled.

Standing strong despite challenges

Despite these obstacles, Spyro remains committed to his faith. He believes staying true to his principles is more important than conforming to an industry that often prioritizes trends over values.

Spyro’s story sheds light on the struggles faced by artists who stand for their faith in a highly competitive and secular industry. His journey is a reminder of the strength and resolve needed to maintain one’s beliefs while navigating the pressures of fame and success.

An inspiring message

In a world where conformity often seems like the easiest path, Spyro’s choice to publicly proclaim Christ is both bold and inspiring.

Whether or not the industry fully supports him, his unwavering faith continues to define his artistry and message.

Seun Kuti: I'm against colonialism, not European people

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian musician Seun Kuti has recently clarified his position on European colonialism, rejecting the idea that he holds animosity toward European people.

The popular singer, known for his outspoken opposition to imperialism and corruption, emphasized that his criticisms are directed at historical colonial powers and not the individuals of European descent.

Call for a fairer world

In a post shared on his Instagram account, Kuti addressed the widespread misunderstanding surrounding his views.

He explained that although he fiercely opposes European colonization, this opposition should not be seen as a condemnation of European people.

Kuti made it clear that his goal is to advocate for a more just and equitable world, where fairness prevails for all, regardless of background or nationality.

Distinguishing colonialism from individuals

“I am against European colonization and imperialism, but that does not mean I’m against European people,” Kuti wrote.

His words were aimed at dispelling any notion that he harbors hatred toward Europeans. Rather, the musician seeks to separate the actions of colonial powers from the people who live in those regions today.

Highlighting European allies in the fight for justice

Kuti’s remarks come amid growing public discussions about the lasting effects of colonialism on Africa and other parts of the world.

The musician has long been an advocate for the oppressed, using his platform to speak out against systems of injustice and exploitation. His position, however, is often misinterpreted, especially by those who may not fully understand his message.

The musician highlighted the importance of acknowledging the role that many Europeans have played as allies in the fight for fairness.

According to Kuti, Europeans have stood shoulder to shoulder with Africans and



others in the battle against inequality, greed, and systemic unfairness. “Many Europeans have been our allies in the fight against greed and unfair systems, to make the world a fairer place for everyone,” he said.

Call for unity, not division

Through his statement, Seun Kuti reiterated that opposing colonialism and imperialism is not synonymous with hating European people.

He is instead advocating for a world that is more inclusive, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The long history of colonial exploitation,

according to Kuti, has led to many of the struggles that persist in today’s society, but those struggles should not be generalized to include individuals based solely on their ethnicity or nationality.

Kuti’s comments shed light on the complex issue of colonialism and its aftermath, offering a perspective that encourages unity over division.

He stressed that collective action, rather than hatred or division, is essential for creating a better future. “Being against colonisation does not mean being against Europeans; many have stood with us in the fight for justice and fairness,” he added.

Emphasizing shared responsibility for a better future

The musician’s remarks also call for a broader understanding of history and its implications for the present day.

His stance advocates for critical examination of the systems that perpetuate injustice, without resorting to blanket hostility toward entire groups of people.

In doing so, Kuti aims to foster a dialogue that emphasizes shared responsibility in building a more just world.

Fostering global dialogue and alliances
Seun Kuti’s post has sparked important conversations about the intersections of race, history, and global justice.

It reminds us that progress is not only about challenging oppressive systems but also about recognizing and fostering the alliances that cross national and cultural boundaries.

In the end, Kuti’s message is clear: the fight for a fairer world requires unity, not division.

Regina Daniels: Surround yourself with like-minded people

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Renowned actress and entrepreneur Regina Daniels recently took to Instagram to share an inspiring message with her followers.

Her heartfelt post encouraged fans to align themselves with like-minded individuals who share their goals and visions.

Regina urged her audience to remain focused on their dreams, regardless of the negativity and challenges surrounding them.

Powerful call to action

In her post, Regina included captivating photos of herself with her husband, radiating warmth and positivity. Accompanying these images was a thought-provoking message.

“In a world full of chaos, bitterness, envy, competition, and evil, set your life goals on fire and unapologetically only seek those who can fan your flame,” she wrote.

Her words resonated deeply, offering a beacon of hope and clarity in a fast-paced, competitive world.

The importance of positive influences Regina emphasized the need to cultivate a circle of supportive and encouraging individuals. She believes life is too short to waste on toxic relationships or negativity.

Instead, people should focus on building meaningful connections with those who inspire and uplift



them.

By doing so, she explained, individuals can maintain clarity and stay committed to their aspirations.

Sharing wisdom through experience

As a public figure, Regina Daniels often uses her platform to share valuable insights and advice. Her journey as an actress, wife, and businesswoman provides her with a wealth of experience to draw upon.

Her followers admire her not just for her success but for her relatable and motivational messages. This post was no exception, showcasing her commitment to inspiring others.

Fans react with gratitude

The response to Regina’s post was overwhelmingly positive. Fans filled the comment section with messages of appreciation, expressing how her words had inspired them to reassess their priorities.

Many shared personal anecdotes of overcoming challenges by adopting a similar mindset, while others simply thanked her for her uplifting message.

The power of supportive connections Her message highlights a universal truth: success often depends on the company we keep. Surrounding oneself with individuals who share similar values and aspirations creates a supportive environment where personal and professional growth can flourish.

Her advice serves as a reminder to invest in relationships that bring out the best in us.

Refreshing voice of positivity

In an era often dominated by negativity, Regina Daniels continues to shine as a voice of hope and inspiration.

Her ability to connect with her audience through relatable messages sets her apart as a role model.

By encouraging her followers to prioritize positivity and meaningful connections, she proves that success begins with a strong and supportive foundation.

Through her words and actions, Regina Daniels demonstrates that staying true to oneself and fostering uplifting relationships are essential steps toward achieving greatness.

Court orders arrest of Mercy Chinwo's manager

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

A Federal High Court in Ikoyi, Lagos, issued a warrant of arrest on Thursday against Ezekiel Onyedikachukwu, the manager of popular gospel singer Mercy Chinwo.

The order was given by Justice Alexander Owoeye following a motion filed by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

EFCC pushes for Manager's arrest

During Thursday's hearing, EFCC counsel Mrs. Bilikisu Buhari presented the case before the court. She filed the motion pursuant to Section 35(1)© of the 1999 Constitution and Sections 35, 36, 37, 38, and 39 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015.

Buhari explained that the arrest warrant was necessary to compel Onyedikachukwu to appear in court and answer to criminal allegations.

"The application seeks to ensure the manager's presence in court," Buhari said. "He must respond to the accusations leveled against him."

She warned that if the EFCC failed to arrest the manager, the commission might issue a public summons to declare him wanted.

Serious allegations surface

The EFCC revealed that the case originated from a petition submitted by Mercy Chinwo. According to an affidavit filed by EFCC investigator Mr. Michael Idoko, Chinwo accused Onyedikachukwu of financial misconduct.

She alleged that her manager had been collecting royalties from her digital



platforms and events without her knowledge or consent.

The affidavit disclosed that Onyedikachukwu allegedly diverted \$345,000, which he failed to share with Chinwo as agreed.

The EFCC stated that multiple attempts to locate and arrest Onyedikachukwu had been unsuccessful, prompting the need for the court-issued warrant.

Judge grants EFCC's request

After reviewing the motion and supporting affidavit, Justice Owoeye granted the EFCC's application. The court issued the warrant of arrest and scheduled the manager's arraignment for January 24.

This legal action marks a critical step in the case against Onyedikachukwu. If the EFCC fails to apprehend him, the commission may resort to broader measures to ensure his accountability.

Implications for the gospel music industry

The case has sparked interest across the gospel music community and beyond. Mercy Chinwo, known for her chart-topping songs and spiritual influence, is a prominent figure in Nigeria's music

scene.

The allegations against her manager have raised concerns about trust and transparency in the artist-manager relationship.

Industry stakeholders have expressed mixed reactions. Some see the case as a warning to ensure ethical practices, while others believe it underscores the need for artists to maintain financial oversight.

Next steps

As the court awaits the arraignment, the EFCC is intensifying efforts to locate Onyedikachukwu. Legal experts suggest that the case could set a precedent for how financial disputes in the entertainment industry are addressed.

Meanwhile, Mercy Chinwo has remained silent, refraining from making public statements about the case.

Observers will be watching closely as the case unfolds. For now, the spotlight remains on the EFCC's ability to bring Onyedikachukwu to justice and restore faith in the management practices within the music industry.

Hollyoaks star Paul Danan dies at 46

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Paul Danan, the actor best known for playing Sol Patrick on the Channel 4 soap Hollyoaks from 1997 to 2001, has passed away at the age of 46.

His management company, Independent Creative Management, confirmed the heartbreaking news in a statement on Wednesday.

“It is with heavy hearts that we share the tragic news of the passing of Paul Danan at just 46 years old,” the statement read. “Known for his television presence, exceptional talent, and unwavering kindness, Paul was a beacon of light to so many.”

Career in the spotlight

Danan rose to fame through his memorable role in Hollyoaks, where he captivated audiences with his portrayal of the troubled yet lovable Sol Patrick.

His time on the show earned him a dedicated fan base and cemented his place as a household name in British television.

Beyond Hollyoaks, Danan expanded his career with appearances on reality TV. He starred in *Celebrity Love Island* in 2005 and returned for the show’s second season in 2006.

His charisma and candid personality made him a standout contestant. In 2017, he appeared on *Celebrity Big Brother*, further solidifying his status as a beloved public figure.

Tributes pour in

Fans and colleagues have expressed their sorrow over the untimely loss. Danan’s management described his death as leaving “irreplaceable voids in the lives of all who knew him.”



They also requested privacy for his family, friends, and colleagues during this challenging time.

Danan was remembered not only for his talent but also for his kindness. Many who worked with him noted his genuine warmth and ability to connect with others. These traits earned him widespread admiration, both on and off the screen.

Life After Hollyoaks

After departing Hollyoaks, Danan occasionally expressed a desire to return to the series. However, his character was last seen fleeing the village with Jess Holt over two decades ago.

In the years since, he pursued a variety of projects, showcasing his versatility as an entertainer.

From 2019 to 2023, Danan hosted the podcast *The Morning After With Paul Danan*. The show offered listeners an intimate glimpse into his life, exploring themes of resilience, recovery, and personal growth.

He also appeared on *Celebrity Coach Trip* and the Channel 4 sketch comedy series *The Kevin Bishop Show*.

Struggles with health

Danan faced health challenges in recent years, which he candidly discussed with fans and the media.

In 2022, he revealed that he had been hospitalized with pneumonia and spent time in intensive care. He credited the experience with inspiring significant lifestyle changes.

In an interview with *The Sun* on Sunday, Danan shared that medical staff had urged him to quit smoking. Though he had successfully given up cigarettes, he admitted to becoming “obsessed” with disposable vapes.

His openness about his struggles resonated with many, highlighting the importance of prioritizing health and well-being.

A legacy of resilience and talent

Paul Danan’s journey was one of highs and lows, marked by resilience, creativity, and a determination to connect with others.

His ability to navigate the complexities of fame while remaining true to himself left a lasting impression on fans and peers alike.

As news of his passing spreads, tributes continue to pour in, celebrating his contributions to British television and his impact as a person.

Paul Danan’s legacy will be remembered as one of talent, kindness, and a life lived in the spotlight.

For those who admired him, his memory will remain a source of inspiration. His untimely death is a poignant reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of cherishing the moments we have with the ones we love.

Israel kills 40, wounds 200 in Gaza despite ceasefire deal

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have killed at least 40 Palestinians despite the truce announced recently.

After news of a ceasefire agreement sparked mass rejoicing in Gaza, residents woke up Thursday to columns of smoke, rubble and more deaths following new Israeli air strikes.

The killings came as the Israeli cabinet preparation to vote on the deal.

The latest strikes came after Qatar and the United States announced a fragile ceasefire deal that should take effect on Sunday.

Al Jazeera insists that in defiance of the proposed deal, the Israeli military has stepped up attacks on the Gaza Strip since the announcement.

“We were waiting for the truce and were happy. It was the happiest night since October 7,” said Gaza resident Saeed Alloush, referring to the Hamas attack on Israel that sparked the war in 2023.

“Suddenly... we received the news of the martyrdom of 40 people,” including his uncle, Alloush said.

“The whole area’s joy turned to sadness, as if an earthquake struck.”

AFP has contacted the Israeli military for comment.

Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for Gaza’s civil defence agency, told AFP on Thursday that at least 73 people had been killed in Israeli air strikes since the announcement on Wednesday.

Among them were 20 children and 25 women, he said, with around 200 others wounded.

As day broke, crowds gathered to inspect and clear the remains of a building reduced to rubble, where chunks of concrete lay interspersed with rebar and personal items scattered across the site.

The scenes mirrored those in other parts of the densely populated territory of 2.4 million people, most of whom have been displaced at least once since war broke out in October 2023.

At Nasser Hospital, the main medical facility of the southern city of Khan Yunis, AFP journalists saw stained metal mortuary stretchers stained in red as staff drained them of the blood of the dead in a strike.



In Gaza City’s Al-Ahli hospital, where several strike casualties were taken, grieving families knelt by the white shrouds enveloping their loved ones’ bodies.

Rescuer Ibrahim Abu al-Rish told AFP that “after the ceasefire was announced and people were happy and joyful, a five-storey building was targeted, with more than 50 people inside”.

Wearing headlights, first responders and local residents searched through the rubble late at night in the devastated streets of Gaza City.

Abu al-Rish, an ambulance driver for Gaza’s civil defence agency, said Thursday that “shelling is still continuing, targeting one house after another”.

In the Al-Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, resident Mahmud al-Qarnawi told AFP that until the agreement takes hold, Gazans would remain vulnerable.

“The shooting has not stopped, the planes are still in the air and the situation is difficult,” he said.

As a result, Qarnawi and others AFP spoke to in the nearby city of Nuseirat said they were worried about what could happen next.

“We must remain cautious. And for the next three days, we are afraid of a (possible) bloodbath (worse) than before,” Motaz Bakeer, a displaced Gazan, said from the market at Nuseirat.

International medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said no one could yet feel safe in Gaza.

“Last night it was a lot of cheering for 20 minutes, and then it was a very bloody night,” MSF’s emergency coordinator Amande Bazerolle told AFP by phone from the territory, rounds of shelling audible in the background.

The Israeli cabinet is expected to approve the Gaza deal later Thursday, though Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office accused Hamas of backtracking on elements of the agreement.

Key mediators Qatar and the United States said Wednesday that Israel and Hamas had agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza starting on Sunday, along with a hostage and prisoner exchange.

If the fragile agreement is approved, 33 hostages should be released in a first phase, Qatar’s Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani said.

The war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas’s attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,210 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures.

Israel’s retaliatory military offensive in Gaza has killed 46,788 people, the majority civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory considered reliable by the United Nations.

However, Hamas official, Izzat al-Risheq, said the deal reached in the Qatari capital, Doha, meets all of the Palestinian group’s conditions.

Farewell address: Biden warns of emerging oligarchy, 'tech industrial complex'

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

President Joe Biden, in his farewell address to the nation Wednesday, spent little time dwelling on the accomplishments of his single term in office, instead telling Americans he wanted to use his final address “to warn the country of some things that give me great concern.”

Calling to mind President Dwight Eisenhower’s farewell address, he warned of the dangers of the potential rise of a tech industrial complex to the U.S.

He noted that the 34th president “spoke of the dangers of the military industrial complex,” warning us of ‘the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power.’”

Now, “six decades later, I’m equally concerned about the potential rise of a tech industrial complex,” Biden said.

“Americans are being buried under an avalanche of misinformation and disinformation enabling the abuse of power,” the president warned.

“The free press is crumbling. Errors are disappearing. Social media is giving up on fact checking. The truth is smothered by lies told for power and for profit.” And meanwhile, he added, “artificial intelligence is most consequential technology of our time, perhaps of all time.”

Biden also expanded on the critical role of democracy in the U.S., which he has said in the past motivated him to run for the presidency four years ago.

He talked about respecting the institutions that govern a free society — the presidency, the Congress, the judiciary and a free press.

“In the past four years, our democracy has held strong, and everyday, I’ve kept my commitment to be president for all Americans in one of the toughest periods of our nation’s history,” Biden said.

He said he was worried about “a



dangerous concentration of power in the hands of a very few ultra-wealthy people, the dangerous consequences if their abuse of power is left unchecked.”

“Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that literally threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedoms and a fair shot for everyone to get ahead,” Biden said.

He added that the consequences could be seen across the country. It was, he said, something that had happened over a century earlier, but “the American people stood up to the robber barons back then.”

The president delivered his fifth and final formal Oval Office address five days before he’ll pass the mantle of the presidency to the man who is both his predecessor and successor, President-elect Donald Trump.

His speech also came hours after he announced a ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas, a deal the U.S. was heavily involved in negotiating.

The deal was the first issue the president mentioned in his speech Wednesday night, and he noted that his administration kept in touch with Trump officials during the negotiations.

“This plan was developed and negotiated by my team, and it will be largely implemented by the incoming

administration. That’s why I told my team to keep the incoming administration fully informed — because that’s how it should be — working together as Americans.”

“This will be my final address to you, the American people, from the Oval Office, from this desk as president,” he said.

“And I’ve been thinking a lot about who we are, and maybe more importantly, who we should be.”

Wednesday night’s speech wraps up not only Biden’s time as president, but his time in elected office. Apart from the four years following his vice presidency, Biden has held elected office every year since 1973.

In his address Wednesday, Biden for the first time took a position on term limits for the Supreme Court. He proposed a term limit of 18 years for justices. And he also called on Congress to amend the Constitution to “make clear that no president is immune from crimes that he or she commits while in office.” Neither is likely to happen.

On the foreign policy front, the president said his administration “strengthened” NATO, noted Ukraine remains free and said the U.S. has pulled ahead in its competition with China. He emphasized the critical role artificial intelligence will play in the future, and said the U.S. — not China — must lead the way in this field.

Billionaires, foreign dignitaries to attend Trump's inauguration

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



World's richest person, Elon Musk will be among several billionaires attending Donald Trump's second presidential inauguration.

Tesla CEO, Musk was instrumental in Trump's reelection with his contribution of over a quarter of a billion dollars to Trump's campaign coffers, according to Forbes.

Musk is set to head Trump's new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), along with Vivek Ramaswamy, the biotech entrepreneur.

Reports say that Musk is slated to be seated at the inauguration with fellow billionaires Amazon CEO, Jeff Bezos and Meta CEO, Mark Zuckerberg.

While it is not customary to invite foreign leaders, Trump has invited several. Argentinian President Javier

Milei is expected to attend, according to Bloomberg.

Milei was the first foreign leader to meet with Trump after he won November's election. Trump has also invited Chinese President, Xi Jinping who is sending an envoy.

Far-right Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni has also received an invitation, but she has said she is not sure her schedule will allow her to attend.

It is customary for all the living presidents to attend the inauguration. Outgoing President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden will attend Monday's ceremony. When Biden was sworn in four years ago, following Trump's losing reelection bid, Trump did not attend because he held on to the belief that he had won the election.

Former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton

will also attend Trump's inauguration. Bush and Clinton are set to be there with their wives, Laura Bush and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

"Former first lady Michelle Obama will not attend the upcoming inauguration," the Office of Barack and Michelle Obama said in a statement.

It will be the second time in recent weeks, following her absence at President Jimmy Carter's funeral, that she has not attended a public ceremony with other former presidents and their wives.

Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, second gentleman Douglas Emhoff, are also expected to be at the ceremony Monday. Harris was the Democratic candidate in last year's presidential election.

UK PM lands in Ukraine, vows continued support

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Sir Keir Starmer has made his first trip to Kyiv as prime minister, vowing to put Ukraine in the “strongest possible position” in 2025.

Arriving on Thursday morning, he accompanied Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to lay flowers at a wall of remembrance for those killed in the war with Russia – telling reporters the UK will “never let up” on giving the necessary support to Ukraine.

The trip is taking place to mark what Downing Street has called a “landmark 100-year partnership” pact with Ukraine. The agreement would formalise economic and military support already pledged to the country.

His visit comes just days before Donald Trump is set to re-enter the White House.

The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is keen to firm security guarantees from key allies, wary that a new US administration could start pushing Ukraine to make peace with Russia.

Unlike other prime ministers who have rushed to Kyiv, Sir Keir has taken his time to visit, but after six months in office he has come to Ukraine pledging long-term support against what he calls Russia’s “illegal and barbaric invasion.”

In Kyiv, the two leaders walked behind an honour guard which carried wreaths in the national colours of the UK and Ukraine.

After soldiers set down the wreaths, Sir Keir and President Zelensky placed their bouquets at the foot of the wall outside St Michael’s Golden-Domed Monastery.

The Kyiv landmark is covered in photos of the dead and has become a place of pilgrimage for grieving families to pay tribute.

The prime minister’s visit comes at a pivotal time for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, ahead of Donald Trump’s



return to the White House on Monday. The prime minister also visited an apartment building that was blasted apart in a New Year’s Day drone attack, killing a couple who were both prominent scientists.

The apartment is just down the street from the president’s office.

“They were sending us a message, the head of Kyiv’s military administration told Sir Keir, “No one is safe.”

Multiple explosions and air raid sirens could be heard in Kyiv shortly after the prime minister laid a wreath in the city’s central square.

Speaking as he travelled to the country, Sir Keir said: “This is not just about the here and now, it is also about an investment in our two countries for the next century.”

“(Russian President Vladimir) Putin’s ambition to wrench Ukraine away from its closest partners has been a monumental strategic failure. Instead, we are closer than ever, and this partnership will take that friendship to the next level,” he added.

Shortly after arriving, the prime minister visited a hospital in Kyiv specialising in treating burns.

He was given a private tour of the intensive care unit where he met

wounded Ukrainians on a rehabilitating ward that is supported by the British Red Cross.

Sir Keir said the injuries he saw were “a grim reminder of the heavy price that Ukraine is paying.”

The prime minister met an injured Ukrainian service member during his visit.

“One of the consequences of this conflict has been to draw Nato more strongly together,” said the prime minister.

He added support for Ukraine was “bigger and stronger than it has been, and we must stand behind Ukraine for as long as it takes.”

“We must never let up on that and we’ve been leading the way,” he said.

Trump’s choice to become secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said earlier this week that both countries would have to make concessions to see an end to the war.

Thursday’s announcement includes economic aid, support for healthcare, and increased military collaboration on maritime security and drone technology.

Zelensky has previously said he is looking towards the UK for help getting security guarantees to deter future attacks.

13 Cuban soldiers killed in ammunition depot explosion

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The Cuban government said Wednesday that 13 soldiers had died after an explosion a week earlier in an arms depot in the country's east.

Cuba's Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces said in a statement Wednesday that "it is officially declared that the 13 comrades are deceased."

The explosion, which the ministry said was likely the cause of a short circuit and power failure, happened on Tuesday last week in Melones, about 450 miles east of the capital Havana. It prompted the evacuation of more than 1,200 residents of the area.

Cuban military officials said that access to the site remains impossible due to the complex terrain, toxic gases and severe structural damage.

"It hurts deeply to confirm the death

of officers, non-commissioners and soldiers who heroically faced the accident in a construction that stored war material from the military region of Holguín," Cuba's leader Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez said in a statement on social media. "They died heroically and as heroes they deserve our deepest tribute and companionship to their loved ones in the pain of loss.

The government named all 13 soldiers in a social media post Wednesday.

The 13 soldiers had initially been declared missing, the Reuters news agency reported, and officials previously said the blast was set off by a fire at a construction site.



Amad's hat-trick rescues Manchester Utd from land of the dead

By Dave Oludare Oso



The Red Devils were on their way to their most humiliating defeat yet as they trailed 1-0 at home to Premier League basement club Southampton after a Manuel Ugarte own goal in the first half.

But Amad took matters into his own hands, equalising in the 82nd minute and completing a hat-trick within the final 10 minutes to give United a 3-1 win they barely deserved but which they badly needed, taking them 10 points clear of the drop zone.

Manchester United's Amad

Diallo speaking to TNT after scoring a 12-minute hat-trick:

"In football you have to believe. We believed until the end and are very happy to win this game. We drew with Arsenal and Liverpool so the confidence was there. We are very happy."

On where this week ranks after scoring his first senior hat-trick and signing a new contract:

"Maybe one of the best weeks in my life. I am very happy for this win. This team deserved to win this game so I am very happy."

On why United left it so late to click into gear: "We know we have quality players in this team. We need sometimes to be more hungry in the final third. Today we showed at the end we were the best team. I am so happy for the win today because this team deserves it."

"I am ready to play every position where the manager likes to put me. I am ready to fight for this club. I am so happy to play where the manager wants me to play and I am so happy to score a hat-trick."

Ex-Manchester Utd coach, Erik Ten Hag linked to Dortmund

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

- Former Manchester United boss Erik ten Hag has been linked with the Borussia Dortmund coaching role
- The German giants are ninth in the Bundesliga, and head coach Nuri Sahin is under pressure to improve the results
- The Dutch coach was fired in October 2023 after more than two years at the Premier League club

Former Manchester United boss, Erik ten Hag has been tipped to take charge at Borussia Dortmund less than three months after leaving Old Trafford.

On Wednesday, the Dutchman was spotted at Signal Iduna Park watching Dortmund's 3-2 defeat to Bundesliga champions Bayer Leverkusen.

The German giants are ninth in the table, and head coach Nuri Sahin is under pressure to improve the situation.

Erik ten Hag won two trophies at Manchester United.

Will Erik ten Hag become Dortmund's coach?

Ten Hag extended his deal with Man United last summer after leading the club to their 13th FA Cup win.

Despite the win, he oversaw Man United's worst-ever Premier League finish, and the 2024/25 season started poorly. He was fired on October 28, and Ruben Amorim was appointed to replace him.

According to Sky Sports reporter Florian Plettenberg, Ten Hag is a 'shadow coach' for Nuri Sahin, who



still has the board's backing.

He added that the former Ajax boss has a good relationship with Dortmund's advisor, Matthias Sammer.

Ten Hag has been jobless since his Man United exit and could take over at Dortmund if Sahin is fired.

Dortmund are ninth in the Bundesliga with 25 points after 17 games. They have won seven, drawn four, and lost six.

Reactions to Erik ten Hag Dortmund links

@BloodRedUnited:

"Erik ten Hag has qualities as a coach. I, however, believe he wasn't able to communicate his ideas effectively in English to the Manchester United players. I wish him well, though."

@Abednego082:

"Ten Hag would actually be good for them."

@Antobee16:

"I honestly think Ten Hag will be a success in his next job. Utd were in shambles when he took over and will still take a miracle for Amorim to achieve anything. Can see him doing

really well with Dortmund if he joins."

@RedDevilKJ81:

"A Bundesliga team would be his absolute dream as he is all about Dutch football, and I think Bundesliga German football is his style, too !!! I hope he gets a good club to manage. He deserves it."

@ViktoryBlast:

"Love to see him balling again in a stress-free club."

Erik ten Hag's record at Man United

Ten Hag managed 128 games at Man United, including 85 in the Premier League and 15 in the Europa League. His team averaged 1.72 points per game, with only David Moyes and Ralf Rangnick having a lower average.

Despite a difficult time in the league, he left with a 56.25% win rate in all competitions. In his first season, he led the club to a third-place finish after a dreadful start.

He also won the League Cup and FA Cup at the club. In the post-Sir Alex Ferguson era, only he, Jose Mourinho and Louis van Gaal delivered trophies.