

**Kemi Badenoch's negative comments won't affect Nigeria - Presidency** **PAGE 2**



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# Kemi Badenoch's negative comments won't affect Nigeria – Presidency

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Presidency has said the constant negative comments by UK Conservative Party leader, Kemi Badenoch against Nigeria won't have any effect on the country.

Badenoch recently renewed her onslaught against Nigeria.

While delivering her first speech of the year at an event organised by Onward, a British think tank producing research on economic and social issues, the Nigerian-born politician said she did not want Britain to be like Nigeria where she claimed the government had failed.

However, a Presidential spokesman, Daniel Bwala during an appearance on Channels Television's Sunrise Daily, said the UK Conservative Party leader's comment was to gain the favour of her party.

Bwala said, "I don't think it would have an effect because she's not the government in power.

"Usually, these international relationships or collaborations are dealings between



governments. Because she's not the government in power, it will not have any effect.

"Secondly, because she's a Nigerian, investors will be smart enough to assess what she's saying, and see whether it is borne out of rhetoric."

Bwala, in the interview, acknowledged Badenoch's achievements in the UK, but argued that she is capitalising on populism that thrives on public discontent.

The Presidential spokesman said, "The only problem we have with Kemi, I think, is the rhetoric because Kemi belongs to the right base in the United Kingdom, which is what you see

in this populism around the world; that you can deepen on your support system if you can feed off of the anger of the people.

"And so she's building a rhetoric of denigrating Nigeria, demarketing Nigeria, so she can probably win the acceptance of the rights in her party. And that to me, is counterproductive because if you look at Rishi Sunak, he is also of Indian origin.

"There has been this issue of gang rape in India. He has never used that as a weapon to promote what he believed to be a departure from what is likely to be believed as hereditary or history of the Indian people, but she has always denigrated Nigeria."



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SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	372,500.00
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10X5	255,238.00
10X4	206,890.50
10X3	179,608.00
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9X5	225,738.00
9X4	193,500.00
9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
5X2	42,916.50
4X4	60,166.50
4X3	36,499.50
4X2	29,333.50
3X3	28,000.00
3X2	17,400.00
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14X2	109,500.00
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9X6	232,500.00
9X5	206,000.00
9X4	177,500.00
9X3	150,000.00
8X6	216,000.00
8X3	98,500.00
7X4	164,002.00
6X4	94,010.50
6X3	78,500.00
6X2	47,500.00
5X5	100,000.00
5X4	61,500.00
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8X5	143,500.00
8X4	93,500.00
8X3	82,434.50
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PHOTO NEWS (4X4)	53,333.30	4,250.00	57,583.30
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# Oyedele: Tax reform bills will be passed in March

By Friday Omosola

Chairman of the Presidential Committee on Tax Policy and Fiscal Reforms, Taiwo Oyedele, has revealed that the National Assembly would enact the contentious tax reform bills into law by the first quarter of 2025.

Speaking during The Platform, a developmental event hosted by The Covenant Nation, Oyedele confirmed that the implementation of the tax reforms would commence in July 2025.

The bills, suspended last year, are set to undergo further deliberations as the National Assembly resumes.

President Bola Tinubu had initially submitted four tax reform bills for consideration on October 13, 2024. Despite facing criticism—particularly from those who claim the reforms are unfavourable to northern interests—the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) endorsed the bills last week and proposed a more equitable VAT-sharing formula.

“We expect the tax reforms to be approved before the end of Q1 2025. This will allow taxpayers time to build capacity and prepare for implementation by July 1,”



Oyedele stated.

He also defended the removal of fuel subsidies, describing it as the most sustainable choice for Nigeria.

According to Oyedele, the subsidy was a drain on the nation’s economy and unsustainable in the long term.

“Subsidy removal was necessary. For years, we lived in a false economic reality. Two years ago, the naira exchange rate was N450 officially, but was it really N450? Petrol was sold at under N200 per litre, but was that the true cost? The economy was being propped up artificially,” he explained.

Oyedele compared Nigeria’s situation to countries like Sri Lanka and Venezuela, warning that a similar economic collapse

was imminent before subsidy removal.

He lamented that the country was using nearly all its revenue to service foreign debts without repaying them, forcing the government to rely on high-interest loans to fund basic needs like salaries and security.

“Our GDP growth over the past decade has been dismal—less than 10%. In real terms, it’s been negative. Before subsidy removal, Nigeria’s entire revenue was consumed by debt servicing. We were borrowing to run the economy,” he noted.

Oyedele expressed optimism that President Tinubu’s economic reforms, including the tax reforms, would steer Nigeria toward sustainable growth.

# FG seeks global mining partnerships to boost economic growth By Friday Omosola

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FG) has expressed a strong commitment to revitalizing the nation's economy through strategic global mining partnerships, focusing on driving economic growth, promoting investment, and encouraging innovation.

Doris Uzoka-Anite, the Minister of State for Finance, led the charge at the Future Minerals Forum (FMF) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where she highlighted Nigeria's vast resource wealth and the country's readiness to collaborate with global partners.

Speaking at the forum, Uzoka-Anite emphasised Nigeria's rich resource base and the government's renewed focus on innovation, sustainability, and investment.

"With our rich resource base and a renewed focus on innovation, sustainability, and investment, we are positioning Nigeria as a leader in the global minerals and energy landscape," she said.

She invited global investors to explore the immense opportunities within Nigeria's mining and energy sectors.

The Future Minerals Forum, which is the world's leading platform for shaping the future of minerals, brought together over 14,000 participants from 178 countries, including government leaders, industry experts, and innovators.

The forum provided an ideal platform



for the Nigerian delegation, led by Uzoka-Anite and Honourable Minister of Solid Minerals, Dele Alake, to present Nigeria as an attractive destination for global investment in the mining sector.

The forum's significance was underscored by Nigeria's focus on fostering partnerships that align with President Bola Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda, which aims to diversify the economy and enhance growth.

Through its participation, Nigeria demonstrated its openness to business and its readiness to collaborate with global partners in the mining, energy, and innovation sectors.

During the forum, Uzoka-Anite engaged in high-level discussions with the Saudi Governor for the General Authority for Foreign Trade and paid a courtesy visit to the Saudi Vice Minister for Finance.

She also met with industry leaders at the Federation of Saudi Chambers of Commerce, presenting Nigeria's mining sector as a prime destination for investment.

A collaborative session with the Saudi Ministry of Energy and key stakeholders, including energy expert Wale Tinubu, focused on partnership opportunities in energy and mining.

These discussions helped to strengthen economic ties between Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, highlighting Nigeria's position as a partner of choice in both sectors.

The Nigerian delegation's engagements at the Future Minerals Forum marked a significant step in the country's efforts to drive economic growth through mining partnerships, with a clear message to global investors: Nigeria is ready to unlock the immense opportunities in the mining sector.

FG said it remained steadfast in its commitment to fostering partnerships that encourage investment, innovation, and collaboration, and continues to invite global investors to partner with Nigeria in harnessing the untapped potential of its mineral resources.



# National Assembly demands thorough assessment of CNG technology

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The National Assembly has called for a thorough review of Nigeria's Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) initiative, citing safety concerns after reports of vehicle explosions linked to uncertified conversions.

The call for reassessment was made during the 2025 budget defence session of the Joint Committee on Petroleum (Downstream), Petroleum (Upstream), and Gas.

Lawmakers demand reassessment of Nigeria's CNG programme

Lawmakers emphasised the need for extensive testing to ensure the technology is safe and adaptable to local conditions.

Senator Natasha Akpoti, representing Kogi Central Senatorial District for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), raised concerns over the insufficient research conducted before the program's rollout.



Akpoti questioned, "Nigeria's rough roads and hot climate differ significantly from the smooth and cooler environments where this technology originated. Were these factors taken into account before rolling out CNG?"

The concerns followed reports of explosions in vehicles converted to CNG, which Minister of State for Gas, Ekperikpe Ekpo, attributed to conversions performed by unlicensed technicians.

Ekpo defends CNG, blames explosions

on unlicensed technicians Ekpo assured lawmakers that certified centres comply with safety standards and that the technology had undergone evaluation by a Presidential Committee on CNG.

He added that CNG was a permanent solution, shifting blame for the explosions to uncertified roadside technicians.

In addition, the session scrutinised the Ministry of Petroleum's 2025 capital budget allocation of N903 million, with lawmakers questioning whether the amount would be enough to address the nation's energy needs.

"For a ministry responsible for driving Nigeria's energy transition, this allocation raises concerns about its commitment to infrastructure and innovation," Honourable Kafilat Ogbara stated.

# EFCC to sell off 891 seized cars online, names vendors

By Dave Oludare Oso

Barring any last-minute change of decision, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) will begin an electronic auction of 891 cars.

The cars, which range from luxury vehicles to mid-range Toyota Camry, were recovered by the EFCC in the course of its investigations into various financial crimes, including corruption, money laundering, and cybercrime.

According to a statement issued by the EFCC on Monday, the auction is in line with the EFCC (Establishment) Act, 2004, Public Procurement Act, 2007 and the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery & Management) Act, 2022.

The statement reads: "The General Public is hereby notified that the @officialEFCC through its appointed Auctioneers will



conduct e-Auction of the under-listed vehicles that are subject of final Forfeiture orders in accordance with the EFCC (Establishment) Act, 2004, Public Procurement Act, 2007 and the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery & Management) Act, 2022."

It added that the auction will be online and is expected to run from January 20-27.

Interested parties have been directed to the following websites: [www.rihogo.com](http://www.rihogo.com), <https://biznjeg.ng>, [www.areogunresourcesniglid.com.ng](http://www.areogunresourcesniglid.com.ng).

Last September, the agency handed over 53 vehicles and a total of \$180,300 stolen by fraudsters to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The Chairman of the Commission, Ola Olukoyede noted that out of the \$180,300, the sum of \$164,000 was stolen from a Canadian woman, Elena Bogomas, in a romance scam, while \$16,300 was stolen from one Sandra Butler.

Olukoyede further stated that the recoveries are the result of the inter-agency cooperation between Nigeria and other countries in the fight against corruption.

# Pastor Kumuyi prays at Trump's inauguration

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Pastor William Kumuyi joined a special event ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration, emphasizing faith, unity, and spiritual renewal for the U.S.

The programme, titled the Inauguration Praise and Prayer Convocation, was hosted at the Greater New Hope Baptist Church.

It was organized by Jim Garlow's Well Versed World ministry and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council.

The gathering drew faith leaders and believers from across the country. They united in prayer for the United States and the incoming administration, seeking divine guidance and blessings for the new leadership.

Pastor Kumuyi's participation highlighted the global reach of faith and the role of spiritual leaders in shaping moral discourse.

## Kumuyi's prayer challenge

During the event, Pastor Kumuyi addressed the attendees, issuing a heartfelt challenge to the American church and its leaders.

He urged them to prioritize holiness and righteousness, emphasizing these virtues as the foundation for spiritual renewal and national revival.

In his prayer, Kumuyi said, "Almighty God, we thank You and bless Your name. What a great and glorious God You are. I want to thank You, Lord, for the church in America. You said, 'Upon this rock, I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.'"

He continued, asking for divine wisdom for Donald Trump and unity among the church. "Lord, we come in preparation



for the celebration of Donald Trump as President.

Grant him wisdom, and give the church unity, revival, and the courage to speak truth to power. Revive Your church and restore holiness and righteousness so that it can have a meaningful ministry in government and for America."

## Focus on revival

Kumuyi's words underscored the importance of aligning spiritual values with national leadership. He highlighted the need for the church to maintain its moral standing while engaging with the government.

His prayer resonated with many attendees, reminding them of the enduring power of faith in shaping a nation's future.

Kumuyi's involvement in the programme extended beyond the prayer convocation. He also participated in interviews and discussions with key figures.

In an SRN News interview, he offered a prayer specifically for the incoming president, Donald Trump. "Almighty God, You chose to bring President-Elect Donald Trump to this position to lead at this time. Grant him Your grace, wisdom, and power. Help him remain focused on honoring Christ as he

promised during his campaign. In Jesus' name, Amen."

## Meeting with leaders

During his visit, Pastor Kumuyi met with influential figures, including former North Carolina Representative Robert Pittenger and Lucas Miles, Senior Director of Turning Point USA Faith. He also interacted with media representatives to share his vision for a spiritually renewed America.

Kumuyi's meetings emphasized the value of collaboration between spiritual and political leaders. By engaging with key stakeholders, he sought to inspire a collective effort toward promoting values of integrity, faith, and service.

## A Historic day

As the United States prepares for Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th President, the focus remains on the nation's future. The oath of office will be administered by Chief Justice John Roberts in Washington, D.C. Millions around the world are watching, hopeful for positive changes in America's leadership.

Pastor Kumuyi's presence and prayers at the pre-inauguration event served as a reminder of the vital role faith can play in guiding leaders and shaping policies. His call for holiness and righteousness challenges not only the church but the entire nation to pursue a path of spiritual and moral renewal.

Through his prayers and discussions, Kumuyi offered a message of hope, urging everyone to rely on divine wisdom during this critical period in history. As the United States enters a new chapter, his words resonate as a call for unity, revival, and a commitment to values that transcend political boundaries.

# World Bank bans two Nigerian companies, CEO over fraud

By Dave Oludare Oso

The World Bank Group has imposed a 30-month ban on two Nigerian companies, Viva Atlantic Limited and Technology House Limited, alongside their Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Norman Bwuruk Didam.

This is according to a press statement made by the Washington-based bank on Monday.

The statement said the sanction follows findings of fraudulent, collusive, and corrupt practices connected to Nigeria's National Social Safety Nets Project (NSSNP).

The statement read, "The World Bank Group today announced the 30-month debarment of two Nigeria-based companies—Viva Atlantic Limited and Technology House Limited—and their Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Mr Norman Bwuruk Didam. The debarment is in connection with fraudulent, collusive, and corrupt practices as part of the National Social Safety Nets Project in Nigeria."

The NSSNP was established to enhance Nigeria's social safety net systems by providing targeted financial transfers to poor and vulnerable households.

However, investigations revealed serious breaches of the World Bank's Anticorruption Framework in the 2018 procurement and subsequent contract processes involving Viva Atlantic Limited, Technology House



Limited, and Didam.

According to the World Bank, the companies and Didam misrepresented a conflict of interest in their Letter of Bids and improperly accessed confidential tender information from public officials, constituting fraudulent and collusive practices.

Also, Viva Atlantic Limited and Didam falsified the company's experience records and submitted forged manufacturer's authorization letters. They also provided inducements to public officials involved in the project, which qualified as corrupt practices.

These violations directly contravened the principles outlined in the World Bank's Anticorruption Framework, prompting the sanctions.

"According to the facts of the case and the general principles of the World Bank's Anticorruption Framework, in connection with a 2018 procurement and subsequent contract, Viva Atlantic Limited, Technology House Limited, and Mr. Didam

misrepresented a conflict of interest in the companies' Letter of Bids and received confidential tender information from public officials, which constituted fraudulent and collusive practices, respectively.

"Further, Viva Atlantic Limited and Mr. Didam misrepresented Viva Atlantic Limited's experience and submitted falsified manufacturer's authorization letters, as well as offered and provided things of value to project public officials. These actions were fraudulent and corrupt practices, respectively," the statement said.

The 30-month debarment bars Viva Atlantic Limited, Technology House Limited, and Didam from participating in World Bank Group-financed projects and operations.

As part of settlement agreements with the World Bank, all three parties acknowledged their culpability and agreed to stringent integrity compliance conditions as a prerequisite for being released from debarment.



# Lagos generates over \$71.6m in revenue during 'Detty December' celebrations

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Lagos State Government has revealed that it generated more than \$71.6 million in revenue from tourism, hospitality, and entertainment during the 2024 'Detty December' festivities.

This impressive sum highlights the growing economic impact of the state's vibrant cultural scene, with substantial contributions from hotels and short-let apartments.

According to the government, hotels alone generated over \$44 million, while short-let apartments added a further \$13 million to the overall revenue.

These figures were shared by the Special Adviser to the Governor of Lagos State on Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Idris Aregbe, during a weekend review of the Lagos State 'Detty December 2024/2025' Report with stakeholders.

Aregbe emphasised the significance of tourism as a key driver of economic growth and cultural preservation for Lagos. He noted that the 'Ember' season, which encompasses the months of November and December, plays a crucial role in the state's tourism calendar.

"Tourism remains a vital driver of economic growth and cultural preservation for Lagos State, with the 'Ember' season playing a key role," Aregbe said.

The review also included a report released by MO Africa Consulting, which detailed the success of Lagos' festivities during December. The city hosted an array of events that attracted large crowds and showcased Nigeria's rich cultural heritage.

Notable events included the Mrs Universe Africa pageant, Greater Lagos Fiesta, music concerts, fashion shows, cultural exhibitions, culinary experiences, the Spotify Wrapped



Concert, Lungu Boy Block Party, Rhythm Unplugged, Entertainment Week Lagos, Joeboy's performances, The La Vida Experience, African Fashion Week, and Fashion Souk.

The 'Detty December' period drew in not only locals but also a significant number of visitors, including Nigerian diaspora members—often referred to as IJGBs (I Just Got Back)—as well as international tourists eager to experience Lagos' dynamic cultural offerings.

Reflecting on the success of the celebrations, Aregbe praised the administration of Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu for its efforts in creating a Lagos that merges tradition with modern creativity.

"The Sanwo-Olu administration is shaping a Lagos that blends tradition with creativity, creating unforgettable experiences for all," he said.

Aregbe highlighted that the activities held during the festive season not only enriched Lagos' cultural landscape but also had a significant economic impact.

He commended both Governor Sanwo-Olu and Deputy Governor Dr Obafemi Hamzat for their unwavering commitment to developing Lagos as a

major cultural and tourism hub.

"Tourism remains a vital driver of economic growth and cultural preservation for Lagos State, with the 'Ember' season playing a key role. This period represents unity, vibrancy, and celebration, fuelled by the dynamic spirit of Lagosians," Aregbe continued.

"From enterprising artisans in local markets to creative entrepreneurs in the entertainment and tourism sectors, the resilience and ingenuity of Lagosians lie at the heart of its success. The participation of residents, visitors from other states, and international tourists has been fundamental in establishing Lagos as a cultural and tourism hub."

Looking ahead, Aregbe revealed that insights from the 2024 season would be used to inform the 2025 'Lagos Tourism is Rising' campaign, which aims to build on the momentum generated and further promote Lagos as a global beacon for tourism and culture.

"As Lagos looks ahead to 2025 with the 'Lagos Tourism is Rising' campaign, the goal remains clear: to build on this momentum, celebrate our cultural richness, and solidify Lagos as a beacon of tourism, culture, and economic excellence," he concluded.

Aregbe also expressed gratitude to the hospitality-minded Lagosians, industry stakeholders, performers, and artisans whose creativity and participation were essential to the success of 'Detty December.'

He further commended the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture for its pivotal role in ensuring the season's success and reinforcing Lagos as Africa's tourism and entertainment capital.

# MTN Nigeria raises N42.2 billion in Series 15, 16 Commercial Paper

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

**M**TN Nigeria Communications Plc has raised N42.2 billion through its Series 15 and 16 Commercial Paper (CP) issuance under its N250 billion Commercial Paper Issuance Programme.

According to a recent notice to the Nigerian Exchange Limited (NGX) signed by the Company Secretary, Uto Ukpanah, MTN Nigeria disclosed that the 180-day and 270-day Commercial Papers were issued at yields of 27.50 per cent and 29.00 per cent, respectively.

The Series 15 and 16 CP were issued on December 23, 2024, following the successful completion of two prior CP issuances in the last two months.

In his comments on the successful CP issuance, the Chief Executive Officer of MTN Nigeria, Karl Toriola, said the issuance was part of its funding strategy as the proceeds from the issuances will be applied toward the company's short-term working capital requirements.

Toriola said, "We are grateful for the success of this transaction, which underscores investor confidence in MTN Nigeria's business model and management team.

"The CP Issuance is part of our established funding strategy and



would not have been possible without the unwavering support of the investor community, as well as our advisers."

The CP issuance was arranged and managed by Stanbic IBTC Capital Limited, with CardinalStone Partners Limited, Chapel Hill Denham Advisory Limited, Cordros Capital Limited, Coronation Merchant Bank Limited, FCMB Capital Markets Limited, Meristem Capital Limited, Quantum Zenith Capital & Investments Limited, and Vetiva Advisory Services Limited acting as joint dealers.

MTN Nigeria's CPs have been oversubscribed twice. MTN Nigeria's Series 11 and 12, and Series 13 and 14 CP issuances under its N250 billion CP Issuance Programme were both oversubscribed.

On November 15, the

telecommunications giant announced the 150 per cent oversubscription of its Series 11 and 12 CPs to the tune of N75.18 billion.

The Series 11 and 12 CPs were issued on November 7, 2024, under MTN Nigeria's N250 billion Commercial Paper Issuance Programme and initially targeted N50 billion.

On November 27, 2024, MTN Nigeria issued its Series 13 and 14 CPs, which saw a 144 per cent oversubscription to N72.18 billion.

It said the CPs were oversubscribed by N22.18 billion from the initial target of N50 billion.

The Commercial Paper offered competitive yields of 27.50 per cent for the 181-day paper and 29.00 per cent for the 265-day paper and attracted a wide range of investors.



# Suspended RCCG Pastor Ilyomade under fire for opening new church

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

Amid controversies around his suspension, a former pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Idowu Ilyomade, has allegedly opened a new church.

The newly-launched church called Family Fellowship, is said to be opened in the Victoria Island axis of Lagos.

Ilyomade, who was the former pastor of the City of David parish of the RCCG, was suspended in 2024 following a backlash of a 60th birthday party he held for his wife, Siju Ilyomade.

The party was also deemed inappropriate, according to reports, because of the tragic and sensitive helicopter death of Herbert Wigwe in the United States.

Wigwe was said to be a prominent member of the church, and Ilyomade's wife's birthday celebration clashed with the sensitive moment when members were mourning his death.

In a recent video that surfaced online, on Sunday, January 19, Ilyomade was captured in his new church happily dancing as he worshipped with his members.

It was the inaugural service of his newly established church. Meanwhile, the absence of his wife in videos circulating on social media raised questions.

Nigerians criticise Ilyomade's



recent move

Nigerians have shared divided opinions on the recent development of pastor Ilyomade. Many criticised his actions and claimed that the cleric was not remorseful of 'actions' that led to his suspension.

TheRadar curated some below:

@Dansuki1122 said, "All these people are just business men aside catholic and living faith the rest na just business,"

@Mazimum\_ said, "I'm very certain that if you ask him what made him open his own church, he will say it was a direction from God, and he will also have a Bible verse to back it up!"

@It\_Chioma wrote, "Church business will continue to thrive in Nigeria because people want to believe in something. They want to believe someone is responsible for their problems, they want to believe their pastor has all the solutions to their problems and that he can save them. Pastors on the other hand use this mindset as a

weapon to extort the people,"

@EbituPromise said, "May his business continue to grow. I am sure investors will be looking for how they will respond now. Congratulations,"

@dan\_p\_fem said, "With the launch of Family Fellowship, Pastor Idowu Ilyomade demonstrates his unshakeable commitment to serving his community and sharing the teachings of God,"

@MrKlassiq said, "I guess since redeem suspended him, God decided to call him personally,"

@official\_micolo said, "...60th birthday celebration for his wife while everyone was mourning the loss of a prominent member of their parish, Dr. Herbert Wigwe,"

@charliebeato said, "Baba say: I no go tire. Suspension na for chair, no be for calling,"

@philkikis said, "he's not the first pastor to be suspended from RCCG, and he won't be the last!!! they all went ahead to open their and became independent pastors, with RCCG experience!!! 85 of new churches with new names emanated from RCCG, Their lead pastors were either suspended or left RCCG. Go and verify,"

@FabsTola wrote, "Hmmm religion na scam. Just believe in God and do your thing,"

# NMA disowns Anambra man who killed EFCC operative, says he's no doctor

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), has described the claim that one Joshua Chukwubueze Ikechukwu, who killed an operative of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) during a raid on his residence in Awka, Anambra State is a medical doctor.

The Secretary of the Anambra State chapter of NMA, Dr. Obiageli Ifeanyi said this in a disclaimer issued in reaction to claims in the media that a medical doctor shot an EFCC officer dead in Awka.

There have also been calls that the NMA should intervene in the shooting incident involving its alleged member on the social media.

Ifeanyi noted one of the publications, Ikechukwu who shot the EFCC officer dead in the early hours of Friday 17th January, 2025 at Dr. J.O. Ukwutinfef Close, Ifite, Awka was also referred to as a medical doctor with Nnamdi Azikwe University Teaching Hospital (NAUTH.)

But in the statement published on the X handle of Anambra chapter of NMA, Ifeanyi said findings by the



Association so far have revealed that Ikechukwu is neither a medical doctor nor a staff of NAUTH.

NMA said the management of NAUTH has already confirmed that Ikechukwu is not on their payroll.

He added that Joshua Ikechukwu is also not a member of NMA Awka Zone of NMA as no member has been able to identify such a name as a colleague.

“Joshua Chukwubueze Ikechukwu is NOT a medical doctor (not even an academic doctor) as widely published by the media though he deals on medical supplies and has been addressed as Doctor,” the NMA said while raising concern about what it described as flagrant abuse of the title Medical Doctor by imposters and quacks, dragging the image of the revered medical profession to the mud.

The statement read, “By this, NMA Anambra State wishes to notify the media & EFCC that the said Joshua Chukwubueze Ikechukwu is NOT a Medical Doctor and that they refrain henceforth from using the title medical doctor for the suspect.

“We also demand immediate retraction of all defamatory publications from the EFCC and the media where the suspect was addressed as a medical doctor. We urge the media to do due diligence before making their publications.

“While we commiserate with the EFCC and the bereaved family on this unfortunate incident, please be rest assured that the medical profession is a noble one and Nigerian doctors are responsible and remain law abiding.”



# Crypto 101: How to get started as a newbie in cryptocurrency in Nigeria

By Eyitayo Jemimah Ajayi

Cryptocurrency has gained significant popularity in Nigeria in recent years, offering new opportunities for investment and financial transactions.

## Cryptocurrency in Nigeria

However, the world of crypto can be daunting for beginners and that's why I have decided to take you on a journey of what cryptocurrency is and how you can get started as a Nigeria regardless of your age demographic. Trust me, its gonna be educative, informative, strategic and fun. Let's go.

To get started with Crypto, you have got to know what they are. Cryptocurrencies are digital or virtual currencies that use cryptography for security.

Unlike traditional currencies issued by central banks, cryptocurrencies operate independently of any central authority.

Bitcoin, the first and most well-known cryptocurrency, was created in 2009. Since then, thousands of other cryptocurrencies, known as altcoins, have emerged.

More of all of these other coins and what they mean would be covered in further articles.

While the Nigerian government's stance on crypto has been somewhat complex and evolving. In February 2021, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) issued a directive prohibiting banks and other financial institutions from facilitating cryptocurrency transactions.

This move was motivated by concerns about financial stability, money laundering, and terrorism



financing. The government is focusing on regulating cryptocurrency activities rather than outright banning them.

In December 2023, the CBN released new guidelines for Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) and lifted the ban on banks facilitating cryptocurrency transactions.

This indicates a more open approach, allowing regulated financial institutions to provide services to crypto businesses.

Although, cryptocurrencies are not recognized as legal tender in Nigeria, The Nigerian Government's stance on crypto is shifting towards a more regulated approach. Cryptocurrency has thrived as a huge digital success and now a digital world of its own,

There are a few key concepts in cryptocurrency you have to learn to get fully started.

### 1. Blockchain

Blockchain is the underlying technology behind most cryptocurrencies. It is a decentralized and transparent ledger that records all transactions across a network of computers.

### 2. Wallet

A crypto wallet is a digital tool used to store, send, and receive cryptocurrencies.

### 3. Exchange

A cryptocurrency exchange is a platform where you can buy, sell, and trade cryptocurrencies. You might have come across some of these exchanges on the Internet, like Binance, Bybit, OKX etc. These platforms are called "Exchange" because that's literally what they do. They exchange your crypto to either other cryptos or to FIAT(physical money you can spend).

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on next page**

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How to get started in cryptocurrency in Nigeria as a beginner

- Research and Education

Before investing in any cryptocurrency, it's crucial to conduct thorough research and understand the basics of blockchain technology, cryptocurrency, and the risks involved.

Numerous online resources, courses, and communities which I would be sharing with you can help you learn about crypto.

- Choose a Reputable Exchange:

Selecting a reliable and secure cryptocurrency exchange is essential. Look for exchanges that comply with Nigerian regulations and offer user-friendly interfaces, strong security measures, and transparent fee structures. Some popular exchanges in Nigeria include Binance, Bybit, and Quidax etc.

- Create a Secure Wallet:

Once you've acquired cryptocurrencies, it's vital to store them securely in a crypto

wallet.

- Start with Small Investments:

It's advisable to start with small investments and gradually increase your portfolio as you gain more experience and knowledge. Never invest more than you can afford to lose.

- Be Patient:

Cryptocurrency investments can be volatile in the short term. Adopt a long-term perspective and avoid making impulsive decisions based on short-term market fluctuations.

- Diversify Your Portfolio:

Don't put all your eggs in one

basket. Spread your investments across different cryptocurrencies to mitigate risk.

- Stay Informed:

The cryptocurrency market is highly volatile and constantly evolving. Stay up-to-date with the latest news, trends, and regulations to make informed investment decisions.

Crypto investments are highly speculative and involve significant risk. Conduct thorough research, understand the risks involved, and seek professional financial advice before investing in cryptocurrencies.





# Trump could sanction ICC over Netanyahu arrest warrant, Foreign Office fears

By Ben Riley-Smith

**T**he 47th US president poised to lead backlash against Hague-based court's ruling on Israeli PM

Donald Trump could sanction the International Criminal Court (ICC) this week over its arrest warrant issued for Benjamin Netanyahu, Foreign Office insiders believe.

Karim Khan KC, the British lawyer who is the ICC's chief prosecutor, may be personally targeted in the action, given the fierce criticism of Mr Trump's allies over his decision.

The move could become one of the first points of tension between the US administration under Mr Trump, as he is inaugurated as the US president on Monday, and Sir Keir Starmer.

Mr Trump's allies gave a heated response to the ICC's decision in late November to order an arrest warrant for Mr Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, and Yoav Gallant, his former defence minister, over the conflict in Gaza.

But Sir Keir's official spokesman said at the time: "We respect the independence of the ICC."

Multiple ministers and UK officials then indicated Mr Netanyahu



would be arrested if he came to the UK.

Any ICC sanctions could become an early test of how Sir Keir and Mr Trump will get along as fellow world leaders.

A senior Whitehall source said they had been briefed to expect sanctions against the ICC.

The source stressed that it was still uncertain if, how and when Mr Trump could act. The US is not a member of the ICC, unlike the UK.

During the first Trump presidency ICC officials investigating alleged US war crimes in Afghanistan were targeted with sanctions.

The ICC, established in 2002 to investigate war crimes and other crimes against humanity, looked at Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel in 2023 and Israel's subsequent

military operation in Gaza.

In November, the ICC announced that Mr Netanyahu and Mr Gallant had been found to "each bear criminal responsibility" for acts including "the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare" and arrest warrants were issued.

An arrest warrant was also ordered for Mohammed Deif, a Hamas commander deemed "responsible for the crimes against humanity" including "murder". Israeli spokesmen have said Deif has already been killed in the conflict.

The move means that ICC members – including the UK – are obliged to arrest Mr Netanyahu if he comes to the UK. Sir Keir's Government has indicated that would happen, but has fallen short of being explicit.

**Continue reading  
on next page**

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The question of whether Mr Netanyahu has diplomatic immunity and therefore it would be unlawful to arrest him if he came to the UK while Israeli prime minister has been raised by leading Conservatives and some lawyers.

Figures expected to play a senior role in Mr Trump's administration suggested the ICC would be sanctioned when the arrest warrants were announced on Nov 21, after the Republican candidate had won the US presidential election.

Mike Waltz, Mr Trump's nominee for national security adviser, said at the time: "You can expect a strong response to the anti-Semitic bias of the ICC and UN come January."

There were even suggestions that allies who supported the ICC could be targeted

Lindsey Graham, the Republican senator for South Carolina and a Trump ally, told Fox News in November: "To any ally, Canada, Britain, Germany, France, if you try to help the ICC, we're going to sanction you."

In the run-up to Mr Trump's inauguration on Monday there have been fresh indications that sanctions over the ICC are expected soon after he takes office. Mr Trump was an ardent supporter of Israel and Mr

Netanyahu during his first term.

Israel Hayom, an Israeli newspaper, reported unnamed sources suggesting that sanctions could be announced as early as Tuesday.

Marco Rubio, who is expected to be approved by the US Senate as Mr Trump's secretary of state in the coming days, was critical of the ICC over the arrest warrants for Mr Netanyahu and Mr Gallant during a confirmation hearing last week.

Mr Rubio said: "I think the ICC has done tremendous damage to its global credibility." He then warned that a "dangerous precedent" had been set.

He added: "This is a trial run to see if they can go after a head of state from a non-member nation. If successful with Israel, they will apply the same standard to the United States at some point."

It is unclear, if the sanctions do come as expected, what form they would take.

In June 2020, the first Trump administration announced economic sanctions against ICC officials investigating alleged US war crimes, as well as visa restrictions on their family members. A counter-investigation into alleged corruption at the ICC was also announced.

'No moral equivalence'

Sir Keir, whose career was spent in the law before turning to elected politics in his 50s, has made a point of standing by the decisions of independent courts while an MP.

Downing Street defended the ICC's right to rule on Mr Netanyahu's actions when the arrest warrant was issued in November.

The Prime Minister's official spokesman said then: "We respect the independence of the ICC, which is the primary institutional institution for investigating and prosecuting the most serious crimes in relation to international law.

"This Government has been clear that Israel has a right to defend itself in accordance with international law. There is no moral equivalence between Israel, a democracy, and Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah, which are terror groups.

"We remain focused on pushing for an immediate ceasefire to bring an end to the devastating violence in Gaza."

The ICC has defended its right to investigate the actions of both Israeli politicians and military commanders and Hamas fighters in the Gaza conflict.



# 'Mufasa' tops North America Box Office

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Disney's animated masterpiece *Mufasa: The Lion King* reclaimed its position as North America's box office leader during the long Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend.

The film, which had slipped from the top spot the previous week, roared back with an impressive \$15.5 million in earnings from Friday through Monday, according to industry tracker Exhibitor Relations.

Two new contenders—Sony's *One of Them Days* and Universal's *Wolf Man*—secured the second and third positions, respectively, but couldn't unseat Disney's juggernaut.

## One of Them Days exceeds expectations

Sony's *One of Them Days*, a heartfelt comedy-drama, had a strong debut. The film, starring Keke Palmer and singer-songwriter SZA as struggling roommates, earned \$14 million during its opening weekend. Analysts believe the film's relatable premise and glowing reviews contributed to its success.

David A. Gross, a leading box office analyst, called the debut "an excellent start for an original Black American comedy." He also highlighted the film's widespread appeal, noting its "sensational critical reception" and "excellent audience score."

## Wolf Man falls short

Universal's *Wolf Man*, a remake of



the 1941 horror classic, underwhelmed at the box office. Starring Christopher Abbott and Julia Garner, the film earned \$12 million over the four-day weekend, falling below industry expectations.

Despite being the launch of a new horror franchise, Gross described its performance as "weak." The numbers suggest it will face an uphill battle to achieve long-term success.

## Sonic and Moana continue to shine

Paramount's *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* slid one spot to fourth place, earning \$10.3 million over the weekend. The animated adventure remains a family favorite, sustaining solid ticket sales.

Meanwhile, Disney's *Moana 2* held on to the fifth spot, adding \$8.4 million in its eighth weekend. The sequel has now surpassed \$1 billion in global earnings, making it Disney's third billion-dollar release of 2024, following *Deadpool* and *Wolverine and Inside Out 2*.

## Other top performers

The remaining top 10 films showcased a mix of genres:

*Den of Thieves 2: Pantera* claimed sixth place with \$7.8 million.

Robert Eggers' gothic horror *Nosferatu* secured \$5.1 million for seventh place.

Biographical drama *A Complete Unknown* landed in eighth with \$4.6 million.

The musical adaptation *Wicked* followed closely with \$4.56 million.

Indie favorite *Babygirl* rounded out the top 10, earning \$2.5 million.

## A bright start to 2025

The holiday weekend box office results reflect a diverse slate of films capturing audiences' attention. From animated favorites to original comedies and horror reboots, Hollywood's offerings are delivering entertainment for all tastes.

As *Mufasa: The Lion King* roars back to the top, industry watchers anticipate more exciting shakeups in the weeks ahead. With several major releases on the horizon, the competition for the box office crown remains fierce.

# Annie Idibia: 'I was pregnant with twins last year but had miscarriage'

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

**N**igerian actress and wife of 2Baba, Annie Idibia, courageously shared a deeply personal experience about her heartbreaking miscarriage last year.

She shared that she suffered a miscarriage last year, a painful chapter in her life that she has kept private until now. Annie disclosed this during an emotional episode of the reality series *Young, Famous, and African*.

Speaking candidly on the show, Annie opened up about the heartbreaking loss of her twins. Despite being a mother of two, she admitted that the experience was incredibly difficult to process.

"I was pregnant with twins, but I had a miscarriage," Annie said during the show. "It was hard. I wasn't even sure if I could share this with any of my friends."

## A struggle in silence

Annie revealed that only her husband, 2Baba, whose real name is Innocent Idibia, and her mother knew about the miscarriage at the time. She explained that she found it hard to talk to others about her loss because she didn't feel comfortable sharing such personal pain.

The actress went on to express her wish for a support system during that time. She said, "I wish I had someone to tell me, in this group, that I'm pregnant. I would be having a baby. And then we lost that."

Her silence throughout the ordeal was also evident in her limited public appearances. Annie explained, "I wasn't coming out enough the whole of last year, even in the group."



A peek into Annie's journey  
Annie's heartfelt confession has sparked conversations about the often-overlooked emotional struggles women face after pregnancy loss. Her vulnerability highlights the importance of support and understanding during such difficult times.

As a star on *Young, Famous, and African*, a reality show that delves into the lives of African celebrities, Annie's story resonates deeply. The third season of the series premiered on Netflix on January 17, drawing viewers into the lives of prominent figures like Annie.

## Breaking the silence

Miscarriage is a topic that many women find challenging to discuss due to stigma and emotional pain. Annie's decision to open up about her experience is a step toward normalizing conversations around pregnancy loss.

Her story sheds light on the need for empathy and a safe space for women who endure such losses. It also highlights how even those in the public eye can face struggles behind closed doors.

Fans react to Annie's revelation

Since the episode aired, fans have expressed their admiration for Annie's courage. Many took to social media to share their support and offer kind words. They praised her for shedding light on an issue that is often kept in the shadows.

Annie's candidness is a reminder of the shared human experiences that connect us all, regardless of fame or status. Her story encourages others to seek support and speak openly about their pain.

A powerful moment in reality TV  
*Young, Famous, and African* continues to be a platform where stars like Annie Idibia can share their truths. This season, the show promises more heartfelt moments and a deeper look into the lives of its cast members.

Annie's revelation adds a layer of authenticity to the series, showing viewers that even the brightest stars have their dark days. Her courage in speaking out about her miscarriage inspires many to confront their struggles and seek healing.

As fans follow the lives of their favorite celebrities on the show, Annie's story stands out as a poignant reminder of resilience and hope.

With season three now streaming, viewers can expect more compelling narratives and emotional revelations. Annie's honesty sets a powerful tone, proving that vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness.

In sharing her journey, Annie Idibia not only honors her loss but also gives a voice to countless women who have faced similar heartbreak.



# Rema is leader of new generation of Nigerian musicians - Timaya

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian music legend Timaya has crowned Rema as the leader of the new wave of Nigerian musicians, praising his talent and global influence.

In a recent interview with Cool FM, the “Dem Mama” hitmaker expressed deep admiration for the young artist, highlighting his exceptional talent, unique style, and deliberate approach to music and fashion.

Speaking enthusiastically about Rema, Timaya said, “I’m a fan of Rema. Among all the young boys—new generational musicians—he’s at the top.

Rema is their dad. You don’t know?” His words were laced with genuine respect and excitement for the rising star, whose impact on the music scene continues to grow.

Distinctive style that shines  
Timaya didn’t just stop at praising Rema’s music. He also pointed out the artist’s fashion sense as a key factor that sets him apart.

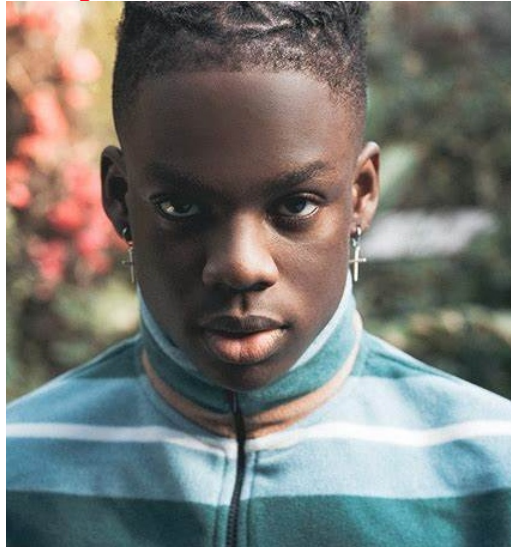
“See his abs, his dress sense, crazy!” he added with a chuckle, highlighting the singer’s ability to stand out not just with his sound but also with his striking appearance.

For Timaya, Rema’s ability to connect with fans goes beyond his chart-topping tracks. His bold and unique fashion choices, combined with his dynamic stage performances, make him a complete package. “He’s intentional; his music, his stage performance are amazing.

And he’s a fine young boy,” Timaya continued, emphasizing Rema’s all-around appeal.

The rise of Rema

Rema, born Divine Ikubor, has been a force to reckon with since bursting onto the music scene. Signed to Mavin Records, the singer gained international attention with hits like “Dumebi,” “Calm Down,” and “Charm.”



His blend of Afrobeats, trap, and pop has earned him accolades, awards, and a massive following both in Nigeria and globally.

Known for his experimental sound and youthful energy, he has carved a niche for himself. He represents a fresh wave of Nigerian artists redefining the music landscape.

With his global collaborations and innovative approach, he’s often seen as a bridge between traditional Afrobeats and the evolving sounds of the next generation.

Timaya’s role in Nigerian music  
Timaya, whose real name is Inetimi Timaya Odon, is no stranger to the Nigerian music industry. With over a decade of experience, he has consistently delivered hits that resonate with fans across Africa. Songs like “Plantain Boy,” “Bum Bum,” and “Balance” have cemented his status as a music icon.

Having achieved so much, Timaya’s endorsement carries significant weight. His praise for Rema reflects not just admiration but also a recognition of the younger artist’s potential to take Nigerian music to even greater heights.

Why Rema stands out

His intentionality, as Timaya pointed out, is evident in every aspect of his career. From his carefully crafted lyrics to his

visually striking music videos, Rema operates with a clear vision.

This deliberate approach has earned him comparisons to global stars and positioned him as one of the key figures shaping the future of Afrobeats.

His ability to connect with younger audiences through relatable lyrics and an ever-evolving sound has made him a favorite among fans.

Whether it’s his catchy hooks, smooth delivery, or infectious energy, he consistently delivers music that resonates.

Shining example for his peers

In recognizing Rema’s achievements, Timaya also hinted at the importance of mentorship and inspiration within the music industry.

By describing Rema as the “dad” of the new generation, Timaya indirectly acknowledged his role as a trailblazer for other young artists.

His influence extends beyond his music. His fashion sense, as Timaya highlighted, is bold, innovative, and trendsetting.

This flair for style has made him a favorite among music fans and the fashion world.

The future of Nigerian music

As Nigerian music continues to gain global recognition, artists like Rema play a vital role in shaping its narrative.

With legends like Timaya acknowledging their contributions, it’s clear that the new generation is in capable hands.

Timaya’s words serve as both encouragement and validation for him and his peers. They also remind fans of the importance of celebrating and supporting the younger generation of artists who are pushing boundaries and keeping Nigerian music at the forefront of the global stage.

# Tunde Ednut, Nigeria's hardworking internet celebrity – Peter Obi

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

**P**eter Obi celebrated Tunde Ednut's birthday on social media, praising his influence and creativity in the Nigerian entertainment industry.

In a heartfelt post shared on X (formerly Twitter), Obi praised Ednut for his significant influence in the entertainment industry.

Obi praises Ednut's creativity and dedication

Obi, the former governor of Anambra State, commended Ednut's creativity, humor, and dedication, highlighting these qualities as central to the influencer's success.

According to Obi, Ednut has risen to prominence as one of the most admired and hardworking internet celebrities in Nigeria, captivating a wide audience with his unique approach to digital content.

"Today, I join the world in celebrating the birthday of a remarkable Nigerian media influencer, Tunde Ednut," Obi began his message. "Tunde has earned his place as one of Nigeria's most respected and diligent social media stars, impressing audiences across the globe with his creativity, humor, and unwavering consistency."

Ednut's global impact on digital entertainment

Obi further acknowledged Ednut's tremendous impact on the digital entertainment sector. He emphasized how Ednut's ability to engage with fans beyond Nigerian borders has solidified his standing as a leading force in the industry.

"His influence on digital entertainment is truly exceptional," Obi continued. "Tunde has shown time and time again that he can bridge gaps, creating a connection that resonates not only with Nigerians but with people worldwide."



Best wishes for Ednut's health and success

The message concluded with him extending his best wishes to Ednut for the year ahead. "On this special day, I wish Tunde Ednut good health, both in mind and body, and continued success," Obi wrote. "May he enjoy many more years of productivity and continue contributing to the growth and development of our nation. Happy birthday, Tunde Ednut!"

Ednut's role in shaping Nigerian digital culture

The former presidential candidate's message not only celebrated Ednut's achievements but also underscored his role in shaping digital culture in Nigeria.

Ednut, known for his humorous and often controversial posts, has used his platform to create conversations on various aspects of Nigerian life, from politics to entertainment, earning him both admiration and criticism.

Throughout his career, Ednut has maintained a consistent presence across several social media platforms, including Instagram and Twitter, where he has amassed millions of

followers.

His relatable content, often infused with humor and bold opinions, has made him a favorite among fans of all ages.

Promoting Nigerian culture on a global stage

As a public figure, Ednut has leveraged his influence to promote Nigerian music, fashion, and lifestyle to a global audience.

His collaboration with artists and creators, along with his sharp commentary on trending topics, has made him a valuable asset to the entertainment world.

Social media personalities in Nigeria: A growing influence

Peter Obi's acknowledgment of Ednut's work highlights the growing influence of social media personalities in Nigeria, where platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are becoming key channels for shaping public discourse.

Ednut's ability to connect with his audience through these digital spaces has firmly established him as one of the leading figures in the Nigerian entertainment industry.

Ednut's journey: A testament to digital media's power

With his birthday greeting, Obi not only celebrated Ednut's accomplishments but also reaffirmed the importance of social media influencers in driving cultural change and promoting national development.

As Ednut continues to grow his brand and impact, his journey remains an inspiring testament to the power of digital media in today's world.



# Iranian pop star, Tataloo sentenced to death for 'blasphemy'

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**T**attoo-covered Iranian pop star, Amir Hossein Maghsoudloo, better known as Tataloo, has reportedly been sentenced to death by an Iranian court after being found guilty of insulting Prophet Muhammad.

The singer, who has gained notoriety for his outspoken views and popularity among young Iranians, was reportedly convicted on charges of "sabb al-Nabi" (insulting or denying the status of the Prophet Muhammad).

Tataloo previously supported President Ibrahim Raisi during the 2017 election campaign. He also publicly expressed his backing for the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, even performing a song called 'Nuclear Energy'.

Despite his political engagements Tataloo's appearance and behaviour have drawn criticism from some conservative factions, which led to restrictions on his artistic activities. Due to what he described as the lack of a proper concert licence, he left Iran and moved to Turkey.

After moving abroad, Tataloo continued to make headlines, including the blocking of his Instagram page due to reports of misogynistic and violent content,



being detained by Turkish police for visa violations while travelling to the UK and facing accusations of insulting Shia religious figures and promoting drug use among youth.

He was also involved in a controversial relationship with Iranian actress Sahar Quraysh Shashi and publicly endorsed betting websites.

Tataloo has consistently rejected the charges against him, asserting his right to free artistic expression. However, four years ago, he was detained by Turkish police and sent back to Iran, where he was imprisoned following accusations of "encouraging citizens, especially young people, to use drugs, especially psychoactive drugs, as well as spreading corruption."

His legal troubles continued when, after the singer had been handed a five-year sentence, the Tehran

prosecutor appealed the initial verdict. The case was reassessed by the Supreme Court, which eventually sent it back to the Tehran Provincial Criminal Court.

Despite claiming that he had no intention of disrespecting Shiite religious figures and stating his own religious beliefs, a group of Iranian media outlets reported on Sunday evening that the court had sentenced him to death.

Soon after, however, the Fars news agency, closely linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, issued a clarification, quoting an informed source who stated, "Tataloo's final verdict has not yet been issued. He has just been subject to legal guardianship."

Under Iranian law, Tataloo has the right to appeal this ruling, and his case will likely be reviewed once more by the Supreme Court.

# Donald Trump sworn in as 47th US President

By Friday Omosola

Donald Trump was sworn in on Monday as the 47th president of the United States, marking a historic political comeback.

Chief Justice John Roberts administered the oath of office inside the Capitol Rotunda at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

This inauguration, the 60th in U.S. history, is also Trump's second, making him only the second president to serve non-consecutive terms.

His return to power follows a tumultuous period that included felony convictions, further underscoring the significance of his resurgence on the political stage.

JD Vance, Trump's running mate and the new vice president, was sworn in by Justice Brett Kavanaugh during the ceremony.

Speaking after his inauguration, Trump wasted no time in launching his administration's sweeping agenda.

Trump declared a "national energy emergency" to address rising costs, a cornerstone of his campaign promises.

"We will drill, baby, drill," Trump proclaimed to applause, vowing to lower energy prices and tackle inflation.

He blamed the nation's economic struggles on "massive overspending and escalating energy prices" and directed his Cabinet to use "the vast powers at their disposal" to reduce the cost of goods.

In another major announcement, he pledged to dismantle clean energy policies, including revoking the electric vehicle mandate and ending the Green New Deal.

"With my actions today, we'll save the auto industry and let Americans buy the



cars of their choice," he declared, emphasising his commitment to American auto workers.

Furthermore, the White House website was updated to reflect Trump's return to power, featuring the slogan "AMERICA IS BACK" alongside images of his previous presidency.

Visitors to the site were greeted with a video montage of military flyovers, Marine One, and Trump saluting, reinforcing his campaign's patriotic themes.

The website also laid out the administration's priorities, including "ending inflation," "securing borders," and "making American cities safe again."

Trump promised swift action on these issues, with executive orders expected in the coming days.

The President also announced plans to overhaul the nation's trade policies, establishing an "External Revenue Service" to collect tariffs and duties.

He argued this would generate "massive

amounts of money" from foreign nations to benefit American families.

Benediction from Rabbi Dr Ari Berman at Trump's inauguration  
Trump also referred to his election as "liberation day," calling it the most consequential election in U.S. history.

He thanked Black and Hispanic voters for their record-breaking support, pledging to work closely with them during his term.

In a surprising move, Trump further announced plans to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, symbolizing his administration's vision of reclaiming national strength and global respect.

He also vowed to end what he described as the "vicious weaponization" of the Justice Department, promising a rebalancing of justice.

The President described a "tide of change sweeping the country", pledging to reverse America's decline and usher in a "golden age" of prosperity and freedom. "From this moment on, America's decline is over," he declared.



# Israel frees 90 Palestinians in ceasefire deal

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Scores of Palestinian detainees have been freed as Israel's truce deal with Hamas takes hold.

Israel releases 90 Palestinian prisoners after Hamas freed three Israeli hostages

The majority of the released Palestinians were from the Israeli-occupied West Bank, while others were from East Jerusalem, Israeli media reported, citing the country's prison authority.

According to the reports, most of those released were women and minors.

Israel has agreed to release 2,000 imprisoned Palestinians under the terms of the ceasefire deal.

Fireworks were launched in celebration as buses carrying former detainees arrived in the West Bank de facto capital of Ramallah, with thousands waiting to welcome them.

The release comes after Hamas handed over three Israeli hostages, kicking off the implementation of the group's ceasefire agreement with Israel.

Here are the latest developments from Israel, Gaza and the wider Middle East on Monday, January 20:

Israeli hospital says released hostages in 'stable condition'

The first three Israeli hostages to have been released since Sunday's ceasefire are said to be in a "stable condition," according to the hospital near Tel Aviv where they are being examined.

"It will take a few more days to complete all the needed examinations," the Times of Israel quoted Sefi Mendelovich, deputy director general of health at Sheba Medical Center, as saying.

Emily Damari, Romi Gonen and Doron Steinbrecher were freed on Sunday after



spending more than 15 months in captivity in the Gaza Strip.

Ninety Palestinian prisoners were freed in exchange for their release. People flooded into the streets to welcome the Palestinian returnees arriving in buses in the occupied West Bank overnight.

In total, 33 Israeli hostages are expected to be handed over in return for 1,904 Palestinians as part of Israel's ceasefire agreement with Hamas.

UN says more than 630 trucks entered Gaza after truce deal

More than 630 trucks carrying humanitarian aid entered the Gaza Strip on Sunday, according to the UN.

"As the ceasefire entered into force ... humanitarian aid moved into Gaza as part of a prepared surge to increase our support to survivors," UN under-secretary for relief Tom Fletcher said in a social media post.

He said more than 630 trucks had entered the territory, with at least 300 of them going north.

"We recognize the logistical challenges facing those delivering this aid, including mountains of rubble and unexploded remnants of war," Fletcher said.

Thousands of Palestinians carrying tents and their personal belongings were seen returning to their homes on Sunday, after

the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas began. The vast majority of Gaza's population of 2.4 million people has been displaced by 15 months of war between the two sides.

Freed Israeli hostage says she has 'returned to life'

One the Israelis held hostage by Hamas and released on Sunday said that she has "returned to life" after being freed.

Emily Damari, who is 28-years-old, thanked her family and supporters in an Instagram post shared by Israeli media.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm the happiest in the world," Damari said.

Damari is a dual Israeli-British citizen and returned from captivity with a bandaged hand.

Authorities said she had lost two fingers during the Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023, in which some 1,200 people were killed and 250 were abducted.

Released hostages in 'relatively good health' — DW's Israel correspondent

DW correspondent Tania Krämer was at the hospital near Tel Aviv where three Israeli hostages were reunited with their families and said they appeared to be "in relatively good health," considering the ordeal they had endured.

"The medical team at the hospital said last night that they want the hostages now to focus on being with their families, being with their friends, taking back control of their lives because their medical condition allows it," Krämer said.

On Sunday, the Hamas militant group handed over three female hostages — Romi Gonen, Emily Damari and Doron Steinbrecher — as part of a ceasefire agreement with Israel.



# Pope Francis sends message to Trump, urges unity, peace

By Friday Omosola

Pope Francis sent a heartfelt message to incoming U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday, offering his cordial greetings and extending prayers for wisdom, strength, and protection as Trump assumes office.

In his message, the Pope expressed his hope for a future where ‘there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion’ under Trump’s leadership.

“On the occasion of your inauguration as the forty-seventh President of the United States of America, I offer cordial greetings and the assurance of my prayers that Almighty God will grant you



wisdom, strength, and protection in the exercise of your high duties,” he wrote.

The Pope emphasised the importance of striving for a just society, hoping that under Trump’s leadership, the American people will thrive and work towards creating an inclusive society where all are

treated with dignity and respect.

He also called on the incoming president to address pressing global issues, particularly the ongoing challenges of war and conflict.

“As our human family faces numerous challenges, not to mention the scourge of war, I also ask God to guide your efforts in promoting peace and reconciliation among peoples,” Pope Francis stated.

The message reflects the pope’s ongoing commitment to advocating for unity, peace, and the promotion of social justice, extending an invitation to President Trump to lead the nation toward these noble goals.

# Zuckerberg busted staring at Jeff Bezos’ fiancée’s chest at Trump’s inauguration

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Meta and Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg was caught looking at Lauren Sanchez’s chest during Donald Trump’s inauguration as the 47th President of the United States on Monday.

According to Daily Mail UK, the billionaire businessman was staring at Jeff Bezos’ fiancée’s chest, as they sat in the rotunda ahead of the swearing-in ceremony.

The news platform added that Zuckerberg was seen glancing down at Sanchez, who wore a bold outfit which consisted of white lace lingerie to the service.



Expectedly, the incident has attracted flurry of comments and discussions on social media.

Listed below are some of the comments:

“I probably would have looked too,

as she’s begging for her breasts to be noticed,” one post on X read.

‘Mark Zuckerberg is ready to risk it all for Jeff Bezos’ fiancée at the inauguration,’ another commentator joked.

Another commentator stated, “Lauren Sanchez’s clothing is horrible. She’s 55 and could wear beautiful clothing but has chosen to wear a lot of skin.”

# TikTok returns! App back online following Trump's promise

By Dave Oludare Oso

**A**fter a black-out that lasted about 14 hours, TikTok has returned to the United States.

The hugely popular video app was taken offline Saturday night in compliance with a law that effectively banned the service nationwide unless it splits off from ByteDance, its China-based owner. Last week, the Supreme Court upheld the law.

Back from the dead? Not just yet

On Saturday, Google and Apple removed the app from their stores, a requirement of the ban, which also forbids web-hosting companies from providing back-end support to the app.

When President Joe Biden officials said they would leave enforcement of the law up to the Trump administration, web-hosting services were not confident they would not be prosecuted. The law outlines stiff penalties for violations that could cost the companies billions.

Trump awakens hopes of 170m Americans with a post

On Sunday morning, President-elect Donald Trump effectively reversed the black-out with a single post to his Truth Social social network: He issued a statement vowing to pause the law and said he would extend a liability shield to tech companies that support TikTok, as the app's future is worked out by his incoming administration.

Oracle and Akamai restore app

Not long after, companies that provide web support, including firms Oracle and Akamai, restored the TikTok website and app for millions of users in the U.S.

But Trump's post Sunday gave the web providers the assurance they needed to



bring TikTok back, according to a person close to TikTok's ongoing discussions with the Biden administration and Trump's transition team, who was not authorized to speak about the talks.

TikTok's future remains clouded with legal and political questions.

Apple and Google cautious, hold out

Apple and Google, which operate the all-powerful app stores for mobile devices, still have not agreed to let TikTok return.

Without the backing of those two companies, TikTok cannot be downloaded by new users; the app cannot receive vital software updates to resolve bugs and other glitches; and in-app purchases have ground to a halt, with users unable to purchase "coins" during live-streams, nor paid subscriptions.

Legal scholars, like Alan Rozenshtein at the University of Minnesota Law School, say TikTok's business partners are taking divergent paths: Apple and Google are holding out, while Oracle and Akamai have restored service based on Trump's Truth Social post.

'Service providers who restored app have lost their minds'

"These 'service providers' have lost

their minds," said Rozenshtein in a post on X. "There's no assurance that Trump, who's not even the president yet, can provide," he said, predicting that litigation could be the next stage of the TikTok saga.

Hefty fines of \$5,000 per user loom

Under the TikTok ban law, supporting the app before divestiture could trigger fines of \$5,000 per user, easily running into billions of dollars in potential penalties.

Apple, Google, Oracle and Akamai did not return a request for comment.

Legal experts said the tech giants may be waiting to see if Trump follows the letter of the law, which requires the White House to certify to Congress that a deal to sell TikTok is in progress before it can halt enforcement of the ban. Otherwise, companies like Apple and Google could, in theory, face steep financial penalties.

Beyond the Apple and Google morass, some lawmakers in Washington are raising doubts about Trump's ability to intervene without abiding by the specific requirements set forth in the law.

Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said on Sunday that Trump does not have the authority to postpone the start date of a law that is already in effect.

Senator warns of 'grave consequences'



# Trump set to deport millions as he takes office

By Friday Omosola

**D**onald Trump is set to take the oath of office on Monday as the 47th president of the United States, pledging to expand executive power and deport millions of immigrants as part of his agenda.

Taking the oath inside the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, Trump has vowed to seek retribution against political opponents and redefine America's global role.

Due to harsh weather conditions, the swearing-in ceremony, traditionally held on the Capitol's West Lawn, has been relocated indoors. Incoming Vice President J.D. Vance will also be sworn in during the event.

Following the oath, President Trump will deliver his inaugural address, outlining his vision and priorities for the next four years.

Trump's inauguration marks the culmination of his extraordinary political resurgence.

He returns to the presidency after enduring two impeachment trials, a felony conviction, two assassination attempts, and charges



related to his efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

The incoming president has pledged a swift start to his second term, promising immediate executive actions on immigration, energy, and tariffs. He plans to sign these measures as soon as he assumes office.

In 2017, Trump's first term began with a stark inaugural address warning of "American carnage," a theme he is likely to revisit in his second stint in office.

Pre-inaugural festivities began Sunday, with Trump's family and allies participating in various events across Washington, D.C.

The day concluded with a lively

campaign-style rally at Capitol One Arena, where Trump promised decisive action to reverse "American decline."

Speaking to a crowd of enthusiastic supporters, the 78-year-old Republican pledged to move with "historic speed" in addressing the nation's challenges.

Earlier in the day, he honoured fallen soldiers with a wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.

Trump's return to the White House signals the start of a bold and controversial chapter in U.S. politics, as he prepares to wield the presidency with renewed determination and vigor.

# Biden preemptively pardons family members, Trump foes

By Dave Oludare Oso

Now former President Joe Biden announced Monday before leaving office that he would be preemptively pardoning several people who could be targeted with President-elect Donald Trump's return to the White House, including members of his family, Dr. Anthony Fauci, General Mark A. Milley and members of the House Jan. 6 committee and their staff.

Just 20 minutes before handing over power to Trump, Biden also announced he was preemptively pardoning his brothers, sister-in-law, sister and brother-in-law.

"My family has been subjected to unrelenting attacks and threats, motivated solely by a desire to hurt me—the worst kind of partisan politics," Biden said in a statement.

"Unfortunately, I have no reason to believe these attacks will end. ... Even when individuals have done nothing wrong and will ultimately be exonerated, the mere fact of being investigated or prosecuted can irreparably damage their reputations and finances."

A source familiar with the decision tells CBS News he made the decision to pardon his siblings and their spouses "in the last few days" amid the "continuing talk and concern about possible persecution and prosecution" by the new administration.

Biden issued preemptive pardons for Fauci, Milley and others earlier in the morning.

"These public servants have served our nation with honor and distinction and do not deserve to be the targets of unjustified and politically motivated prosecutions," Biden said in a statement.

The former president noted that the pardons "should not be mistaken as an



acknowledgment that any individual engaged in any wrongdoing, nor should acceptance be misconstrued as an admission of guilt for any offence."

He added that the nation instead "owes these public servants a debt of gratitude for their tireless commitment to our country."

Biden praised the service of Fauci, who worked for decades as the nation's top infectious disease expert; Milley, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the members of the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol and their staff, who the president said worked with "integrity and a commitment to discovering the truth." The individuals have all been the subject of GOP ire and threats of retribution for perceived wrongdoings.

The president said he believes in the rule of law and is "optimistic that the strength of our legal institutions will ultimately prevail over politics." But he added that "these are exceptional circumstances, and I cannot in good conscience do nothing."

Fauci issued a statement on Monday after the pardon news saying that he is grateful

for the action.

"Despite the accomplishments that my colleagues and I achieved over my long career of public service, I have been the subject of politically motivated threats of investigation and prosecution," Fauci said.

"There is absolutely no basis for these threats. Let me be perfectly clear: I have committed no crime and there are no possible grounds for any allegation or threat of criminal investigation or prosecution of me. The fact is, however, that the mere articulation of these baseless threats, and the potential that they will be acted upon, create immeasurable and intolerable distress for me and my family."

Milley said in a statement after Biden's announcement Monday that he and his family "are deeply grateful for the President's action today."

"After forty-three years of faithful service in uniform to our nation, protecting and defending the Constitution, I do not wish to spend whatever remaining time the Lord grants me fighting those who unjustly might seek retribution for perceived slights," Milley said.

Rep. Bennie Thompson, who had been the chair of the Jan. 6 select committee, and former Rep. Liz Cheney, the Republican who had served as the vice chair, issued a joint statement on Monday expressing gratitude for the pardons due to the "extraordinary circumstances."



# LA LIGA: The real Kylian Mbappe has arrived! Superstar's brace sends Blancos top

By Dave Oludare Oso



The Frenchman led Carlo Ancelotti's attack with a first-half brace as they strolled to an easy win at Santiago Bernabeu.

Kylian Mbappe scored twice – and could have had four – as the Real Madrid attack hummed around him in Los Blancos 4-1 win over Las Palmas on Sunday that puts them top of La Liga.

The Frenchman turned in a dominant performance to quell any fears regarding Vinicius Jr's absence through suspension, and showed that things might just work out at Santiago Bernabeu

for him after all.

Madrid started awfully and were behind after just 25 seconds as Las Palmas constructed a slick attack right from the kick-off, one that ended with a tidy finish from Fabio Silva – marking the earliest goal Madrid have conceded since 2011.

From there, though, they woke up. Mbappe bagged the equaliser from the penalty spot after Rodrygo was tripped in the box, and Brahim Diaz put the hosts ahead, turning into an empty net from a Lucas Vazquez cut-back.

Mbappe then put the game beyond doubt after 36 minutes with an arrowed finish into the top corner, and he thought he had a hat-trick shortly before half-time, only for his effort to be ruled out for a narrow offside in the build up.

The second half only brought more action, as Rodrygo scored on 57 minutes, completing a carefully crafted move, and Madrid had two further goals disallowed, while shoddy finishing from first Jude Bellingham and then Brahim let Las Palmas off the hook.

# Rashford will remain on sidelines at Man Utd 'no matter what' – Amorim

By Dave Oludare Oso



Ruben Amorim has brutally declared that Marcus Rashford will remain on the sidelines at Manchester United “no matter what.”

## \*WHAT HAPPENED?

Rashford was not in the squad again as United fell to a 3-1 defeat to Brighton at Old Trafford. With the exception of Amad Diallo, the Red Devils' forwards have struggled to nail down starting roles as inconsistency and poor finishing plague the squad.

Meanwhile, Rashford has made it clear he would like to leave the club, and Amorim has doubled down on his promise to keep the Englishman on the sidelines despite his team being stuck in a “bad moment”.

## \*WHAT AMORIM SAID

Speaking after the Brighton loss, Amorim said when asked if he could consider recalling Rashford: “It is his choice (not to play). I don't want to focus on this bad moment because in the games we lost, Rashford is not here.

I don't want to put this moment on Rashford. Rashford is out of this moment because he is not playing. No matter what, I am not going to put out a player I don't believe is the best for the team.”

## \*THE BIGGER PICTURE

Amorim will be desperate for a swift end to the saga surrounding the wantaway forward's future as, with each disappointing defeat, his absence becomes an increasingly glaring and obvious question. In the Portuguese coach's opening games, Rashford

shone brightly and appeared as if he might be recapturing his best form. However, within weeks, he announced he would like to leave the club and left his new boss in a lurch.

## \*WHAT NEXT FOR UNITED?

United will be desperate to find a resolution to Rashford's future in the remaining days of the transfer window to put an end to one of the many crises sweeping the club.

Amorim declared this United side as the worst in the club's history and will be hoping the Red Devils, currently 13th, do not slide any further down the table. Yet, they face a tricky test away at Fulham next week and the headache may get worse for Amorim still.



# EPL: Chelsea beat Wolves to end five-match winless run

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Chelsea beat Wolves to end their five-game winless run in the Premier League and move into the top four, after a dominant second-half display in the Sunday encounter at the Stamford Bridge, in London.

In the first-half of the match, Tosin Adarabioyo's opener was cancelled out by Matt Doherty. However, two goals in five second-half minutes from Marc Cucurella and Noni Madueke carried the hosts to victory at Stamford Bridge.

Cucurella, making his 100th Premier League appearance, forced home from close range after Madueke's cross was flicked on by Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall.

Madueke then nodded home after Trevoh Chalobah, playing after returning from his loan at Crystal Palace, climbed highest at a corner.

Those goals spared the blushes of Chelsea goalkeeper Robert Sanchez whose error allowed Doherty to equalise in first-half stoppage time.

Sanchez had moved a few yards off his line, which was spotted by Matheus Cunha, and the Brazilian swung a delicious delivery goalbound which the Spaniard attempted to claim rather than punch clear.

The error was keeper Sanchez's fourth that has led to a goal this season - only Ipswich's Arijanet Muric (five) has made more in the Premier League - and will lead to more questions around his selection with just one home clean



sheet this campaign.

Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca defended Sanchez, telling Sky Sports: "You said it was the fourth mistake [leading to a goal]? OK, and how many times did he save us? More than four. So no problem. It happens. Mistakes happen to him, the strikers, the midfielders. He is doing well.

"Tosin's opener - which was awarded by the video assistant referee (VAR) after being ruled out for offside - came when Reece James' effort was deflected into his path following a corner.

The victory moves Chelsea fourth, two points clear of Manchester City and Newcastle United.

Wolves, who have now conceded a league-high 51 goals, remain 17th and Vitor Pereira's side are only outside of the relegation zone on goal difference.

Chelsea made five changes - including a first Premier League start since his summer move from Leicester for

Dewsbury-Hall - and began brightly.

They had four shots in the opening five minutes and continued that pressure with Cole Palmer coming closest in the opening exchanges when his drive from the edge of the area was parried away by visiting keeper Jose Sa.

Their fine start threatened to go unrewarded, before Tosin did well to control on his thigh and slot home for his first Premier League goal for Chelsea.

The flag went up immediately but he was kept onside by Cunha, who had failed to push up with the rest of his defence at the back post.

Chelsea's levels then dropped drastically and Wolves, who had offered little in the opening half an hour, took control.

Doherty's equaliser was their first shot on target but came after a period of sustained pressure.