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3,600 Nigerians marked as Trump deportation blitz intensifies

By Dave Oludare Oso

Out of the nearly two million persons classified as illegal immigrants by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for deportation from the country, 3,690 have been identified to be Nigerians.

The deportations come as President Donald Trump enforces his crackdown on illegal immigrants in the country.

According to a document from ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO), titled "Noncitizens on the ICE Non-Detained Docket with Final Orders of Removal by Country of Citizenship," Mexico and El Salvador top the list of nations facing the most deportation, with 252,044 and 203,822, respectively.

The document revealed that as of November 24, 2024, the total number of non-citizens on ICE's non-detained docket stands at 1,445,549, adding that they have final removal orders against them.

ICE, tasked with safeguarding the US from cross-border crime and illegal immigration, has intensified efforts since last week, arresting hundreds of migrants, with many of them already deported using military aircraft.

With 3,690 persons on the list, Nigeria was the country with the second most citizens in Africa, just behind Somalia which had 4,090.

Ghana held the third spot with 3,228 illegal immigrants.

Nigerians and other African migrants residing illegally in the US now face



heightened fear and uncertainty as deportation looms.

The US government urged countries to accept the return of their nationals, with the document, seen by NEW DAILY PRIME reading, "Lack of cooperation from the foreign government delays and, in many cases, inhibits the removal process.

"The U.S. Government requests foreign governments take appropriate steps to confirm the citizenship of noncitizens suspected to be their nationals, which include conducting interviews, issuing travel documents in a timely manner, and accepting the physical return of their nationals by scheduled commercial or charter flights consistent with ICE and/or foreign government removal guidelines.

"Lack of cooperation from countries in accepting the return of their nationals may lead to ICE classifying those countries as uncooperative or at-risk of non-compliance."

Before winning the presidential election in November, Trump said clamping down on illegal immigrants would be one of his priorities.

The US president has repeatedly described illegal immigrants as aliens who drive up crime rates in the US.

Trump signed a slew of executive orders on the first day of his second coming. Among these was declaring a national emergency at the US-Mexico border and ordering the deployment of troops to enhance border security.

Hours after Trump was sworn in, claims alleging that over three million Nigerians would be deported, went viral on social media but the claim was found to be untrue.

Trump's deportation plans have faced huge criticisms from Brazil, Mexico and Columbia, leading to these complaints.

On Tuesday, two Columbian Air Force planes filled with 201 immigrants from the US landed in Bogota after a huge standoff between both countries.

Columbian President Gustavo Petro had refused to allow the military planes to land—a decision he was forced to withdraw after Trump threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Columbian businesses.

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SIZE	TOTAL RATE
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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
2X2	13,000.00
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10X3	171,000.00
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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We will welcome Nigerians deported from US - FG

By Dave Oludare Oso

In the face of the ongoing deportation crackdown initiated by President Donald Trump, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM) has said that the Federal Government is ready to welcome deported Nigerians from the United States.

Speaking in an interview with Vanguard on Tuesday, NIDCOM's Director of Media and Corporate Affairs, Abdur-Rahman Balogun, said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in charge of such development, adding that the Federal Government had already set up an inter-agency committee to handle the matter should Nigerians be deported from the US.

Balogun said, "The Federal Government has set up an inter-agency committee, comprising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NIDCOM, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and office of the National Security Adviser, NSA, should there be mass deportation of Nigerians from the US."

However, the NIDCOM spokesperson stressed that its commission was not aware of Nigerians in America being processed for deportation.

Recall that about 3,690 Nigerians



in the United States are faced with deportation as Donald Trump crackdown on illegal immigrants in the country.

In the document compiled by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Enforcement and Removal Operations and sighted by our correspondent on Tuesday, the agency revealed the data is broken down by nationality and number of people faced with deportation.

It also clarified that as of November 24, 2024, there are 1,445,549 non-citizens on ICE's non-detained docket with final removal orders.

In the document titled "Noncitizens on the ICE Non-Detained Docket with Final Orders of Removal by Country of Citizenship," Mexico and El

Salvador top the list of nations facing the most deportation, with 252,044 and 203,822, respectively.

The ICE is charged with the responsibility of protecting America from cross-border crime and illegal immigration that threaten national security.

Meanwhile, on Thursday last week, hundreds of migrants were arrested, and others flew out of the country on military aircraft as Donald Trump's promised mass deportation operation got underway.

NEW DAILY PRIME reports Nigerians and other African illegal immigrants in the United States may be the next target for deportation by the American government.

NLC declares nationwide protest over telecom tariff hike

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has said it plans to embark on a nationwide protest against the proposed 50 percent increase in telecom tariffs on Tuesday, February 4.

NEW DAILY PRIME gathered that the nationwide demonstration was agreed upon during the National Administrative Council (NAC) meeting of the NLC on Wednesday.

According to reports, the protest aims to send a strong message to the government that workers will oppose the planned increase, which would exacerbate poverty throughout the nation.

Recall that on January 22, the NLC rejected the 50 per cent increase in telecommunication tariffs that the Federal Government sanctioned via the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC).

The NLC argues that approving such a significant tariff hike while Nigerian workers and the general populace are facing extraordinary economic challenges is a blatant attack on their well-being and a neglect of the people in favour of corporate interests.

In a statement titled “50% Telecom tariff hike: Another burden too harsh”, NLC’s President, Joe Ajaero, said: “The NLC expresses its unequivocal condemnation of the Federal Government’s recent approval, through the Nigerian



Communications Commission of a 50 percent increase in telecommunication tariffs.

“This decision, coming at a time when Nigerian workers and the masses are grappling with unprecedented economic hardship, is a clear assault on their welfare and an abandonment of the people to corporate fat cats.

“Telecommunication services are essential for daily communication, work, and access to information. Yet, an average Nigerian worker already spends approximately 10 percent of their wages on telecom charges.

“For a worker earning the current minimum wage of N70,000, this means an increase from N7,000 to a staggering N10,500 per month or 15 percent of his salary—a cost that is unsustainable.

“This hike exemplifies the government’s apparent ease in prioritizing corporate profits over citizens’ welfare.

“It is shocking that the government approved this 50 per cent tariff increase for telecom companies within a month, yet took nearly a year to approve the recent minimum wage for workers, despite the rising cost of living and inflation eroding purchasing power.

“This glaring disparity underscores a troubling reality. The government appears more aligned with the interests of wealthy corporations than with the needs of the workers and citizens it is meant to serve.

“We must ask: ‘when will the government stand for the people it swore to protect?’

“When will the National Assembly rise to its responsibility and hold the executive accountable for policies that blatantly undermine the welfare of the majority? When will the common man heave a sigh of relief in Nigeria?

FG issues 25-year gas distribution licences to boost domestic gas utilisation

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Federal Government, through the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), has granted 25-year gas distribution licences to 10 companies in a move aimed at enhancing domestic gas utilisation across the country.

The licences, issued on Tuesday in Abuja, will enable these companies to establish, construct, and operate gas distribution networks in key regions of Nigeria.

The awarded licences cover franchise areas in Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, and Benin City, with a primary goal of ensuring that natural gas reaches households and industries in the southwestern and southern parts of the country.

The initiative is part of Nigeria's broader effort to expand its gas distribution network and support its energy transition plans.

Speaking at the award ceremony, Ahmed Farouk, the Chief Executive Officer of NMDPRA, revealed that prominent companies such as the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC), Shell, Nipco, Central Horizon Gas Company (CHGC), Falcon, and Axxela were among the recipients of the licences.

These companies will oversee gas distribution across areas already connected to the Escravos-Lagos Pipeline System.

Out of 30 applications submitted, 20 were disqualified, leaving the top 10 companies to spearhead the first phase of the country's gas expansion initiative.

The successful applicants will collectively manage a gas distribution network covering over 1,200 kilometres and more than 500 customer stations.

Key clusters set to benefit from the new licences include:

Agrara, Ota, and Badagry Local Gas Distribution Zone, operated by NNPC



and Shell, with a capacity of 102 million standard cubic feet per day (MMSCF/D). Greater Lagos Industrial Area (GLIAS Local Gas Distribution Zone), a joint venture between NNPC and Gaslink, with a capacity of 130 MMSCF/D.

Ikorodu Local Gas Distribution Zone, operated by NNPC and Falcon, with a capacity of 25 MMSCF/D.

Kara Bridge-Ibafo-Sagamu Interchange Local Gas Distribution Zone, managed by NNPC and Nipco, with a capacity of 150 MMSCF/D.

Lekki Free Trade Zone Local Gas Distribution Zone, operated by NNPC and Nipco, with a capacity of 25 MMSCF/D.

Ogere-Ibadan-Oluyole-Olorisako-Asuire-Ajoda Local Gas Distribution Zone, managed by NNPC and Nipco, with a capacity of 150 MMSCF/D.

Port Harcourt Cluster 2, operated by CHGC, with a capacity of 50 MMSCF/D.

Port Harcourt Cluster 1, managed by Shell, with a capacity of 30 MMSCF/D.

Ada Local Gas Distribution Zone, managed by NNPC, with a capacity of 30 MMSCF/D.

Benin Local Gas Distribution Zone, operated by Nipco, with a capacity of 20 MMSCF/D.

In total, the licences are expected to facilitate the distribution of over 1.5 billion cubic feet of gas per day, contributing to the country's growing domestic gas market.

Farouk noted that this initiative will support energy-intensive industries, improve power generation, and promote cleaner, more efficient energy across the nation.

The NMDPRA's Chief Executive highlighted that the new gas distribution framework is poised to create significant investment opportunities, enhance socio-economic development, and drive long-term growth in Nigeria's energy sector.

The licences also serve as a catalyst for investments in pipeline infrastructure, offering continuous, cost-effective, and safe gas supply to industries and households alike.

Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Gas), Hon. Ekperikpe Ekpo, emphasised that the gas distribution licence regime is a crucial component of the federal government's "last mile" gas expansion programme.

The programme is designed to bring gas supply closer to Nigerians, ensuring greater accessibility to clean cooking and power solutions.

Ekpo also highlighted the importance of the programme in reducing carbon monoxide exposure, which contributes to the deaths of 600,000 women and children across Africa annually due to the lack of access to clean cooking.

President Tinubu highlights \$3.25bn investment in Nigeria's power sector

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

President Bola Tinubu has announced that Nigeria is leveraging over \$3.25 billion in foreign investment to ensure a steady and reliable power supply for 23.7 million people across the country.

This investment, which includes contributions from the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank, is central to Nigeria's ongoing efforts to electrify its most remote and hard-to-reach communities, with a focus on achieving energy equity.

Tinubu made the announcement at the Mission 300 Africa Energy Summit, which recently concluded in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

The summit focused on improving energy access across the African continent, and Tinubu took the opportunity to reaffirm Nigeria's commitment to expanding its electricity infrastructure, especially in underserved areas.

According to a statement signed by the President's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga, Tinubu highlighted the substantial progress made with the support of international development partners. These investments will play a key role in addressing Nigeria's electricity access challenges, particularly for the millions of Nigerians who still lack reliable power.

Among the key contributions, Tinubu pointed out the AfDB's \$1.1 billion investment, which is expected to provide electricity to 5 million people by the end of 2026. Additionally, the AfDB's \$200 million commitment to the Nigeria Electrification Project is set to bring electricity to 500,000 people by



the end of 2025.

The AfDB also plans to invest \$700 million in the Nigeria Desert to Power programme and \$500 million in the Nigeria-Grid Battery Energy Storage System, which together will provide electricity to an additional 2 million Nigerians.

In addition to the AfDB's contributions, Tinubu also discussed the World Bank's \$750 million support for expanding Nigeria's distributed energy access.

This investment will fund the installation of mini-grids and standalone solar systems, which will provide power to 16.2 million people across the country.

"The support from the African Development Bank and the World Bank is invaluable, and we are determined to ensure that these investments translate into real, lasting improvements for Nigerians," Tinubu said.

The President also took the opportunity to praise the efforts of international partners in addressing the electricity access challenges facing Africa.

The African Development Bank, World Bank Group, and other development partners have pledged to bring electricity to 300 million people across the continent by 2030.

In his speech, read by Nigeria's Minister of Power, Adebayo Adedun, President Tinubu called on African leaders to prioritise energy access and collaborate on solutions to the continent's energy challenges.

"Let us work together to create a brighter future for our citizens—where every African can access reliable and affordable energy," Tinubu said.

"A future where our industries thrive, our economies grow, and our people prosper."

President Tinubu also reaffirmed Nigeria's goal of providing reliable, affordable, and sustainable electricity to its unelectrified population by 2030.

With significant international investment and strong political will, Nigeria is poised to make substantial strides toward achieving this ambitious goal in the coming years.

APC expels Aregbesola over alleged anti-party activities

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The All Progressives Congress (APC) has expelled former Minister of Interior and ex-Osun State Governor, Rauf Aregbesola, over alleged anti-party activities.

Aregbesola, who governed Osun State for two terms, had been leading a faction within the APC known as The Osun Progressives, which was later rebranded as the Omoluabi Caucus.

The APC leadership confirmed his expulsion in an official letter on Wednesday, accusing him of violating Article 21 of the party's constitution, which addresses disciplinary actions



for members.

The letter, titled "Allegations of Anti-Party Activities – Conveyance of State Exco Decision to You," stated that the State Executive Committee (SEC) had reviewed the findings of the Disciplinary Committee, leading

to Aregbesola's expulsion for actions that allegedly undermined the party's unity and integrity.

"The SEC resolved to approve your immediate expulsion from the APC, and as such, you are no longer a member of the party," the letter read in part.

Aregbesola's expulsion comes after a Sunday meeting of the Omoluabi Caucus, where the group, led by the former governor, announced their decision to leave the APC, citing the party's diminishing influence in Osun State.

Oyo State government issues warning ahead of Valentine's Day

By **Eyitayo Jemimah Ajayi**

In anticipation of Valentine's Day celebrations, the Oyo State government has issued a stern warning to event organizers and businesses, urging strict adherence to safety regulations.

The Oyo State Commissioner for Information, Prince Dotun Oyelade, noted the numerous advertisements promoting Valentine's Day events and emphasized the need to avoid a repeat of the tragic incident on December 18, 2024, where 35 children lost their lives at a funfair.



The government mandates that all event planners collaborate with security agencies, including the police, NSCDC, Amotekun, and Operation Burst, to ensure well-organized and safe gatherings.

Venue selection must be agreed upon by event planners, security personnel, and medical staff. The Commissioner also stressed the required involvement of the Ministry of Health, the hospital management board, and private hospitals (as needed) to guarantee adequate medical support.

Oyelade warned that violators of this directive will face serious legal repercussions. He reiterated that the state remains in mourning following the December tragedy and is committed to preventing future occurrences.

Pandemonium as violence erupts at PDP BoT meeting

By Dave Oludare Oso

Peace continues to elude the leading opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as a fight broke out at the party's headquarters, where a meeting of the party's Board of Trustees (BoT) is currently taking place.

At present, the crisis-riddled party, being battered with self-inflicted problems for the last four years is holding its BoT meeting at its Wadata House National Headquarters on Wednesday.

The violence ensued as Samuel Anyanwu and Sunday Ude-Okoye clashed over the position of National Secretary of the party.

Both men laid claim to the position at the ongoing PDP Board of Trustees, BoT, meeting at the party's national headquarters in Abuja.

Ude-Okoye arrived the venue of the meeting before Anyanwu and acting National Chairman, Ambassador Iliya Damagum.

But, when Anyanwu arrived, Ude-Okoye was forced out of the meeting by suspected thugs, a situation that led to an altercation. This led to Ude-Okoye screaming and urging his supporters to prevent his ejection.



It was around this time that journalists were asked to give way for a closed door session.

The position of the PDP National Secretary has been a contentious issue since Anyanwu left to contest the Imo governorship position which he lost.

In his absence, the South-East Caucus of the party endorsed Ude-Okoye to replace him.

After losing the Imo governorship election, Anyanwu returned to the party's national secretariat to reclaim his seat as National Secretary, triggering a fresh crisis in the opposition party.

An Appeal Court sitting in Enugu had on December 20, 2024, upheld

an earlier decision of a High Court removing Anyanwu as PDP National Secretary and affirmed Ude-Okoye as the authentic holder of the position.

Anyanwu had accused the party's former South-East Zonal Vice Chairman, Ali Odefa, of plotting his removal from office.

Anyanwu has, however, filed for a Stay of Execution and Appeal, with Dr. Musa (SAN) nominated as the party's legal counsel by Damagum, the crux of the new impasse.

Ude-Okoye later came to the gate, lamenting injustice as Anyanwu's men were allowed into the Secretariat but his own supporters were denied access.

Alleged cybercrime: Sowore pleads not guilty, demands bail

By Dave Oludare Oso

Presidential candidate of the African Action Congress (AAC) in the 23023 general elections, Omoyele Sowore, who had been detained at the Intelligence Response Team (IRT) detention facility in Abuja since Monday, after refusing to accept the administrative bail conditions granted to him by the police over alleged cybercrime, on Wednesday, pleaded not guilty to the seventeen-count cybercrime charges brought against him by the Police.



After honouring a police invitation to the Force Intelligence Headquarters in Abuja over allegations of resisting and obstructing public officers, disobedience to lawful orders, cyber stalking, and actions allegedly aimed at preventing arrests, Sowore was detained at the IRT detention facility in Abuja on Monday, after refusing to accept the administrative bail conditions granted to him by the police.

The Publisher of Sahara Reporters was, however, arraigned before Justice Musa Liman to take his plea on Wednesday.

When the charges were read to him, Sowore pleaded not guilty to all seventeen counts.

The Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, had filed the charges against Sowore for allegedly calling him an “illegal IGP” on his verified X handle (formerly Twitter).

Count One of the charge read, “That you, Omoyele Sowore, on the 13th day of December 2024, within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, did intentionally and knowingly send

messages through your verified X handle account, ‘Omoyele Sowore,’ and caused a publication against the Inspector General of Police, where you called him ‘illegal IGP Kayode Egbetokun.’

”This statement, which you knew to be false, was intended to cause a breakdown of law and order. By causing this message to be sent, you committed an offence contrary to Section 24(1)(b) of the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act, 2015, as amended (2024), and punishable under Section 24(2)(c)(ii) of the same Act.”

Among those present in court were former senator, Shehu Sani, the President of the Nigerian Bar Association, Afam Osigwe, the Country Director, Action Aid, Andrew Mamedu, and his predecessor, Ene Obi.

Also, some Nigerian youths and members of the Mr Sowore-led Take It Back Movement (TIB) thronged the court in support of the human rights activist.

Meanwhile, Sowore, has described the charges as ridiculous.

“These have to be some of the most ridiculous charges ever filed by Nigerian law enforcement agents. Omoyele Sowore to face charges for calling retired and fired IGP Kayode Egbetokun ‘Illegal IGP,’” Sowore in a message he circulated via his Whatsapp line on Tuesday.

Sowore also mocked the charges in a Facebook post, portraying blunders in the filing as justifying his accusation that Egbetokun was incompetent.

“Sowore claimed IG of Nigeria Police Force, KAYODE Egbetokun, was illegal and incompetent, then he quickly moved to court to file charges for cybercrime, with incorrect spellings of Sowore’s 1st name and wrong spelling of ‘incite.’” Sowore wrote on Facebook Tuesday night.

A review of the charges by NEW DAILY PRIME shows that Sowore’s first name was misspelt as “Omoleye” instead of “Omoyele” across the 17 counts.

Police kill five kidnappers on Lagos-Ibadan Expressway

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Operatives of the Ogun State Police Command, on Wednesday, neutralised five suspected kidnappers operating on the Lagos-Ibadan highway.

Disclosing the incident in a statement, the Police Public Relations Officer of the Command, CSP Omolola Odutola, said the hoodlums were engaged in their hideout while the Police engaged them.

Odutola said the Area Commander, Sagamu, last Saturday, received a distress call from commuters travelling on the Sagamu -Ijebu Ode highway, that there was an armed robbery attack, near Ilishan Remo, area of the State.

The PPRO said a crack team of officers



was immediately deployed to the scene of the incident, saying the officers upon arrival noticed that a group of unidentified gunmen had set up a roadblock using an articulated truck, indiscriminately opening fire on unarmed passengers, causing widespread panic.

She said three commuters, Bolaji

Bilesanmi 'm', 65yrs; Olasunkanmi Idowu 'm' 50yrs and Mohammed Salisu 'm' (age unknown) were abducted into the forest from two vehicles, a Honda Pilot with registration number LAGOS EKY113GZ and a Honda Accord Car marked LAGOS KJA13QFA.

She explained that the State Police Commissioner, CP Lanre Ogunlowo, directed his men to locate the hideout of the hoodlums.

The kidnappers upon sighting the Police were said to have opened fire while the Police engaged them, leaving five fatally injured and others escaping with gun wounds.

Odutola said one AK-47 rifle; 10 rounds

Police nab suspected child traffickers, rescue victims in Rivers

By Helen Okechukwu

In tackling the issue of child trafficking in the country, the Rivers State Police Command says its team has apprehended two suspects, Ugochukwu Onyebuchi and Ogechi Nmezi, for an alleged child trafficking deal.

The command spokesperson, Grace Iringe-Koko, made this known in a document made available to journalists on Wednesday, acknowledging that the two female suspects were arrested on 24 January.

Iringe-Koko revealed the suspects allegedly conspired to defraud two female victims named Juliet Blossom and Esther Michael under the disguise of facilitating baby adoptions.

Meanwhile, in the past, the suspects



was said to have, "lured one Gift Chimanu, the mother of a two-month-old baby girl, Evidence Olomachukwu Chimanu, and Hope Onyebuchi, the mother of a one-year-old baby boy, Chukwuemeka Kingsley, into their scheme.

She noted that the victims has been rescued and reunited with their love ones.

Read Also: Pastors arrested in Rivers State

The statement read partly, "Preliminary investigations indicate that the suspects acted in collaboration with members of a local vigilante group, OSPAC, to perpetrate the crime.

"During interrogation, the suspects confessed to their involvement and are still in police custody. Efforts are ongoing to identify and apprehend other syndicate members, including the implicated OSPAC members.

The command spokesperson reaffirmed on the force commitment in safeguarding vulnerable individuals and eradicating child trafficking within the state.

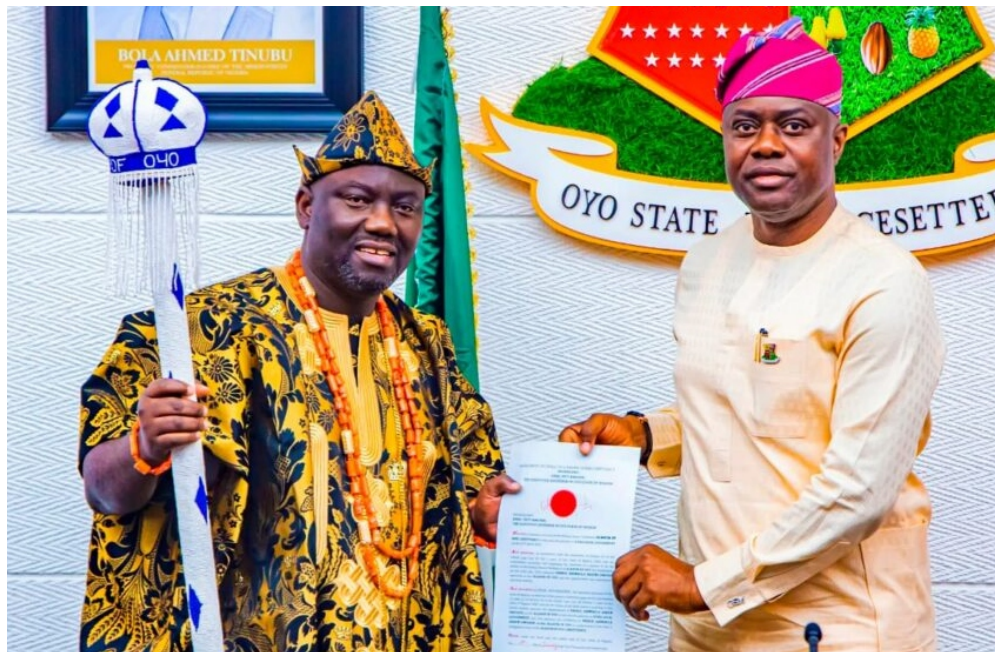
ALAAFIN: Oyomesi sues Gov Makinde for harassment, intimidation

By Dave Oludare Oso

Even after the presentation of paraphernalia to the new Alaafin of Oyo, there is still tension in the ancient town as kingmakers, better known as the Oyomesi, have instituted legal proceedings against the state governor, Seyi Makinde and others over what they described as the unlawful use of the Oyo State Anti-Corruption Agency (OYACA) to harass and intimidate them, including through threat of arrests.

NEW DAILY PRIME reported that the crisis between both parties started when the governor called for a fresh process for the selection of the Alaafin of Oyo, which the majority of kingmakers rejected because they had selected a candidate in a process that met all the criteria stipulated by the law.

The governor eventually settled for another candidate selected without the consent of the majority of the kingmakers, a move that they rejected and have since approached the court to



seek redress against.

However, in multiple filings before the Federal High Court in Ibadan, three of the kingmakers, Yusuf Akinade, Bashorun of Oyo; Wakeel Akindele, Lagunna of Oyo, and Hamzat Yusuf, Akinniku of Oyo, are urging the court to protect their fundamental human right and put an end to the governor's alleged witch-hunt.

In their separate filings, they alleged that the governor ordered the state anti-corruption agency to invite them for an investigation on January 21st and the invitation letter was dated January 20th, the day before the scheduled invitation.

They urged the court to declare that the harassment, intimidation, threat of arrest and attempted arrest by OYACA officers acting at the behest of the governor is "unwarranted, baseless, unlawful, unconstitutional" and constitutes a violation and threat of his right to liberty, dignity and agents.

They also noted that the action of the agency is unacceptable because the issue is already being investigated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and subject of Appeal No. CA/IB/134/2024 and as such their action amounts to a breach of the law.

Tears as 11 family members die in Enugu tanker explosion

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

In an heart-rending circumstances, 11 members of the same family from the Abofia-Agbaja community in the Ebonyi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State were among the victims of a tanker fire that occurred at Ugwu Onyeama along the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway, on Saturday, reports have revealed.

Eyewitnesses stated that the fire broke out around 11 a.m., when the tanker lost control while descending a hilly section of the road, crashing into vehicles ahead before spilling its contents and igniting a massive explosion.

Narrating the tragic incident on Tuesday, the brother of the deceased Ebonyi 11 family victims, Mr. Ikechukwu Nwaji, told journalists amidst tears that the explosion claimed the entire family of Mr. Jeremiah Nwaji, who was travelling in their private Sienna to the village to bury their late father.

Nwaji disclosed that his brother was on his way from Onitsha, Anambra State with his six children, wife, brother and servants to the village when their vehicle caught fire from the explosion that burnt them to ashes.

According to him, his deceased brother who was the breadwinner of the family borrowed the Sienna from a friend to enable him to carry all the things they need for their father's, which was billed for burial this Friday, before he met his



death.

He said, "It was disheartening that we lost 11 members of the family in an uncontrollable situation involving my eldest brother and breadwinner of our family, his wife, six children, among whom were a twin, our last born, our brother's house help and servants.

"They were in a Sienna vehicle coming to Ebonyi State from Anambra where the incident occurred and were coming for our father's burial which was scheduled to be held this Friday before his death leaving the family with two siblings as my mother gave birth to four males."

He called on President Bola Tinubu to revisit the policy that banned the movement of tankers loaded with petrol during the day, adding that many families had lost their loved ones in similar circumstances.

"As seen in advanced countries, our family is pleading to President Tinubu to revisit the policy that stipulated that tankers should only move by night as seen before where drivers moved from 9:00 in the night till early morning where they pack to continue the next day seeing the havoc it is causing in our country."

Also, the bereaved's sister and a widow, Mrs Chiamaka Onyibe, said the victim was the one paying her children's school fees since she lost her husband.

She added that the family had lost their 'divine helper'.

Reports have it that the deceased was a classmate (2004 Set) of Governor Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi State.

Court adjourns Yahaya Bello's money laundering trial to April 3

By Dave Oludare Oso

The alleged money laundering case against a former governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello, has been adjourned to 3rd, 24th April, and 6th May, 2024.

In her ruling on Wednesday, Justice MaryAnne Anenih of the Federal Capital Territory High Court, Abuja, adjourned the case for the continuation of the hearing after the first witness, Fabian Nworah, a property developer, was called to testify.

At the day's proceedings, the Prosecution Counsel, Kemi Pinheiro (SAN), informed the court that he had five witnesses to call for the day. However, Justice MaryAnne Anenih said she could only take one witness.

Counsel for the 1st and 2nd Defendants, Joseph Daudu (SAN), informed the court that the prosecution had not made the statements on oath of the 2nd Defendant available to the defence team. He said he was aware that the 1st Defendant had not made any statement yet.

Daudu also objected to the witness presented by the prosecution, arguing that the defendants had no prior knowledge of the witness and were only seeing him in court for the first time.

Citing authorities, he emphasised that legal proceedings should not be a "hide and seek" game, stating that the prosecution was required to provide the witness' statements on oath in advance so the defence could adequately prepare for cross-examination.

"The statements of the second defendant have not been served on us to be able to know if we will be able to represent him or not. So, it is a serious handicap on us.



They need to serve us all the statements made by the defendants. I understand the first defendant has not made a statement. Fortunately, we are still within the housekeeping stage of the proceeding," he added.

Corroborating this, Counsel for the 3rd Defendant, Abubakar Aliyu, SAN, said, "Mine is not a comment but an observation, my lord. My application is for the court to order the prosecution to provide us with the statements of the 2nd and 3rd defendants."

When the judge asked if he had previously requested the statements, Aliyu (SAN), said he discovered on Tuesday that the said statements were not part of the proof of evidence served on the defendants.

He stated, "I am also applying that the court order the prosecution to provide us with copies of recovered digital devices and the report or the extract therefrom mentioned on Page 14 of Volume 1 of the proof of evidence and the report of the forensic expert if any. I am following the procedure followed in Okoye against the Commissioner of Police, which was

adopted by the Supreme Court in Okemini Vs Comm of Police."

The Prosecution, however, disagreed, saying the Defendants were trying to delay a speedy trial. He insisted that the proof of evidence had been served on the defendants on November 27.

"The constitutional provision, which they rely on, does not imply that the prosecution should provide all the documents which it relies on. The law only provides that the prosecution should oblige the defence with all the documents requested for," Pinheiro argued.

He noted that the issues would be addressed whenever they receive formal applications from the Defendants and urged the court to proceed with the business for the day. "As it is, we have almost utilised more than an hour on these arguments," he stated.

The judge asked the Defendant's Counsel why he did not raise the issues in December. Daudu, SAN, replied that it was because it had to be done after arraignment.

APC N50m Bribe: LP slams Atiku's statement as reckless

By Friday Omosola

The Labour Party (LP) has described as reckless and ignominious former Vice President Atiku Abubakar's claim that the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led federal government offered a N50 million bribe to the leadership of opposition parties.

This came after APC denied the allegation and called Atiku Nigeria's most prolific electoral litigator.

In a statement issued on Wednesday in Abuja, the party's National Publicity Secretary, Obiora Ifoh, denied ever receiving a kobo from any individual, group, organisation, or government entity that is not a member of the party.

Atiku, the Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) 2023 presidential candidate, had alleged during a national conference on strengthening democracy in Abuja that the APC bribed opposition party leaders with N50 million each to undermine Nigeria's democratic process.

Expressing "shock and disbelief" over the allegation, the LP criticised Atiku for making what it described as a wild, unguarded, and baseless claim.

It noted that as a seasoned politician who has contested multiple elections, Atiku should have exercised greater caution before making such statements.

The statement added, "The party has however expressed shock and disbelief by the revelation from one of the leading political figures and former vice President of Nigeria, Atiku



Abubakar, insisting that it would be improper for the politician to throw shade at the entire opposition without also putting forward a tangible proof other than a 'gossip' from an unnamed source.

"For us in the Labour Party, a party which has remained the strongest and most veritable opposition and which speaks truth to power; a party that led the most serious campaign in the 2023 general election and has been steadfast and has remained the voice of the people, we view that statement as demeaning, ignominious, reckless and a let down from someone like Atiku Abubakar."

The LP stated that it had run a frugal administration using internally generated funds, having received no support from its elected representatives.

Furthermore, the party noted that despite the challenges it had faced in the recent past, its leadership remained solid and committed to its ideals.

"The leadership has not received any

salary from anybody. Salaries are not hidden and it is not difficult to verify who and who are on the government payroll. It is a public document and it can be verified. We therefore advise Atiku to be circumspect and careful in generalizing certain allegations. We expect him to speak for himself and his party.

"The opposition is the oxygen of any virile democracy because it helps put the government in power in proper checks while also ensuring inclusivity in democratic participation. Democracy without opposition is an autocracy and it takes a lot of sacrifices to sustain opposition. It is therefore frustrating and unpatriotic when leaders who ought to know better, begin to derive joy in denigrating the opposition camp and making jests of their sacrifices.

"We are therefore calling on Atiku Abubakar to provide concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations without which Nigerians will be forced to take every other of his statements with a pinch of salt and politically motivated."

Police arrest Lagos hotelier for allegedly sodomizing 5 boys

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Operatives of the Lagos State Police Command have arrested a Lagos-based hotelier for allegedly sexually assaulting a 16-year-old secondary school student and four others in his hotel.

Assistant Inspector-General of Police, Zone-2 Command, Lagos, AIG Adegoke Fayoadé said police took the man into custody after the boy confessed to his mother that the hotel owner molested him at his hotel located at Bucknor in the Isheri Oshun area of the state.

Fayoadé said the hotelier has been detained for the alleged sexual assault on male students in his hotel after the parents of the boy reported the case to the police at Zone 2.



He said the suspect will remain in detention pending conclusion of investigations.

The police chief said, "The boy told his parents that the suspect allegedly lured him and four other students to his hotel and sodomised them.

"The boy's father (name withheld) said: 'we rushed him to a prayer house and after some days when he became a little bit sober, we took him to Isheri-Oshun Police Station where he made a statement and narrated his ugly encounter with the hotelier.'

"Shockingly, after he disclosed the names of his fellow students that took him to meet the hotelier, he relapsed and started behaving like a mad person.

"The police succeeded in getting only one of the students who brought a laptop and gave detailed accounts of how the hotelier has been molesting them sexually."

JAMB suspends admission to study law in KWASU, 7 other varsities

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has suspended admissions for the Law programme in Kwara State University (KWASU) and seven other universities.

JAMB Spokesperson, Dr Fabian Benjamin stated this in a statement on Wednesday.

He said the decision was taken over the suspension of the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) programme by the Council of Legal Education (CLE) for the 2025/2026 academic session at the universities.

The affected universities include;

1. Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State
2. Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State
3. Redeemers University, Ede, Osun State
4. Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State
5. Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State



State

6. Arthur Jarvis University, Akpabuyo, Cross River State
7. Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State
8. Nigerian Police Academy, Wudil, Kano State.

He said the suspension of the Law programme at the Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano State, will last for two academic sessions: specifically, the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 sessions.

"As a result, JAMB will not approve any admissions for candidates seeking to enroll in the Law programme at the aforementioned universities for the 2025/2026 academic session. Furthermore, the ban on registration for the Law programme at the Nigerian Police Academy will extend into the 2026/2027 academic session," he added.

Meanwhile, JAM earlier announced the registration, and examination dates for the 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).

"As a result, JAMB will not approve any admissions for candidates seeking to enroll in the Law programme at the aforementioned universities for the 2025/2026 academic session. Furthermore, the ban on registration for the Law programme at the Nigerian Police Academy will extend into the 2026/2027 academic session," he added.

Court adjourns ruling on Sowore's bail application to today

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Federal High Court in Abuja has adjourned its ruling on the bail application of former presidential candidate and activist Omoyele Sowore until Thursday, January 30, 2025.

Sowore, who is facing 17 counts of cybercrime, is accused by the Nigerian Police Force of using his verified X handle to post a tweet referring to the Inspector General of Police as "illegal IGP Kayode Egbetokun." The police have claimed that the statement was false and intended to incite public disorder.

Justice Musa Liman made the decision after hearing arguments from Sowore's counsel, Marshall Abubakar, and the prosecution's representative, Udey Jonathan. Sowore, who has pleaded not guilty to all the charges, was present in court for the proceedings.

Initially scheduled for 3 p.m., the ruling was postponed earlier in the day. Upon the resumed hearing, Abubakar urged the court to grant bail on the most lenient terms, stressing that



Sowore's application was supported by a 16-paragraph affidavit, which was sworn by Sunday Agabi.

Abubakar further argued that the court had the discretion to grant bail regardless of the prosecution's objections.

"We ask you, my noble lord, to release the applicant on bail in the most liberal terms possible, pending the hearing and determination of the trial," Abubakar stated.

However, prosecution counsel Udey Jonathan opposed the application, submitting a counter-affidavit deposed by one Friday Ameh, a police intelligence officer.

Jonathan argued that bail should not be granted easily

and, if it were, should be accompanied by stringent terms to ensure Sowore's appearance for trial, including the submission of his international passport.

"My lord, we urge the honourable court to dismiss the bail application," Jonathan said.

After hearing both sides, Justice Liman adjourned the ruling to Thursday at 1 p.m. Until then, Sowore will remain in police custody.

The outcome of the bail application will be closely monitored, as Sowore remains a prominent figure in Nigeria's activism and political landscape.

AFE BABALOLA: Court quashes defamation suit against Farotimi

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

The legal brickbat between legal giant, Aare Afe Babalola (SAN) and activist lawyer, Dele Farotimi has finally been laid to rest as the Federal High Court in Ado Ekiti on Wednesday struck out the defamation suit filed by the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun against Farotimi over the defamation of the senior lawyer and alleged cybercrime.

As one of the most debated cases in recent time, the case, which stemmed from comments made by Farotimi in an interview about his book, 'Nigeria and its Criminal Justice System', particularly concerning the founder of Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Babalola, was formally withdrawn in court.

At the Wednesday hearing, counsel for the complainant, Samson Osobu, informed the court that the prosecution had filed a notice of discontinuance.

The counsel stated, "The matter is slated for hearing today, but we have filed a notice of discontinuance dated January 29, 2025, and filed this morning."

Osobu cited Section 108(1)(2)(a)



of the Administration of Criminal Justice Act 2015 as the basis for the withdrawal, adding, "The prosecution, with the leave of this honourable court, seeks to withdraw the charge against the defendant and pray that the charge be struck out."

He further explained that the decision to withdraw the case followed interventions by well-meaning Nigerians and a request from the nominal complainant, Afe Babalola, to discontinue the matter.

Counsel for the defendant, Adeyinka Olumide-Fusika (SAN), did not oppose the withdrawal.

Consequently, Justice Babs Kuewumi struck out the case, declaring, "This case is hereby struck out."

Speaking to journalists after the ruling, Olumide-Fusika noted that the case had been concluded in Ado Ekiti but declined to comment on related matters pending in courts across Lagos, Ibadan, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and the Magistrate Court in Ado Ekiti.

He also stated that he had advised Farotimi against granting press interviews on the matter.

The withdrawal of the suit follows the intervention of prominent traditional rulers, led by the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi.

On Monday, Afe Babalola announced that he would instruct his lawyers to withdraw the defamation charges against Farotimi.

50% tariff hike: Telecom subscribers plan legal action, NCC unmoved

By Dave Oludare Oso

The recent 50 percent increase in call and data tariffs has continued to generate tension as telecom subscribers and advocacy groups are contemplating challenging the contentious action in court after failing to get the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to have a rethink.

In light of this, the subscribers' umbrella group, the National Association of Telecommunications Subscribers (NATCOMS) on Wednesday, declared its intention to initiate legal proceedings against the telecom regulator, citing the NCC's failure to address its demand for a reduction of the tariff hike to a more acceptable 10 percent.

The NCC announced the tariff hike last week Monday, marking the first adjustment in over a decade, igniting widespread concerns from critics like the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP).

These groups, including NATCOMS, contend that the increase exacerbates already challenging economic conditions, disproportionately affecting low-income households and small businesses struggling to navigate rising inflation and a volatile economic climate.

The subscriber group, which represents 157 million Nigerians who rely on affordable telecom services, on Friday initiated talks via correspondence, requesting the NCC reconsider its stands within three working days. The regulator failed to do so.



NATCOMS President, Adeolu Ogunbanjo, who spoke to journalists on Tuesday, revealed the NCC's inaction to respond to its request, which has left consumers increasingly disillusioned by the rising cost of telecom services.

Ogunbanjo stated, "We gave them until the end of the day (Tuesday) to respond. Since we have not received any response, we are moving forward with the court process starting tomorrow (Wednesday).

The Director of Publicity at the NCC, Reuben Mouka, had not responded to questions put forward by our correspondent via text messages as of the time of filing this report.

Ogunbanjo said the letter sent to NCC highlighted the burden that the 50 per cent hike places on subscribers, especially those in lower-income brackets who rely on affordable communication services for their daily activities.

The NATCOMS President said, "Our National Secretary informed us that the NCC has until 11:59 pm today (Tuesday) to respond. They can still reply through their website, which is available 24/7, but

with no word from them, we are left with no choice but to proceed with legal action."

The association's decision to move forward with court action is now imminent, with the plea letter scheduled to be released to the press tomorrow.

Adding to the mounting legal pressure on the NCC, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project also filed a lawsuit last Friday at the Federal High Court in Abuja against the government of President Bola Tinubu.

The rights group described the tariff hike as "arbitrary, unconstitutional, unlawful, unfair, and unreasonable."

In the suit, numbered FHC/ABJ/CS/111/2025, SERAP is asking the court to determine whether the NCC's decision to authorise the tariff hike violates Nigerians' freedom of expression and access to information.

"The unilateral decision by the NCC to authorise telcos to hike telecom tariffs by 50 per cent is arbitrary and inconsistent with constitutional guarantees," SERAP said in its filing.

Reviewing Akin Faminu's outfits for the Paris Fashion Week 2025

By Eytayo Jemimah Ajayi

Akin Faminu is one of Nigeria's most devoted fashion enthusiasts, consistently making bold fashion statements.

Last year, he impressed us with his out-of-the-box designs, which he embodied flawlessly—all thanks to the amazing designers behind his outfits.

This year, he has continued to set trends. Since the start of Paris Fashion Week 2025, he has ensured that his fashion choices remain statement-worthy. Let's take a look at the stunning designs he has showcased so far.

Day 1 Paris Fashion Week Fw25

The first look is a great way to set the stage for Paris Fashion Week. The checkered fabric was transformed from a simple shirt into a stylish jacket with studded buttons. The outfit bears similarities to traditional Swedish attire, featuring drapes that resemble a skirt.

The plain pants, paired with a



dangling necklace, immediately catch the eye. Akin Faminu pays meticulous attention to every detail of his outfit, including his jewelry, ensuring every piece is thoughtfully curated.

His headwear exudes a distinct Peaky Blinders vibe, adding a vintage touch to the ensemble.

Day 2

Black has never looked this good. I am stunned by the choice of fabric to create this piece. Also, the design at the hem of the fabric has various triangular cuts to create a statement.

Akin Faminu has made various fashion statements with black but this one is one for the history books.

The fashion enthusiast goes ahead to dazzle it with his accessories and his hat and shades. This look will surely gain Dr. Akin a lot of attention at the Paris Fashion Week.

Akin Faminu for Paris Fashion Week 2025 Day 3

I think Dr. Akin has a particular fondness for bootleg pants, as they are a consistent feature in his outfits. There's something about bootleg

pants that beautifully highlights the elegance of a shoe.

This outfit stands out from the other ensembles Dr. Akin has worn so far for the fashion show, as it plays with a mix of colors, predominantly orange.

The design seems to draw inspiration from cultural roots. The highlight of the outfit is undoubtedly the striking sky-blue boots.

Akin Faminu also has a penchant for hats, and in this look, it feels like he's channeling a cowboy aesthetic in his own unique way

Akin Faminu for Paris Fashion Week 2025 Day 4

To wrap the fashion show up, the fashion enthusiast graces us in an unusual style of suit which quite the cynosure of the eyes. This outfit is different because of its fly collars and dramatic sleeves. The studdings at the hems of the jacket gives it a glittering look.



2027 Polls: Frontline presidential contenders to watch and issues that will dominate contest

By Friday Omosola

In consonance with the provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), Nigerian voters will in two years' time - 2027 – go to the polls to elect a president who will steer the country's affairs for another four years.

However, while the exact date for the 2027 presidential election remains unknown, yet the political landscape is already upbeat with behind-the-scenes negotiations, alignments and horse-trading among key contenders.

Also, major political parties are not left out in the rave of the moment, as they are re-strategizing for the fierce electoral contest.

In this report, The New Daily Prime examines the 2027 polls, the chances of presidential polls' contenders, their proposed policies, and the key factors that will shape the election.

Bola Tinubu

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the incumbent Nigeria's President elected under the platform of the All Progressives Congress (APC) is most likely to contest the 2027 presidential election for a second term.

As in the 2023 presidential election, what has traditionally been a two-horse race between the ruling and opposition parties is expected to feature a strong third contender—or even a fourth.

Tinubu's APC is likely to capitalize on his previous stronghold in the North, where he enjoyed massive support, as a key strategy for securing his victory.

Additionally, the APC's control of more



states may serve as another advantage, allowing the President to leverage on the influence of governors to win the hearts of the electorate in many states in 2027.

Furthermore, President Tinubu and his party may still rely on the narratives surrounding a candidate's ethnicity, religion, and regional representation—issues that played a significant role in past elections.

This strategy could prove effective, given the ongoing discourse about the need to shift power to the South after President Muhammadu Buhari's eight-year tenure. Similar sentiments dominated the build-up to the 2023 election and ultimately contributed to Tinubu's victory.

Moreover, the APC may also engage in strategic negotiations with other opposition parties to consolidate its votes in the country's six geo-political zones.

Peter Obi

From all indications and his body language, the former Anambra State Governor does not seem to have the intention of backing out of the 2027 presidential election.

He has continued to consolidate his

political base across the country and has been consistent in affirming his planned vision for a new Nigeria.

While it remains uncertain whether he will secure the Labour Party (LP) ticket for the 2027 polls —especially as political pundits and party stakeholders debate who has the best chance of defeating President Tinubu—his strong electoral performance, where he placed second position, could bolster his candidacy.

If he wins the party's presidential primaries, there is a possibility that he will adopt the same strategy of preaching and reaching out deployed in the 2023 presidential election, despite its limited success.

Even his army of supporters -Obidients- who were primarily visible on social media kept opposition parties jittery during the 2023 election. Although it is unclear whether Obi and his party—if he becomes its flag bearer—will employ this strategy again, and whether it could yield positive results if his supporters turn out to vote.

Continue reading from
next page

Cont from page 21

Ethnicity may also play a role in Obi's chances of winning the 2027 presidential election, as seen in Lagos State when he was declared the winner there in 2023.

Obi and his LP may also adopt political strategies that involve forging alliances with influential political figures, and regional leaders across the country.

They may also seek the support of traditional rulers, religious leaders, and civil society organisations to strengthen their grassroots influence.

While Obi enjoys strong backing from urban youth and middle-class Nigerians, his party may need to actively engage rural voters through grassroots mobilization, leveraging local influencers, town hall meetings, and community-based campaigns.

Atiku Abubakar

Another major contender in the upcoming presidential election could be the former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar.

However, after suffering consecutive defeats as the People's Democratic Party (PDP) flag bearer in the last two elections, the party may or may not consider him as its next candidate.

Nonetheless, given his resolve to remain a rallying point in Nigeria's political space, Atiku is most likely to contest the 2027 election, as he is determined to become Nigeria's president.

However, whichever party he represents will need to strengthen its structure by building strong leadership at the ward, local government, and state levels—especially since he finished third in the last presidential election, losing the second position he once held, to Obi.

Furthermore, the party might seek to leverage a strategy of recruiting credible and influential candidates for governorship, National Assembly, and state assembly

positions. It must also ensure that party agents are well-trained and present at polling units to prevent electoral malpractice.

Seyi Makinde

Seyi Makinde, the Oyo State Governor's bid for the presidential race remains speculative, but strong indications suggest that many within the PDP acknowledge his viability for the exalted ticket.

If he decides to run, he will likely be an aspirant for the party's presidential ticket in 2027. The PDP is seeking a new direction as it moves towards 2027 after suffering three consecutive defeats in the presidential elections.

Having lost credibility for twelve years—longer in some states—the PDP and its candidates may adopt political strategies that focus on communicating clear and practical policies on the economy, security, education, and job creation.

Polls

Seyi Makinde (PHOTO CREDIT: Google) Although Makinde remains one of the most loved governors, winning the PDP ticket may not guarantee him success. The party's strategy may also involve countering misinformation and propaganda through social media, radio, TV, and grassroots campaigns.

Additionally, the party aims to engage with labour unions, professional bodies, and student organisations to solidify support. It also plans to encourage and assist supporters in registering for PVCs, ensure they collect them, and organize voter education programs to prevent voter ID suppression and boost turnout.

Rabiu Kwankwaso

Kwankwaso, the former Minister of Defence ran unsuccessfully for President of Nigeria in 2023 under the platform of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), securing only 6.23 per cent of the votes cast.

While it is clear that the former Kano State governor may contest again, allegations of irregularities in the last election, where he placed fourth, could influence his party's strategy. The NNPP may collaborate with civil society groups to monitor the electoral process and report cases of irregularities.

Although it is uncertain whether he will clinch the NNPP ticket for the 2027 polls, the party may seek to boost its financial contributions from supporters through crowdfunding and transparent fundraising as part of its strategy to win.

Moreover, the party may focus on ensuring the proper allocation of resources for campaign logistics, media outreach, and election-day activities.

Omoyele Sowore

Another key person who may contest this is the human rights activist, Omoyele Sowore.

He ran for president in 2023 but lost to President Tinubu.

Sowore, who founded the African Action Congress (AAC) party and ran as its presidential candidate in 2019, recorded fewer votes. However, if he emerges as the party's candidate in 2027, the party may strategize politically by using data-driven strategies to identify strongholds, swing states, and areas needing more engagement.

AAC may also deploy technology to track election activities, monitor results, and prevent vote rigging, having alleged fraud in past elections.

Nasiru El-Rufai

Nasiru El-Rufai, the former Kaduna State governor is another politician who may contest the 2027 presidential election, especially following his recent criticisms of the President Bola Tinubu-led administration.

From lovers to separation: The Idibia's love story

By Michael Damilola

From lovers to separation, the love story of Innocent Ujah Idibia, popularly known as 2Baba, and Annie Macaulay Idibia remains one of the most captivating tales in Nigerian entertainment. The couple, who were once admired as a symbol of love and commitment, saw their fairy-tale romance come to a dramatic and heartbreaking end after more than a decade of marriage.

2Baba, a member of the defunct music group Plantashun Boiz, was already a household name in the Nigerian music industry when he met Annie Macaulay, a rising model, in the early 2000s.

Despite their age difference and 2Baba's existing relationships, their connection was undeniable. In 2004, Annie featured prominently in his iconic music videos, such as "African Queen" and "Nfana Ibagá (No Problem)." These appearances catapulted her into the limelight, and she later shared that meeting 2Baba changed her life.

Reflecting on their early days, she revealed, "Nineteen years ago (as of 2022), while still struggling to find my feet in the modelling industry, my then-boyfriend, who had just broken away from a boy band group, asked me to star in his new song, 'African Queen.'"

Their love blossomed, and in 2008, before they were officially married, they welcomed their first child, Isabel Idibia. Their traditional wedding ceremony was held in Annie's hometown in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, followed by an elegant white wedding in Dubai on March 23, 2013. In 2014, they celebrated the arrival of their second daughter, Olivia Idibia.

Read also: Annie Idibia reportedly admitted to rehab after split from 2Face

Despite their deep connection, their relationship was not without its challenges. Even before their marriage, 2Baba had fathered five children with two

other women. With Sumbo Adeoye, he had two sons, Nino Idibia (born in 2006) and Zion Idibia (born in 2008). With Pero Adeniyi, he had three children: Ehi Idibia (born in 2006), Justin Idibia (born in



2012), and Innocent Idibia Jr. (born in 2013).

Annie's love and commitment to 2Baba were tested by these complexities, and although they professed their love repeatedly, the dynamics of co-parenting and public scrutiny added significant strain.

The marriage faced public drama in 2015 when Pero Adeniyi accused Annie of being violent and aggressive. Annie, in turn, alleged that 2Baba maintained a romantic relationship with Pero under the pretence of co-parenting. She claimed his family never fully accepted her and accused him of being too lenient with his exes.

In a widely shared post, she expressed her frustration, writing, "What kind of man takes his kids to Disneyland and spends nights in the same apartment with their mother? Your baby mamas constantly use your children as an excuse for all sorts of rubbish. You can do better. Everything I do is to show the good human that you are, but today, this move by you, Efe, Frankie,

and your family is unacceptable."

In 2019, the conflict escalated when 2Baba's brother, Charles Idibia, accused Annie of being manipulative and the source of tension within their family. These allegations further deepened the cracks in their marriage, leaving fans divided over who to support.

The final blow came in January 2025 when 2Baba announced their separation on social media. While he promised to provide a detailed statement explaining the reasons for their divorce, the news left fans in shock and disappointment. Reports soon emerged that Annie had been admitted to a rehabilitation centre following the separation.

In an emotional disclosure from the reality series "Young, Famous, and African," Annie shared the pain of a miscarriage in 2024, where she lost twins. "I was pregnant with twins, but I had a miscarriage. It was hard. I wasn't even sure if I could share this with any of my friends," she said. She revealed that only 2Baba and her mother knew about the loss, as she found it difficult to share such a deeply personal tragedy with others.

The story of Annie and 2Baba Idibia is a poignant reminder of the complexities of love, fame, and family. From their fairy-tale beginnings to their painful separation, their journey highlights the challenges that come with navigating relationships in the public eye. Though their romance captivated the hearts of many, it also served as a cautionary tale about the pressures and sacrifices that accompany life in the spotlight.

Celebrity marriages not benchmark for successful relationship — Nasboi

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Popular content creator and musician Nasboi has spoken out against using celebrity marriages as a benchmark for success or failure in relationships.

He believes that people should stop judging the institution of marriage based on high-profile breakups.

Taking to his X account, the rising star shared his views on the matter. He wrote, “One celebrity divorce, and suddenly you say marriage isn’t for you. But you forget that your parents have been married for over 30 years. Stop using celebrity marriages to define marriage. If you don’t want to marry, that’s your decision.”

His post quickly sparked conversations online, with many users agreeing with his perspective. Others, however, pointed out that celebrity marriages often reflect modern realities, where relationships face intense public scrutiny, pressure, and personal differences.

The rise and fall of celebrity marriages
Celebrity marriages often make headlines, especially when they end in dramatic divorces. Fans follow these stories closely, sometimes shaping their own beliefs about love and commitment based on what they see online.

When a famous couple splits, social media floods with reactions, ranging from disappointment to cynicism about marriage.

Nasboi’s concern highlights a growing trend where people base their views on marriage solely on what happens in the lives of public figures.

Celebrity marriages not benchmark for successful relationship — Nasboi. [Photo credit: Google]

He argues that this perspective ignores the long-lasting, stable marriages that exist outside the spotlight.



Many people grow up seeing their parents or relatives maintain healthy relationships for decades. However, in the age of social media, these real-life examples are often overshadowed by the glamorous, fast-paced world of celebrities.

Why celebrity marriages fail

There are many reasons why celebrity marriages often don’t last. Unlike regular couples, celebrities live under constant public scrutiny.

Their personal lives become entertainment, with every argument or misunderstanding turning into a headline. This pressure can strain even the strongest relationships.

Busy schedules and long periods apart also play a role. Musicians, actors, and influencers frequently travel, making it difficult to maintain a normal family life.

Additionally, the entertainment industry exposes them to temptations that can test loyalty and commitment.

In contrast, non-celebrity couples face fewer public pressures. They handle conflicts privately, work through challenges together, and are not constantly judged by millions of people.

A call for a broader perspective

Nasboi’s statement encourages people to take a step back and reconsider how they view marriage. Instead of letting celebrity divorces shape their opinions, he urges them to look at real-life examples around them.

Many marriages, especially among ordinary people, stand the test of time. These relationships thrive on mutual respect, understanding, and commitment. While no marriage is perfect, defining love based on celebrity breakups creates a distorted image of what marriage truly is.

The musician’s message resonated with many fans who shared their own stories of successful marriages in their families. Some users commented that while celebrity relationships may seem glamorous, they rarely represent the everyday realities of marriage.

The bigger picture

Nasboi’s statement serves as a reminder that social media often magnifies the negatives while ignoring the positives. While celebrity breakups get widespread attention, the many lasting, happy marriages that exist remain unnoticed.

Marriage, like any other commitment, requires effort, patience, and communication. Judging its value based on the failures of a few famous couples creates an unrealistic and discouraging narrative.

In a world where social media influences opinions, Nasboi’s message is a call for balance. He urges people to form their own perspectives on marriage based on real-life experiences, not just the dramatic stories that dominate the headlines.

His words remind everyone that, while celebrity marriages may be entertaining to watch, they should not dictate personal decisions about love and commitment.

Iyabo Ojo knocks 2Baba for announcing split from Annie

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Actress Iyabo Ojo criticizes singer 2Baba for publicly announcing his impending divorce from wife Annie Idibia, calling for more privacy in such matters.

The announcement, which has sparked widespread reactions, drew sharp criticism from Ojo, who described the timing as insensitive and lacking empathy.

Ojo questions the timing amid Annie's vulnerability

In a heartfelt Instagram post, the actress expressed her concerns about the effect of the announcement on Annie, who has already been facing intense public scrutiny following her appearance on the Netflix reality show *Young, Famous & African*. Ojo argued that airing such private matters publicly only adds to the emotional burden of those involved.

A call for empathy and children's well-being

"A heartfelt reminder to couples: when love fades, prioritize your children's well-being," Ojo wrote. "As parents, sacrifices are essential. Never abandon loved ones in their darkest moments, even if separation or divorce is inevitable."

Ojo highlighted the importance of handling sensitive issues with care, especially in the public eye. She emphasized that children's mental health should be at the forefront of all decisions made during times of conflict.

The impact of publicly shared personal matters



She continued, "Let's emphasize empathy and our children's mental health. Sensitive issues shouldn't be publicly aired; social media sometimes disregards the well-being of those involved. @official2, 2Baba, I adore you both, but this timing was off. Adding fuel to the fire, burning the mother of your kids who's already vulnerable, is so unempathic. I'm disappointed."

The actress's message comes amidst growing public debate over the role of celebrities in sharing personal matters online. Many fans and commentators have sided with Ojo, agreeing that such announcements should be made with more consideration for the emotional toll on family members, particularly children.

Words of encouragement for Annie Idibia

Ojo concluded her message with words of encouragement for Annie Idibia. She prayed for the actress to find strength during these trying times and urged her to focus on her

children's needs. "This storm shall pass," Ojo wrote, offering a glimmer of hope amid the controversy.

A broader conversation on fame and privacy

2Baba's announcement has reignited discussions about the responsibilities of public figures in managing their personal lives in the digital age.

While the singer has not yet responded to Ojo's comments, her message has struck a chord with many, shedding light on the delicate balance between public personas and private struggles.

As fans and followers continue to weigh in on the situation, Ojo's call for empathy serves as a poignant reminder of the impact public actions can have on families. The actress's plea underscores the need for compassion, especially when children are involved, and advocates for a more thoughtful approach to handling personal disputes.

The pressures of fame and social media

This unfolding story highlights a broader conversation about the pressures of fame and the consequences of making private matters public. In an era where social media amplifies every action, the need for sensitivity and restraint has never been more crucial.

A message of unity and understanding
For now, Ojo's words resonate as a plea for unity and understanding during a difficult time for the Idibia family. As the dust settles, her message stands as a testament to the power of empathy in navigating the challenges of life, love, and family.

Speed Darlington shares arrest experience in Owerri

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian rapper Speed Darlington has shared details about his unexpected rearrest in Owerri, shedding light on the circumstances surrounding the incident.

The musician, known for his energetic performances and outspoken personality, described the arrest as sudden and shocking.

According to Speed Darlington, the incident happened just moments after he left an event venue. He initially assumed that his host had arranged a police escort to take him safely back to his hotel. However, within seconds, he realised something was wrong.

A shocking turn of events

The rapper explained that two squads of police officers rushed toward him as soon as he stepped outside. At first, he was not alarmed. He thought the officers were there to escort him, especially since his host had not provided security when he arrived at the venue.

But as he observed the reaction of the crowd, panic set in. People around him became visibly anxious, and in just 12 seconds, the truth became clear—he was under arrest.

Two months behind bars

Speed Darlington expressed deep frustration about spending two months in detention. The arrest interrupted his music career and personal life, leaving him with



many unanswered questions.

To highlight his ordeal, the rapper shared a video clip of his last performance before his arrest. In the video, he appeared unaware that he would soon be taken into custody. His post also included a caption detailing the bizarre sequence of events that led to his arrest.

The moment of arrest

He wrote:

“After I measured this booty right there in Owerri, 30 minutes later, I stepped outside to head back to my hotel. My obligation to the host was complete. That’s when two squads of police rushed me and roughed me up.”

He continued,

“The whole time, I thought my host wanted to make me feel special by providing police escorts back to my hotel. Since he couldn’t arrange one from the hotel to the venue, I assumed this was his way of making

up for it.”

But that assumption quickly faded.

“It took me about 12 seconds or more to realize that I was under arrest. Just like that, I was gone for two months.”

Fans react to the news

Speed Darlington’s revelation sparked a wave of reactions on social media. Many fans expressed shock and concern over the way he was taken into custody. Some questioned why he was arrested, while others criticized the police for their approach.

His story adds to the growing conversation about law enforcement practices in Nigeria, particularly concerning the treatment of public figures and entertainers.

Unanswered questions

The rapper has not yet disclosed the exact reason for his arrest or whether he faced any charges. Authorities have also remained silent on the issue. However, his fans eagerly await more details, hoping for clarity on what led to his two-month detention.

For now, Speed Darlington is back to making music and reconnecting with his audience. But his experience serves as a reminder of how quickly things can change, even for those in the spotlight.

Comedian AY urges empathy, rejects sensationalism in failed marriages

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian comedian Ay Makun has condemned the growing trend of sensationalizing failed marriages and blaming individuals for their breakdowns.

In a passionate post on his X page, he called for empathy and understanding instead of speculation and harsh criticism.

Makun stressed that no one enters marriage with the intention of failing. When a relationship ends, real people suffer, and their pain should not be used for entertainment. He urged the public to approach these situations with compassion rather than feeding the drama that fuels online gossip.

Criticism of social media and blogs
The comedian specifically criticized social media users and bloggers who capitalize on failed marriages for clicks and engagement.

He warned that their reckless narratives could have severe consequences, including pushing vulnerable individuals toward depression or even suicide.

“Instead of pointing fingers in marriages you know nothing about, why not focus on why the institution itself is struggling?”

Makun wrote. “No one plans to fail. It’s disturbing to see ‘online in-laws’ and blogs thrive on sensationalism at the expense of those in pain. Real lives are at stake—choose empathy



over drama and gossip. Some of you won’t rest until you drive someone to suicide.”

A plea for compassion

Makun, a father of two, urged for a shift in mindset when discussing marital issues. Rather than amplifying negativity, he encouraged a culture of support and kindness. He reminded his followers that people going through marital struggles deserve understanding, not judgment.

His message resonates in an era where social media often turns personal crises into public spectacles.

The rise of instant commentary and viral content has made it easy to forget the real emotions behind these headlines.

When marriages fail, families experience deep pain—yet, instead of support, they often face scrutiny from strangers.

The need for responsible conversations

Makun’s statement highlights a pressing issue in today’s digital landscape: the need for responsible conversation.

While public figures may expect some level of attention on their private lives, the increasing tendency to exploit their struggles for content is harmful. The impact extends beyond celebrities, affecting everyday people whose personal stories become fodder for viral discussions.

His words serve as a wake-up call to rethink how society treats those experiencing difficult personal moments.

Rather than rushing to judge, he asks people to reflect on the deeper issues affecting marriages today.

He believes that fostering open, honest conversations about the challenges of marriage—without resorting to blame—will lead to more constructive solutions.

Choosing kindness over cruelty

Ultimately, Makun’s plea is simple: choose kindness over cruelty, and empathy over entertainment. In a world quick to criticize, he reminds us all that behind every failed marriage is a human being who deserves dignity, not ridicule.

I will never abandon the ways of my forefathers — Yul Edochie

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Popular Nollywood actor Yul Edochie has once again reaffirmed his strong dedication to preserving and promoting African culture, values, and rich traditions.

In a bold statement shared on his Facebook page, the actor reaffirmed his unwavering dedication to the beliefs and practices of his ancestors.

Criticism of abandoning African traditions

Edochie criticized the growing trend of Africans abandoning their indigenous religions. He argued that many people turn away from their roots due to fear of societal judgment. Labeling this shift as an “abomination,” he made it clear that he would never forsake the ways of his forefathers.

“Africans are running away from their powerful African religion and their originality because they fear what people will say,” he wrote. “I will NEVER abandon the ways of my forefathers. It is built on truth, transparency, and fairness.”



Proudly embracing his traditional titles

He further declared himself a “hardcore traditionalist” and proudly listed his titles, including ISI MMILI JI OFOR, EZEDIKE 1, ALUSI NA EJE UKA, OKALA MMADU OKALA MMUO, and THE KING OF WARRIORS.

Mixed reactions from fans and followers

Edochie’s statement sparked discussions online, with many supporting his stance on preserving African heritage. Some praised his courage in standing firm despite criticism, while others debated the role of tradition in modern society.

A consistent advocate for African heritage

This is not the first time the actor has voiced his views on tradition and culture. Over the years, he has used his platform to advocate for the preservation of African customs. His latest declaration reinforces his belief that heritage should not be abandoned for foreign influences.

Will his message inspire change?

As Nollywood continues to shape cultural narratives, Edochie remains a vocal figure in promoting African identity. Whether his stance will inspire more people to embrace tradition or fuel further debate remains to be seen.

Bruno Mars vows quick debt payoff after Spotify record

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Bruno Mars has set a new record in the music industry, becoming the first artist to surpass 150 million monthly listeners on Spotify.

The achievement, confirmed on January 27, cements his place as one of the most streamed musicians of all time.

He reacts with humor and excitement

The Grammy-winning singer shared his excitement with fans through Instagram Stories. In a lighthearted message, he encouraged listeners to keep streaming his songs.

Adding his signature humour, he wrote, "Keep streaming! I'll be out of debt in no time," a comment that quickly went viral among his supporters.

A testament to his lasting popularity His ability to reach this historic milestone highlights his continued relevance in the music industry. With a career spanning over a decade, he remains a global favourite. Songs like Just the Way You Are, Locked Out of Heaven,



and 24K Magic have stood the test of time, consistently drawing millions of listeners.

The power of streaming on Spotify

Spotify, one of the world's largest streaming platforms, plays a crucial role in shaping modern music trends. Streaming numbers directly impact an artist's reach, earnings, and influence.

His record-breaking achievement proves that digital platforms continue to redefine success in the music industry.

Joining the ranks of streaming giants

Top artists earn millions from

streaming, and Mars' latest feat puts him closer to the highest-paid musicians on Spotify. According to Chart Masters, Drake and Taylor Swift currently lead in Spotify earnings, with \$7,717,904 and \$7,713,106, respectively. With his massive listener count, Mars could soon join them at the top.

Bruno Mars' influence remains strong

This milestone reinforces Mars' status as a dominant force in global music. His ability to evolve, entertain, and connect with audiences has kept him at the forefront of the industry. As his fan base continues to grow, one thing is certain he isn't slowing down anytime soon.

White House revokes spending freeze in face of legal challenges

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

President Donald Trump's administration pulled back a proposed spending freeze that threatened to disrupt hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to U.S. programmes, a White House official said on Wednesday.

The first major domestic policy reversal of the Republican president's new term came after one federal judge had temporarily blocked the freeze and before another judge was due to hear a separate legal challenge. The proposal had thrown the federal government into chaos and disrupted payments to medical and child-care providers.

It says the test flight over the Mojave Desert marked the first time any privately funded plane has hit the landmark speed.

Separately, the White House said Trump will target pro-Palestinian student protesters for deportation in a sign that he is broadening his immigration crackdown to include people based on their political views.

The White House said Trump will sign an executive order that would revoke student visas for college students and other non-citizens who took part in anti-Israel protests that roiled college campuses last year.

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president's new term came after one federal judge had temporarily blocked the freeze and before another judge was due to hear a separate legal challenge. The proposal had thrown the federal government into chaos and disrupted payments to medical and child-care providers.

But supersonic travel hasn't been on offer to airline passengers for some two decades. That is since the Anglo-French.

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students and other non-citizens who took part in anti-Israel protests that roiled college campuses last year.

"We will find you and we will deport you," Trump said in a statement. Trump has been a vocal supporter of Israel during its war with Hamas.

Trump's immigration crackdown until now has focused on deporting migrants who don't have a legal basis to stay in the United States. This order, if implemented, would target those who are in the country legally.

It was the latest boundary-pushing move for a president who has moved quickly to assert power since taking office on Jan. 20. He has halted wide swaths of foreign aid, pardoned supporters who attacked U.S. Capitol police and offered buyouts to thin the ranks of civil-service workers.

Stampede at India's mega-festival leaves 30 people dead

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

At least 30 people in India were trampled to death, with many more injured after a surging crowd spilled out of a police cordon and barrelled into bystanders during a stampede at the world's largest religious gathering on Wednesday.

Deadly crowd incidents are a frequent occurrence at Indian religious festivals, including the Kumbh Mela, which attracts tens of millions of devotees every 12 years to the northern city of Prayagraj.

As pilgrims rushed to participate in a sacred day of ritual bathing, people sleeping and sitting on the ground near the rivers told AFP they were trampled by huge swells of devotees coming towards them in the darkness.

"The entire crowd fell on top of me, trampling me as it moved forward," pilgrim Renu Devi, 48, told AFP. "When the crowd surged, elderly people and women were crushed, and no one came forward to help."

Rescue teams carrying victims from the accident site weaved through piles of clothes, shoes and other discarded belongings. Police were seen carrying stretchers bearing the bodies of victims draped with thick blankets.

"Thirty devotees have unfortunately died," senior police officer Vaibhav Krishna told reporters during an evening news conference at the festival. "Ninety injured were taken to the hospital."

Krishna's briefing came nearly 18 hours after the stampede and was the first official death toll given by authorities.

Festivities had otherwise been allowed to continue almost as normal during the day,



with millions still trekking to the riverbanks to immerse themselves in the water.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the stampede "extremely sad" and offered his "deepest condolences" to relatives of those killed, adding his wishes "for the speedy recovery of all injured."

Dozens of relatives were anxiously waiting for news outside a large tent serving as a purpose-built hospital for the festival near the disaster site.

The six-week Kumbh Mela is the single biggest milestone on the Hindu religious calendar. Wednesday marks one of the holiest days in the festival, when saffron-clad holy men lead millions in a sin-cleansing ritual of bathing at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in tandem with a planetary alignment in the Solar System.

Devotees Gather near Sangam, at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and mythological Saraswati Rivers, to take a holy dip on the eve of "Mauni Amavasya," the second Royal Bathing day of the Kumbh Mela Hindu religious

festival, Jan. 28, 2025, in Allahabad, India. Ritesh Shukla/Getty

Officials had attempted to divert crowds away from the disaster site, instructing them to bathe at other locations.

"We humbly request all devotees do not come to the main bathing spot," said one festival staffer, his voice crackling through his megaphone.

"Please cooperate with security personnel."

But even as news of the stampede spread, crowds pushed through cordons to move towards the river, shrugging off aggressive orders from police to turn back.

Officials from the Uttar Pradesh state government, responsible for staging the festival, said millions had participated in the ritual bathing through the day.

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi blamed the disaster on poor crowd control that prioritised the comfort of distinguished visitors.

Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso finally exit ECOWAS

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

The three military-led West African nations – Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso – have officially withdrawn from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The regional bloc disclosed this in a statement issued on Wednesday, January 29, 2025.

This brings to an end a year-long attempt by ECOWAS to convince the countries to reconsider leaving the bloc.

In the Wednesday statement, ECOWAS said though the withdrawal of the three countries became effective today, its decision to keep its doors open was in the spirit of regional solidarity and in the interest of the people.

However, in the spirit of regional solidarity, it asked members to recognize National passports and identity cards bearing ECOWAS logo held by the citizens of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali and the Republic of Niger, until further notice.

The statement reads, “In the spirit of regional solidarity”, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) asked its member countries to still recognise the national passports of the three exiting countries bearing the ECOWAS logo until further notice.”

It also enjoined members to continue to treat goods and services coming from the three countries in accordance with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and investment policy.

It added, “Allow citizens of the three affected countries to continue to enjoy the right of visa free movement, residence and establishment in accordance with the ECOWAS protocols until further notice.”

More so, it urged members to continue providing full support and cooperation to



ECOWAS officials from the three countries in the course of their assignments for the Community.

The ECOWAS Authority also said its doors remain open for more engagements with the three countries and thus requested its member states to:

“a) recognize national passports and identity cards bearing ECOWAS logo held by the citizens of Burkina Faso, the Republic of Mali and the Republic of Niger, until further notice.

“b) continue to treat goods and services coming from the three countries in accordance with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and investment policy.

“c) allow citizens of the three affected countries to continue to enjoy the right of visa-free movement, residence and establishment in accordance with the ECOWAS protocols until further notice.

“d) provide full support and cooperation to ECOWAS officials from the three countries in the course of their assignments for the Community.”

“These arrangements will be in place until the full determination of the modalities of our future engagement with the three countries by the ECOWAS

Authority of Heads of State and Government.

“The Commission has set up a structure to facilitate discussions on these modalities with each of the three countries. This message is necessary to avoid confusion and disruption in the lives and businesses of our people during this transition period,” the statement concluded.

The departure of the three countries has fractured the region and is leaving the ECOWAS grappling with an uncertain future.

The three junta-led countries formally notified ECOWAS of their plan for an “immediate” withdrawal in January 2024, citing the organisation’s excessive dependence on France in particular.

Paris has become the common enemy of the three juntas, which now favour partnerships with countries such as Russia, Turkey and Iran.

However, ECOWAS required one year’s notice for the departure to be effective — that deadline falls on Wednesday.

The three Sahelian countries have teamed up to form a separate confederation called the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

Alibaba releases AI model it claims surpasses DeepSeek-V3

By Eduardo Baptista

Chinese tech company Alibaba (9988.HK), opens new tab on Wednesday released a new version of its Qwen 2.5 artificial intelligence model that it claimed surpassed the highly-acclaimed DeepSeek-V3.

The unusual timing of the Qwen 2.5-Max's release, on the first day of the Lunar New Year when most Chinese people are off work and with their families, points to the pressure Chinese AI startup DeepSeek's meteoric rise in the past three weeks has placed on not just overseas rivals, but also its domestic competition.

"Qwen 2.5-Max outperforms ... almost across the board GPT-4o, DeepSeek-V3 and Llama-3.1-405B," Alibaba's cloud unit said in an announcement posted on its official WeChat account, referring to OpenAI and Meta's most advanced open-source AI models.

The Jan. 10 release of DeepSeek's AI assistant, powered by the DeepSeek-V3 model, as well as the Jan. 20 release of its R1 model, has shocked Silicon Valley and caused tech shares to plunge, with the Chinese startup's purportedly low development and usage costs prompting investors to question huge spending plans by leading AI firms in the United States.

But DeepSeek's success has also led to a scramble among its domestic competitors to upgrade their own AI models.

Two days after the release of DeepSeek-R1, TikTok owner ByteDance released an update to its flagship AI model, which it claimed outperformed Microsoft-backed OpenAI's o1 in



AIME, a benchmark test that measures how well AI models understand and respond to complex instructions.

This echoed DeepSeek's claim that its R1 model rivalled OpenAI's o1 on several performance benchmarks.

DEEPSEEK VERSUS DOMESTIC COMPETITORS

The predecessor of DeepSeek's V3 model, DeepSeek-V2, triggered an AI model price war in China after it was released last May.

The fact that DeepSeek-V2 was open-source and unprecedentedly cheap, only 1 yuan (\$0.14) per 1 million tokens – or units of data processed by the AI model – led to Alibaba's cloud unit announcing price cuts of up to 97% on a range of models.

Other Chinese tech companies followed suit, including Baidu (9888.HK), opens new tab, which released China's first equivalent to ChatGPT in March 2023, and the country's most valuable internet company Tencent (0700.HK), opens new tab.

Liang Wenfeng, DeepSeek's enigmatic founder, said in a rare interview with Chinese media outlet Waves in July that the startup "did not care" about price wars and that achieving AGI (artificial general intelligence) was its main goal.

OpenAI defines AGI as autonomous systems that surpass humans in most economically valuable tasks.

While large Chinese tech companies like Alibaba have hundreds of thousands of employees, DeepSeek operates like a research lab, staffed mainly by young graduates and doctorate students from top Chinese universities.

Liang said in his July interview that he believed China's largest tech companies might not be well suited to the future of the AI industry, contrasting their high costs and top-down structures with DeepSeek's lean operation and loose management style.

"Large foundational models require continued innovation, tech giants' capabilities have their limits," he said.

Meta's Mark Zuckerberg explores purchase of Washington DC property

By Hannah Murphy and George Hammond in San Francisco

Billionaire founder of social media group seeks to work more closely with Trump administration

Mark Zuckerberg is exploring buying a property in Washington DC, according to two people familiar with the matter, as Meta's billionaire founder steps up his efforts to shape US President Donald Trump's approach to the tech sector.

A potential property had been identified, one of the people said. The 40-year-old already owns multiple properties in California, where Meta is headquartered, as well as a compound in Hawaii.

The move signals Zuckerberg's ambition to work closely with the Trump administration, the people said, as he seeks a role in influencing regulation in areas, such as artificial intelligence, that are of increasing importance to Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram.

Zuckerberg has said he is aiming to make Meta, which has a market capitalisation of \$1.7tn, the "leader" in AI, battling rivals such as OpenAI, Google and Microsoft.

A Meta spokesperson declined to comment.

Mark Zuckerberg

Mark Zuckerberg is seeking to influence regulation in areas that are of increasing importance to Meta's \$1.7tn social media business © AFP via Getty Images Acquiring a property in Washington would be the latest attempt by Zuckerberg to ingratiate himself with Trump, who threatened to jail the tech



billionaire if he interfered in last year's election and dubbed his company an "enemy of the people" for allegedly censoring rightwing voices.

This month, the company launched an unexpected overhaul of its content moderation, ending its third-party fact-checking programme in a move welcomed by Trump and his allies. It also accused the Biden administration of previously pressing the company to censor content related to the pandemic, for example.

Zuckerberg also replaced Meta's global policy chief Nick Clegg with prominent Republican ally Joel Kaplan, and appointed Dana White, a martial arts tycoon and friend of Trump, to Meta's board.

The billionaire attended Trump's inauguration, sitting behind the president alongside tech executives including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

Trump has returned to the White House at a critical juncture for Silicon Valley, as the biggest tech companies compete to be a powerhouse in AI. Zuckerberg said he expected to allocate between \$60bn and \$65bn in capital spending to bolster the company's AI efforts, including expanding its teams

"significantly".

However, Trump's attention has so far been focused on his rivals. Last week, the president announced that OpenAI, SoftBank and Oracle were forming a \$500bn US AI infrastructure joint venture called "Stargate", lauding the initiative as "a resounding declaration of confidence in America's potential under a new president".

Some experts have noted a recent surge in the sale of luxury real estate in Washington DC in what has been dubbed a "Trump bump", as business executives bet that property in the capital will help bolster their influence with the administration.

Venture capitalist and entrepreneur David Sacks, appointed as Trump's new crypto and AI tsar after supporting his campaign, has bought a \$10mn residence in the US capital, according to documentation seen by the Financial Times and a person familiar with the matter. Axios first reported the move on Monday.

Elon Musk, who is leading the Department of Government Efficiency and has been working out of SpaceX's Washington office, has reportedly also been seeking to invest in a DC property, prompting a backlash from locals in the city's Adams Morgan neighbourhood.

The precise contours of Musk's role in the administration have yet to be outlined, but Trump last week denied that Musk would be getting an office in the White House itself.

Additional reporting by Joe Miller in Washington DC

Ferdinand wants Manchester United to sign Osimhen

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Former England International, Rio Ferdinand has urged Manchester United to sign Nigerian striker, Victor Osimhen to bail the team out of its goalscoring problems.

Himself being a Manchester United legend, Ferdinand posited that the on-loan Super Eagles player would be a perfect mentor for struggling forwards, Rasmus Hojlund and Joshua Zirkzee, and help end the goal drought that has plagued the team this term.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, Ferdinand pinpointed the 2023 CAF African Footballer of The Year as the perfect candidate to not only score goals for United but also guide Hojlund, who has struggled to make an impact since his £70m move.

Ferdinand said, "I'd be going to get Osimhen now if we can do it from a financial standpoint. Get him on loan now! Guarantees you someone who can get on the end of things, scores goals, experienced, done it at the top level."

The former England defender's comments came after another disappointing performance from Hojlund in United's narrow 1-0 victory over Fulham at Craven Cottage, where the Danish striker was substituted after 55 minutes.

Osimhen, who is currently on loan at Galatasaray from Napoli, has been in scintillating form, scoring 16 goals and providing five assists in 12 appearances for the Turkish giants.



The Nigeria international's stock has risen considerably following a stellar 2022/23 season with Napoli, where he scored 26 goals to win the Serie A Golden Boot and help the Partenopei claim their first league title in 33 years.

Ferdinand believes United's current striker situation is particularly concerning, with neither Hojlund nor his backup Joshua Zirkzee showing the required quality to lead the line.

"I just feel like because Hojlund was £70m-odd we're expecting the finished article. Unfortunately (he's not). He's a young striker but normally a striker of that age comes in and learns off someone. He's got nobody to learn off," the six-time Premier League winner added.

United's interest in Osimhen comes as new manager Ruben Amorim looks to bolster his attacking options, with the Red Devils managing just 17 goals in 12 league matches this season.

The Old Trafford outfit had previously shown interest in the 24-year-old striker before his €70m move to Napoli in 2020/21, where he has since scored 57 goals in 95 appearances.

Earlier reports suggested United and Napoli were considering a potential swap deal involving Marcus Rashford, but there has been little progress on that front.

Meanwhile, Dusan Vlahovic is expected to leave Juventus at the end of the season, and according to Gazzetta, Joshua Zirkzee and Victor Osimhen are among the possible replacements of the Serbia international at the Allianz Stadium.

Therefore, the Serie A giants are already monitoring the market for possible Vlahovic replacements.

According to Gazzetta, Joshua Zirkzee and Osimhen are the Bianconeri's primary targets.

Champions League: Man City to face Real or Bayern after comeback win

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Manchester City scaled through to the play-off phase of the Champions League after coming from behind to beat Club Brugge 3-1 and finish 22nd of the 24 qualified teams to secure progress.

Man City will face Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in February's play-offs - the price to pay for such a flawed campaign.

City's night had started in worrying fashion when a merchandise kiosk outside the stadium caught fire and it took a stirring second-half revival to ensure their European hopes were not also up in flames.

Pep Guardiola called for "something special" ahead of the game and what he got - in the first half at least - was something quite shocking as City failed to muster any drive, intensity or shots on target before getting stung on the break by Raphael Onyedika.

City knew ahead of time - having surrendered a 2-0 lead at PSG to lose 4-2 last week - that anything other than a win would consign them to an early exit from the competition they won just 18 months ago, but even that could not summon the urgency necessary to hurt Brugge.



Luckily for Guardiola, all that changed after the break when Savinho came on, providing more direct threat and creating gaps, allowing Mateo Kovacic to drive through the heart of midfield and sweep home the leveller.

Everything became a bit more straightforward thereafter as Josko Gvardiol forced young defender Joel Ordonez to turn through his own net before Savinho scored a well-worked third to ease any lingering nerves with 13 minutes to go.

Guardiola: We cannot win Champions League

Man City manager Pep Guardiola:

"When I saw the fire before the game I thought the journalists have

their headlines already, that's for sure. We were out but now we go forward.

"Brugge defend so tight, they go man to man, we need the quality and the spark to make the right action to score - maybe we felt the pressure. In the right moments we got the goals and the new format has been really tough, really difficult.

" In the future important teams might live what we have this season. It's an incredible lesson for the club, for me firstly, and for the players - nothing is for granted."

Asked if Man City can still be considered contenders to win this year's Champions League: "Right now, no. I'm so pragmatic, the reality is the reality.