



Nigerians abroad are enhancing nation's image, says Tinubu

Pg 2

Corps members to receive N77,000 monthly allowance starting February

Pg 7



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Trump threatens BRICS with tariffs if they replace US dollar



Pg 24

The Rise of Nigerian Music: Afrobeats' Global Dominance PAGES 17 & 18



AGF Fagbemi declares IGP's stay in office legal despite reaching retirement age

Pg 9



Nigeria to launch production of HIV test kits, ARVs

Pg 14

WORLD

Pg 33

Russia slams Trump for 'Iron Dome' missile defense shield plan



ENTERTAINMENT

Pg 20

Burna Boy unveils 2025 European tour dates, includes 80K capacity stadium in France



SPORTS

Pg 27

FULL DRAW: Man City to face Real Madrid in UEFA Champions League knockout phase play-off



Nigerians abroad are enhancing nation's image, says Tinubu

By Friday Omosola

President Bola Tinubu has praised the achievements of Nigerians living abroad, stating that their positive contributions serve as an inspiration to younger generations and help enhance the nation's global image.

The President made these remarks yesterday in Abuja while receiving Letters of Credence from newly appointed envoys, including the High Commissioner of Canada to Nigeria, Pasquale Salvaggio; the High Commissioner of Sierra Leone, Julius F. Sandy; the Ambassador of Ethiopia to Nigeria, Legesse Geremew Haile; and the Apostolic Nuncio of the Vatican to Nigeria, Archbishop Michael Francis Crotty.

During his meeting with the Canadian High Commissioner, President Tinubu welcomed reports of Nigerians excelling in Canada across various fields, including education, sports, science, health, and business.

He described their success as a testament to Nigeria's talent and resilience. "It is good to hear how well Nigerians are doing in the diaspora," Tinubu said.

Salvaggio emphasised Nigeria's importance as Canada's largest trading partner in Africa and highlighted his country's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties, particularly in oil and gas, ICT, and agriculture.

"The Nigerian diaspora in Canada is dynamic and strong. We have Nigerians in government, business, science, and sports. We want to build on these ties further," Salvaggio noted.

In his meeting with the Sierra Leonean



High Commissioner, President Tinubu reaffirmed Nigeria's commitment to fostering development across West Africa.

He highlighted Nigeria's longstanding support for Sierra Leone, which has contributed to regional stability and economic progress.

Sandy expressed gratitude for Nigeria's assistance, stating that Nigerian professionals and businesses play a significant role in Sierra Leone's development.

"In Sierra Leone, more Nigerians are doing business than Sierra Leoneans. Most of my teachers in school were Nigerians. There is no difference between a Nigerian and a Sierra Leonean when walking the streets of Freetown," he said.

With the Ethiopian Ambassador, President Tinubu stressed the need for African nations to work together to ensure peace and stability across the continent.

"Our challenge in Africa is insecurity. Insecurity detracts from development. We do not have anybody that will bring peace to us except we work for it," the President stated.

Haile pledged to strengthen Nigeria-Ethiopia relations, particularly in cultural exchanges, citing Ethiopian Airlines as a key driver of collaboration between the two countries.

After receiving the Letter of Credence from the Apostolic Nuncio of the Vatican, Tinubu commended the Catholic Church for its contributions to education and poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

"We highly value education in Nigeria, and the Catholic Church has done a lot in that regard, as well as in fighting poverty. Education reduces ignorance and poverty," he said.

He expressed anticipation for continued engagement with the Vatican's leadership in Nigeria.

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PUBLIC NOTICE COLOUR		SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	=		372,500.00
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QUARTER PAGE	=		106,500.00
14X2	=		118,000.00
10X6	=		261,585.50
10X5	=		255,238.00
10X4	=		206,890.50
10X3	=		179,608.00
9X6	=		254,977.00
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
2X1	=		8,600.00
1X1	=		4,400.00

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10X5	=		237,500.00
10X4	=		192,500.00
10X3	=		171,000.00
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9X5	=		206,000.00
9X4	=		177,500.00
9X3	=		150,000.00
8X6	=		216,000.00
8X3	=		98,500.00
7X4	=		164,002.00
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POLITICAL BLACK & WHITE		SIZE	RATE
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8X4	=		93,500.00
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SPECIAL POSITIONS		SIZE	RATE
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2X6 INSIDE PAGE	=		155,000.00
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4X6 FRONT PAGE	=		2,250,000.00
5X6 FRONT PAGE	=		3,350,000.00
10X6 FRONT PAGE	=		8,250,000.00
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DOUBLE SPREAD HALF COLOUR	=		432,881.00
DOUBLE SPREAD STRIP COLOUR	=		144,294.00
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CENTRE SPREAD HALF PAGE B & W	=		550,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD B & W	=		725,000.00
DOUBLE SPREAD HALF B & W	=		425,000.00
FULL WRAP AROUND	=		15,000,000.00
HALF WRAP AROUND	=		8,500,000.00
HALF PAGE FRONT	=		5,500,000.00

ALLURE RATE		SIZE	RATE	TOTAL
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DOUBLE SPREAD	=			806,250.00
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(IBC) Inside Back Cover	=			376,250.00
(IFC) Inside Front Cover	=			430,000.00
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Full Page	=			430,000.00
10X5	=			295,625.00
Half Page	=			225,000.00
EVENT	=			250,000.00

PICTURE & CAPTION			
SIZE	RATE	7.5% VAT	TOTAL
PHOTO NEWS PAGE 2	50,000.00	3,750.00	53,750.00
PHOTO NEWS (3X3)	30,000.00	2,250.00	32,250.00
PHOTO NEWS (4X4)	53,333.30	4,250.00	57,583.30
PRESS RELEASE (4X4)	30,000.00	2,250.00	32,250.00
EVENT COVERAGE	100,000.00	7,500.00	107,500.00
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FG restates commitment to gas as catalyst for economic growth

By Friday Omosola

In a significant move to boost domestic gas utilization, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited (NNPC Ltd.) and its partners launched five mini-liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plants in Ajaokuta, Kogi State.

This groundbreaking event held yesterday, marks the commencement of construction for the plants, which are designed to enhance Nigeria's energy capacity and economic development.

The five mini-LNG plants include NNPC Prime LNG, NGML/Gasnexus LNG, BUA LNG, Highland LNG, and LNG Arete. NNPC Ltd. holds significant stakes in three of these plants, with 90% in Prime LNG, 50% in NGML/Gasnexus LNG, and 10% in BUA LNG, while Highland LNG and LNG Arete are being developed by other private entities.

Together, these plants will have a combined capacity of 97 million standard cubic feet of gas per day (mmscf/d).

This collaboration between NNPC Ltd. and private investors represents a strategic leap toward energy sufficiency, off-grid industrial support, and a reduction in carbon emissions across the nation.

The mini-LNG plants are expected to revolutionize gas transportation, making energy more accessible to households, businesses, and industries, particularly in regions lacking gas pipeline infrastructure.

Mele Kyari, the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) of NNPC Ltd., emphasised the importance of natural gas in powering Nigeria's industrialization, job creation, and economic diversification.



He reiterated the company's commitment to the FG's gas-to-power initiatives, which aim to increase energy access, promote economic growth, and contribute to national GDP.

Additionally, the plants are expected to support the FG's flare-down goals and provide cleaner, more affordable energy options.

Kyari credited President Bola Tinubu's support for advancing gas utilization and infrastructure projects as essential for achieving energy security and industrial growth in Nigeria.

The Minister of State for Petroleum Resources (Gas), Ekperikpe Ekpo, lauded the development as a milestone for Nigeria's oil and gas industry.

Ekpo reaffirmed the FG's support for the initiative and highlighted the strategic role of natural gas in driving industrialization, reducing Nigeria's carbon footprint, and improving the well-being of its citizens.

Kogi State Governor, Usman Ododo, appreciated the FG for

selecting Ajaokuta for the mini-LNG plants.

He described the move as a step forward in achieving Nigeria's energy security and underscored the potential economic opportunities the plants would generate for the state, including job creation and investment opportunities.

Governor Ododo also pledged full support from the state government to ensure the success of the project.

Pius Akinyelure, Chairman of NNPC Ltd., described the launch as a transformative development in Nigeria's energy sector, aligning with the FG's Renewed Hope Agenda.

Akinyelure noted that the project signals a new era of sustainable energy, energy security, and industrial growth for Nigeria.

The completion of these mini-LNG plants is set to reshape Nigeria's energy landscape, ensuring cleaner and more accessible energy for millions while driving economic growth and development across the country.

Bagudu: Nigeria's economic future brightens as fiscal, monetary policies align

By Friday Omosola

The Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Abubakar Bagudu, has praised the growing cooperation between Nigeria's fiscal and monetary policy authorities, emphasising that this collaboration is crucial for the country's economic progress.

Speaking at the Central Bank of Nigeria's Monetary Policy Forum in Abuja yesterday Bagudu highlighted the significant strides made over the past 18 months in aligning the goals of both sectors.

He attributed much of the success to President Bola Tinubu's deep understanding of the complexities between fiscal and monetary policies and his ability to balance them in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda.

Bagudu commended the leadership of the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun, and the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Olayemi Cardoso, noting their wealth of experience and past work with the president, which has been instrumental in this collaboration.

Acknowledging that fiscal and monetary policies do not always align, Bagudu stated that such divergences were healthy, as they enable necessary debates on priorities.

He emphasised the importance of increasing the revenue-to-GDP ratio while balancing inflation with economic growth, particularly in an inclusive manner.

"The central bank and the fiscal authorities are clear in their priorities and objectives, and no doubt disagree. But that's how it should be," Bagudu explained.



"We also have to deal with balancing inflation and driving economic growth, especially in an inclusive manner, as outlined in the Renewed Hope Agenda."

The minister pointed out that while the fiscal authority advocates for greater investment in domestic production, particularly in agriculture and solid minerals, the central bank has maintained its stance against direct intervention in these sectors.

Despite this, Bagudu stressed the vital role of investing in agriculture, citing security gains in regions like the Northwest and Northeast, which have improved agricultural production and contributed to lower food prices across the country.

Notably, Bagudu highlighted the success of states like Borno and Kaduna, where agricultural output has surged, with Borno's harvests now comparable to pre-Boko Haram levels.

He urged continued focus on boosting domestic production to further reduce inflationary pressures.

"We might have been disappointed

with some of the interventions in the past, but maybe we have gained knowledge to calibrate and ensure that we do better," he said, emphasising the strong connection between domestic output, productivity gains, and inflation control.

Bagudu also reassured that the administration's economic reforms are producing results and setting the country on a path toward inclusive growth and development.

He shared insights from recent meetings with global business leaders and rating agencies, noting their recognition of Nigeria's bold reforms.

"We met with three ministers in Saudi Arabia who acknowledged that we are undertaking reforms even bolder than theirs," Bagudu revealed. "They recognize we have done more in the last 18 months, and our challenges have been even greater due to the election."

Bagudu expressed confidence in the ongoing collaboration between fiscal and monetary authorities, stating that it will continue to evolve into a policy mix that will foster deflation and generate double-digit inclusive growth.

Africa CDC urges leaders to increase investment in public health amid growing crisis

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) has called on African leaders to implement innovative financing mechanisms and ramp up domestic investment in public health, warning that failure to act could undo years of progress and lead to catastrophic health and economic consequences for the continent.

In a statement released on Friday, January 31, the Africa CDC highlighted an alarming increase in health emergencies across the continent.

The number of outbreaks surged from 153 in 2022-2023 to 242 in 2024, raising concerns about the potential for another pandemic to emerge from Africa.

These challenges are compounded by a global shift in priorities, with wealthy nations increasingly turning inward and reducing development assistance.

Notably, the United States recently announced a 90-day pause in foreign aid, exacerbating the crisis.

Without urgent intervention, the Africa CDC projects that the continent could face a significant reversal in health gains, with morbidity and mortality rates potentially returning to levels seen in the early 2000s.

This could result in an estimated two to four million additional deaths per year from preventable and treatable diseases.

The human cost of such a setback would be staggering, with Africa



potentially losing billions of dollars annually and an additional 39 million people being pushed into poverty.

“Africa is facing an unprecedented convergence of crises that threaten to undo decades of progress in health security,” the statement read. “This is not just an African crisis—it is a global crisis in the making.”

In response to the challenges posed by the reduction in international aid, Africa CDC Director-General, Dr. Jean Kaseya, took immediate action by engaging with the U.S. administration and advocating for a waiver on humanitarian aid. His efforts led to the successful continuation of life-saving interventions. However, the Africa CDC warned that this was just one battle and that African leaders must act decisively to protect their populations.

“We must implement innovative financing mechanisms and increase domestic investment in public health,” Dr. Kaseya said.

“This moment should serve as a wake-up call for African leaders to take control of their health futures.”

The statement also emphasised the critical need for peace and stability in regions facing severe health challenges.

One of the most urgent examples of this is the ongoing crisis in Goma, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where insecurity and mass displacement have contributed to widespread health emergencies, including the deadly mutation of the Mpox virus. The epidemic has already claimed thousands of lives, particularly among children and young people, and is spreading rapidly across 21 African countries.

The Africa CDC has worked tirelessly to secure vaccines and essential health supplies for Goma and the broader eastern DRC, but ongoing conflict has made it impossible to deliver these life-saving resources to those in need.

Dr. Kaseya issued a stark message to African leaders: “To my fellow African leaders: End this unnecessary war. If you fail to act, it will not be bullets that kill us—it will be major outbreaks and pandemics emerging from this region, sparing no one while devastating economies and businesses. Our collective survival depends on urgent and decisive action. Let us end this war. Let us choose peace. Let us choose life.”

The Africa CDC’s plea underscores the growing urgency for African governments to take a proactive approach to public health, increase investment in local health systems, and ensure the stability necessary to combat the looming health crises threatening the continent’s future.

NAF, presidency partner to boost personnel capacity through training

By Friday Omosola

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) has strengthened its commitment to personnel training and capacity development through a strategic partnership with the Presidency.

This collaboration was reaffirmed during a courtesy visit by the Senior Special Assistant to the President (SSAP) on Industrial Training and Development Initiatives, Adamson Ayinde, to the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Hasan Abubakar yesterday.

Discussions during the visit focused on providing industrial training opportunities for NAF personnel, particularly those nearing retirement, in key areas such as aerospace technology,



information and communication technology (ICT), and agriculture.

Ayinde stressed the importance of equipping retiring personnel with practical skills to transition into civilian

life successfully.

Air Marshal Abubakar welcomed the initiative, noting that it aligns with the NAF's structured approach to continuous training for both serving and retiring personnel.

He emphasised that capacity-building efforts would not only benefit individuals but also contribute to national development.

Both parties expressed their commitment to consolidating the partnership, ensuring that NAF personnel gain valuable skills that enhance their post-service careers while supporting the broader objectives of national growth.

Corps members to receive N77,000 monthly allowance starting February

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Director-General of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Brigadier General Yushau Ahmed, has announced a significant increase in the monthly allowance for corps members, confirming that starting in February 2025, they will receive N77,000 instead of the current N33,000.

Ahmed made the announcement on Thursday, January 30, during an address to the 2024 Batch 'C' Stream II corps members in Katsina State.

He explained that the allowance increment is part of the 2025 Federal Government budget and would take effect once the budget is passed.

“Although this month (January) has already ended, once the budget is passed, by next month (February), you will start



receiving N77,000 instead of the usual N33,000,” Ahmed stated.

The increase comes as part of the government's ongoing efforts to improve the welfare of corps members and incentivise their service to the nation. Ahmed also reassured the corps members that their safety and well-being remain a top priority.

Addressing concerns about security, the NYSC DG affirmed that no corps member would be posted to areas with security challenges.

“We will not send our corps members to any areas with security threats. Wherever we send them, they should be assured that the place is safe and secure for them to serve,” he said.

The announcement of the allowance increase has been welcomed by many, as it signifies the government's recognition of the vital role that corps members play in nation-building, as well as a response to rising living costs.

The NYSC continues to provide young Nigerians with an opportunity to contribute to the country's development while also enhancing their own personal growth.

EU grants €300,000 to strengthen Eurocham Nigeria's advocacy, engagement By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The European Union (EU) has announced a €300,000 grant over three years to strengthen the European Chamber of Commerce (Eurocham) Nigeria's secretariat, enhance its advocacy efforts, and boost engagement with key stakeholders.

EU Ambassador to Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States, Gautier Mignot, unveiled the grant during Eurocham's 25th Annual Stakeholders Conference in Lagos.

He described the financial support as a significant step in fostering stronger EU-Nigeria trade relations.

"This financial support will allow the Chamber to strengthen its Secretariat's administrative capacity and expand its external activities and advocacy work on behalf of its members," Mignot said.



The grant is part of the EU's broader strategy to improve policy dialogue and strategic engagement between Eurocham, local governments, policymakers, and businesses.

Mignot highlighted that the support would help create a more favourable business environment, allowing

Eurocham to further promote trade and investment between Europe and Nigeria.

He also noted the EU's continued role as Nigeria's largest trading partner and a key source of foreign direct investment.

The initiative is aligned with the EU Global Gateway Strategy, which focuses on enhancing infrastructure and addressing key areas such as digital skills, e-governance, and renewable energy projects in Nigeria.

Mignot pointed to transformative projects like the Omi Eko water transportation initiative, as well as investments in agriculture, local vaccine manufacturing, and sustainable transportation, as critical priorities for the future.

Moghalu urges African nations to prioritise healthcare funding from own resources

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

Former presidential candidate and economist, Kingsley Moghalu, has called for African countries to focus on funding healthcare from their own resources instead of relying on foreign aid.

In a statement shared on Friday via X, Moghalu criticised the continent's dependence on external assistance for healthcare interventions, calling it an unsustainable strategy.

His remarks follow the U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organisation under former President Donald Trump, which Moghalu described as a "wake-up call" for African nations to take greater responsibility for their healthcare systems.



"African countries must make funding for healthcare from their own resources a priority," Moghalu said.

"Reliance on foreign aid for healthcare interventions is not wisdom."

He also highlighted the misallocation of resources in many African nations,

pointing out that the aid received is often insignificant compared to the funds squandered on political luxuries and corruption.

"What many African countries receive in aid is nothing compared to the resources that are wasted on the comfort of politicians or corruptly misappropriated," he stated.

While acknowledging that some African countries have shown better fiscal responsibility, Moghalu urged governments across the continent to treat healthcare funding as a critical national priority, ensuring the long-term sustainability and independence of their healthcare systems.

AGF Fagbemi declares IGP's stay in office legal despite reaching retirement age

By Friday Omosola



The Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, has stated that the continued stay in office of the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, is both legal and lawful.

Fagbemi's remark comes amid the ongoing controversy over Egbetokun's tenure, which was sparked by activist and former presidential candidate Omoyele Sowore.

In a statement on Thursday, Fagbemi clarified that Egbetokun's continued stay in office is legal, contrary to claims that he should no longer remain in

office.

He explained that Egbetokun's appointment, which took effect on the 31st of October, 2023, would have ended upon his attainment of 60 years of age on the 4th of September, 2024.

However, Fagbemi noted that the Police Act had been amended before his retirement age, allowing the occupant of the office to remain in position and complete the original four-year term granted under Section 7(6) of the Act, regardless of having reached the age of 60.

As a result, the tenure of

Egbetokun has been statutorily extended until the 31st of October, 2027, to enable him to complete the four-year term granted to him.

For the avoidance of doubt, Fagbemi emphasised that Egbetokun's continued stay in office aligns with the amended provisions of the Police Act of 2024, which allow the occupant of the IGP office to serve a four-year term, starting from the date of his appointment—in this case, the 31st of October, 2023.

“This advisory is necessary for the guidance of the general public”, Fagbemi said.

JAMB announces postponement of 2025 UTME registration

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has confirmed the postponement of the 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) registration, which was originally set to begin on Friday, January 31.

The registration will now commence on Monday, February 3.

In a statement posted on the official X handle on Friday, JAMB's Public Communication Advisor, Fabian Benjamin, explained that the delay was necessary to allow for important adjustments to the registration process.

These adjustments include addressing issues surrounding the suspension of law programmes at certain Nigerian universities, as well as the discovery of fraudulent facilities posing as approved Computer-Based Test (CBT) centres.

Benjamin noted that the suspension of law programmes in some universities, following directives from the Council for Legal Education, was one of the factors leading to the change in schedule.

He also mentioned that some CBT centres had attempted to gain approval by using deceitful means, prompting the Board to review and revoke their certification.

In light of these developments, JAMB apologised for any inconvenience caused to prospective candidates and other stakeholders.

The Board reassured all involved that the registration process would proceed smoothly once the necessary adjustments were made.



"These changes have arisen due to the recent suspension of law programmes at select universities, as communicated by the Council for Legal Education," Benjamin said.

"Additionally, some CBT centres have been found to have submitted misleading documentation for approval, necessitating further scrutiny."

JAMB also stressed that the extra time would allow for the correction of these issues, ensuring a seamless experience for all candidates.

On January 29, the Board had announced that it would no longer oversee the admissions process for the Law programme at eight universities, following the suspension of the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) programme by the Council of Legal Education for the 2025/2026 academic session.

The affected institutions include Kwara State University (Malete), Bingham University (Karu), Redeemers University (Ede),

Western Delta University (Oghara), Taraba State University (Jalingo), Arthur Jarvis University (Akpabuyo), Alex Ekwueme Federal University (Ndufu-Alike), and the Nigerian Police Academy (Wudil).

In a bid to help candidates prepare for the upcoming examination, JAMB has advised them to obtain their National Identification Number (NIN) and secure a unique phone number that has not previously been used on the platform to generate their profile codes.

In addition, the Board has selected The Lekki Headmaster by Kabir Alabi Garba as the recommended reading text for the 2025 UTME Use of English paper, urging candidates to familiarise themselves with it ahead of the exam.

As JAMB prepares for the revised registration timeline, prospective UTME candidates are encouraged to stay updated and follow the official JAMB channels for further instructions.

Tinubu, APC focused on dismantling Opposition – Atiku By Friday Omosola

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar has alleged that President Bola Tinubu and his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), are more focused on weakening the opposition parties than addressing governance, economic issues, or national development.

In a statement on his X page yesterday, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) said he became the target of vicious attacks over his remarks during the recently concluded two-day National Conference on Strengthening Democracy in Nigeria, held in Abuja.

Earlier, The New Daily Prime reported that the APC, in a statement by its National Publicity Secretary, Felix Morka, described Atiku as Nigeria's most



prolific electoral litigator and dismissed his position as baseless and misguided.

Atiku further stated that the arrest and baseless prosecution of Yele Sowore, publisher of Sahara Reporters, marked

the latest chapter in this unrelenting campaign.

He wrote: “When I made the clarion call that Tinubu and the APC were devoting their energies to the systematic harassment, intimidation, and dismantling of the opposition, all in service of their grand design for a one-party autocracy, I became the target of vicious attacks.

“The arrest and baseless prosecution of Yele Sowore is the latest chapter in this unrelenting campaign. Now, they have seen fit to add Professor Usman Yusuf — an outspoken critic of this administration — into their grim roster. At the pace they are going, it seems they may soon find themselves contending with the incarceration of every one of us.”

Ned Nwoko defects from PDP to APC

By Friday Omosola

Senator Ned Nwoko, representing Delta North in the National Assembly, has left the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and joined the All Progressives Congress (APC).

Nwoko, who defected after months of speculation attributed his action to deepening internal divisions within the PDP, describing the party's factionalization as irreconcilable.

In a resignation letter to the PDP Chairman of Ward 8, Aniocha North Local Government Area, Delta State, Nwoko stated that his decision to leave the party was made in the best interest of those he served.

He emphasised his continued commitment to the progress and prosperity of both the state and the nation.

Nwoko reassured PDP members and his constituents of his unwavering dedication to statesmanship, unity, and the



advancement of Delta North.

The statement read: “I write to formally resign my membership from the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a party I have proudly served as a foundation member since 1999.

“My decision to resign is due to the deep divisions and factionalization within the party. These divisions have made it increasingly difficult to unite and pursue the collective interests of our people.

“Just this week, on the 29th of January, top party functionaries descended to the lowest levels by physically fighting among themselves due to these irreconcilable factions.

“I am also grateful for the platform the PDP provided me to contest the 2022/2023 senatorial election, which allowed me to directly engage with the people of my constituency and present my vision for a brighter future.

“However, during my campaign, I made solemn and actionable promises to my constituents—commitments I take seriously as a servant of the people.

“Unfortunately, the current structure of the party in our state has not been conducive to fulfilling these promises. After careful consideration, I have concluded that stepping away from the party is necessary to honour my obligations to my people.”

PDP governors express concern over Tinubu's macroeconomic policies

By Friday Omosola

Governors of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) have expressed deep concern over the macroeconomic policies of the Federal Government (FG), which they say have worsened hardship across the nation.

In a communiqué issued in Asaba, the Delta State capital, after a meeting attended by 12 PDP governors, they called on the FG to urgently revisit and reform these policies to mitigate their adverse effects on Nigerians.

The communiqué was signed by Bauchi State Governor and Chairman of the PDP Governors' Forum, Bala Mohammed.

The governors used the meeting as a platform for peer review of developmental initiatives across PDP-governed states and a critical assessment of national and party affairs as the year 2024 came to a close.

They commended their colleagues for implementing people-centred policies and programmes aimed at alleviating hardship while laying the foundation for sustainable development in their respective states.

They also welcomed ongoing efforts to resolve the dispute within the National Working Committee



(NWC) over the position of National Secretary.

Reaffirming their support for the Court of Appeal judgment on the matter, they advised the NWC to take immediate steps toward implementing the ruling.

After reviewing all legal requirements for convening a valid National Executive Council (NEC) meeting, the Forum recommended that the NWC reschedule the NEC meeting for March 13, 2025.

The governors commended the nation's Armed Forces and security agencies for their relentless efforts in safeguarding the country, particularly in countering banditry and insurgency.

However, they expressed grave concern over the resurgence of non-state actors engaging in violent activities and called for the

strengthening of the nation's security architecture to decisively address these threats.

They expressed gratitude to the host governor, Sheriff Oborewori, as well as the Government and People of Delta State, for their warm hospitality and for facilitating a successful, well-structured, and impactful meeting.

They also praised Governor Oborewori for his notable achievements in infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, empowerment programs, and security.

Reassuring Nigerians, the governors emphasised that despite prevailing economic and security challenges, the PDP remains committed to restoring the country to the pre-2015 era—characterized by affordable living costs, security, national unity, and economic prosperity.

Matawalle warns Amaechi to stop inciting violence or face legal consequences

By Friday Omosola

In response to a controversial statement made by former Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, the Minister of State for Defence, Bello Matawalle, has issued a stern warning.

Amaechi, speaking at a recent conference in Abuja, claimed that Nigerian politicians must ‘steal, maim, and kill’ to retain power, adding that President Bola Tinubu would not relinquish power to the younger generation without a struggle.

Matawalle, through a statement from the Ministry of Defence’s Director of Press and Public Relations, Henshaw Ogubike, condemned Amaechi’s remarks as reckless and incendiary.

He argued that the statement was designed to incite violence, undermine the leadership of President Tinubu, and threaten the nation’s peace and security.

The minister further stated that Amaechi’s words insulted the intelligence of Nigerians and posed a serious risk of radicalizing the youth, potentially destabilizing the country.

Matawalle said: “It is both reckless and dangerous for a former public office holder to make such inflammatory remarks. At a time when the government is working tirelessly to consolidate national unity and security, no responsible leader should be fanning the flames of violence and political unrest.”

The Minister also warned against efforts to deceive young Nigerians with distorted views of violence and



chaos, stressing that Nigeria is a sovereign country ruled by law, not a lawless territory where power is taken by force.

“Let me make it clear: the security agencies are on high alert. Any individual or group found inciting violence or attempting to destabilize this nation will face the full force of the law. We will not tolerate any form of subversive rhetoric that seeks to undermine national unity or incite lawlessness,” Matawalle warned.

The Minister reminded Amaechi that power is gained through democratic processes, not through intimidation, violence, or lawlessness.

He emphasised that President Tinubu’s administration is dedicated to maintaining peace, upholding democratic values, and ensuring the security of all Nigerians.

“The President’s commitment to our nation’s unity and progress is unwavering,” he stated. “Having lived through both military rule and democratic governance, he will never compromise the democracy he has

worked tirelessly to protect.”

Pointing to the accomplishments of the current administration in a short period, Matawalle confidently predicted that President Tinubu would secure a decisive win in the 2027 Presidential election.

He urged Nigerians to trust in the leadership of President Tinubu GCFR, advising them to ignore the harsh criticisms from Amaechi and his allies, whom he described as politically disconnected and out of touch with the nation’s development.

“Amaechi and others who think they can manipulate our youth into chaos should rethink their actions. This government will not fold its arms and allow any individual to disrupt the peace and stability of Nigeria,” he added.

The statement also noted that the Ministry of Defence, working with relevant security agencies, will continue to monitor any activities that threaten public peace and ensure that those responsible face strict penalties.

Nigeria to launch production of HIV test kits, ARVs

By Helen Okechukwu

The Director-General of the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), Dr. Temitope Ilori, has announced plans to commence the local production of HIV test kits and antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in Nigeria.

According to Dr. Ilori, the initiative is expected to begin before the end of 2025 as part of the government's strategy to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2030.

She made this known on Friday during the inauguration of the Kwara Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) and Paediatric ART Acceleration Committee in Ilorin.

Dr. Ilori highlighted several key measures aimed at strengthening HIV response efforts.

These include increasing enrollment in the National Health Insurance Scheme, mobilizing resources, enhancing advocacy, and supporting vaccine research and development.

She emphasized that the newly established committee is focused on ensuring a future free from AIDS and sustaining the progress made in HIV response.

Providing statistical insights from UNAIDS 2023, Dr. Ilori revealed that approximately 140,000 children aged 0-14 are currently living with HIV.

Additionally, the country records 22,000 new infections and 15,000 AIDS-related deaths annually.

“Despite progress, PMTCT and paediatric HIV coverage remains below 33%, far from the 95% target.

She noted that the Global Alliance Action Plan to End AIDS in Children,



launched in 2021 with full financial backing, has yet to achieve optimal coverage.

While commending Kwara State's HIV prevalence rate of 0.8%, which is below the national average of 1.4%, she pointed out the persistent disparities, particularly affecting women more than men.

“Women are disproportionately affected (1.3%) compared to men (0.4%), and some local governments require targeted interventions to maintain and further reduce prevalence rates,” she added.

Dr. Ilori stressed that eliminating mother-to-child transmission is a critical goal and called for collaborative efforts to compile a comprehensive list of children born to HIV-positive parents to facilitate nationwide paediatric ART access.

She also addressed concerns about Nigeria's reliance on foreign donor funding for HIV programmes, particularly in light of the recent 90-day suspension of foreign aid.

While she reassured that HIV services

remain unaffected, she underscored the importance of government-led sustainability initiatives.

To mitigate dependence on external funding, she outlined government strategies, including integrating HIV services into the national health system, strengthening government-led structures, and ensuring timely release of state and local government funds for HIV programmes.

Additionally, she emphasized the role of civil society organizations in advocacy and service delivery and production.

Kwara State's Deputy Governor, Mr. Kayode Alabi, reaffirmed the state government's commitment to the committee's success.

As the Chairman of the Kwara State AIDS Control Agency, he expressed confidence that mother-to-child HIV transmission would soon be eliminated through the committee's efforts and production of test kits.

Uganda to receive \$1 million from WHO to tackle Ebola outbreak

By **Helen Okechukwu**

To control the spread of the recent Ebola outbreak in Uganda, the World Health Organisation pledges to support the national health authorities of Uganda with \$1 million from its Contingency Fund to accelerate early action.

This was contained in a document made available on their website on Thursday, following its confirmation of the outbreak.

In its effort to bring the virus under control, WHO noted that senior public health experts will be deployed to work with mobilised country office staff.

Among its responses to tackle this surge are the supplies of medical equipment and personal protective gear, which are to be delivered to Uganda from its Emergency Response Hub in Nairobi.

The statement read partly, “While there are no licensed vaccines for the Sudan virus disease, WHO is coordinating with developers to deploy candidate vaccines as an addition to the other public health measures. The vaccines will be deployed once all administrative and regulatory approvals are obtained.

“So far, one confirmed case—a nurse from Mulo National Referral Hospital in the capital Kampala—has been reported. No



other health workers or patients have shown symptoms of the disease. A total of 45 contacts, including health workers and family members of the confirmed case (deceased), have been identified and are currently under close monitoring. The identification of the case in a densely populated urban area requires a rapid and intense response.

Meanwhile, there have been eight reported outbreaks of the Sudan virus disease. In 2022, five cases were recorded in Uganda and three in Sudan.

While declaring the outbreak, WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, pledges its support to the country’s government.

Dr. Kasonde Mwinga, WHO

Representative in Uganda, reaffirmed its assurance in tackling the outbreak.

“Banking on the existing expertise, we are accelerating all efforts, including expertise, resources, and tools to save lives and bring the outbreak to a halt swiftly,” Mwinga noted.

Sudan virus disease is a severe, often fatal illness affecting humans and other primates that is due to Orthoebolavirus sudanense (Sudan virus), a viral species belonging to the same genus of the virus causing Ebola virus disease.

The mortality of the virus has increased from 41% to 100% in past outbreaks with no actual approved treatments or vaccines, but early detection has significantly reduced deaths from Sudan virus disease.

WHO: Niger declared free from river blindness disease

By **Helen Okechukwu**

Niger has successfully become the first African country and the fifth globally to be declared free from onchocerciasis, a deadly parasitic disease known as river blindness.

Onchocerca volvulus is the parasite that causes river blindness and is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected black fly, mainly found near rivers.

Marking a significant breakthrough, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organisation Director-General, on Thursday congratulated the nation for its tireless dedication in attaining this milestone.

“I congratulate Niger for its commitment to liberating its population from this blinding, stigmatizing illness that causes so much human suffering among the poorest.

“This success is yet another testament to the remarkable strides we have made against neglected tropical diseases and offers hope to other nations still battling onchocerciasis, demonstrating that elimination is possible.”

Onchocerciasis is the second leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide, after trachoma. It primarily affects rural populations in sub-Saharan Africa, Yemen, and parts of Latin America.

To combat this disease, Niger witnessed a significant reduction in onchocerciasis transmission after implementing vector control measures between 1976 and 1989 under the WHO Onchocerciasis Control Programme in West Africa (OCP).

The WHO document noted, “Following the donation of ivermectin by Merck, Sharpe & Dohme (MSD), areas still affected by lymphatic filariasis (LF)



underwent mass drug administration (MDA) with ivermectin and albendazole from 2008 to 2019, followed by surveillance.

This intervention successfully halted the transmission of the *Onchocerca volvulus* parasite.

In 2014, preliminary assessments were introduced after stopping LF MDA in most regions. Reports entomological and epidemiological surveys showed a reduction in prevalence from approximately 60% to 0.02% after administering the combination of medicine and vector control.

However, this achievement was made possible through the combined support and resources of the Nigerien government, WHO, and various non-governmental organizations.

The WHO highlighted that persistent disease monitoring contributed to strategic adjustments and ensured the effectiveness of the intervention.

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, stated, “Onchocerciasis has long caused immense human suffering. It has also

impeded the economic development of affected communities, driving people away from rivers, which are often lifelines for livelihoods.

“Niger’s success ends this burden for its people. It also positions Niger as a model for the elimination of neglected tropical diseases in Africa. The country previously demonstrated its leadership in public health by eliminating Guinea-worm disease in 2013. Today, it takes another historic step forward.”

Fifty-four countries, including Niger, have successfully eliminated Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) globally.

The other countries declared free from onchocerciasis are Colombia (2013), Ecuador (2014), Guatemala (2016), and Mexico (2015).

In WHO African Region, about 21 countries has eliminated one of the NTD.

“Onchocerciasis is the second neglected tropical disease eliminated in Niger; the country was certified free of dracunculiasis (Guinea-worm disease) transmission in 2013.”

The Rise of Nigerian Music: Afrobeats' Global Dominance

By Friday Omosola



Over the past decade, Nigerian music has experienced a remarkable surge in popularity, with Afrobeats emerging as a major attraction on the global music scene. This genre, characterized by its unique blend of traditional Yoruba music, jazz, fuji, and funk, has captivated audiences worldwide, catapulting Nigerian artists to international stardom.

Early Beginnings

Afrobeats' global rise can be traced back way to the 1960s and 1970s, when legendary musicians like Fela Kuti and King Sunny Adé pioneered the genre. Their innovative fusion of traditional Nigerian music with Western influence laid the groundwork for future generations of artists.

The New Wave

In the 2010s, a new wave of Nigerian artists emerged, determined to take Afrobeats to the global stage. Artists like Wizkid, Davido, and Tiwa Savage achieved widespread success in this entertainment space, collaborating with international acts like Drake, Beyoncé, and Kanye West. These collaborations not only introduced Afrobeats to new audiences but also lent credibility to the genre.

Global Recognition

Nigerian music's global recognition can be attributed to several factors:

Digital Platforms: The proliferation of digital music platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube has made it easier for Nigerian artists to connect with a global audience. These platforms allow local

musicians to reach both domestic and international audiences without the need for physical records or CDs

- **Social Media:** Social media platforms have enabled artists to connect directly with fans, promoting their music and building a loyal following.
- **Collaborations:** Strategic collaborations with international artists have helped many Nigerian musicians tap into new markets and gain exposure.
- **Cultural Exchange:** The increasing popularity of African culture worldwide has created a fertile ground for Afrobeats to flourish.

Continue reading
from next page

Cont from page 17

Breakthrough Artists

Several Nigerian artists have achieved significant success on the global stage:

- **Wizkid:** With his unique sound and collaborations with Drake and Beyoncé, Wizkid has become a household name.

- **Davido:** Davido's energetic live performances and hits like "Fall" and "If" have endeared him to fans worldwide.

- **Burna Boy:** Burna Boy's popularly acclaimed album "African Giant" and collaborations with international artists like Jorja Smith have solidified his position as a global Afrobeats ambassador.

- **Tiwa Savage:** Tiwa Savage's soulful voice and empowering lyrics have made her a beloved icon in the music industry.

Impact of Afrobeats on African Culture

Afrobeats has not only put Nigerian music on the global map but has also played a significant role in promoting African culture worldwide. The genre's unique blend of traditional and modern sounds has helped to showcase the richness and diversity of African

music.

Afrobeats and Social Commentary.

Many Afrobeats artists have used their music as a platform for social commentaries, addressing issues like corruption, inequality, and social justice. Artists like Fela Kuti and Burna Boy have been vocal about their criticisms of government policies and social injustices, using their music to raise awareness and inspire change.

Role of Women in Afrobeats

Women have played a significant role in the development and growth of Afrobeats. Artists like Tiwa Savage, Yemi Alade, and Simi have broken down barriers and paved the way for future generations of female musicians. Their music has not only showcased their talent but also addressed issues like gender equality and women's empowerment.

Challenges

As Afrobeats continues to grow in popularity, there are several challenges and opportunities that the genre will face. One of the major challenges is the need for better infrastructure and support systems for artists, including access to funding, training, and resources. There is also a need for greater recognition and compensation for

artists, as well as protection for their intellectual property rights.

The Future of Afrobeats in Nigeria

The Future of Afrobeats in Nigeria

As Nigerian music continues to gain momentum, several factors will shape the future of Afrobeats:

- **Innovation:** Artists will need to continually innovate and push the boundaries of the genre to maintain its global appeal.

- **Collaborations:** Strategic collaborations with international artists will remain crucial in expanding Afrobeats' global reach.

- **Digital Platforms:** The continued growth of digital music platforms will provide Nigerian artists with unprecedented opportunities to reach new audiences.

Conclusion

Nigerian music's global takeover is a testament to the country's rich cultural heritage and the innovative spirit of its artists. As Afrobeats continues to captivate audiences worldwide, it is clear that Nigerian music is here to stay. With its unique sound, energetic live performances, and empowering lyrics, Afrobeats is poised to remain a major force on the global music scene for years to come.

Singer Tems cancels Rwanda show over M23 crisis

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Popular Nigerian singer Temilade Openiyi, better known as Tems, has announced the cancellation of her upcoming concert in Kigali over Rwanda's support of the M23 armed group waging an offensive in eastern DR Congo.

The announcement came amid international condemnation of Rwanda's backing of the M23 group, which seized control of the city of Goma this week in the Democratic Republic of Congo's mineral-rich east.

Grammy award-winning singer, revealed in a post on X that she was cancelling a concert at BK Arena in the Rwandan capital on March 22.

"So I recently promoted my show in Rwanda without realising that there is ongoing conflict between Rwanda and Congo," she wrote.

"I never ever intend to be insensitive to real-world issues, and I sincerely apologize if this came across that way," said Tems, who became the first Nigerian singer to win a Grammy in 2023.

"I simply had no idea this was going on. My heart goes out to those affected."

The post came hours after M23 leaders vowed to "continue the march of liberation all the way" to the DR Congo capital Kinshasa.

Both countries have a history of conflict that dates back to 1996.

January, however, opened up a new spate of conflict between both East African countries.



The DRC cut off relations with Rwanda following its invasion of Goma by rebels who were reportedly backed by the Rwandan Government, which led to the displacement of 400,000 people.

DR Congo has accused Rwanda of waging an offensive to profit from the region's mineral wealth. A report by UN experts in July supported these claims, finding that Rwanda has thousands of troops in eastern DR Congo — and holds "de facto control" over the M23.

Rwanda has denied the accusations.

President Paul Kagame has never admitted military involvement but has maintained the fighting cannot end until a DRC-based armed group, the FDLR, created by former Hutu leaders who massacred Tutsis during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, is eliminated.

UK Threatens to Cut Aid, UN Report Exposes Rwanda's Role

Tems' withdrawal follows a growing global outcry against Rwanda's alleged military involvement in DRC, with the United Kingdom announcing on Thursday that it may review its financial aid to Rwanda over the situation.

Reports from the United Nations have also backed claims that thousands of Rwandan troops are present in eastern Congo, effectively controlling the M23 rebels, despite Rwanda's repeated denials.

The Congolese government has long accused Rwanda of fuelling the conflict to gain access to the region's vast deposits of gold, coltan, and other valuable minerals.

A UN expert report published in July 2023 supported this claim, stating that Rwanda has "de facto control" over M23 operations.

Burna Boy unveils 2025 European tour dates, includes 80K capacity stadium in France

By Oluwatosin Ologun



Nigerian superstar Burna Boy has officially unveiled dates for his highly anticipated stadium concerts across Europe in 2025.

The ‘Grammy-winning’ artiste is set to headline massive venues in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany as part of what is expected to be a record-breaking tour.

The African Giant will kick off his European run with a historic performance at the 80,000-capacity Stade de France on April 18, 2025. This comes shortly after he graced the same venue for a charity concert alongside global icons John Legend and Katy Perry.

Following his Paris show, Burna Boy

will take the stage at the 23,000-capacity Coop Arena in the UK on April 23. His German leg of the tour will see him headline the 22,000-capacity Waldbühne Arena in Berlin on July 5, before performing at the 21,000-capacity SparkassenPark Arena in Mönchengladbach the next day, July 6.

These concerts are expected to be part of Burna Boy’s upcoming tour in support of his highly anticipated eighth studio album, ‘No Sign of Weakness.’

The album, set for release in 2025, follows the success of his 2024 singles ‘Higher’ and ‘Bundle by Bundle,’ which have both made waves internationally.

Burna Boy’s 2025 schedule is already packed, having kicked off the year with a performance in France. The ‘Twice As Tall’ crooner is also in contention for his second Grammy Award at the upcoming 67th ceremony, where he is nominated in the ‘Best African Music Performance’ category.

As one of Africa’s biggest musical exports, Burna Boy continues to set new records, and with this tour, he will be looking to extend his reign as the African artist with the highest-grossing tour across Europe and North America. Fans can expect electrifying performances as he brings his signature Afro-fusion sound to some of the biggest stages in the world.

Morayo Tour: Wizkid announces 3 Arena dates in Europe

By Oluwatosin Ologun



Nigerian international superstar, Ayo Balogun, popularly known as Wizkid has unveiled dates for his Morayo tour.

The Grammy-Award winner is set to kick off the tour in Paris France, Rotterdam Netherlands, and Berlin Germany as he sets to go on the road for the first time in nearly three years.

Wizkid will be headlining the 12,000-capacity Velodrome Arena in Berlin Germany on May 21 before taking to the Ahoy RTM Stage in Rotterdam Netherlands on May 23.

On May 25, Wizkid will be headlining the famous 20,000-capacity Accor Arena.

The tour is coming off the back of the release of Wizkid's sixth album 'Morayo'.

The project released in November 2024 features guest appearances from Afrobeats star Asake, French hitmaker Tiakola, French-Gabonese singer Anais Cardot, and American R&B stars Jasmine Sullivan and Brent Faiyaz.

Wizkid performed songs from the albums in several surprise concert appearances during the 2024 Dettu December festive season.

Fans will be excited to see Wizkid back on the road as the singer has achieved several notable feats with his tour including selling out the O2

Arena for three consecutive nights.

Wizkid also achieved a major stride when he headlined the Tottenham Hotspur stadium.

The highly anticipated tour will see the hitmaker get back on the road to perform some of the hit records with which he has cemented his place as one of the greatest Nigerian artists of the 21st century.

Ahead of his 2025 tour, Wizkid will be aiming to win his second Grammy award at the upcoming 67th ceremony where he's nominated in the Best African Music Performance category courtesy of his contributions to Asake's 'MMS'.

Beyonce leads Grammys pack at Gala backdropped By Fires

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Music's biggest stars including Beyonce and Taylor Swift will vie for top awards at Sunday's Grammys gala, a glitzy ceremony proceeding despite devastating wildfires in Los Angeles.

The shell-shocked entertainment capital is still reeling after the deadly blazes razed entire neighborhoods, leaving the music and film industries — vital to the city's economy — grappling with how to navigate the coming awards season.

Many annual Grammy week functions were scrapped, including prominent parties organized by top labels and companies like Spotify.

But Harvey Mason Jr, the head of the Recording Academy behind the Grammys, said the gala would go on as planned at Crypto.com Arena "in close coordination with local authorities" — and with an eye towards raising money for wildfire relief.

The fires have lent prominence to the Recording Academy's philanthropic arm MusiCares, which says it has already distributed several millions of dollars in emergency aid.

On Friday, MusiCares will host its annual pre-Grammy gala — this year honoring psychedelic jam band rockers The Grateful Dead — bringing together top industry figures where relief efforts and honoring firefighters is set to take precedence.

The night before, major event promoters Live Nation and AEG Presents will hold FireAid benefit concerts featuring A-listers like Lady



Gaga, Billie Eilish, Dave Matthews and John Mayer.

The Recording Academy is "thrilled that so many artists in our community are banding together at this time to show support for their fellow music makers and others impacted by the recent wildfires," said Mason.

Beyonce paradox

Beyonce and her groundbreaking "Cowboy Carter" album that vaunted Black cowboy culture lead this year's Grammy hopefuls, with 11 chances at a prize.

The megastar is already the most nominated and most decorated Grammy winner, but also the most conspicuously snubbed: she's never won the gala's most prestigious Album and Record of the Year trophies.

"Cowboy Carter" is her fifth studio album vying for the top prize (she also was shortlisted as a featured artist on Lady Gaga's "The Fame Monster"), with Swift — who has won it a record four times — among her rivals.

Though her sprawling double album "The Tortured Poets Department" left critics wanting, Swift — who just wrapped her record-setting Eras Tour — enters the night with six chances at Grammys gold.

Eilish, another perennial contender, has seven nominations, while a buzzy group of artists including pop sensations Charli XCX (eight nods), Sabrina Carpenter (six) and Chappell Roan (six) are all in the running for major prizes.

Hip-hop laureate Kendrick Lamar — whose dig-heavy rap battle with Drake spawned "Now Like Us," one of the year's most viral songs — scored seven nods, and the shapeshifter Post Malone, who recently worked with both Beyonce and Swift, scored eight. Both are featured in the top categories.

The paradox of Beyonce never winning the big prizes has revived frequent criticism that the Recording Academy sidelines the work of Black artists.

Russia slams Trump For 'Iron Dome' missile defense shield plan By Oluwatosin Ologun



Russia on Friday criticised President Donald Trump's plan to build a "Star Wars"-like missile shield for the United States, saying it risked turning space into an arena of "confrontation".

In an executive order on Monday, Trump called for the creation of an "Iron Dome for America" to counter ballistic and hypersonic missile threats, reviving parts of a controversial Reagan-era plan nicknamed "Star Wars" that would have placed missile interceptors in space.

"We regard this as yet another confirmation of the US intent to turn space into an arena of armed confrontation and to deploy weapons there," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a briefing.

Zakharova said the plan would expand Washington's missile deterrence to a scale "comparable to Reagan's Star Wars", which she called "odious".

She said the move was primarily aimed at "devaluing Russian and Chinese strategic deterrence capabilities".

"To put it mildly, these US approaches will not contribute to reducing tensions," she said.

The "Iron Dome" in Trump's decree refers to a highly successful system employed by Israel to down short-range rockets.

Washington faces various missile threats from adversaries, but they differ significantly from the short-range weapons that Israel's Iron

Dome is designed to counter.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last year unveiled a new hypersonic missile nicknamed "Oreshnik", a weapon that experts believe flies at 10 times the speed of sound.

The United States said in its 2022 National Defense Strategy that Beijing is also closing the gap with Washington when it comes to ballistic and hypersonic missile technology.

Both Moscow and Washington have traded accusations of weaponising space in recent years.

The United States accused Russia last May of deploying a "space weapon" into the same orbit as a US satellite.

Trump threatens BRICS with tariffs if they replace US dollar

By Dave Oludare Oso

US President Donald Trump has threatened BRICS nations with 100% tariffs if they replace the US dollar as reserve currency.

He has also threatened Canada and Mexico with tariffs.

Trump threatened BRICS member states with 100% tariffs on Thursday to dissuade them from replacing the US dollar as reserve currency.

Trump had made a similar statement right after winning the November 2024 elections.

“We are going to require a commitment from these seemingly hostile countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency, nor back any other currency to replace the mighty US dollar or, they will face 100% tariffs,” he said on his Truth social media platform.

“There is no chance that BRICS will replace the US dollar in international trade, or anywhere else, and any country that tries should say hello to tariffs, and goodbye to America!” he added.

BRICS and the US dollar

The BRICS group consists primarily of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

In the last few years, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran and Indonesia have also joined the group, bringing the number of members to eleven.

It was formed in 2009 as a counter to



dominance by the US and western allies.

Nigeria and some other countries were only recently admitted as partner countries of BRICS, moving them closer to becoming full BRICS members.

BRICS represents nearly half of the world’s population and is considered as a counterpart to the G7 group of countries.

The economic bloc has been in talks about introducing another reserve currency, but the idea took momentum especially after the West imposed sanctions on Russia due to its war in Ukraine.

The power of the US dollar in the world has strengthened recently. It remains the world’s primary reserve currency and there is a huge worldwide reliance on it.

Trump warns Canada, Mexico over fentanyl, illegal immigration

Meanwhile, Trump said that 25% tariffs would be imposed on imports from Canada and Mexico from Saturday, but he’s still considering whether to include oil from those countries as part of his import taxes.

“We may or may not,” he told reporters at the Oval Office on Thursday.

His decision is supposed to be based on whether oil prices charged by Washington two North American trade partners is fair.

However, his decision is also influenced by his bid to stop illegal immigration and the smuggling of chemicals used for fentanyl. The drug and other synthetic opioids have caused tens of thousands of deaths in the US alone.

Canada warns Donald Trump's tariffs could leave US reliant on Venezuela's oil

By Aime Williams

Foreign minister Mélanie Joly holds meetings in Washington in attempt to avert trade war.

Mélanie Joly told the Financial Times the US president's threat to impose levies of 25 per cent on Canadian imports would hit "real people" if relations between the two countries descended into a trade war.

"We ship oil at a discount which is, ultimately, refined in Texas. If it's not us, it is Venezuela," Joly said, referring to the heavy grades of oil produced in Venezuela and Canada on which many American refineries depend.

"There's no other option on the table, and this administration doesn't want to work with Venezuela," Joly said.

US President Donald Trump imposed sweeping sanctions on Caracas during his first term in the White House.

Joly was in the US capital spearheading Canada's last-minute effort to avert the first full-blown trade war of Trump's new administration, with the president threatening again on Thursday to apply tariffs of 25 per cent on Canada and Mexico starting on February 1.

The president said he was considering excluding oil imports from the tariffs — reflecting the US's dependence on its neighbour for huge supplies of energy.

Despite soaring shale oil production in states such as Texas, Canada accounts for about one in every five barrels of oil consumed in the US and about 60 per cent of its imported crude.

Many US refineries depend on the kind of heavy oil produced in Canada or Venezuela — not on the lighter grades produced by America's prolific shale industry.



Joly, who had travelled to Washington to meet US secretary of state Marco Rubio and other senior US officials, said she had also warned lawmakers on Capitol Hill that trade tensions would hit "real people", particularly in Republican states.

"We don't want that," Joly said. "We want us to be in a win-win position, and we think we can offer that."

Ottawa and Mexico City have both drawn up lists of retaliatory tariffs to issue against the US in the event that Trump pulls the trigger on tariffs against them, people with knowledge of the matter previously told the FT.

Canada's energy minister, Jonathan Wilkinson, has vowed "tit-for-tat" levies on American goods such as steel and orange juice if Trump follows through on his threats.

Trump has launched repeated broadsides against Canada in recent weeks, describing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as a "governor" and claiming the country should become the US's 51st state.

Trump said in a speech earlier this month that a US annexation of Canada "would really be something" and he could use "economic force" to do so.

Joly said the idea had not come up in any of her meetings with US officials. "Absolutely not," she replied, when asked.

"We can be really good friends, best friends, but we will never be a state, nor a colony, period," she said.

Canada and Mexico have also tried to demonstrate to Trump that they are securing their extensive land borders with the US in response to his claims that drugs and migrants are crossing illegally into his country.

"On the border, I think we're getting good traction," Joly said, adding that she would meet with Trump's border tsar Tom Homan on Friday.

Canada has pledged to spend \$1bn on border security, and has recently deployed newly leased Black Hawk patrol helicopters, extra dogs and 60 drones at the border partly in response to Trump's demands — as well as concerns about weapons and undocumented migrants arriving from the US.

Joly said: "We wanted to reinforce the border as well on our side, because we are concerned with the flow of illegal guns coming from the US and the potential flow of illegal migrants coming from the US."

Trump has threatened to deport millions of people without permanent legal status from the US, prompting concerns that some migrants will travel to Canada to seek refuge.

Joly said that while the US president had clearly linked his early threat of 25 per cent tariffs with border security, the US and Canada would review their broader trade relationship, including the North American trade deal signed by Trump during his last administration, as part of a separate process.

South Carolina to carry out first US execution of 2025

By Oluwatosin Ologun

A South Carolina man convicted of murder is scheduled to be put to death by lethal injection on Friday, the first execution in the United States this year.

Marion Bowman Jr, 44, was sentenced to death in 2002 for the murder the previous year of Kandee Martin, 21, a high school friend.

Martin was shot to death and her body placed in the trunk of her car, which was set on fire.

Bowman, who was 20 years old at the time, has acknowledged that he sold drugs to Martin but denied any involvement in her murder.

“I am so sorry for Kandee and her family, but I did not do it,” he said in a statement posted online by his lawyer. “I just don’t want to be executed or imprisoned for life for a crime that I didn’t commit.”

Bowman has filed numerous appeals seeking to put off his execution including a claim that the attorney who defended him at trial “held racist attitudes.”

Bowman is Black. Martin was white.

Bowman’s attorneys also argued that two witnesses who testified against him and received plea deals suffered from “credibility issues.”



Bowman has also sought to halt his execution because of the possibility of complications stemming from his body size — he weighs nearly 400 pounds (180 kilograms).

This exposes him to the danger of a “potentially torturous execution process,” his lawyers said.

Bowman’s appeals have all been denied and he is to be put to death at 6:00 pm (2300 GMT) at a prison in Columbia, the state capital.

The judge who denied Bowman’s appeal over concerns about lethal injection said he could have opted for the electric chair or the firing squad instead.

There were 25 executions in the United States last year. Three used the controversial method of nitrogen gas while the rest relied on lethal injection.

Advertisement

Four more executions are scheduled over the next two weeks, including two in Texas.

The death penalty has been abolished in 23 of the 50 US states, while six others — Arizona, California, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Tennessee — have moratoriums in place.

President Donald Trump is a proponent of capital punishment and on his first day in the White House he called for an expansion of its use “for the vilest crimes.”

FULL DRAW: Man City to face Real Madrid in UEFA Champions League knockout phase play-off

By Oluwatosin Ologun

The 2024/25 UEFA Champions League knockout phase play-off draw took place on Friday at the House of European Football, Nyon, Switzerland.

Former Liverpool player and two-time Champions League winner, Thiago Alcantara, was the special guest at the Champions League knockout phase play-offs to pick teams from the seeded and unseeded pots.

After grabbing 11 points from eight matches, Manchester City will face the defending champion, Real Madrid in the knockout phase play-off.

What are the Champions League knockout phase play-offs?

The knockout phase play-offs are new to the competition in 2024/25. While the top eight sides in the league phase qualify automatically for the round of 16, the teams finishing in ninth to 24th place kick off the knockout stages. They compete in a two-legged knockout phase play-off to secure their path to the last 16.

From the knockout phase play-offs onwards, the tournament is a bracket. The teams that finished the league phase between ninth and 16th were seeded for the first draw of the knockout phase and paired with a team placed 17th to 24th. The seeded team will, in principle, play the return leg at home.

Potential opponents were also pre-defined by pairings of teams' final league positions. For example, teams finishing ninth and tenth will face the sides that ended 23rd or 24th; teams finishing 11th or 12th were drawn against either the 21st or 22nd-placed sides and so on.



The eight clubs that prevail in the knockout phase play-offs progress to the round of 16.

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

Champions League play-off round draw

Brest vs Paris Saint-Germain

Monaco vs Benfica

Juventus vs PSV

Feyenoord vs AC Milan

Manchester City vs Real Madrid

Celtic vs Bayern Munich

Club Brugge vs Atalanta

Sporting vs Borussia Dortmund

Round of 16

Monaco, Brest, Paris Saint-Germain or Benfica v Liverpool

Monaco, Brest, Paris Saint-Germain or Benfica v Barcelona

Sporting, Club Brugge, Atalanta, Borussia Dortmund v Lille

Sporting, Club Brugge, Atalanta, Borussia Dortmund v Aston Villa

Feyenoord, Juventus, Milan or PSV v Arsenal

Feyenoord, Juventus, Milan or PSV v Inter Milan

Celtic, Manchester City, Real Madrid or Bayern Munich v Atletico Madrid

Celtic, Manchester City, Real Madrid or Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen

How did the Champions League knockout phase play-off draw work?

Eight bowls were prepared for the draw, with the balls containing the names of the seeded and unseeded teams placed in pairs in the corresponding marked bowls according to the league phase rankings.

Could Chelsea drop Sanchez?: Maresca speaks on goalkeeper choice

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Chelsea football club head coach Enzo Maresca said goalkeeper Robert Sanchez cannot “make a mistake every game” and expect to keep his place as he hinted he could turn to understudy Filip Jorgensen for Monday’s home game against West Ham.

The former Brighton ‘keeper has made five mistakes leading directly to goals this season, most recently in the 3-1 defeat to Manchester City last weekend when he was caught badly out of position, allowing Erling Haaland to give City the lead.

Maresca has until now backed him unconditionally, insisting that Sanchez is the club’s No 1.

The head coach was asked whether Sanchez, who lost his place to the inexperienced Djordje Petrovic for the second half of last season, could benefit from a period out of the team.

“Sometimes it can happen,” he said. “Not only in Robert’s case. It happened already this season, the other day I was reading about (Gianluigi) Donnarumma, this season he was playing always for PSG then for some games Luis Enrique left him out. Now he’s playing every game and doing well.”

Jorgensen, who joined from Villarreal in the summer, has



impressed as the regular goalkeeper for cup and Conference League matches.

“For sure, the No 1 is Robert but we have two good ‘keepers and we can make some different decisions, for sure it can happen,” said Maresca.

“It doesn’t mean Robert can make a mistake every game and he’s always going to play. No. But the No 1 choice was Robert. We will see on Monday.

Sanchez and Maresca
Sanchez and Maresca
Read also: Chelsea breaks records to sign Naomi Girma for £900,000

“Not (decided) yet, the decision we have two, three days. The good thing is that any decision I take I feel good, because every time Filip has played since we started, he has done well.

“So Filip or Robert, we will see

but any decision will be OK.”

Asked whether the club could look to recall goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from his loan spell at Bournemouth, Maresca said: “No, absolutely not.”

Chelsea’s poor form, which has seen them slip out of the top four having been two points behind leaders Liverpool on December 22, has coincided with speculation during the January transfer window linking a number of their players with moves away.

“Hundred per cent it could affect (form),” said Maresca. “I’ve said many times, they are human beings.

“Even if they say ‘no I’m professional, I’m focused on this’, in the end if they are talking about you and about different clubs, probably the focus is not a hundred per cent.”

FULL LIST: UEFA Europa League knockout-playoff draw

By Oluwatosin Ologun

The 2024/25 UEFA Europa League, Road to Bilbao, knockout phase play-off draw held on Friday at the House of European Football, Nyon, Switzerland, after the play-off draw of the UEFA Champions League.

The draw for the UEFA Europa League knockout playoffs paired Porto with Roma as teams prepare to put it all on the line in pursuit of a place in the Round of 16.

Four-time Champions League winners Ajax, who also lifted this trophy back in 1991/92, travel to neighbouring Belgium to take on Union Saint-Gilloise in the first game of a two-legged tie. There will be a couple of visits from Istanbul to the Lowlands as Jose Mourinho's Fenerbahce take on Anderlecht and Galatasaray face AZ Alkmaar.

FC Twente complete a trio of Dutch representatives and must try to get past Bodo/Glimt, while a trip to England is the prize for the winner of the tie between Midtjylland and Real Sociedad as Manchester United or Tottenham lie in wait for them in the last 16.

Elsewhere, PAOK face Steaua Bucharest and Ferencvaros play Viktoria Plzen, who lost 3-1 to Athletic Bilbao in midweek at San Mames, the host venue of the 2025 Europa League final on May 21.

UEFA Europa League knockout-playoff draw result: Full list of matches
The following are all the matchups in the Champions League knockout playoff round:

FC Twente vs. Bodo/Glimt

Fenerbahce vs. Anderlecht

Union Saint-Gilloise vs. Ajax

PAOK vs. Steaua Bucharest

AZ Alkmaar vs. Galatasaray



Midtjylland vs. Real Sociedad

Ferencvaros vs. Viktoria Plzen

Porto vs. Roma

When are the UEFA Europa League knockout-playoff matches?

The first legs of the playoffs will be held on February 13, with the return games a week later on February 20.

As with the Champions League, the draw to decide the Round of 16 ties, plus the bracket for the quarterfinals and semifinals, is held on February 21.

When will top-eight clubs learn last-16 opponent?

For the three British clubs through to the last 16, Friday's draw didn't teach us anything new. There are still four possibilities in the last 16 for all three of Manchester United, Rangers and Tottenham.

United and Tottenham will each face one of Real Sociedad, Galatasaray, AZ Alkmaar or Midtjylland on March 6 and 13.

europa league
Europa League Road to Bilbao

Draw format – how it worked

Teams finishing between ninth and 16th in the league are seeded for the play-off round.

They will face an unseeded team that finished between 17th and 24th in the table – with the seeded team also having the benefit of playing the second leg at home.

Sides have been paired together in the draw, meaning the two sides who finished ninth and 10th have been drawn against either the 23rd or 24th-placed sides.

Teams who finished 11th and 12th have been drawn against either the 21st or 22nd-placed sides, and so on.

The eight winners from the play-offs will meet the teams who finished in the top eight from the initial league phase in the last 16, where the familiar theme of knockout rounds will run all the way to the final.

When are the other knockout stages?

Last-16 games will be played on March 6, with the second legs occurring on March 13.