



Badenoch in desperate search for relevance - UK PM Pg 29

Foreign fraud syndicates establishing cells in Nigeria - EFCC Chairman Pg 6



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Lagos House of Assembly insists Meranda is speaker, disowns Obasa

● **Obasa leads plenary with 4 lawmakers** Pg 4



The New Daily Prime

TRUCE DEAL: Israel releases over 600 Palestinian prisoners Pg 28



Oscar-winning actor, Gene Hackman, wife, dog found dead Pg 23



Trump says EU 'formed to screw US', threatens 25% tariffs Pg 26

WORLD

Pg 32

Trump hints UK might avoid sanctions he plans for EU



SPORTS

Pg 37

Mourinho given four-match ban for comments after Istanbul derby



ENTERTAINMENT

Pg 21

Diddy threatened to do what he did to 'Pac' to me - Rape accuser



Nigeria's power sector faces over N4 trn debt, Minister reveals

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Minister of Power, Adebayo Adelabu, has revealed that the Federal Government owes electricity generation companies (GenCos) and electricity distribution companies (DisCos) a staggering N4 trillion in electricity subsidies, a figure that is crippling the power sector and hindering optimal service delivery to consumers.

Speaking at the public presentation of the National Integrated Electricity Policy and Nigeria Integrated Resource Plan in Abuja on Thursday, February 27, Adelabu explained that the vast debt burden has significant repercussions for the functioning of the power industry.

The minister provided a detailed breakdown, stating that GenCos are owed over N2 trillion as legacy debt. Additionally, another N1.9 trillion is still outstanding as part of the electricity subsidy for 2024. Meanwhile, DisCos are owed N450 billion for the same subsidy period.

“One of the major issues that concerns me is the huge debt in the sector. We are talking about legacy debt, which is over N2 trillion, and we still have an unpaid subsidy for 2024, How do you expect the GenCos to perform optimally? How do you expect them to pay for gas, service and maintain their turbines and other infrastructure, as well as pay their staff, if a total of N4 trillion is being owed to them?” Adelabu said.

The debt, which encompasses both legacy and subsidy-related payments, has left the power sector grappling with liquidity problems and the inability to meet the growing demand for electricity.



The minister warned that the continued government subsidy model is unsustainable, particularly as electricity consumption in the country rises.

“I do not deceive myself. The government cannot afford to continue funding the level of subsidy that our consumption pattern is throwing up, We have seen increasing consumption of electricity, and we need to address the key issues — the market, liquidity, and sector reforms.” Adelabu said.

While not explicitly stating that tariffs would be increased, the minister hinted at a review of the current electricity tariff structure, noting that the government would consider ways to improve upon last year's modest achievements in the sector.

Adelabu also acknowledged that a new model of intervention would be necessary to address the ongoing subsidy payments.

He pointed out that the government plans to identify a specific segment of

the population in need of assistance, rather than continuing the blanket subsidy approach.

In addition to the financial struggles, the minister expressed concern over the lack of investment in the distribution networks of DisCos, which has prevented more customers from migrating to higher tariff bands, particularly Band A.

“The government has not seen the migration of more customers to Band A as we anticipated, This is largely due to the lack of investment by DisCos in their networks.” Adelabu lamented.

The challenges outlined by the minister underscore the urgent need for reforms within Nigeria's power sector to ensure its sustainability and ability to meet the growing demands of consumers.

The government is under increasing pressure to find a long-term solution to the sector's financial woes while improving service delivery for Nigerians.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

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SIZE	TOTAL RATE
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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
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10X6	242,500.00
10X5	237,500.00
10X4	192,500.00
10X3	171,000.00
9X6	232,500.00
9X5	206,000.00
9X4	177,500.00
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8X3	98,500.00
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6X3	78,500.00
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10X5	192,305.50
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Lagos House of Assembly insists Meranda is speaker, disowns Obasa

By Damilola Olufemi



Lawmakers at the Lagos State House of Assembly have disowned Mudashiru Obasa's claim that he remains the speaker.

Addressing journalists on Thursday at the Assembly complex, they insisted their allegiance to Mojisola Meranda, insisting that she is the speaker of the assembly.

One of the lawmakers said, "He was not elected as Speaker by his constituency. For nearly a decade, we

endured his authoritarian style of leadership. Enough is enough, and we are not backing down."

Meanwhile, Obasa took charge of a plenary session on Thursday with four lawmakers at the sitting shortly after security operatives allegedly forced open the chamber doors, granting Obasa and his loyalists access.

Among those in attendance with Obasa include Ayinde Akinsanya (Mushin

Constituency I) and Noheem Adams (Mushin Constituency II).

The Chairman of the House Committee on Information, Strategy, and Security, Stephen Ogundipe, while reacting, described the scenario as chaos.

He said, "This is the Lagos State House of Assembly, and what we are witnessing today is shocking. If there are issues, leadership should address us directly, not resort to this kind of display."

Made-in-Nigeria helicopter nears completion, to fly soon - NASENI

By Dave Oludare Oso

The National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI) has announced that the first Made-in-Nigeria helicopter is nearing completion and will soon take its maiden flight.

Project Manager at NASENI's Aeronautics and Air Vehicle Development Institute, Engr. Kareem Aduagba, while speaking at a Focus Group Engagement in Kaduna on Wednesday, said significant progress had been made on the indigenous helicopter, which would soon be officially recognized as the "Nigerian Chopper."

The engagement session, organized by NASENI, brought together inventors, manufacturers, government officials, industry leaders, and academics to promote local innovation and discuss policies that will drive Nigeria's industrial and technological advancement.

Aduagba explained, "What we are doing now is not reinventing the wheel. We have one of our projects that started from the ground up, including the Made-in-Nigeria helicopter and some Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

"Additionally, we have acquired some aircraft components from developed countries in Semi Knock Down (SKD) and Complete Knock Down (CKD) forms. Using scientific and engineering expertise, we are working on assembling and modifying them.

"Very soon, we will conduct the first test flight of the Made-in-Nigeria helicopter as we approach the final stages of development," he added.



Also speaking at the event, Engr. Abdulfatai Ambali, Head of the Manufacturing Services Department at NASENI's Hydraulic Equipment Development Institute, Kano, emphasized the agency's renewed commitment to commercialization, collaboration, and innovation under its current leadership.

"Many Nigerians are unaware of NASENI's contributions, but with the leadership of the Executive Vice Chairman, Khalil Suleman Halilu, we are prioritizing awareness, stakeholder engagement, and community impact.

"Our goal is to develop homegrown technology that reduces Nigeria's reliance on foreign products. Many of our innovations are already being deployed across various sectors," Ambali stated.

Facilitator of the programme, Saleh Kwaru, urged Nigerians to support local industries, stressing that national development depends on patronizing

homegrown products.

"We must look inward and leverage our resources. Constant reliance on foreign products weakens our economy," he noted.

Similarly, Yusuf Suleman, Acting Zonal Coordinator for the North West Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), commended the event for tackling challenges affecting locally made products, such as quality and finishing.

Suleman added, "Innovation and modern technology are key to improving the acceptance of Nigerian products. This kind of engagement will help solve production challenges and create more job opportunities.

"SMEDAN and NASENI share common goals, including marketing, technological advancement, and job creation, ensuring sustainable industrial growth."

We found USAID-donated drugs in Lagos, Abia markets – NAFDAC

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has disclosed that it seized 87 truckloads of banned, expired and substandard medicinal products, including USAID and UNFPA-donated antiretroviral drugs, male and female condoms, among others.

Disclosing this on Wednesday, NAFDAC's Director-General, Prof. Mojisola Adeyeye, who briefed State House correspondents at the Presidential Villa in Abuja, said NAFDAC is currently on a nationwide crackdown on illicit drug trade, which saw it raiding the country's three major open drug markets of Ariaria and Eziukwu in Aba, Bridge Head Market in Onitsha and Idumota Drug Market in Lagos.

She said the campaign is part of NAFDAC's National Action Plan 2.0 (2023-2027) to eliminate counterfeit medicines, improve regulatory compliance and safeguard public health.

Prof Adeyeye affirmed that the operation uncovered shocking violations of drug storage and distribution regulations, including diverted donated medical supplies, large quantities of USAID and UNFPA-donated antiretroviral drugs and condoms meant to support Nigeria's HIV/AIDS response were found expired and repackaged for sale.

She said these life-saving medications were either improperly stored or deliberately resold for profit, undermining global efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, noting that while the integrity and legality of some of the products were not in question, the storage environment was harsh and could denature the products.

Her statement read, "Some of the



products (seized) are large quantities of donated antiretroviral drugs, expired female, and male condoms by USAID, UNFPA.

"Large quantities of pharmaceutical products, including vaccines, prescription-only medicines, etc. These products were discovered stacked in toilets, under the staircase, and on the rooftop at very high temperatures without consideration for cold chain storage requirements.

"Oxytocin injection and several thermolabile products stored under extremely hot temperatures, enough to denature any genuine pharmaceuticals.

"The problem is not only about the originality of the products but about the environment and storage. Products recommended to be stored at -8°C , -2°C to 8°C were found in this environment."

Among the discovered goods were large quantities of controlled drugs such as TAFRADOL (recently banned in India after BBC undercover exposure of the company manufacturing and exporting various illicit drugs to Africa, including Nigeria), Tramadol, Flunitrazepam (Rohypnol), Nitrazepam and Diazepam.

The volume of narcotics and controlled substances seized from each of these locations is enough to destabilise the country security-wise," she added, saying the agency also found vast quantities of banned, unregistered, expired products in the plumbing and wood plank sections of the Head Bridge.

"Warehouses filled to the brim with such drugs listed above, without windows, and where the temperature could be as high as 40°C , a high potential for chemical degradation of the products into less effective and toxic degradants," the NAFDAC DG explained.

Adeyeye, who described the operation as the agency's most significant in history, put the value of drugs seized at N1 trillion, saying post-assessment figures could be much higher.

"It is N1 trillion. It may be an underestimation for now, but when we finish the operation, we will have a good idea," she said.

Commencing on February 9, 2025, it involved 1,100 security operatives, including military personnel, police, and Department of State Services agents.

FG commissions 990kWp interconnected mini-grid in Niger

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Federal Government has commissioned a 990kWp Interconnected Mini-Grid in Lambata Community, Gurara Local Government Area of Niger State, as part of its efforts to boost rural electrification and expand access to clean energy solutions.

The project, implemented under the Interconnected Mini-Grid Acceleration Scheme (IMAS) of the Rural Electrification Agency (REA), was officially inaugurated by the Minister of Power, Adebayo Adedun, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Power and the Nigerian Energy Support Programme (NESP), Abba Aliyu, MD/CEO of REA stated in a tweet on his X account on Wednesday.

The Lambata mini-grid is one of 19 sites under the IMAS initiative and is expected to provide clean, reliable electricity to over 3,500 connections, including households and businesses in the community.

The project was developed through a public-private partnership between the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC) and Nayo Tropical Technology Ltd.

The IMAS initiative is backed by €9.3 million in funding from the European Union (EU) and the German Government, further reinforcing Nigeria's commitment to advancing its interconnected mini-grid market and ensuring sustainable energy access across the country.

Speaking on the development, Aliyu highlighted the agency's continued efforts in scaling up renewable energy deployment, strengthening rural



electrification, and fostering socio-economic development through clean energy access.

“This milestone reinforces the REA's commitment to scaling up renewable energy deployment, strengthening rural electrification efforts, and driving socio-economic development through clean energy access,” Aliyu stated.

The commissioning of the 990kWp mini-grid aligns with Nigeria's broader objectives of diversifying its energy mix, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and integrating more decentralized renewable energy solutions into the national grid.

The Federal Government, through the REA, has been working with local and international partners to develop off-grid and interconnected mini-grid solutions, with a focus on improving electricity supply to underserved and unserved communities.

The project is also expected to drive economic growth in Lambata by

enhancing productivity for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), creating job opportunities, and improving overall living standards for residents.

With Nigeria's power sector facing persistent challenges, initiatives like the IMAS mini-grid programme serve as critical interventions to bridge the energy access gap, promote investment in renewable energy, and support the country's transition towards a more sustainable energy future.

The Special Adviser to the President on Energy, Olu Verheijen earlier said that Federal Government's policies are designed to strengthen investor confidence and enhance liquidity across Nigeria's power sector.

She stressed that diversifying the sector is necessary but cannot be achieved without first addressing the underlying challenges from gas to power.

According to her, the federal government has made significant progress in the power sector, especially on-grid access.

PRESS RELEASE: President Tinubu To Airtel Chairman: "I am Pro-business. Nigeria needs investors like you to grow"

By New Daily Prime

President Bola Tinubu, Thursday in Abuja, said the telecoms sector's regulatory framework and operations would be reviewed to reflect global best practices, with a greater focus on protecting infrastructure.

President Tinubu spoke at a meeting with an Airtel delegation led by Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal at the State House.

"I am grateful for your openness, readiness, and confidence, which moved us very close to the Prime Minister of India. When he was here, we discussed things at length.

"The entire ecosystem will be further examined, and if there is anything we can copy from India, we are ready to do so. We are prepared to learn. We are not ashamed of copying what is working in other climes.

"It is for the good of all of us, and Nigeria is so critically important that we must give attention to those revolutionary intentions that can make business work. I am pro-business, and I will continue to be that. I can give you that assurance," he said.

The President noted that the tax reforms will create a more favourable climate for investors.

"We will find a way to work with tax administrators to ensure that whatever we have to do, we will encourage growth and opportunities. We are ready to do that".

The Minister of Communication, Innovation, and Digital Economy, Bosun Tijani, thanked the President for consistently supporting the telecoms sector's growth.

Tijani said the approval by the President for the protection of fibre optic and undersea cables as critical national assets would further stimulate growth in the industry, assuring that the Office of the



National Security Adviser (NSA) has started implementing and enforcing the law.

The Chairman of Airtel commended the President for the two-pronged economic reforms that had transformed the economy for future growth.

"When you took office, you made some promises. Given the country's situation, I was unsure how deep and far you could take your commitments.

"I am indeed reminded of 1991, when India was in a similar situation, and we were practically on our knees, having pledged 500,000 tons of gold to the Bank of England, and our vessel in Tokyo had been put up for sale.

"During that time, the Prime Minister and his team took similar reforms to what you are taking now in Nigeria, and India has never seen better times after that.

"The duties went down, the rupee was floated, and it depreciated significantly. Relicensing happened, and it was the dawn of a new world in India. We just moved forward," he said.

Mittal said the reforms turned India into one of the largest economies in the world.

"I feel that what you have done here is unprecedented in a challenging time. Only people of resolve and steel can

endure this huge pressure, floating the naira, which moved from N450 to about N1900 and is now coming back to N1400 to N1500.

"It has been a remarkable achievement celebrated by the entire world. This was much required, and you delivered on your promises," the Airtel Chairman told President Tinubu.

He also commended the removal of the petrol subsidy.

"The second one was the removal of subsidy, which was a very tough decision for any politician. It was unpopular and difficult, but you held your position, knowing fully that not doing it would not help the country.

"You have taken a long-term position. It is my belief and hope that you have created a legacy for yourself. Your first term as President will mark a watershed in the development of your country.

"This will be a turning point, and I would like to commend you for having held a firm position and taken the country forward," he added.

Mittal said more Nigerians should be encouraged to invest in the country, particularly those with huge financial portfolios abroad.

Police restore Speaker Meranda security details

By **Damilola Olufemi**

The Commissioner of Police in Lagos, Moshood Jimoh, has disclosed the security detail of Lagos State House of Assembly, Mojisola Meranda, has been restored.

The police chief said this on Thursday while addressing journalists, adding the speaker's security detail was initially withdrawn for audit purposes.

He noted that the audit of the security personnel attached to some persons and facilities was aimed at proper accountability of the police officers and their weapons.

While expressing that Lagos is not the only state in the country taking audits of police personnel, he stated that "the ongoing police personnel audit is done in the public interest and not with any



consideration except for the safety of everyone in the state.

"As we speak, the audit of the police personnel of honourable Mojisola Meranda has been completed, and the four armed police personnel attached from the Lagos police command have been

returned to her for protection.

Jimoh expressed that the police personnel audit has been ongoing for several days, and prominent personalities have been complying with it.

16 killed in Niger suspected bandits attacks

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Armed bandits have killed 16 people in two separate attacks in southwestern Niger, state radio has revealed.

The reports stated that though the assailants have not been identified, the attacks were similar to jihadist raids that have plagued the central Sahel region in recent months.

State radio said Wednesday that the bandits gathered people from a village in Dioundiou on the night of February 22-23 and "opened fire, killing 14 people."

The report stated that two nights later, attackers killed two people in a neighbouring town.

The area around Dioundiou, which



borders Nigeria and Benin, is a haven for jihadist groups, according to Niger authorities.

It is crossed by a 2,000-kilometre (around 1,200-mile) pipeline that transports Niger oil to Benin.

This comes as at least 4 government-backed Katsina Community Watch Corps

(KCWC) fighters have been killed in an ambush by bandits in Nigeria's northwest Katsina State, according to authorities.

Katsina police spokesman, Abubakar Sadiq Aliyu told newsmen on Wednesday that a convoy of pro-government fighters was returning from paying condolences to the family of a dead colleague when it came under fire from bandits in the village of Baure, in the Safana district.

"Sadly, 4 persons were fatally shot as a result of the attack," Aliyu said, adding police were seeking to "ensure the arrest of the perpetrators" of the attack, which happened on Tuesday.

Witnesses, however, told journalists that as many as eight people were killed in the attack, while many more villagers remain missing.

NAFDAC unveils new technology to combat counterfeit medical products

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

In furtherance of its anti-fake products war, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has introduced GreenBook, Traceability Project, and Pediatric Policy to combat counterfeit medical products.

Speaking on Wednesday, NAFDAC Director-General, Prof. Mojisola Adeyeye, who was represented by Bitrus Fraden, the agency's Director of Post-Marketing Surveillance, said GreenBook serves as a tool to help consumers identify and avoid potentially fake or substandard products.

The NAFDAC boss spoke at a meeting for sensitizing stakeholders on detecting substandard and falsified medical products in the Northwest Zone.

She disclosed that Traceability is a legal framework for tracking products along the supply chain, while the Pediatric Regulation 2024 is designed to address the special medical needs of children.

"With this technology, stakeholders can detect and prevent the entry of fake products into the supply chain," she said.

Adeyeye said the workshop aimed to provide information, raise awareness of healthcare givers, manufacturers, and wholesalers, among others and offer



training on the three new technologies to detect fake products.

"Now that counterfeiters have adopted more sophisticated methods to advance their trade, the agency is poised to use technologies and modern means to mitigate their activities.

"Therefore, the sensitisation of stakeholders is highly relevant," she added.

According to her, NAFDAC over the years, has deployed various measures to combat substandard and fake products, including consumer safety publications, publication of counterfeit products in newspapers, TV programmes and social media handles.

Adeyeye called on all stakeholders in the healthcare sector to support the initiatives to combat fake products and

ensure Nigerians have access to quality, safe, and effective medical products.

Similarly, Director of the Northwest Zone, Fraden Mullah, noted that the zone was challenged with fake and counterfeit products, particularly in Kano, making it difficult to identify and categorise them as substandard.

"The agency has the power to prosecute anyone found guilty, depending on the offence. Punishments ranging from closure and seizure to revoking certificates," he said.

Stakeholders from the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria (PCN), Nurses, Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists, and Nigerian Association of Patent and Proprietary Medicine Dealers (NAPPMED) attended the event.

Aiyedatiwa to new cabinet: 'We're in hurry to deliver for Ondo people'

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

Ondo State Governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to rapid and effective governance, declaring that his team is in a hurry to fulfill its promises to the people.

Speaking at the swearing-in ceremony of newly appointed and reappointed members of the State Executive Council on Thursday, Aiyedatiwa charged them to immediately settle into their roles and deliver tangible results.

The newly sworn-in officials include Taiwo Fazoranti as the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Olukayode Ajulo as the Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, and Omowumi Isaac as the Commissioner for Finance.

Others are Johnson Alabi, who will serve as the Special Adviser on Power, Seun Osamaye as the Special Adviser on Women Affairs, and Bola Taiwo as the Special Adviser on Union Matters and Special Duties.

Also appointed are Simidele Odimayo as the Special Adviser on Health and Abiola Olawoye as the Special Adviser on Infrastructure, Lands, and Housing.

Governor Aiyedatiwa stressed that his administration's approach to



governance is centered on speed, accuracy, and measurable impact.

He urged the new officials to align with the seven-point developmental agenda, "OUR EASE," designed to drive growth across the state.

He also emphasised the need for teamwork and collaboration with career officers, Permanent Secretaries, and Accounting Officers in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) to ensure seamless governance.

To promote accountability and efficiency, the governor announced the introduction of performance measurement techniques, warning that his administration would not tolerate corruption, indolence, or disloyalty.

"We demand excellent performance

from all appointees because that is the primary reason we were voted into office by the good people of Ondo State," he stated.

Governor Aiyedatiwa praised the Speaker of the Ondo State House of Assembly, Olamide Oladiji, and other lawmakers for their swift confirmation of the commissioners, describing their cooperation as a reflection of their commitment to the state's progress.

Responding on behalf of the appointees, Fazoranti, the newly appointed SSG, expressed gratitude to the governor for the confidence reposed in them.

He assured that they would work tirelessly to support the administration's vision and deliver impactful governance.

Obasa says Meranda has resigned as Speaker

By Friday Omosola

Mudashiru Obasa, the ousted Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, has alleged that Mojisola Meranda voluntarily relinquished her position as Speaker.

During an interview on Politics Today on Channels Television, Obasa stated that Meranda announced her resignation at a meeting with prominent All Progressives Congress (APC) figures in Lagos, held in the Marina district.

His remarks came in response to inquiries about why Meranda's security details were withdrawn while his own were reinstated.

“When my own security personnel were removed even when I was not around without my knowledge, without my consent, did I complain? Obasa asked.

“There was a meeting that took place in Marina where we had in attendance all the party leaders. Openly, Meranda herself made the statement that she had stepped down, she had resigned. So, when you resign from an office, the paraphernalia of the office would be taken away. What are you saying?”



He emphasized that while impeachment is a legitimate constitutional and democratic process, it must strictly adhere to established legal procedures.

Earlier today, security officers assigned to Meranda were withdrawn from their duties.

Shortly after, Obasa announced that he had resumed his role as Speaker of the House. However, his claim was immediately rejected by the majority of assembly members.

Despite his impeachment, Obasa proceeded to hold a “plenary session” with only four lawmakers in attendance.

Although the Lagos State House of Assembly comprises 40 members, most legislators refused to participate in the session, even

though they were present at the assembly complex.

Later, Moshood Jimoh, the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, confirmed that Meranda's security detail had been reinstated.

Jimoh explained that the police were conducting an audit of officers assigned to individuals and facilities to ensure proper accountability of personnel and firearms.

He further clarified that similar security audits were being carried out by police commands across other states.

The police commissioner stressed that the decision to withdraw Meranda's security detail was made solely in the public interest, with no ulterior motives.

Obasanjo urges Nigerian cocoa farmers to build strong institutions for food security

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

Former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, has called on cocoa farmers in the country to establish robust farmer institutions as a pathway to achieving food security.

In a statement released by the Cocoa Farmers Association of Nigeria (CFAN) and made available to NewDailyPrime on Thursday, February 27, Obasanjo made the appeal following a summit of All Commodities Value Chain Associations Representatives in Nigeria.

The summit was convened by the former president to discuss strengthening Nigeria's agricultural institutions and building a resilient food supply chain.

Obasanjo urged leaders of farming associations present at the event to take control of their future by forming strong, cohesive associations centred on specific commodities.

Drawing a parallel to the influential Soybean Farmers Association of America, Obasanjo highlighted how the American body has historically played a key role in supporting presidential candidates in every election cycle.

"A strong farmers' institution will make food security achievable through farmers' empowerment," Obasanjo said during his address.

The summit, which brought together cocoa farmers from across Nigeria, was an opportunity for them to discuss strategies for advancing their interests within the agricultural sector.



Obasanjo emphasised the need for cocoa farmers to adopt a unified approach to secure their place in national decision-making processes.

Earlier in the day, the National President of CFAN reflected on the evolution of the association, noting that the dissolution of the Cocoa Board in 1986 left cocoa farmers without a central body to represent their interests.

This gap, he explained, led to the formation of CFAN in order to give cocoa farmers a unified voice in government dealings and industry affairs.

"Before CFAN, the structure of the Cocoa Association of Nigeria (CAN) favoured exporters and buyers, who dominated leadership roles, leaving cocoa farmers sidelined in key decisions. This imbalance led to the creation of CFAN as a platform to protect the interests of cocoa

farmers at every level—from national to local," he explained.

The CFAN summit participants agreed on the importance of forming a collective, consensus-driven association that would represent their needs more effectively in the wider agricultural framework of Nigeria.

The cocoa farmers, who were present at the event from various cocoa-producing regions across the country, came together in a unified stance to push for greater recognition and support for their industry.

The call for stronger farmer institutions comes amid increasing concerns over food security in Nigeria, with Obasanjo reiterating that empowered farmers, united under a strong organisational structure, are the key to ensuring a sustainable and secure food supply for the nation.

Kwara govt flags off digital, coding course for pupils in public schools

By Friday Omosola

The Kwara State Government has launched a Coding and Digital Literacy training program for at least 50 public primary and junior secondary schools across the state.

Mashood Agboola, Deputy Chief Press Secretary to Governor Abdulrahman AbdulRazaq, announced this in a statement.

The programme, organised by the Office of the Special Assistant to the Governor on Digital and Innovation, Hon. Ishola Kayode, aims to enhance digital skills among students.

Speaking on behalf of Governor AbdulRazaq at the launch, the Senior Adviser and Counselor to the Governor, Sa'adu Salau, stated that the initiative is designed to reinforce the administration's impactful investments in the education sector.

According to Salau, the pilot phase targets over 150 students in each of the 50 selected schools.

"We are now faced with the reality of the digital revolution. So, what we have done today is to flag off the training for digital literacy in 50 schools in Kwara State," he said at the symbolic launch at the Bishop's Smith Junior Secondary School Ilorin.

"It is our expectation that with the foundation laying of a digital society for this generation, the children of Kwara State would not lag behind



among their counterparts globally."

Other public schools in the capital city where the pilot scheme was launched included Queen Elizabeth School, Ilorin Grammar School, and Sheikh Alimi L.G.E.A Primary School.

Ishola, for his part, said the programme aimed to ensure that public school students did not lag behind in the digital world.

"They should be digitally literate and able to solve problems in their communities because many challenges can be addressed with technological knowledge. Without that knowledge, problem-solving becomes difficult," he said.

He explained that 50 schools were selected for the pilot scheme, with 15 from Kwara Central, 13 from the North, and 22 from the southern part of the state.

He added that the programme would be expanded following a data-driven assessment.

The Principal of Bishop's Smith College (Junior Session), Akanbi Janet Ayoola, described the project as one of the governor's best decisions, especially in an era where information technology and artificial intelligence have become necessities of life.

Opadili Dorcas Boluwatife and Akinola Kolawole Abdulrahman, along with other students who spoke at the ceremony, expressed gratitude to the state government for the initiative.

They pledged to make the most of the opportunity, emphasising that it would enable them to compete favourably with their global counterparts in the digital revolution.

Former P-Square manager, Jude Okoye remanded in Ikoyi prison

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Older brother and former manager of Paul and Peter Okoye of the defunct P-Square music group, Jude Okoye Chigozie has been ordered to be remanded at Ikoyi Correctional Centre by a Federal High Court, sitting in Ikoyi, Lagos.

Justice A.O. Owoeye, the presiding judge gave the order after Okoye was arraigned by the Lagos Zonal Directorate of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on Wednesday, February 26, 2025.

Okoye was arraigned alongside his company, Northside Music Ltd, on a seven-count charge bordering on money laundering to the tune of N1.38 billion, \$1million and £34,537.59.

One of the charges reads: “That you, Jude Okoye Chigozie and Northside Music Ltd sometimes in 2022, in Lagos, within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, did directly acquire a landed property known as No 5, Tony Eromosele Street, Parkview Estate, Ikoyi, Lagos worth N850,000,000.00 (Eight hundred and fifty million naira) only, which money you knew or reasonably ought to have known forms part of proceeds of unlawful act and thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 18 (2) (d) and punishable under Section 18 (3) of the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.”



Another charge reads: “That you, Jude Okoye Chigozie and Northside Music Ltd sometimes in 2022, in Lagos, within the jurisdiction of this Honourable Court, did indirectly using bureau de change, converted the sum of \$1,019,762.87 (One million nineteen thousand, seven hundred and six-two dollars eighty seven cents), domiciled in Access Bank Plc operated by Northside Music Ltd to the naira equivalent and remitted into various bank accounts with intention of concealing that the said fund formed part of the proceeds of an unlawful act and thereby committed an offence contrary to Section 18 (2)(a) and punishable under Section 18 (3) of the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022.”

He pleaded “not guilty” to the charges, following which prosecution counsel, L.P. Aso, applied for a trial date and for Okoye to be remanded in a correctional facility.

The defence counsel, Inibehe Effiong, however, informed the court of Okoye’s bail application and prayed for a short date of adjournment to enable its hearing.

The defence counsel also prayed that the defendant be rather remanded in the EFCC custody pending the hearing of the bail application.

Objecting to the prayer for the defendant to be remanded in EFCC’s custody, the prosecution counsel argued that the Commission’s holding facility was already congested with suspects awaiting arraignment and that the court should remand the defendant in the correctional facility since he has taken his plea.

Justice Owoeye adjourned the matter till February 28, 2025 for the hearing of the bail application and April 14, 2025 for trial, and ordered that the defendant be remanded in Ikoyi Correctional Centre.

Power struggle in Lagos Assembly: Experts warn of constitutional crisis

By New Daily Prime

The ongoing political turmoil in the Lagos State House of Assembly has raised concerns among political analysts and legal experts, who warn that the Assembly may be facing a constitutional crisis.

Earlier today, former Speaker Rt. Hon. Mudashiru Obasa and three lawmakers convened a session in the legislative chamber, further intensifying the controversy over the Assembly's leadership.

Obasa and three other Members held a 'Sitting' of the Assembly

In a separate development, Speaker Mojisola Meranda's security details and escorts were withdrawn early this morning, sparking public concerns over her safety and her standing within the Lagos State Council of Elders.

Addressing the issue, Lagos State Commissioner of Police (CP) Olohundare Moshood Jimoh explained at a press briefing that the withdrawal of police protection was part of an ongoing nationwide personnel and arms audit. He dismissed speculation that the move was politically motivated.

In a shocking twist, Obasa claimed that Speaker Mojisola Meranda had stepped down following a peace meeting at Lagos House in Marina last weekend. He made this assertion during an interview on Channels Television's Politics Today. However, there has been no official confirmation from Meranda or the House leadership regarding her alleged resignation.

In what appeared to be an attempt to reassert his influence, Obasa arrived at the Assembly Complex today with three lawmakers and proceeded with a



controversial sitting despite the absence of Speaker Meranda and other principal officers.

The session began with an opening prayer, where Obasa prayed for peace, unity, and prosperity in Lagos State and Nigeria. He also thanked his colleagues for their loyalty and commitment.

During the sitting, Obasa raised concerns about power supply issues in the Assembly. He lamented the lack of electricity, which disrupted essential legislative functions, including air conditioning and other electronic devices. In response, he directed the Majority Leader to move a motion for adjournment until power was restored.

However, legitimacy of Obasa's sitting has sparked serious constitutional concerns, with political analysts suggesting that it may have been a strategic move to challenge the Assembly's leadership transition and regain control.

Security operatives were seen around the Assembly Complex, indicating growing tensions among lawmakers and staff. Some sources believe the sitting is tied to behind-the-scenes negotiations to resolve the crisis.

A legal expert who spoke to New Daily Prime emphasized that any sitting held without a proper quorum could be nullified in court. Given that Obasa and his three allies failed to meet the quorum requirement, any resolutions or decisions made during their session hold no legal weight.

"The absence of Speaker Meranda and other key lawmakers raises serious questions about the legality of today's sitting. If challenged in court, the session could be declared invalid," the expert stated.

Attempts to reach Obasa and Speaker Meranda for comments were unsuccessful. However, a lawmaker speaking anonymously described the situation as a "test of political will" within the Lagos State House of Assembly.

As the crisis unfolds, Lagos residents and political stakeholders are closely monitoring developments within the Assembly. The question of legitimate leadership remains unresolved, and further political maneuvering is expected in the coming days.

For now, the House of Assembly remains in limbo, awaiting either a decisive resolution or judicial intervention to bring an end to the standoff.

Legal Experts' Opinion

Yomi Fabiyi leads justice protest for Mohbad's death

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Lagos witnessed a peaceful protest on February 27 as actor Yomi Fabiyi led a march demanding justice for late singer Mohbad.

The demonstration started in the Alausa area and moved toward the Lagos State Police Command in Ikeja.

Fabiyi, along with a group of supporters, carried banners with bold messages, including one that read, "Justice for Mohbad 2025." Their goal was clear—to push for transparency in the investigation and ensure accountability for those linked to the singer's tragic death.

Mohbad's death and ongoing investigation

Mohbad, a rising star in Nigeria's music industry, passed away under mysterious circumstances on September 12, 2023. His sudden death sparked nationwide outrage, with fans and celebrities calling for answers. The case gained more attention when allegations surfaced regarding mistreatment and threats he faced before his passing.

The legal battle has been ongoing. Recently, a magistrate court dismissed charges against Mohbad's former record label boss, Naira Marley, along with two other individuals. However, the Lagos Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP) remains committed to seeking justice.

DPP moves to charge key suspects

Following the court's decision, the DPP announced plans to pursue legal



action against Feyisayo Ogedengbe, the auxiliary nurse who treated Mohbad before his death. Authorities also intend to charge Ayobami Sadiq, a close friend of the singer, for alleged reckless and negligent acts.

Public outcry and protest demand

Fabiyi and his fellow protesters voiced their dissatisfaction with the pace of the investigation. They urged the authorities to ensure justice is served, regardless of who is involved. The protesters believe that those responsible for Mohbad's death must be held accountable, whether through negligence or foul play.

Chanting slogans and carrying placards, the demonstrators marched peacefully through the streets, drawing the attention of passersby and media outlets. Some protesters called for stricter laws to protect artists and ensure better working conditions in the entertainment

industry.

A nation watching closely

Mohbad's death remains a sensitive issue in Nigeria. His fans continue to seek justice, while the public closely monitors the legal proceedings. Many believe his case highlights the struggles young artists face in the industry, from exploitative contracts to personal safety concerns.

Yomi Fabiyi, known for his activism, stated that the protest was necessary to keep the pressure on authorities. He emphasized that justice delayed is justice denied. "We will not stop until the truth comes out," he told reporters.

As investigations continue, Nigerians hope that this case will not fade into silence like many others. For now, the calls for justice grow louder, and the demand for accountability remains strong.

Nobody made me a star – Funke Akindele

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Nollywood actress Funke Akindele calls herself self-made, crediting her success to hard work, dedication, and divine guidance.

Speaking at the 2025 Media Sales Conference hosted by the Media Independent Practitioners Association of Nigeria (MIPAN) in Lagos, she reflected on her journey in the entertainment industry.

Akindele, known for her resilience and talent, stated that no individual was solely responsible for her rise to fame. Instead, she attributed her achievements to God and her relentless efforts.

“Nobody made me a star, only God,” she said, reinforcing her belief in hard work and perseverance.

D’banj’s influence on her career

Despite her self-reliant mindset, she acknowledged the influence of veteran singer D’banj in shaping her career. She recalled a pivotal moment when he encouraged her to build on the success of her breakout film, *Jenifa*.

“After *Jenifa* became a hit in 2009, a club owner invited me for an appearance, and that was where I met D’banj. He asked about my plans for the *Jenifa* brand, and I told him I had moved on to other things. He disagreed and told me to capitalize on it. He said, ‘This is a brand. You should not let it fade. Go and write another script.’ He even supported me financially, and I went back to writing,” Akindele shared.

Her journey to stardom

Akindele’s career in Nollywood began with the popular television series *I Need*

to Know, which aired from 1998 to 2002.

However, her breakthrough came in 2008 with *Jenifa*, a film that resonated with audiences and cemented her place in the industry.

Over the years, she has continued to push boundaries, becoming one of Nigeria’s most successful filmmakers. She holds the record as the highest-grossing producer in Nigerian cinema, a testament to her ability to create compelling stories that attract large audiences.

A source of inspiration

Akindele’s career has been marked by resilience, innovation, and adaptability. She has transitioned from acting to producing and directing, consistently delivering blockbuster films. Her work ethic and business acumen have set her apart in the industry, inspiring a new generation of filmmakers.

At the conference, she encouraged aspiring actors and producers to stay committed to their craft.

“Success does not come overnight. It takes years of persistence, learning, and believing in yourself. If you want to make it in this industry, you have to put in the work,” she advised.

The road to continued success

Akindele’s story serves as a reminder that success in the entertainment industry requires more than just talent. It demands vision, dedication, and the ability to seize opportunities. While she credits divine intervention for her journey, her discipline and strategic decisions have played a crucial role in shaping her career.

As she continues to make waves in Nollywood, Funke Akindele remains an inspiration to many. Her journey proves that with hard work, resilience, and the right support, dreams can become reality.

Comedian AY urges fans, colleagues to manage business wisely

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian comedian AY Makun urges colleagues and fans to act responsibly, emphasizing the impact of words and actions on others.

He stressed the need for individuals to protect their interests while remaining mindful of how their words and actions affect others.

In a recent Instagram post, AY called on his followers to handle their affairs with care and avoid behavior that could harm their reputation or relationships. He warned against reacting negatively to others due to personal insecurities, stating that such behavior only exposes a person's weaknesses.

"It's always good to protect what is ours. But sometimes, we get caught up in our insecurities without thinking about what we say or do to others," he wrote.

A message on self-control

AY's post highlights a common issue—people often let their emotions take control without considering the consequences. He pointed out that lashing out in frustration, especially at those who have no idea what one is going through, only makes a person appear weak.

"Every time we lash out at others who are clueless about our true situation, it shows how weak we are," he added.

His words serve as a reminder that emotional reactions can have lasting effects. While everyone faces struggles, projecting anger or frustration onto others does not solve the problem. Instead, he urged people to handle their business with a sense of responsibility.

A call for thoughtfulness

In a world where social media allows instant reactions, his message encourages self-discipline. The urge to respond in anger or frustration can be strong, but he



advised his fans to think before they act.

His post resonated with many, as it reflects everyday situations where people act impulsively without considering the bigger picture. He reminded his audience that self-control is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Fans react to AY's message

AY's message sparked discussions among fans and fellow entertainers. Many agreed with his statement, emphasizing the need for emotional intelligence in handling personal and professional matters.

Social media users praised the comedian for speaking on a topic that affects many. Some shared their personal experiences, agreeing that insecurities often lead people to act irrationally. Others thanked him for using his platform to spread wisdom and encourage positive behavior.

A consistent voice of reason

This is not the first time he has spoken out on personal growth and responsibility. Over the years, he has used his influence

to inspire his audience, often sharing motivational messages and life lessons. His latest post continues his pattern of encouraging self-awareness and responsible decision-making.

As a respected figure in the entertainment industry, his words carry weight. His advice serves as a reminder that success is not only about talent but also about character and discipline.

The takeaway

His message is simple but powerful: Protect your interests, think before you act, and treat others with respect. Insecurity and frustration are natural, but how people handle them defines their strength.

His call for responsibility is relevant in today's fast-paced, reaction-driven world. Whether in business, relationships, or social interactions, his advice remains valuable: handle matters wisely, avoid unnecessary conflicts, and always consider the impact of your words and actions.

VeryDarkMan petitions embassies, alleges Nedu's drug dealings

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Popular social media critic, VeryDarkMan, has intensified his accusations against media personality Nedu Wazobia, taking his claims to international embassies.

He visited the embassies of South Africa, Turkey, and Morocco to submit petitions against Nedu, alleging his involvement in drug trafficking and fraud in these countries.

VeryDarkMan shared a video of his visit on Instagram on Tuesday evening. In the clip, he was seen arriving at the embassies, holding documents he claimed contained evidence.

He also submitted an alleged audio recording of Nedu speaking with individuals suspected to be Yahoo Boys and drug dealers.

The video's caption read: "If they try to bring you down and you survive, make sure they don't. EXTREMIST #RATEL."

Feud escalates after podcast interview
This latest development follows an ongoing feud between VeryDarkMan and Nedu. The controversy started after comedian Deone made comments about VeryDarkMan during an interview with Nedu on The Honest Bunch podcast. The remarks sparked a heated exchange on social media, leading to accusations, counterclaims, and now, formal complaints to embassies.

Divided reactions on social media



The feud has drawn mixed reactions online. Some social media users support VeryDarkMan, arguing that serious allegations require formal complaints. Others believe he is taking things too far, possibly using the situation for attention.

Meanwhile, Nedu has not publicly responded to the accusations. He remains active on social media, continuing with his usual content without addressing the controversy directly.

The power and pitfalls of social media accusations

This incident highlights how social media can influence public perception. VeryDarkMan has built a reputation for exposing alleged wrongdoings, using online platforms to amplify his message. By involving foreign embassies, he is trying to add legal weight to his claims.

However, critics point out that social media trials often lack due process. While VeryDarkMan has presented what he calls evidence, the authenticity of the audio recording remains unverified. Authorities in the mentioned countries have not issued any official statements regarding the allegations.

What Next?

With the petitions now submitted, the next steps depend on whether the embassies take action. If they launch investigations, Nedu may face legal scrutiny. If they dismiss the complaints, it could weaken VeryDarkMan's credibility.

For now, the controversy continues to unfold. The public waits to see if Nedu will respond, if authorities will act, and how this feud will ultimately be resolved. One thing is certain: social media will keep the conversation alive.

Diddy threatened to do what he did to 'Pac' to me – Rape accuser

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

A former escort has claimed that Sean “Diddy” Combs anally raped him and then threatened to do to him what he did to “Pac,” a new lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in New York on Wednesday, Feb. 26 on behalf of an anonymous man, who accuses Combs, 55, of drugging and anally raping him and then threatening him to stay quiet about the incident.

Per the complaint, the alleged victim, then 31, met Combs through a male companion service in Florida where he worked as a contractor and would travel from Florida to New York City “at Combs’ request.”

The unnamed accuser alleged he travelled to New York City in 2012 and met Combs at the Intercontinental Hotel where he was “brought into a suite where Combs soon ordered Doe to perform sexual acts upon a female companion of Combs.”

Per the complaint, Combs allegedly had the man drink from a water bottle and then rubbed baby oil over his body, “one or both of which made Doe feel as if he had been drugged and not in complete control of his body.”

He was then told to have sex with Combs’ companion for “multiple hours, degrading her and directing Doe to degrade and perform degrading acts upon her.”

The man claimed that he was later in the bathroom when Combs approached him, saying, “I really want you to stay, let’s turn up, let’s turn up.”



When the man refused because he wasn’t feeling well, Combs grabbed his penis, inserted his finger in the man’s rectum before “forcibly” anally raping him.

“Doe continually told Combs to stop, screaming ‘no’ because he was in pain,” the complaint alleges.

The complaint further alleges that after the alleged assault, Combs “began to threaten him” to keep quiet.

“I’m not fng playing with you,” Combs allegedly told Doe. “If I can get Pac (presumably referring to Tupac Shakur, who was gunned down in Las Vegas in 1996) hit, what the f do you think can happen to you?”

Doe, fearing for his life, again affirmed that he would not say anything about the assault.

Dozens of lawsuits have been filed against the rap mogul accusing him of sexual misconduct. He has repeatedly denied he did anything wrong.

“No matter how many lawsuits are filed—especially by individuals who refuse to put their own names behind their claims—it won’t change the fact that Mr. Combs has never sexually assaulted or sex trafficked anyone—man or woman, adult or minor,” his lawyers wrote in a statement.

“We live in a world where anyone can file a lawsuit for any reason. Fortunately, a fair and impartial judicial process exists to find the truth, and Mr. Combs is confident he will prevail in court.”

In addition, Combs is facing multiple federal criminal charges, including sex trafficking and transportation to engage in prostitution. He has pleaded not guilty to the criminal charges.

Combs is in custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn. His trial is scheduled for May.

Music Week Awards: Burna Boy's mum nominated for best manager

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Bose Ogulu, Burna Boy's mother and manager, has been nominated for the prestigious Manager of the Year award at the 2025 Music Week Awards in London.

The award ceremony, which recognizes outstanding contributions to the global music industry, will take place in London, United Kingdom, on May 8, 2025. The organizers announced the list of nominees on Wednesday, February 26, 2025.

A competitive category

Bose Ogulu is one of several top industry professionals shortlisted for the Manager of the Year category. Other nominees include Neil Hughes, Alistair Goldsmith, and Wes Banton, all known for their work with high-profile artists.

Ogulu's nomination highlights her impact in the music industry, particularly in managing Burna Boy's rise to international stardom. Over the years, she has played a crucial role in shaping his career, securing global deals, and ensuring his music reaches audiences worldwide.

A history of success

This is not the first time Bose Ogulu has received recognition for her work as a manager. In 2022, she won the Manager of the Year award at the Artist



& Manager Awards in London. That win solidified her reputation as one of the most influential managers in the business.

Her dedication has helped Burna Boy achieve numerous milestones, including Grammy wins, sold-out concerts, and collaborations with global superstars. Fans and industry insiders widely respect her for her strategic planning and ability to navigate the competitive world of music.

A family of excellence

Beyond her role as a manager, Bose Ogulu is also a key figure in promoting African music on the global stage. She has consistently championed Afrobeats, helping artists from Nigeria and beyond gain international recognition.

Her nomination at the 2025 Music

Week Awards further cements her status as a powerhouse in the industry. It also reflects the growing influence of African music on the world stage.

Looking ahead

As the awards ceremony approaches, all eyes will be on London to see if Bose Ogulu will take home yet another prestigious title. Whether she wins or not, her impact on the music industry is undeniable.

The 2025 Music Week Awards will honor top executives, managers, and artists who have made significant contributions to the industry. The event is expected to attract major players from the global music scene.

With her continued success and dedication, Bose Ogulu remains a force to be reckoned with in the music world.

Oscar-winning actor, Gene Hackman, wife, dog found dead

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Gene Hackman, the versatile leading man renowned for his smoldering performance as hard-nosed New York City narc Jimmy “Popeye” Doyle in *The French Connection*, has died. He was 95.

The much-admired two-time Oscar winner, who played gritty and cantankerous characters with a virile, edgy intensity, and his wife Betsy Arakawa were found dead at their home in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In a statement to the Santa Fe New Mexican newspaper, Adan Mendoza, the Santa Fe County Sheriff in New Mexico, said: “We can confirm that both Gene Hackman and his wife were found deceased Wednesday afternoon at their residence on Sunset Trail. The couple died along with their dog.

“This is an active investigation – however, at this time we do not believe that foul play was a factor.”

Hackman took home the best actor Oscar for his work in William Friedkin’s *The French Connection* (1971) and earned a supporting trophy for his portrayal of sadistic sheriff Little Bill Daggett in Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* (1992).

He received three other Academy Award nominations: for playing Clyde Barrow’s older brother Buck in Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967); for his emotional performance as a son whose aging dad becomes dependent on him in Gilbert Cates’ *I Never Sang for My Father* (1970); and for his turn as a good



ol’ boy FBI agent in Alan Parker’s anti-segregation drama *Mississippi Burning* (1988).

Hackman also was terrific as a driven Olympic coach in *Downhill Racer* (1969), directed by Michael Ritchie; as a brawling ex-con on the road with Al Pacino in Jerry Schatzberg’s *Scarecrow* (1973), a performance that he considered the best of his career; as Harry Caul, the paranoid surveillance expert caught up in a murder plot, in Francis Ford Coppola’s masterful *The Conversation* (1974); and as the win-at-all-costs Indiana high school basketball coach in David Anspaugh’s *Hoosiers* (1986).

While generally associated with volatile, no-nonsense roles, Hackman also possessed an adroit comic sensibility: witness *Young Frankenstein* (1974), where he killed it as a blind hermit; *Superman* (1978), as bad guy Lex Luthor; *Get Shorty* (1995), playing a sleazy movie producer; *The Birdcage* (1996), as a right-wing senator for

director Mike Nichols; and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), as the patriarch of a dysfunctional family of geniuses created by Wes Anderson.

Hackman’s searing turn as the hyper, gum-smacking Doyle in the documentary-style *French Connection* distinguished him as a leading man. Friedkin’s first choice for the role had been Jackie Gleason.

The story was based on a 1969 nonfiction book by Robin Moore that described how narcotics detectives Eddie Egan and Sonny Grosso dismantled a drug smuggling ring in the early 1960s that netted 120 pounds of heroin. The film also won Academy Awards for best picture, director, adapted screenplay and editing.

In his Oscar acceptance speech, Hackman thanked “Mr. Billy Friedkin, who has already received his prize tonight, but I have to thank him because he really brought me through this when I wanted to quit.”

Michelle Trachtenberg, 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' star dies at 39

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Former child star and beloved millennial actress, Michelle Trachtenberg, best known for her work on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Gossip Girl," was found dead at her New York City home, police said Wednesday.

She was 39.

Police responded to a 911 call shortly after 8 a.m. at 1 Columbus Place, where "officers observed a 39-year-old female unconscious and unresponsive," according to an NYPD statement.

Paramedics pronounced her dead at the scene. There is no foul play suspected and the New York Medical Examiner is investigating the cause of death, police said.

"It is with great sadness to confirm that Michelle Trachtenberg has passed away," according to a statement by the actor's representative. "The family requests privacy for their loss. There are no further details at this time."

Trachtenberg appeared in 66 episodes of "Buffy" playing Dawn Summers, the younger sister of the title character played by Sarah Michelle Gellar between 2000 and 2003.

"Michelle touched a generation of television fans throughout her career, including in her unforgettable role as the independent and strong-willed Dawn Summers in 'Buffy,'" according to a statement on Wednesday from 20th Century Fox Television, which produced "Buffy."

"She brought depth, heart, and



authenticity to every performance and will be remembered for her remarkable talent. Our sincere condolences go out to her family and friends — she will be deeply missed."

The beloved early 2000s show could be headed for a reboot.

Trachtenberg said she was always grateful for that role, writing to Gellar via social media in 2019: "You slayed too much to ever be anyone but Buffy. I'm happy to have been the chosen sister to your iconic role."

Michelle Trachtenberg in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer." 20th Century Fox / Courtesy Everett Collection

The actor was also a fan favorite on 28 episodes of "Gossip Girl," between 2008 and 2012, playing Georgina Sparks, a complicated frenemy to virtually all the show's characters.

"We are deeply saddened by the news of Michelle's passing. Michelle was so funny, kind, and talented," according to a

joint statement of "Gossip Girl" creators Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage.

"Her portrayal of Georgina Sparks was an iconic fan favorite, and grew from a one season villain to a beloved character who returned over the course of six seasons. She was a delight to have on set and will be deeply missed. Our thoughts are with her family."

Blake Lively, who starred in "Gossip Girl," posted a tribute to Trachtenberg on her Instagram story, calling her "a kind person through and through."

"She was electricity. You knew when she entered a room because the vibration changed. Everything she did, she did 200%," Lively wrote. "She laughed the fullest at someone's joke, she faced authority head on when she felt something was wrong, she cared deeply about her work, she was proud to be a part of this community and industry as painful as it could be sometimes, she was fiercely loyal to her friends and brave for those she loved, she was big and bold and distinctly herself."

Nedu refutes VeryDarkMan's fraud, hard drug claims

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Popular media personality Nedu Wazobia has firmly denied allegations linking him to drugs and fraud, calling the claims baseless and completely untrue.

His response follows a leaked audio recording that went viral, accusing him of criminal activities.

The controversy began when a well-known social media critic, VeryDarkMan, shared the audio clip online. In the recording, an unidentified voice allegedly discusses drug deals and fraudulent schemes.

VeryDarkMan claimed the voice belonged to Nedu and accused him of having ties to individuals involved in illegal activities in Turkey, South Africa, and Morocco.

Petition filed against Nedu

Taking the matter further, VeryDarkMan filed a petition against Nedu on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. He submitted the complaint to the embassies of Nigeria in Turkey, South Africa, and Morocco. He urged authorities to investigate Nedu's alleged connections to criminal networks in these countries.

Nedu breaks silence

In response, Nedu took to Instagram to clear his name. In a post on his Instagram story, he dismissed the claims as baseless. He insisted he had no involvement in any criminal activities.

"Hello everyone, this is not a joke anymore," he wrote. "I know nothing about that voice note going around. I did



not make that voice note. While this seems to be fun and games, I've never and will never be part of anything criminal."

The media personality expressed frustration over the accusations. He emphasized that he has built a career based on integrity and professionalism.

Mixed reactions on social media

The leaked audio sparked widespread reactions online. Supporters of Nedu questioned the authenticity of the clip, arguing that the voice in the recording had not been verified. Others demanded an official investigation to clarify the situation.

Meanwhile, some social media users sided with VeryDarkMan, insisting that Nedu should provide more evidence to prove his innocence. They called for authorities to conduct a thorough inquiry into the allegations.

Legal experts weigh in

As the controversy grows, legal experts

have weighed in. Some argue that without concrete evidence, the claims remain speculative. Others believe the case could damage his reputation, even if he is innocent.

Public figures frequently face accusations, especially in the age of social media. Many celebrities have been victims of false claims, leading to serious consequences for their careers and personal lives.

What's next?

For now, he remains firm in his stance. He continues to deny any connection to illegal activities. His fans await further developments as the story unfolds.

Authorities have not yet responded to the petition. It remains unclear whether they will launch a formal investigation into the claims.

With the case gaining traction, all eyes are on Nedu and the next steps he will take to defend his name.

Trump says EU 'formed to screw US', threatens 25% tariffs

By Dave Oludare Oso

U.S. President Donald Trump has said he will impose 25 percent tariffs on the European Union (EU) "very soon" and claimed the bloc was "formed in order to screw the United States."

The US president made the remarks while holding his first wide-ranging cabinet meeting at the White House since his inauguration in January.

The world's richest man Elon Musk, who leads the US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) but is not a cabinet member, was among those present.

During his second term as president, Trump has sparked fears of a global trade war by either imposing, or threatening to impose high tariffs on both America's allies and geopolitical rivals.

Earlier this month, the US government imposed 25% tariffs on goods imported from Canada and Mexico and a 10% tariff on imports from China.

Beijing retaliated by imposing 10% duties on many US imports and 15% tariffs on coal and liquefied natural gas.

Meanwhile, the 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada were paused after agreements were reached on border security.

'They've taken advantage of us'

Asked whether he had made a decision



about imposing tariffs on the European Union, Trump said: "We have made a decision, we'll be announcing it very soon and it will be 25% generally speaking and that will be on cars and all other things.

"The European Union is a different case than Canada, a different kind of case, they've really taken advantage of us in a different way.

"They don't accept our cars, they don't accept essentially our farm products. They use all sorts of reasons why not, and we accept everything from them, and we have about a \$300bn (£237bn) deficit with the European Union."

He added: "The European Union, it was formed in order to screw the United States.

"Let's be honest – the European Union was formed in order to screw the United States, that's the purpose of it, and they've done a good job of it, but now I'm

president.

Asked what he will do if the EU retaliates, Mr Trump said: "They can't, I mean, they can try, but they can't."

He added: "They can retaliate, but it cannot be a successful retaliation, because we just go cold turkey, we don't buy anymore.

"If that happens, we win."

The threat of tariffs comes at a time of fragile relations between the US and Europe as the Trump administration appears to favour Moscow over Kyiv as it tries to bring about peace in Ukraine.

Trump shocked European leaders last week by calling Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a "dictator with no elections."

Mr Zelenskyy accused the US president of living in a Russian-made "disinformation space."

North Korea behind \$1.5bn crypto theft – FBI

By Dave Oludare Oso

An agency of the United States government, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has said North Korea was behind the theft of \$1.5 billion worth of digital assets, described as the largest crypto heist in history.

According to reports, the theft took place last week.

“(North Korea) was responsible for the theft of approximately \$1.5 billion USD in virtual assets from cryptocurrency exchange, Bybit,” the FBI said in a public service announcement.

The bureau said a group called TraderTraitor, also known as the Lazarus Group, was behind the theft.

It said they were “proceeding rapidly and have converted some of the stolen assets to Bitcoin and other virtual assets dispersed across thousands of addresses on multiple blockchains.”



“It is expected these assets will be further laundered and eventually converted to fiat currency,” the FBI added.

According to AFP, the Lazarus Group gained notoriety a decade ago when it was accused of hacking into Sony Pictures as revenge for “The Interview,” a film that mocked North Korean leader Kim Jong

Un.

North Korea’s cyber-warfare program dates back to at least the mid-1990s.

It has since grown to a 6,000-strong cyber-warfare unit known as Bureau 121 that operates from several countries, according to a 2020 US military report.

Trump administration ends funding for UN programme fighting HIV/AIDS

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Trump administration has terminated its funding of the joint United Nations programme on HIV/Aids, known as UNAids, delivering another devastating blow to the global fight against the disease.

The notice that US funding of UNAids is being cut off is the latest move by the administration to end American involvement in life-saving health and anti-poverty programs around the world. It was issued by Peter Marocco, a Trump loyalist who is spearheading the evisceration of the US overseas aid programme through USAid.

Marocco said in a letter to UNAids that its funding was being terminated “for the convenience of the US government”. The action was made “for alignment with agency priorities and national interest”, he said.

The Trump administration’s funding freeze



on foreign assistance has already wreaked havoc on HIV treatment programmes worldwide. A new UN report has revealed the impact of the cuts on 55 different countries.

Before the funding freeze, the US government was responsible for two-thirds of all international financing for HIV prevention in low- and middle-income countries. Much of it came through the

President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (Pepfar) which was founded by George W Bush in 2003 and which has financed about 70% of the global Aids response.

The countries most heavily dependent on financial support from Washington for the fight against HIV/Aids are among the most stricken parts of the planet. They include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast and Haiti.

A study commissioned by the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation estimates that up to 500,000 people could die in South Africa over the next decade as a result of the US funding cuts. A further half a million new infections might be recorded as a result of USAid grants being stopped to South African health groups.

“We will see lives lost,” the foundation’s Linda-Gail Bekker said.

TRUCE DEAL: Israel releases over 600 Palestinian prisoners

By Dave Oludare Oso

Militant group, Hamas has handed over the bodies of four hostages, and Israel has released more than 600 Palestinian prisoners, as the five-week-old ceasefire appeared to get back on track after a breach that had brought fears of a return to war in Gaza.

The bodies of the hostages were transferred to the Red Cross in southern Gaza and driven to the border point at Kerem Shalom at about midnight, when immediate identity checks were carried out using dental records.

By dawn on Thursday morning, three out of the four had been positively identified, according to a group representing the hostages.

Meanwhile, buses carrying Palestinian prisoners arrived in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Khan Younis in Gaza and in Egypt, where 97 of the prisoners were deported. They will stay there until accepted by another country, Israeli officials said.

Ambulances brought freed Palestinians to the European hospital in Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, where they were set to undergo medical examination. Prisoners freed in previous exchanges have had limbs amputated while in Israeli custody and many were extremely emaciated.

The Palestinian Prisoners' Information Office said on Thursday morning that 642 prisoners had been released overnight in the seventh phase of the Gaza ceasefire, of whom 46 were women or minors. If confirmed, it means Israel freed more Palestinians than scheduled, after a four-day breach in the ceasefire agreement.

On Saturday, Israel had been due to free 602 prisoners and detainees in exchange for six surviving hostages, but the government suspended the transfer of the prisoners at the last moment, in protest at what it complained were the propaganda



ceremonies Hamas staged to hand over hostages and the remains of the Israelis who had been killed while in captivity.

Red Cross vehicles, carrying the bodies of four Israeli hostages, leave the pickup point after Hamas handed over the bodies without a ceremony in Gaza. Photograph: Abdallah F.s. Alattar/Anadolu/Getty Images

Since then, Hamas agreed to hand over the four hostages' bodies away from the cameras, and in return Netanyahu's government said it would proceed with the prisoner releases, but implemented a new system of identity checks, first at the point of transfer in Kerem Shalom using dental records, followed by a more thorough check at a national forensics laboratory.

The new measures followed an incident on Saturday when Hamas delivered the wrong body, apparently in error.

Hamas said in a statement early on Thursday that the only way the remaining hostages would be freed was through commitment to the Gaza ceasefire deal. It said it had abided by the agreement and was ready to start talks on a second phase.

The bodies handed over to the Red Cross just after midnight on Thursday morning were named by Hamas as Shlomo Mantzur, Tsachi Idan, Ohad Yahalomi and Itzhak Elgarat.

The IDF said the identities of the bodies had not yet been verified.

Relatives of Idan said that he was alive when he was taken hostage by Hamas on 7 October 2023, according to a statement released by the Hostages and Missing Families Forum, the group representing families of the hostages.

"Since Tsachi was kidnapped, we received several signs of life, and in the previous deal last November, Tsachi was alive and expected to be released," wrote the family. "We are still waiting for the much-needed certainty, which we can only receive after his arrival in Israel and after all necessary examinations are conducted by the authorised state authorities."

The latest exchange came as the UN human rights chief accused Israel on Wednesday of showing an unprecedented disregard for human rights in its military actions in Gaza and said Hamas had violated international law.

Badenoch in desperate search for relevance - UK PM

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The Prime Minister of the UK, Keir Starmer on Wednesday dismissed the assertion by the leader of the Conservative Party, Kemi Badenoch, that he had followed her advice on cutting the aid budget.

The prime minister also took a swipe at her political stance, calling her a “self-appointed saviour of Western civilisation” in what appeared to be a pointed jab at her rhetoric.

Badenoch had during the plenary session, suggested that Starmer had acted on her recommendation to reduce aid spending while questioning inconsistencies in the government’s defence budget figures.

Ms Badenoch said, “Over the weekend I suggested to the prime minister that he cut the aid budget, and I am pleased that he accepted my advice. It’s the fastest response I’ve ever had from the prime minister.”

The Nigerian-born Tory Leader also added, “However, he announced £13.4 billion of additional defence spending yesterday. This morning, his defence secretary said the uplift is only £6 billion. Which is the correct figure?”

Reacting to her claims, Starmer flatly denied being influenced by Badenoch’s suggestion and dismissed her claim with sarcasm.

“I’m going to have to let the leader

of the opposition down gently. She didn’t feature in my thinking at all. I was so busy over the weekend I didn’t even see her proposal,” he remarked.

Taking his criticism further, Starmer quipped, “She’s appointed herself, I think, the saviour of Western civilisation. It’s a desperate search for relevance. If you take the numbers for this financial year, and then the numbers for financial year 27/28, that’s a £13.4 billion increase—the largest sustained increase in defence spending since the Cold War.”

The prime minister’s remarks elicited laughter from the MPs on the House floor, with the Conservative leader herself seen smiling at the exchange.

Trump says Canada, China, Mexico tariffs coming next week

By Dave Oludare Oso

President Donald Trump said Thursday that 25% tariffs on goods imported from Canada and Mexico would go into effect Tuesday.

In a post on his Truth Social app, Trump said the tariffs were needed to combat the continued flow of illicit drugs into the United States.

“We cannot allow this scourge to continue to harm the USA,” he wrote, adding that the tariffs would be imposed “until it stops, or is seriously limited.”

Trump also said reciprocal tariffs on major trading partners, which he threatened earlier this month, were slated to take effect April 2.

Major stock indexes retreated on the news after notching earlier gains Thursday morning. Trump has continued to keep markets off balance as he has advanced, then withdrawn, various tariff proposals in recent weeks.

He has also offered conflicting rationales for imposing them, with a long-running fixation on closing the U.S. trade deficit giving way to ongoing concerns about drug flows — even though interdiction data from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection show trafficking is already in retreat.

Days after first proposing the Canada and Mexico duties earlier this month, the president announced he was suspending them for 30 days after signaling he had won concessions from the two nations.

Some experts said some of those gains, which included a troop deployment by Mexico and a new anti-drug policy for



Canada were less substantial than heralded.

A proposal for steel and aluminum tariffs announced earlier this month are also scheduled to take effect Tuesday — but Trump did not mention those duties Thursday in his social media post.

More recently, the president called for tariffs on autos, computer chips and pharmaceuticals.

Yet, those, too, went unmentioned Thursday.

And as for the reciprocal duties now planned for April, the White House has signaled that those tariffs would also be contingent on studies of their potential impact.

All told, though Trump has threatened a bevy of tariffs since taking office, only an additional 10% duty on Chinese goods on top of existing levies on that nation have gone into effect so far.

Still, many analysts say the unpredictability alone created by Trump’s

talk of tariffs has already taken a toll on the markets and the economy.

“Instead of clearing up the uncertainty about the direction of U.S. economic policy, Donald Trump’s victory in last November’s presidential election has only magnified it,” Capital Economics research and consultancy group said in a note to clients Thursday morning, “with threats of massive punitive tariffs and the potential upending of traditional geopolitical alliances plunging the rest of the world into a state of heightened uncertainty too.”

“Uncertainty could end up weighing on global investment and consumer spending for an extended period, particularly if Trump repeatedly pushes back his tariff deadlines.”

Trump has previously stated that the duties would bring in revenues and help close America’s budget deficit.

“Our country will be extremely liquid and rich again,” he said.

Vietnam court jails journalist 30 months over Facebook posts

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A leading independent journalist and book author from Vietnam has been sentenced to 30 months in jail over Facebook posts critical of the government.

Following a trial that lasted only for a few hours, a court in the capital Hanoi convicted 63-year-old Huy Duc of “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state” through posting 13 articles on Facebook.

“These articles have a large number of interactions, comments and shares, causing negative impacts on social order and safety,” the indictment quoted by Vietnam News Agency read.

Huy Duc worked for influential state-run newspapers before authoring one of Vietnam’s most popular blogs and Facebook accounts, where he criticised the country’s communist leaders on issues such as corruption, media control and relations with China.

Huy Duc, whose real name is Truong Huy San, is a former senior army lieutenant.

He was fired from a state news outlet in 2009 for criticising past actions by Vietnam’s former communist ally, the Soviet Union.

In 2012, Huy Duc spent a year at Harvard University on a Nieman Fellowship.

During his time abroad, his account of life in Vietnam after the end of the war with the United States, *The Winning Side*, was published.

His conviction comes just a few months after blogger Duong Van Thai was jailed for 12 years on charges of publishing antistate information.



He had almost 120,000 followers on YouTube where he regularly recorded livestreams critical of the government.

In January, a prominent former lawyer was also jailed for three years over Facebook posts.

Shortly before his arrest in June, Huy Duc took aim online at Vietnam’s new powerful leader To Lam, as well as his predecessor Nguyen Phu Trong. It is unclear if the charges were related to these particular posts.

Vietnam, a one-party state, has no free media and clamps down hard on any dissent. It is one of the world’s top jailers of journalists, according to the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) press freedom campaign group.

RSF said previously that his articles were “an invaluable source of information enabling the Vietnamese public to access censored information by the Hanoi regime”.

Rights campaigners say the government has in recent years intensified its crackdown on civil society.

In December, Vietnam enacted new online rules requiring Facebook and TikTok to verify user identities and hand over data to authorities.

Under “Decree 147”, all tech giants operating in Vietnam must verify user accounts by phone number or Vietnamese identification numbers and store that information alongside their full name and date of birth.

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Trump hints UK might avoid sanctions he plans for EU

By Dave Oludare Oso

President Donald Trump has hinted that the United Kingdom (UK) may avoid the sort of swingeing tariffs that he has threatened to impose on the European Union (EU).

When it was put to him that he said yesterday the EU was constructed to “screw” the US on trade, and when he was asked what Keir Starmer could say to him that would ensure that Britain did not face tariffs, Trump at first claimed not to have said that “bad word.”

He then launched into a long attack on the EU over trade policy, claiming that people thought it was “politically correct” to say the US’s trade relationship with the EU was good even though it wasn’t.

Then, referring to the UK, he went on: I can say that, we’re here for a different reason – we’re talking about a very different place. This is some place that I have investments there. I own Turnberry, I own Aberdeen, and I own a great place called Doonbeg in Ireland. So, I have a great warm spot for your country.

At this point Keir Starmer interrupted, saying: And our trade, obviously, is fair and balanced and, in fact, you’ve got a bit of surplus. So, we’re in a different position there. And obviously we contributed hugely in relation to Ukraine.

Trump then added: “It’s going to work out.”

Asked if he was saying that meant there would not be any sanctions on the UK, he replied:

Well, I have to take a look. We’re going



to have a good discussion today, and we have some very talented people on the other side, and we have some people that probably aren’t as talented to them, but they’re pretty good. We’re going to have a good discussion, and we’ll be talking about it.

Trump claims UK and US will do trade deal ‘rather quickly’

When asked: Will there be a trade deal with the UK?

Trump says:

We’ve had great discussions on trade and I think we’re going to have a deal done rather quickly. As quickly as it can be done. We’re going to have something, I think, rather quickly.

Trump praises Starmer as ‘very tough negotiator’

Trump started by saying Starmer is PM of a very special place. He goes on: You’re a very tough negotiator. However, I’m not sure I like that, but that’s OK.

Starmer will be pleased. In Trumpworld, to be a “very tough negotiator” is high praise indeed.

Donald Trump repeated his false claim that European aid to Ukraine will all be repaid.

The facts: French president Emmanuel Macron fact-checked Trump’s claim during their meeting at the White House earlier this week.

“No, in fact, to be frank, we paid,” Macron said on Monday, explaining that his country had provided aid in the form of grants, loans and loan guarantees. “We provided real money, to be clear.”

Keir Starmer also tried to correct the US president’s claim earlier today.

“Quite a bit of ours was gifted,” Starmer told Trump in the Oval Office. “There were some loans, but mainly it was gifted actually.”

Hamas ready to cede control of Gaza, official says

By Dave Oludare Oso

Hamas is willing to cede political power and administrative governance of the Gaza Strip to a Palestinian unity government, but would not disarm unless an independent Palestinian state is achieved, Dr. Basem Naim, a senior political official for Hamas, told NBC News.

“We are ready today, if not yesterday, to step back from governance to hand it over to a body, a government, a committee, that is ready to run the Gaza Strip,” Naim said.

Naim made his comments during a critical impasse: the first phase of a tenuous deal between Hamas and Israel is set to end on Saturday, and no arrangements have been made for continuing the ceasefire.

While there have been few publicly acknowledged negotiations to extend the truce into a second phase, the office of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said it will soon send a diplomatic delegation to Cairo to continue talks.

Hamas fighters during a hostage handover in Khan Younis. Saeed Jaras / Middle East Images / AFP – Getty Images

Naim said that beyond that public announcement, Hamas had not been officially notified of Israel’s intention to resume negotiations.

It was unclear whether Israeli officials would seek to extend the first phase of the agreement or negotiate terms for a second phase, which could ultimately lead to a more permanent ceasefire and the eventual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip.

Naim said Israel was deliberately



delaying further negotiations to create a pretext for returning to war against Hamas.

“We believe that this is intentionally done to escalate the situation or to push the second-phase negotiations under the threat to return back to war and not to withdraw from the Gaza Strip,” he said.

Israeli troops are supposed to start withdrawing from the Gaza-Egypt border area on Saturday, marking the end of the ceasefire’s first phase.

However, Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen told public broadcaster Kan on Thursday that Israel has demanded that their military stay in the Philadelphi Corridor, which runs along Gaza’s southern border with Egypt.

The last step of the agreement’s six-week first phase came overnight, when Israel released more than 600 Palestinian prisoners after Hamas handed over the corpses of four Israeli hostages killed during captivity in the Gaza Strip.

Under the ceasefire’s terms — which were inked with help from intermediaries Qatar and Egypt in late January, after

more than a year of fraught negotiations — talks on the second stage should have begun weeks ago.

But rather than returning to the negotiating table, each side has repeatedly accused the other of violating the agreement’s terms. Several of the weekly exchanges of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners have been dogged by last-minute accusations and near-cancellations.

Hamas has stated before that it is willing to cede governance of the Gaza Strip to a Palestinian body, and Israel has made clear that any plan for Gaza’s “day after” should not include Hamas, which led the Oct. 7 terror attack on southern Israel.

On that day, about 1,200 people were killed and 250 were kidnapped, according to local officials, sparking Israel’s 15-month war on Gaza that has killed at least 48,300 people, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry, and destroyed much of the enclave.

The thorniest question standing in the way of negotiating the second phase of an agreement remains whether or not Hamas will disarm.

AP, Reuters, others blocked from covering Trump cabinet meeting

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Several major news outlets, including Reuters, Associated Press (AP), and HuffPost, were on Wednesday blocked from covering President Donald Trump's first cabinet meeting by the White House.

However, it is yet to be known whether the blockade will be permanent or a one-off censorship.

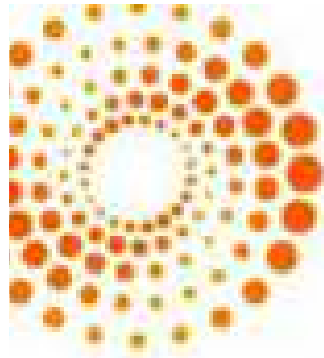
This move is part of the administration's new policy on media coverage, which gives the White House control over which outlets can cover the president in smaller spaces like the Oval Office.

Only select media outlets, such as TV crews from ABC and Newsmax, and correspondents from Axios and Bloomberg News, were allowed to cover the event, according to Reuters.

The White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA), which traditionally coordinates the rotation of the presidential press pool, has protested the new policy.

Reuters, AP, and Bloomberg in a joint statement released in reaction to the new development, emphasised the importance of a free press in a democracy.

"It is essential in a democracy for the public to have access to news about their government from an independent, free press," they said.



REUTERS



House policy.

They explained that the services "have long worked to ensure that accurate, fair and timely information about the presidency is communicated to a broad audience of all political persuasions, both in the United States and globally. Much of the White House coverage people see in their local news outlets, wherever they are in the world, comes from the wires."

HuffPost on the other hand condemned the White House decision as a violation of the First Amendment right to freedom of the press.

The move has sparked concerns about the administration's control over media access and the potential impact on the public's right to know.

On Tuesday, the WHCA also issued a statement protesting the new White

House policy. The move follows the Trump administration's decision to bar the Associated Press from being in the pool because it has declined to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, the name Trump has assigned the body of water, or update its widely followed stylebook to reflect such a change.

White House spokesperson, Karoline Leavitt said the five major cable and broadcast television networks would continue to hold their rotating seats in the pool while the White House would add streaming services.

Rotating print reporters and radio reporters would continue to be included, while new outlets and radio hosts would be added.

Pope battling pneumonia, showing new improvement – Vatican

By Dave Oludare Oso

Pope Francis's condition showed "a further, slight improvement", the Vatican said Wednesday, while continuing to maintain the prognosis for the 88-year-old fighting pneumonia in both lungs was "reserved."

"The clinical conditions of the Holy Father in the last 24 hours have shown a further, slight improvement," said the Vatican in its nightly bulletin on the health of the pontiff, who has been in hospital since February 14.

"Although a slight improvement is being recorded, the prognosis remains reserved," it said.

The Argentine pope was originally admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital with breathing difficulties and bronchitis, but his condition subsequently deteriorated, sparking widespread concern among Catholics.

Respiratory attacks he suffered at the weekend that required high levels of oxygen and blood transfusions have not repeated, according to the Vatican, although he continues to receive oxygen and do breathing exercises.

On Wednesday, the Vatican said a CT scan performed Tuesday showed "normal progression of the pulmonary inflammatory



condition" while blood tests on Wednesday confirmed the improvement.

It also said that a mild renal insufficiency detected at the weekend "had resolved."

As Catholics across the globe pray for Francis, doctors have warned the path to recovery could be long, with the Jesuit pontiff likely staying in hospital beyond this week.

Despite his critical condition, the leader of the world's nearly 1.4 billion Catholics has kept up with Church matters from his hospital suite, according to the Vatican.

Now on his 13th day in the hospital, the pope Wednesday was "sitting in a chair, and continuing with the treatment as normal," a Vatican

source said.

The Vatican said he received the Eucharist in the morning and spent his afternoon working.

The current hospitalization is Francis's fourth and longest.

The pope, who had part of one of his lungs removed as a young man, has suffered increasing health problems in recent years.

He is prone to bronchitis and suffers from hip and knee pain, which has made him reliant on a wheelchair.

Pilgrims and faithful have been flocking to the Vatican and the Gemelli to pray for Francis, with a fresh round of prayers held in St Peter's Square later Wednesday evening.

Trump accepts King Charles' invitation to visit Britain

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

President Trump said Thursday he will visit the United Kingdom in the “near future” and accepted an invitation for a state visit with King Charles during a meeting with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer at the White House.

“It’s a great honor to have Prime Minister Starmer in the Oval Office,” Trump said. “It’s a very special place and he’s a special man. And the United Kingdom is a — is a wonderful, this is a wonderful country that I know very well. I’m there a lot. And I’ll be going, I’ll be going there and we expect to see each other in the near future. We’ll be announcing it.” Both leaders emphasized the “special relationship” between the two countries, forged during World War II.

Trump said he and Starmer would discuss Russia and Ukraine, as the president seeks an end to the war started when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

In a break with many European allies — including Britain — Trump has called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a “dictator” but has declined to give the same label to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“Did I say that?” Trump said, asked to repeat his characterization of Zelenskyy. “I can’t believe I said that. Next question.”

Starmer thanked Trump for changing the conversation on Ukraine, according to reporters in the room, and said he believes an “historic deal” can be achieved.

Trump, however, disagreed with a previous assessment by Starmer that there is a risk Putin could invade Ukraine again after a deal is reached, saying he trusts Putin to keep his word.

“No. I don’t think so,” Trump said. “I think when we have a deal, it’s going to be the



deal.”

“I think he’ll keep his word,” Trump said, calling it a “trust and verify” situation.

“We had to go through the Russian hoax together, that was not a good thing,” Trump said, adding he’s known Putin for a long time.

Trump said they’ll see if there are parts of Ukraine taken by Russia that could be given back to Ukraine, although he didn’t specify where.

“There are a lot of areas that were taken,” Trump said. “Yeah, we’ve talked about it. A lot of the sea line has been taken. And we’ll be talking about that. And we’re going to see if we can get it back, or get a lot of it back for Ukraine, if that’s possible.”

Trump said the two will also be discussing trade, as he imposes new tariffs on allies and adversaries alike.

Starmer said ahead of the meeting that the U.S. and Britain “want to strike a new partnership. We share the view that our best days lie ahead.”

“Taking out a chainsaw isn’t quite my style, but we are stripping away red tape and bureaucracy,” he said, at once taking a gentle jab at Musk while also attempting to appeal to Trump’s passion for a slimmed down government. “We are reforming, permitting, getting things built, reducing barriers to investment and growth, and we’re open for business, open for investment, and we’re determined to help U.S. innovators thrive in the United Kingdom.”

Starmer presented the president with a letter from King Charles, and Trump read it in real time. Trump called the British king a “beautiful man and a wonderful man.”

Britain, the U.S., and collective security via NATO

Starmer didn’t arrive in Washington empty-handed. He flew in on the wings of an announcement just days earlier that his government was planning to bump U.K. defence spending from the current 2.3% of GDP to 2.5% by 2027, which his office has billed as Britain’s biggest sustained defence spending increase since the Cold War.

Mourinho given four-match ban for comments after Istanbul derby

By Dave Oludare Oso

Fenerbahce manager, Jose Mourinho has been banned for four games and fined a total of £35,194 for comments made after Monday's game with local rivals Galatasaray.

Mourinho was accused by Galatasaray of making racist statements after the Istanbul derby and, on Tuesday, Fenerbahce released a statement saying his comments had been taken "completely taken out of context."

The 0-0 draw was refereed by Slovenian Slavko Vincic after both clubs requested a foreign official take charge of the fixture.

The Portuguese coach, 62, said that he went to the referee's dressing room after Monday's game, telling the fourth official that "if you were a referee, this match would be a disaster."

On Thursday, the Turkish Football Federation confirmed it would sanction Mourinho, external for two separate disciplinary matters.

The TFF said it would penalise him for "his derogatory and offensive statements towards the Turkish referee" and because he "accused Turkish football of chaos and disorder with insulting and



offensive statements towards both the Turkish football community and all Turkish referees."

The former Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham boss has been banned from the dressing room and dugout for two games and fined 117,000 Turkish lira (£2,543).

Mourinho has also received another two-match ban for "an act against sportsmanship" during his post-match news conference and been fined £32,651.

His comments included him saying that "after the big dive in the first minute and their bench jumping like monkeys on the top

of the kid... with a Turkish referee you would have a yellow card after one minute and after five minutes I would have to change [substitute] him."

The TFF said "the statements used towards the members of the opposing team were contrary to the ethics of sports and the concept of fair play, contained expressions that could encourage violence and disorder in sports, were divisive and separatist in society and could cause fan incidents."

Fenerbahce officials confirmed to the BBC on Thursday that the club will appeal the penalties given to Mourinho.

AFCON Comment: You owe Africans an apology – Mikel Obi tells Jamie Carragher

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Former captain of the Super Eagles of Nigeria, John Obi Mikel has told Jamie Carragher to apologise to Africans, insisting that the Englishman offended Africans with his statement about the status of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Mikel Obi's demand for an apology is coming after Carragher recently argued why he thinks the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) is not a 'major tournament'.

Speaking on The Obi One Podcast, Mikel said: 'It's so disrespectful what he said, and this is coming from someone who never won any major international competition with England.'

'His statement was absolutely wrong. I hope he will come out and make a massive apology because he owes people around the world an apology. [It was] ignorant to disrespect such a wonderful tournament.'

Carragher's statement about the AFCON During the post-match analysis of Liverpool's 2-0 win over Manchester City on Sunday, the Liverpool legend suggested that Mohamed Salah is disadvantaged in the yearly debate for the Ballon d'Or due to not being able to win a major international tournament – in his eyes, the Euros, Copa America, or the World Cup (for which Egypt are not heavily fancied).

'I think the problem is that he [Salah] is with Egypt, and he's probably not playing in a major tournament or maybe doesn't have a great chance of winning. I think it's either the Champions League or a major tournament.'

'Normally, the player who excels in that, like Vini Jr. and Mbappe right now, Real Madrid looking really good going for the Champions League. Liverpool will be in that conversation, but right now, Los Blancos are certainly the front-runners,' he said.

No Premier League without Africans... – Mikel

The Former Nigerian international said the Premier League would not have global



relevance if not for players from Africa and other continents.

'If you think that the Premier League would be what it is today with just the English players you're f***ing having a laugh mate.'

'The smirk on his face, the arrogant f***ing smirk on his face to dismiss... That smirk on his face is absolutely what tipped me off. You have people trying to correct you and you're coming out and attacking absolutely everyone else and discrediting this wonderful tournament,' he said.

Mikel added that Carragher does not have the experience of winning the Premier League with Liverpool not a winning experience with England national team.

'The guy says so many things on TV, never won the Premier League, analyses teams and tells them you have to win the Premier League.'

'You never won it, you don't know what it takes to win the f***ing Premier League, you don't know what it takes to win with your national team. You can't discredit such a wonderful, wonderful tournament. People in Africa die for the Africa Cup of Nations,' Mikel added.

'I am angry' – Mikel

Mikel while admitting that he is angry at the statement made by Carragher, said no disrespect should come for the tournament he struggled to win for Nigeria.

He said, 'I am f***ing angry, I am f***ing angry, he spent so many years playing for Liverpool, he didn't win the f***ing Premier League. He sits there week in, week out, telling and teaching people trying to tell people how to win the Premier League. You haven't won it.'

'Africans watch you on the weekend and you sit there, open your mouth and discredit the whole f***ing African continent, saying your African Nations tournament is s***. That is has no value because it's not the Euros or Copa America. He can f*** off. We know in Africa what we bring to the Premier League.'

'If you won the Euros with England I might understand that, if you won a major tournament with England I might understand that. You won f*** all with England. F*** all. And you try to discredit the tournament that I won, shed blood and tears for?'

During his playing career, Mikel won the Africa Cup of Nations back in 2013 and finished as a runner-up on two separate occasions.