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Senate reviews 2025 budget, adjusts key allocations for reconsideration

By Friday Omosola

The Senate has revised portions of the 2025 Appropriations Bill after detecting discrepancies in allocations following its passage by both chambers of the National Assembly last Thursday.

The inconsistencies were identified during the final review conducted by the Joint Committee on Appropriations, prompting necessary adjustments in recurrent spending, pensions, and capital projects.

The allocation for the Ministry of Defence was reduced from ₦2.51 trillion to ₦2.49 trillion, while the budget for the Ministry of Police Affairs was adjusted slightly from ₦1.225 trillion to ₦1.224 trillion.

In the pensions sector, significant increases were made to accommodate additional financial commitments.

The total allocation for Pensions, Gratuity, and Retirement Benefits was raised from ₦950 billion to ₦1.44 trillion, while Military Pensions and Gratuities saw an increase from ₦252.6 billion to ₦383.9 billion.

Similarly, the budget for the National Pension Commission



(PENCOM) was revised upwards from ₦529.4 billion to ₦804.7 billion to ensure adequate funding for pension-related obligations.

Similarly, modifications were made to capital expenditures, leading to reductions in funding for several ministries:

The budget for the Presidency was adjusted from ₦144.4 billion to ₦142.7 billion.

Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security saw a reduction from ₦1.95 trillion to ₦1.83 trillion.

The Federal Ministry of Works experienced a cut from ₦2.04 trillion to ₦2 trillion, while the Federal Ministry of Education had its allocation decreased from ₦953.9 billion to ₦944.6 billion.

Despite these revisions, the overall budget size remains ₦54.99 trillion.

Allocations for Statutory Transfers (₦3.64 trillion) and Debt Service (₦14.31 trillion) remain unchanged.

However, the adjustments resulted in an increase in Recurrent (Non-Debt) Expenditure to ₦13.58 trillion while Capital Expenditure dropped to ₦23.43 trillion.

Citing relevant provisions in the Senate Standing Orders (2023, as amended), the Senate has decided to rescind its earlier approval of the affected items.

The revised bill will now be sent back to the Committee of Supply for further consideration and final approval.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

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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
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3X3	28,000.00
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9X3	150,000.00
8X6	216,000.00
8X3	98,500.00
7X4	164,002.00
6X4	94,010.50
6X3	78,500.00
6X2	47,500.00
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PHOTO NEWS (4X4)	53,333.30	4,250.00	57,583.30
PRESS RELEASE (4X4)	30,000.00	2,250.00	32,250.00
EVENT COVERAGE	100,000.00	7,500.00	107,500.00
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Tinubu pays tribute to Edwin Clark, calls him a courageous leader

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

President Bola Tinubu expressed deep sadness over the death of Chief Edwin Clark, former Federal Commissioner for Information and leader of PNDP.

Tinubu extended his heartfelt condolences in a statement released on Tuesday by Bayo Onanuga, the Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy.

A lifetime of dedicated service

In his message, President Tinubu described the late Clark as a man who led an illustrious life, marked by unwavering dedication to both his community and the nation. Tinubu acknowledged Clark's vast contributions as a councillor, a member of state and federal cabinets, and a passionate advocate for the people of the Niger Delta region.

"He led an illustrious life marked by dedicated service to the nation and his community," Tinubu said. "His work as a councillor, cabinet member, and advocate for resource control, economic and environmental justice in the Niger Delta, will forever be remembered."

Condolences to the family and community

The statement, issued on behalf of the federal government, also extended Tinubu's condolences to Chief Clark's family, the Ijaw nation, the people of the Niger Delta, and the government of Delta State. The President referred to Clark's passing as a "deeply sobering loss," reflecting on the late leader's immense influence across Nigeria for nearly six decades.

A courageous and conviction-fueled leader

In paying tribute to Clark, Tinubu emphasized the statesman's courage and conviction. "Chief Clark was a towering figure whose influence was felt across Nigeria's political landscape. He was a courageous leader who stood firm in his beliefs and never hesitated to speak up against injustice," Tinubu said.



The President added that Chief Clark's voice was a constant source of advocacy for the Niger Delta and the nation. As a lawyer and educationist, Clark's work was always driven by a sense of justice and a desire for unity across Nigeria. Throughout his life, he reached out to various groups, promoting national unity based on fairness and equality. Even in his final days, he remained committed to this cause.

Champion for Niger Delta and national unity

"Chief Clark spoke for the Niger Delta. He spoke for the nation. His views were distinct, patriotic, and always focused on advancing national interests," the statement noted. "He believed in a united Nigeria and worked tirelessly to foster this vision, never ceasing to urge collaboration between the country's diverse communities."

A political legacy that endures

As a seasoned politician, Clark was known for his strength of character. His political opponents always respected the weight of his words and the unwavering confidence with which he expressed his views. Tinubu reflected on Clark's enduring legacy, noting that the late statesman would be remembered as a man who fiercely championed the rights of the Niger Delta

people. His efforts for unity in diversity, true federalism, and the pursuit of justice will remain etched in the country's history.

"Indeed, a patriot has passed on," Tinubu remarked. "History will honor him for his relentless fight for the rights of the Niger Delta people, and for his role in shaping Nigeria's unity, prosperity, and stability."

Prayers for the family and friends

Tinubu concluded by offering prayers for divine comfort to Chief Clark's family, friends, and all those mourning this significant loss. "I pray that God grants his family, friends, and all those affected by his passing the strength and peace they need in this difficult time," the President said.

Official announcement of his death

Chief Clark's death was first reported by The New Daily Prime on Monday, with the news officially confirmed by his family representative, Professor C. C. Clark, on Tuesday. The loss of the political icon has left many in the Niger Delta and across the country grieving the departure of a leader who devoted his life to the well-being of his people and the nation as a whole. His passing marks the end of an era for both the Niger Delta and Nigerian politics at large.

EFCC, CAC strengthen partnership to tackle corruption, boost business integrity

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) have announced a deepened collaboration aimed at tackling corruption and promoting transparency in Nigeria's business sector.

In a statement released on Tuesday, February 18, in Abuja, the two agencies outlined their commitment to working together to curb fraudulent activities, ensure businesses operate with integrity, and create a more stable economic foundation for the country.

This new phase of cooperation was disclosed following a courtesy visit by EFCC Executive Chairman, Olanipekun Olukoyede, to the CAC headquarters.

Speaking at the meeting, Olukoyede expressed his gratitude for the prompt and consistent support provided by the CAC in response to EFCC's requests.

He stressed the importance of both agencies fulfilling their mandates to improve the lives of Nigerian citizens and boost national development.

The EFCC chair further highlighted that this enhanced collaboration would not only contribute to the fight against corruption but would also stimulate economic growth, attract investment, and foster a business-friendly environment.

"We have resolved to use the instrumentality of fighting corruption to stimulate the economy, create a conducive environment for investors to run their business, and ensure that everyone plays by the rules," Olukoyede remarked.



Hussaini Magaji, the Registrar-General of the CAC, welcomed the partnership, noting that it would provide a valuable opportunity to strengthen existing collaborations, particularly in the areas of knowledge exchange and information sharing.

He also reaffirmed the CAC's commitment to supporting President Muhammadu Buhari's 7-point transformation agenda, which focuses on economic development and governance reforms.

"We are aligned with the President's vision for a better economy, and this strengthened partnership with the EFCC will contribute to promoting transparency, combating financial crimes, and facilitating ease of doing business in Nigeria," Magaji said.

Magaji also revealed that the CAC has made significant strides in modernising its operations.

The registration process for businesses is now AI-driven, and the Commission has introduced an intelligent company

registration portal designed to streamline the process.

According to Magaji, the ultimate goal is to ensure that companies can be registered in just one hour, a standard comparable to that of the UK Companies House and in line with international best practices.

The meeting, which was attended by key officials from both organisations, also saw the presence of EFCC Special Investigation Officer Chris Odojin and senior CAC members including Mrs. Olayemi Oyeniya (Director of Human Resources), Mr. Deinma Anga (Director of Customer Service), Mr. Duke Ukaga (Director of Incorporated Trustees), Mrs. Justine Nidiya (Special Adviser to the Registrar-General), and Mr. Dominic Inyang (Director of Public Affairs).

This enhanced collaboration between the EFCC and CAC marks a significant step forward in Nigeria's ongoing efforts to combat corruption, promote good governance, and create a more favourable environment for business and investment.

IGP donates gunboats to Rivers to boost security, warns against misuse

By Helen Okechukwu

The Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, has donated six gunboats to the Rivers State Police Command to strengthen security on waterways.

The launching exercise took place on Tuesday, at Abonnema Wharf.

Representing the IGP, Deputy Inspector General of Police Operations (DIG), Ali Ali, emphasised that the boats must be strictly used for security purposes and not for private protection services.

“the IGP office was inundated with complaints from people of Bonny complaining of sea piracy armed robbery along the waterways,” Ali stated.

This came following several attacks on the waterways.

He stressed that a safer environment would attract investors, create jobs, and boost the economy.

“The Nigerian marine domain is a



major contributor to economy of the nation. For effective policing of this area, there is need for visibility patrol and apprehension of criminals, hence the donation of the gunboats,” he added.

Read Also: Rivers boat mishap: 19 rescued, 3 dead including toddler

Ali urged the marine unit to maintain the equipment properly and use them responsibly. “These equipments is not to be deployed for private security guard, is to combat insecurity on waterways, not to make money for

individuals at the expense of the safety of the general public,” he warned.

Representing Governor Siminalayi Fubara, Secretary to the State Government, Tammy Danagogo, expressed appreciation for the donation.

He acknowledged the police’s efforts in maintaining law and order and reaffirmed the state government’s commitment to security.

“We extend our heart felt gratitude to the IGP and President who enabled him,” Danagogo stated.

The Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIG), Zone 16, Yenagoa, Adebola Hamzat, described the initiative as a major step in improving security beyond land operations.

Rivers State Commissioner of Police (CP), Olugbenga Adepoju, also acknowledged the challenges faced on the waterways and assured the public that the boats would be used effectively to combat crime.



\$23bn refinery project the biggest risk of his life – Dangote

By Olamilekan Botti

Billionaire businessman Aliko Dangote has boldly labeled his monumental \$23 billion Dangote Refinery project as the “biggest risk” of his life, shedding light on the numerous challenges he encountered while bringing this ambitious venture to reality. In an exclusive interview, Dangote candidly discussed the substantial risks associated with such a large-scale undertaking, reflecting on the potential consequences had the project failed.

“It was the biggest risk of my life. If this didn’t work, I was dead,” Dangote stated, emphasizing the stakes involved. The refinery, which boasts a groundbreaking capacity of 650,000 barrels per day, stands as Africa’s largest and most significant industrial endeavor to date. However, Dangote revealed that the road to completion was riddled with uncertainties and obstacles.

Throughout the interview, Dangote elaborated on various hurdles, including financing difficulties, regulatory challenges, and the complexities of securing reliable suppliers. He maintained that these issues are common in large-scale projects but emphasized his commitment to overcoming them. “We have to build our own nation by ourselves. We have to build our own continent by ourselves, not [rely on] foreign investment,” he asserted, underscoring his vision for African self-sufficiency.

Dangote pointed out that Africa has often been “a mere dumping ground for finished products.” His refinery project represents a critical step toward enabling the continent to refine its own crude oil. This, he believes, will



generate wealth and prosperity for Africa’s vast population. “We must create our own capacity,” Dangote stated, reflecting his ambition to change the narrative of African industry.

Undeterred by the challenges that have surfaced, Dangote remains resolute in his mission to ensure the success of the refinery. According to a recent report from New Daily Prime, he has established a family office in Dubai, involving his three daughters in various roles within the family business. However, his primary focus continues to be on Nigeria, where he dedicates a significant portion of his time to the refinery. Regular meetings with engineers and managers are part of his hands-on approach to overseeing progress.

In addition to the refinery, Dangote is pursuing other ambitious projects. He is working on constructing a subsea pipeline that will transport natural gas from the Niger Delta to Lagos, further enhancing Nigeria’s energy infrastructure. Moreover, he aims to

expand the capacity of the refinery’s fertilizer plant, reinforcing his commitment to addressing the agricultural needs of the continent.

Looking ahead, Dangote has plans to take the refinery public within the next year or two, which would mark a significant milestone in his business journey. “I’ve been fighting battles all my life and I have not lost one yet,” he confidently remarked, illustrating his unwavering determination and resilience.

In summary, Aliko Dangote’s \$23 billion refinery project is not just a personal gamble; it embodies a larger vision for Africa’s industrial future. By addressing the continent’s dependency on foreign products and investing in local capacity, Dangote aims to reshape the economic landscape of Africa. As he navigates the complexities of this ambitious project, his commitment to fostering self-sufficiency and prosperity remains steadfast, signaling a new era for African industry.

Meet 94 year-old Nigerian who enrolled for UTME

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

To fulfil his lifelong dream of pursuing higher education, Adedapo Idowu, a 94-year-old man, has reportedly enrolled for the 2025 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

JAMB is responsible for conducting the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) for aspiring students across Nigeria.

In a featured JAMB bulletin, Mr. Idowu expressed his excitement about finally pursuing academic excellence after many years of waiting.

“Age is just a number when it comes to determination. I can now attain my dream of higher education at an advanced age,” Idowu said.

He praised JAMB for its seamless registration process and the integration of the National Identity Number (NIN), which he believes ensures that everyone interested in acquiring knowledge faces no limitations.



Oldest JAMB Candidate in History
Findings by NEW DAILY PRIME revealed that Mr. Idowu is the oldest individual ever to enroll for the JAMB examination, setting a new record for academic ambition in Nigeria.

Expressing confidence in taking this year’s UTME, he stated: “The registration staff made me feel a sense of belonging through their warm reception at the registration venue.”

According to the Punch, the 94-year-old man has encouraged aspiring students to prioritize competence and satisfaction in

their pursuit of knowledge.

So far, over 700,000 candidates, including about 11,000 underage applicants, have registered since UTME registration commenced on January 31, 2025.

If Mr. Idowu passes the JAMB, he will likely graduate at the age of 98 for four years University course. However, it remains uncertain whether he will use the certificate to find a job or pursue further studies after his graduation.

His remarkable journey serves as an inspiration, proving that age is never a barrier to education and lifelong learning.

No obstacle to Owoade's coronation as 46th Alaafin of Oyo, says Chief of Staff

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Chief of Staff to the Alaafin-designate, Rotimi Osuntola, has firmly declared that there are no hindrances to the planned coronation of Engr. Akeem Abimbola Owoade as the 46th Alaafin of Oyo.

The event is set to take place on April 5, 2025, at the Olivet Baptist High School in Oyo.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, Osuntola assured the public that all necessary arrangements for the coronation are in full compliance with historical traditions and that recent reports suggesting delays due to the absence of the Apetunmodu of Ipetumodu are unfounded.

The controversy arose after news emerged that Oba Joseph Oloyede, the Apetunmodu of Ipetumodu, had been missing since January 2024, leading some to speculate that his absence could affect the planned coronation.

Traditional customs dictate that the newly-designated Alaafin must receive the sword of authority from the reigning monarch of Ipetumodu before ascending the throne.

However, Osuntola refuted these claims, stating that there is no historical basis for the assertion that the Apetunmodu's presence is essential to the coronation process.

He stressed that while recent oral traditions may have included the Ipetumodu in the narrative, historical records do not support the notion that the Apetunmodu's involvement is crucial.

"The royal office wishes to assure the Yoruba people and the general public that there is no obstacle to the coronation of Oba Engr. Akeem Abimbola Owoade I as



the 46th Alaafin of Oyo, The necessary rites are being conducted in strict accordance with the historical traditions of the Oyo Empire, and any claims to the contrary are misleading and should be disregarded." Osuntola said.

He further emphasised that the most significant ritual in the Alaafin's installation is the presentation of the *Ida Oranyan* (Sword of Oranyan), a symbol of the divine authority of the Alaafin.

This sacred sword, Osuntola explained, is traditionally sent from Ile-Ife and forms the cornerstone of the coronation rites.

The Chief of Staff referenced historical sources to back his position, citing *The History of the Yorubas (1921)* by Reverend Samuel Johnson, which does not mention the Apetunmodu as a mandatory participant in the coronation process.

Osuntola also referred to other Yoruba historians, including C.L. Adeoye, whose work *Asa ati Ise Yoruba* documents the critical elements of the coronation rites, specifically the role of the *Sword of Oranyan*.

"The *Ida Oranyan* is the singular most important symbol of the Alaafin's divine

authority, representing the continuation of Oranmiyan's legacy, After the sword is sent from Ile-Ife, it is used in the installation rites before being returned to Ile-Ife, with a replica kept by the newly coronated Alaafin." Osuntola stated.

The state government of Oyo had previously appointed a 25-man committee, headed by the Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters, Mr Demola Ojo, to oversee the coordination of the coronation event.

This came after the formal presentation of the staff and instrument of office to Owoade by Governor Seyi Makinde on January 13, 2025.

Despite the ongoing disputes surrounding the legitimacy of Owoade's ascension, with his rivals—Lukman G b a d e g e s i n and I s m a i l Owoade—challenging the process as unlawful, Osuntola's statement serves to reassure the people of Oyo that the coronation will proceed without further delays.

The upcoming coronation ceremony is set to be a landmark event in the Oyo Kingdom, marking a significant chapter in the history of the Alaafin dynasty.

Portable insists he's a mental health patient as Police declare him wanted

By Damilola Olufemi

The Neuropsychiatric Hospital Aro, Abeokuta, Ogun State, have said it would be meeting tomorrow over the claim of Nigerian singer Habeeb Okikiola (Portable), stating he is a patient of the hospital.

The claim of Portable comes after police in Ogun State declared him wanted.

The “Zazu” singer in a video on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, said he is a patient at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital Aro and is currently receiving treatment for his mental health.

Earlier, the singer was involved in an altercation with three officials from the Ogun State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Ota Zonal Office.

The officers were on an enforcement exercise at Oke-Osa, Tigbo Ilu Ota, area of the state.

The police have since declared Portable wanted for failing to



honour the police invitation.

In a video posted on his Instagram handle, Portable said: “I’m not a criminal. I’m not feeling fine. And I’m afraid. I don’t want them to lock me up. I’m going through pain all over my body. I’m a federal government liability. I didn’t go to school, I’m a fashion designer.

“I fear government. I am a federal government liability. Then I’m a madman; I have medications that I usually take. You can confirm from Aro Hospital. I have a card that certifies me as one of their patients.

“I am from Abeokuta, and they are

taking care of me there. I am not a thief, I help people around me without even looking at their background.”

Meanwhile, a source at the Neuropsychiatric Hospital Aro in Ogun state exclusively told our reporter that the hospital management will be meeting tomorrow over the claim of the singer and release an official press statement.

The source said, “Tomorrow (Wednesday) morning, we will issue a press release about Portable. You will get an official statement,” the source said.

Edwin Clark's legacy: Championing Niger Delta rights, resource control

By **AGbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

Edwin Clark, a distinguished Nigerian statesman, Ijaw leader, and political figure from Delta State, passed away on Monday, February 17, 2025, at the age of 97.

The news of his death was confirmed on Tuesday, February 18, through a statement jointly issued by Olorogun Obiuwevbi Ominimini, the National Publicity Secretary and Spokesman of the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF); Professor College Clark of the Clark-Fuludu-Bakederemo family of Kiagbodo; and Ambassador Godknows Igali, the National Chairman of PANDEF.



Early Life and Background

Edwin Clark was born on May 25, 1935, in the then-British colonial Nigeria. As a man of the Ijaw ethnic group, one of the major communities in the Niger Delta, he grew up with firsthand knowledge of the struggles facing his people.

The Niger Delta, rich in natural resources, especially oil, has been one of the most exploited regions of Nigeria, yet its people remain among the poorest in the country.

Clark's formal education and his background as a lawyer allowed him to ascend into positions where he could use his voice for advocacy, eventually becoming a strong political figure, particularly in the South-South region of Nigeria.

The Fight for Resource Control

Edwin Clark became a key advocate for resource control, a central issue for the people of the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta has long been the oil-

producing heart of Nigeria, yet the region's people have seen little to no benefit from the immense wealth generated by oil extraction.

In the early stages of his activism, Clark was vocal in condemning the imbalances in revenue distribution between the federal government and the oil-producing states.

While the federal government controlled nearly all the revenues generated from oil, states like Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Akwa Ibom, which host oil fields, received only a small portion.

Clark, alongside other Niger Delta leaders, sought to reform this system. His call for "resource control" was to ensure that states hosting the oil fields would have greater control over the resources extracted from their land, thereby improving the living conditions and infrastructural development of the region. His efforts found a strong ally in the late General Sani Abacha's regime, where the concept of resource control became a rallying cry for many Southern leaders.

Although the battle for resource control was long and difficult, it led to key constitutional debates in Nigeria. Clark was a major proponent of the agitation that would eventually lead to the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, an initiative aimed at addressing underdevelopment in the region.

Despite the commission's establishment, Clark continued to push for further reforms, arguing that it was not enough and that resource control remained the only just solution to the Niger Delta's plight.

Championing the Rights of Niger Delta People

Edwin Clark's fight wasn't just about oil wealth—it was about the preservation of the rights and dignity of the people of the Niger Delta.

**Continue reading
on next page**

Cont from page 10

He stood for the region's right to govern itself, demand fair compensation for its environmental damage, and control its own resources. One of his significant contributions to this cause was his involvement in the Niger Delta People's Congress (NDPC), which sought to protect the cultural, social, and economic rights of the people of the region.

The environmental degradation in the Niger Delta due to decades of oil spills, gas flaring, and lack of meaningful investment in the region's infrastructure prompted Clark to press for corporate responsibility from oil companies.

He played a central role in holding multinational oil corporations like Shell and Chevron accountable for their actions, often accusing them of complicity in the environmental destruction of the region.

Clark also spoke out against the Nigerian government's heavy-handed approach to the region's struggles, notably during the era of military dictatorship. His support for peaceful protests and his resistance against military suppression marked him as a prominent anti-authoritarian voice.

He condemned the Nigerian government's treatment of the region, arguing that the government often used military force to suppress Niger Delta communities rather than engage in genuine dialogue or development.

The Battle for Autonomy and Local Governance

Edwin Clark also played a significant role in advocating for political autonomy for the Niger Delta.

He was a strong proponent of a federal system of governance that would empower local authorities in the South-South region, especially when it came to controlling their natural resources and managing their affairs.

During Nigeria's transition to democracy in the 1990s, Clark supported the creation of a South-South geopolitical zone to give the region a more significant voice in the Nigerian political sphere. His lobbying efforts helped ensure that the Niger Delta was not overlooked in the creation of the state's structure in the country.

He was instrumental in the political dynamics that brought the South-South region into greater focus at the national level.

The Ogoni Nine and the Struggle for Environmental Justice

Although the Ogoni people were the most prominent group in the Niger Delta's environmental activism, Clark was a vocal ally in their battle for justice.

The Ogoni Nine, a group of activists and leaders executed in 1995 by the Nigerian military government, symbolized the sacrifices made by Niger Delta activists fighting against environmental degradation and government oppression.

Clark repeatedly called for

accountability for the killings and the unfair treatment of Niger Delta activists. He worked to bring attention to the environmental damage caused by oil companies and the negligence of the Nigerian state in addressing these issues.

His legal acumen and activism ensured that the Ogoni struggle remained on the national and international radar.

Legacy and Ongoing Impact

Edwin Clark's contributions to the Niger Delta's political and environmental struggles are immeasurable. He remains a prominent figure in Nigerian politics and an icon of the Niger Delta's pursuit of justice. His influence has shaped the way the region is viewed both domestically and internationally.

While resource control remains a contentious issue, Edwin Clark's advocacy has had a lasting impact on Nigeria's political landscape. His involvement in the formation of various political coalitions, including his leadership role in the South-South Peoples Assembly, has helped to ensure that the voices of the Niger Delta continue to be heard in Nigerian politics.

Though the region still faces many challenges, Edwin Clark's life and work have shown the world that the fight for justice is not just about securing economic benefits but also about the dignity, rights, and identity of the people living in one of the world's most oil-rich, yet economically deprived regions.

Flies on food: hidden danger to your health

By Helen Okechukwu

Health experts warn that eating food exposed to flies can lead to serious health problems, including infections and diseases.

Flies often land on dirty surfaces before touching food, spreading harmful germs that can make people sick.

Flies move between garbage, sewage, and other filthy areas, picking up bacteria and viruses along the way. When they land on food, they transfer these germs, increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), contaminated food causes 600 million cases of foodborne diseases each year, leading to 420,000 deaths.

Children under five are the most affected, accounting for 30% of these deaths.

Common Diseases Spread by Flies

In THE PUNCH report, Public health expert, Prof. Tanimola Akande, explains that flies can transmit diseases like cholera, typhoid, dysentery, and intestinal worms.



“Diseases that are transmitted through flies perching on food include diarrhoea diseases like cholera, typhoid, dysentery, parasitic infections like intestinal worms, and also poliomyelitis,” Akande, Professor of Public Health at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State.

Read Also: Why a big belly is bad for your brain health

Food Loses Nutrients When Contaminated

Nutrition expert, Prof. Wasiu Afolabi, highlights another concern—nutrient loss.

“When food is contaminated, it loses its intended benefits. Instead of nourishing the body, contaminated food can cause illness. The presence of toxic substances, bacteria, or

other harmful microorganisms can lead to symptoms like diarrhea, fever, and stomach discomfort,” he explained.

How to Protect Your Food

To stay safe, experts advise keeping food covered at all times, especially in open markets and homes. Proper food storage and hygiene can reduce the risk of contamination. Washing food thoroughly before cooking and ensuring it is properly heated can also kill harmful germs.

However, keeping flies away from food is a simple yet crucial step in preventing disease. By maintaining good hygiene and covering food, individuals can protect themselves and their families from dangerous infections.

Timini Egbuson's 'Reel Love' cinema debut earns N99.2m

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian actor and filmmaker Timini Egbuson has made an impressive debut in cinema production, breaking records and capturing audiences with his first film.

His debut film, *Reel Love*, has stormed the box office, breaking multiple records within its first few weeks. Since premiering on Valentine's Day, February 14, the romantic drama has grossed over ₦99 million, marking a major achievement for the rising filmmaker.

From actor to record-breaking filmmaker Best known for his roles in hit films and television series, Timini has now stepped behind the camera—and with great success.

His transition from actor to filmmaker has proven his versatility and ability to connect with audiences on a deeper level. The film's strong box office numbers show that he is not only a fan-favorite actor but also a filmmaker to watch.

Gratitude to fans

Timini credits his success to the unwavering support of his fans. Taking to Instagram, he shared a heartfelt message:

“Little drops of water make a mighty ocean, and every single one of YOU has been a part of this incredible wave! *Reel Love* has shattered records at the box office, and it's all thanks to your unwavering support—every ticket bought, every share, every cheer.”

Encouraging his supporters to keep the momentum going, he added:

“This is OUR victory, and I'm endlessly grateful for each of you who believed in this dream. But the journey isn't over yet!



Let's make HISTORY this week—push harder, spread the love, and show the world what we're made of.”

The power of smart timing and marketing Industry analysts believe that *Reel Love*'s success is no accident. The film's Valentine's Day release gave it a strong advantage, as romance movies tend to perform well during the season. Additionally, the film's marketing strategy played a key role. From heavy social media promotion to celebrity endorsements and fan engagement, the film built strong anticipation before its release.

Positive audience reactions

Moviegoers have praised *Reel Love* for its engaging storyline, powerful performances, and high production quality. Social media has been buzzing with positive reviews, with many calling the film a refreshing addition to Nollywood's evolving storytelling. Fans have especially appreciated its realistic portrayal of love, relationships, and personal growth.

Will it cross ₦100 million?

With *Reel Love* still dominating cinemas, all eyes are on whether it will cross the ₦100 million mark in the coming days. If it does, the film will join an exclusive list of Nollywood blockbusters that have achieved this milestone.

A new era for Nollywood

Egbuson's success is a sign of Nollywood's continued growth. His ability to balance storytelling with commercial appeal has set a new standard for first-time filmmakers. Many industry insiders believe that his achievements will encourage more actors to take creative risks and explore directing or producing.

The future looks bright

Whether *Reel Love* continues to climb the charts or not, one thing is certain—Timini Egbuson has made a powerful statement with his first film. He has proven himself not just as an actor but as a visionary filmmaker with a bright future ahead.

Davido issues apology to Osun police commissioner

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Grammy-nominated singer Davido apologized to Osun Police Commissioner Mohammed Umar Abba after earlier criticizing him over the state's political crisis.

The music star, who had called out the commissioner on social media, has now admitted that his emotions clouded his judgment.

Davido's Initial Criticism

Tensions flared in Osun State following a political crisis that led to tragic violence. In response, Davido took to social media, directly addressing the commissioner. He urged Abba to uphold the rule of law and warned him not to "try" him. His strong words quickly went viral, sparking debates among his fans and political observers.

Many interpreted Davido's remarks as a direct challenge to law enforcement. His comments fueled further controversy, with some supporting his stance and others questioning the wisdom of publicly confronting the police.

The Apology and Acknowledgment

However, in a surprising turn, Davido later retracted his statements. Posting on X (formerly Twitter), he expressed regret for his outburst. He admitted that grief over the tragic loss of innocent lives had clouded his judgment.

"In memory of the innocent souls lost, emotions overwhelmed me and many of my friends," he wrote. "We did not realize that the Commissioner of Police had been working tirelessly, losing sleep alongside other commanders. At that moment, I did not fully appreciate his contributions. This was a grave oversight."

Davido acknowledged the commissioner's role in maintaining law and order. He praised security forces for their efforts to restore peace amid the crisis.

"I now see that this issue is bigger than just



the Commissioner of Police or other security chiefs," he continued. "The senseless killings angered me so deeply that I felt they should have been prevented. However, I now recognize that security agencies, under the leadership of the Commissioner of Police, did their best and deserve commendation."

Public Reactions

Davido's apology quickly gained attention, drawing mixed reactions from the public. Some praised him for admitting his mistake and showing maturity, while others believed he should have maintained his stance against authorities.

Supporters applauded his willingness to acknowledge the efforts of law enforcement. They argued that emotions often run high in times of crisis, and his ability to reflect and correct himself was commendable.

On the other hand, critics saw his retraction as a sign of pressure from authorities. Some questioned whether he had been advised to soften his stance to avoid further conflict with law enforcement.

The Bigger Picture

The Osun political crisis has sparked widespread concerns about security and governance. The tragic loss of lives has intensified public scrutiny of how

authorities handle political unrest.

Davido's involvement highlights the growing influence of celebrities in political discussions. His initial outburst and subsequent apology show the power of social media in shaping public discourse. As a well-known figure with millions of followers, his words carry significant weight, influencing both supporters and policymakers.

This incident also raises questions about how public figures should engage with sensitive political matters. While their voices can amplify important issues, the responsibility that comes with such influence cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

Davido's apology marks an important moment in the unfolding political situation in Osun State. His ability to recognize his mistake and publicly correct it demonstrates a level of responsibility not always seen in public figures.

While emotions may run high during times of crisis, his statement serves as a reminder of the importance of careful judgment before making public declarations. The situation in Osun remains tense, but for now, Davido has chosen to support law enforcement's efforts in restoring peace.

Nathaniel Bassegy responds to criticism of 'Hallelujah Challenge'

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Renowned gospel artist Nathaniel Bassegy has urged his followers to avoid turning their passion for faith into an "unholy obsession."

He emphasized that knowing him or other young servants of God does not determine one's standing as a Christian.

In a message shared on X, Bassegy reminded his audience that faith is not about personality worship. He referenced Romans 12:3, which warns against thinking too highly of oneself.

According to him, being unaware of his work or that of other gospel ministers does not make anyone less of a believer.

Faith is not about popularity

Bassegy stressed that Christianity is not measured by familiarity with specific religious figures. "There are many Christians who have never heard of me or my music. That does not make them any less Christian," he wrote.

He added that no one should feel superior based on their level of exposure to certain ministers. "I am not the best thing since sliced bread. I do not even see myself that way. Thinking otherwise would be placing myself on a pedestal, which I should not," he explained.

Quoting Romans 12:3, he reiterated, "For I say, through the grace given



unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

Respecting different worship practices

Bassegy also addressed the Hallelujah Challenge, a popular online worship session he hosts. He clarified that participation in the challenge is not a requirement for being a Christian.

"Not joining the Hallelujah Challenge does not make anyone less of a believer. People should connect with whatever strengthens their faith," he wrote.

Using an analogy, he compared faith expressions to fruit-growing conditions. "Apples do not grow everywhere. That does not mean places without apples are bad. It just means apples do not thrive in those environments," he said.

Bassegy cautioned against judgment between those who participate in the

challenge and those who do not. "Those who join should not look down on those who do not. Likewise, those who do not should not judge those who do," he stated.

He supported his argument with Romans 14:3: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him."

A call for unity

The singer explained that his message was prompted by ongoing discussions where he had been tagged in various conversations. He typically avoids commenting on such matters but felt the need to offer clarity.

"Let every man abide where he is called," he quoted from 1 Corinthians 7:24, urging believers to stay true to their faith in their unique ways.

Despite his cautionary message, Bassegy reaffirmed his commitment to the Hallelujah Challenge. He announced its return after a short break, inviting followers to join. "HC is back tonight for Day 7. Let's gather before our Father at the altar to offer our praises. No wahala! Only Hallelujah!" he declared.

With this message, Bassegy reinforced the importance of unity in faith, discouraging religious elitism and reminding believers to focus on their personal relationship with God rather than external recognition.

Police dismiss Portable's psychiatric treatment claims, insist singer remains wanted

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

The Ogun State Police Command has rejected claims by controversial musician Habeeb Okikiola, popularly known as Portable, that he is receiving psychiatric treatment at the Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Aro, Abeokuta.

Portable made the statement in a video on Tuesday, February 18, appealing to Nigerians and the Ogun State Government after being declared a wanted man by the police.

In the video, Portable described himself as a "madman" and claimed he was undergoing treatment for his mental health at Aro Psychiatric Hospital, further asserting that he feared government authorities.

He appealed to the public to understand his condition, insisting that he was not a criminal but someone who helps people around him.

However, Ogun State Police Public Relations Officer, Omolola Odutola, dismissed these claims, maintaining that the singer remains a wanted individual.

Odutola spoke, stating, "Portable will come and submit himself. He cannot be in the psychiatric hospital in Aro. Everybody knows that he is a wanted person. So, if he is going to be in anybody's facility, the police will not accept that. He is a wanted man."

Portable has been in hiding since a violent altercation with officials from the Ogun State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development during an enforcement exercise at Oke-Osa, Tigbo Ilu Ota, Ogun State.

According to reports, Portable's father initially informed the officials that his son was unavailable, but the singer later arrived at the scene, armed with a firearm and accompanied by nine thugs.

The altercation led to injuries for the



ministry officials, who managed to flee and report the incident to the Ota Area Command.

Following the incident, nine of Portable's alleged associates were arrested, but the singer himself fled and has been evading arrest.

Despite multiple invitations from the police, Portable has failed to attend questioning, prompting the police to obtain a court order declaring him wanted.

In response to these developments, Portable took to Instagram on Tuesday, February 18, to further defend himself, claiming he was being framed due to his association with Senator Adeola Solomon (popularly known as Yayi), the lawmaker representing Ogun West.

Portable implied that his wearing of a vest bearing the senator's image had led to the police targeting him unfairly.

"I am from Abeokuta, and they are taking care of me there. I am not a thief; I help people around me without even looking at their background," he said in his social media post.

He also repeated that he has medical records confirming his mental health condition, insisting that he is under treatment at the psychiatric hospital.

However, Senator Yayi's Special Assistant on New Media, Damilare

Oloyede, distanced the lawmaker from the singer's predicament. Oloyede urged Portable to take responsibility for his actions rather than using the senator's name as a shield to avoid justice.

"Portable should be responsible for once, Senator Yayi won't help him in this predicament that's purely a result of his irresponsibility, lack of decorum, and sheer display of lunacy (as confirmed by himself). How does one think name-dropping of Senator Yayi would help him evade justice after being declared wanted by law enforcement agencies?" Oloyede said in a statement.

Oloyede reiterated that Senator Yayi is a law-abiding public servant and would not tolerate any form of irresponsible behaviour around him.

The case has further sparked public debate on accountability and the behaviour of public figures in Nigeria, with many questioning whether Portable's claims of mental instability should be taken into account in the ongoing legal process.

The Ogun State Police Command has reiterated its intention to continue pursuing Portable for questioning, with no clear indication as yet when the singer will submit himself for investigation.

Americans rally against Trump, Musk in nationwide protests

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Protesters against President Donald Trump and his policies braved frigid temperatures in parts of the U.S. Monday, shouting “No kings on Presidents Day” in East Coast cities and attempting to enter the Arizona Statehouse to oppose a bill that would bolster fast-changing federal immigration enforcement.

In Florida and California, local media outlets reported on hundreds of protesters carrying out “Not My Presidents Day” protests. The “No Kings” theme was orchestrated by the 50501 Movement and marked the second set of protests crisscrossing the nation in less than two weeks. A similar nationwide event on Feb. 5 drew participants in dozens of cities.

Both sets of rallies denounced Trump and billionaire adviser Elon Musk, the head of the White House’s Department of Government Efficiency, known as DOGE, which the administration says is designed to slash federal spending.

Demonstrators march holding posters during a rally against President Trump’s policies on Presidents Day, Feb. 17, 2025, in Los Angeles. Etienne Laurent/AP

Nearly 1,000 people marched in the snow from the Statehouse in Boston to City Hall, chanting “Elon Musk has got to go” and other slogans. The temperature was below freezing, with wind chills in the teens.

Boston protesters, some dressed in Revolutionary War-style clothing, carried signs saying such things as “This is a Coup” and “Cowards Bow to Trump, Patriots Stand Up.” One sign had a depiction of Uncle Sam saying, “I Want You to Resist.”

“I thought it was important to be here on Presidents Day to demonstrate what



America stands for,” said Emily Manning, 55, a Boston engineer who came to the rally with her two teenage sons. “American values are not the values of the plutocracy or the limited few rich people.”

Organizers of Monday’s protests, which were focused on state capitals and major cities including Washington, D.C.; Orlando, Florida; and Seattle, said they were targeting “anti-democratic and illegal actions of the Trump administration and its plutocratic allies.”

One sign at the rally that attracted hundreds in the nation’s capital said, “Deport Musk Dethrone Trump.”

People participate in a National Day of Protest on Presidents’ Day at Washington Square Park in New York on Feb. 17, 2025. Eduardo Munoz/REUTERS

Many demonstrations were slated for cities where temperatures were well below freezing as a polar vortex worked its way across the country.

The rallies followed a series of executive orders from Mr. Trump and came just days after layoffs across federal agencies

as part of an effort to reduce the government workforce.

In Phoenix, hundreds of protestors gathered in front of the Capitol carrying signs reading “No Kings” and “Resist Fascism.”

Security barred protesters from entering the building after a few tried to get inside. Demonstrators were seeking access to a state Senate committee hearing on legislation that would require law enforcement officers across the state to support federal immigration policy.

Protest organizer December Archer said her goal was to keep the event civil. She quickly came between someone trying to enter the Statehouse and a security guard who pushed the protestor back through the doorway.

“We’re trying to make sure everything stays civil and stays respectable because again, we’re here to make a statement, not be the statement,” Archer said.

A Senate committee heard the measure in a packed room and it passed in a party-line vote, CBS Phoenix affiliate KPHO-TV reports.

Zelensky furious as Trump, Putin demand Ukrainian elections before peace deal

By Dr. Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Trumpp and Putin push for Ukrainian elections before a peace deal, sparking outrage from Zelensky. U.S.-Russia talks exclude Ukraine, fueling geopolitical tensions.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – President Donald Trump has called for Ukrainian presidential elections, arguing that Volodymyr Zelensky lacks the legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of the Ukrainian people. Trump cited Zelensky's declining approval ratings and his use of martial law to remain in power.

The demand has sparked intense geopolitical debate, with critics arguing that holding an election in war-torn Ukraine could destabilize the government and potentially lead to the rise of a pro-Putin candidate who may be willing to accept peace terms favorable to Moscow.

Historic U.S.-Russia Talks in Saudi Arabia
Trump's comments follow a landmark meeting in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, where Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio met for the first time to discuss a possible end to the war.

After more than four hours of talks, reports emerged that both sides had agreed that Ukraine must hold elections before a final peace settlement can be reached. The meeting was widely criticized by European nations, who accused Trump of rushing into talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin without consulting key allies.

Speaking later from Mar-a-Lago, Trump took full credit for the election proposal, saying:

"The demand for a Ukrainian presidential election came from me."



He elaborated on his reasoning:

"We have a situation where we haven't had elections in Ukraine, where there is martial law—essentially martial law. Zelensky, I mean, I hate to say it, but he's down to a 4 percent approval rating, and the country has been blown to smithereens..."

"If Ukraine wants a seat at the table, shouldn't the people have a say? It has been a long time since they had an election. That's not a Russian thing—that's coming from me and many other countries as well."

Backlash from Ukraine and European Leaders

Zelensky was not invited to the Saudi Arabia negotiations and, in response, canceled a planned visit to the country. Reacting to the meeting, he expressed outrage:

"Negotiations should not take place behind our backs. Any peace talks must be fair and involve European countries, including Turkey, which has offered to host negotiations."

Zelensky also insisted that Ukraine, the European Union, Turkey, and the UK must be part of any security discussions with the U.S. regarding the region's

future.

A senior Ukrainian official described the U.S.-Russia meeting as:

"Absolutely mind-blowing and downright infuriating—pure, unbelievable absurdity."

The developments in Saudi Arabia have also created diplomatic tensions between the U.S. and its European allies.

British opposition leader Sir Keir Starmer, who had recently called for Britain and NATO allies to send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine, now faces uncertainty about whether the U.S. will support such a mission.

After a NATO leaders' meeting in Paris, Starmer stated he would urge Trump to provide security guarantees when he visits Washington. However, Trump appeared open but indifferent to European intervention, stating:

"That would be fine. I wouldn't object to it at all."

Peace Deal Framework: Elections and Ceasefire First

Mexico threatens Google with lawsuit over 'Gulf of Mexico' name change

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Mexico has threatened that it will take legal action against Google if the tech giant continues to label the entire Gulf of Mexico as the “Gulf of America” for US-based users.

President Claudia Sheinbaum said Monday that the renaming follows an order by US President Donald Trump but argued that the directive only applies to the portion of the continental shelf under US jurisdiction.

Talking to reporters on Monday, Sheinbaum said, “What Google is doing here is changing the name of the continental shelf of Mexico and Cuba, which has nothing to do with Trump’s decree, which applied only to the US continental shelf.

“We do not agree with this, and the Foreign Minister has sent a new letter addressing the issue.”

Sheinbaum criticised the change as “incorrect,” stressing that Trump’s order “only changed the name within his own continental shelf, which extends 22 nautical miles from the US coast—not the entire Gulf.”

Google last week updated its maps to reflect the name change for users in the United States, citing “a longstanding practice of applying name changes when they have been updated in official government sources.” However, users in Mexico



still see “Gulf of Mexico,” while those in other countries see both names.

Sheinbaum initially raised the possibility of legal action last week, calling the designation “inaccurate” and suggesting a civil suit could be an option if the issue is not corrected.

During Monday’s press conference, Sheinbaum read out Google’s response to a letter Mexico had sent in January contesting the name change.

“As we first announced two weeks ago, and consistent with our product policies, we’ve begun rolling out changes in Google Maps. We would like to confirm that people using Maps in Mexico will continue to see ‘Gulf of Mexico,’” the letter stated.

“People in the US will see ‘Gulf of America’. Everyone else will see both names,” it added.

Sheinbaum confirmed that Mexico has now sent a new letter back to Google, which states: “Any reference to the ‘Gulf of America’ initiative on your Google Maps platform must be strictly limited to the marine area under U.S. jurisdiction.

“Any extension beyond that zone exceeds the authority of any national government or private entity. Should that be the case, the Government of Mexico will take the appropriate legal actions as deemed necessary.”

Sheinbaum said Mexico would await Google’s response before deciding on the next steps.

Turkey arrests nearly 300 PKK suspects, including opposition figures

By Olamilekan Botti

Turkish police detained nearly 300 PKK suspects individuals allegedly connected to the outlawed militant group, the government announced on Tuesday. Among those apprehended are journalists, politicians, and academics, highlighting the broad scope of the crackdown that has drawn widespread concern.

Over the past five days, police raids have targeted various locations across the country, reflecting the Turkish government's intensified efforts to dismantle alleged networks associated with the PKK. This surge in detentions coincides with the ongoing removal of elected pro-Kurdish mayors from their positions, further escalating tensions in the region. The government claims these officials have ties to the PKK, an organization designated as a terrorist group by Turkey and its Western allies.

The PKK has been engaged in an armed insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984, seeking greater Kurdish autonomy and rights. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of more than 40,000 people, making it one of the most protracted and deadly conflicts in modern history. As Turkey grapples with internal and external pressures, the recent detentions signal a renewed commitment to addressing what the government perceives as threats to national security.

Notably, the individuals detained include members of the Peoples' Democratic Congress (HDK) and its affiliated smaller leftist parties. The arrests also encompass academics and a prominent LGBTQ rights activist, underscoring the crackdown's far-reaching implications for civil society in Turkey. Critics argue that the government's actions are not only aimed at combating terrorism but also at stifling



dissent and suppressing voices advocating for minority rights.

This latest wave of arrests has sparked outrage among human rights organizations and opposition groups, who argue that the government is using the PKK's designation as a terrorist organization to justify the suppression of legitimate political opposition. The government, however, maintains that its actions are necessary to ensure national security and stability in a region that has historically been fraught with conflict.

As the Turkish government intensifies its efforts to eradicate PKK influence, there are emerging signs that the long-standing conflict may be approaching a turning point. Recent discussions have hinted at the possibility of renewed peace talks aimed at resolving the decades-long strife. However, the ongoing crackdown on dissent raises questions about the government's commitment to genuine dialogue and reconciliation with the Kurdish population.

The PKK's demands for greater autonomy and rights for Kurds in Turkey have long been a contentious issue, and

the government's hardline approach may further alienate Kurdish communities. Observers warn that without addressing the underlying grievances and fostering an inclusive political environment, Turkey risks perpetuating cycles of violence and unrest.

As Turkey navigates this complex landscape, the international community watches closely, urging the government to uphold human rights and engage in constructive dialogue with all segments of society. The recent detentions serve as a stark reminder of the challenges facing Turkey as it seeks to balance national security concerns with the imperatives of democracy and human rights.

In conclusion, the detention of 282 suspects linked to the PKK marks a significant moment in Turkey's ongoing struggle with Kurdish militancy and political dissent. As the government intensifies its crackdown, the implications for civil society, political representation, and the prospects for peace remain uncertain. The coming weeks will be crucial in determining whether Turkey can navigate these challenges and move toward a more inclusive and peaceful future.

Elon Musk launches new AI chatbot, Grok 3

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



Tech billionaire businessman and head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) created by President Donald Trump to cut federal government spending and wastage, Elon Musk has launched Grok 3, the latest artificial intelligence chatbot from his company, xAI.

According to reports, the launch coincides with Musk leveraging former President Donald Trump's influence to restructure and potentially eliminate bureaucratic hurdles within federal agencies.

This move has raised concerns over possible conflicts of interest, as many of these agencies regulate Musk's various business ventures.

Grok 3, introduced on Monday, February 17, enters a fiercely competitive AI market alongside industry leaders like OpenAI's ChatGPT and China's DeepSeek.

During the launch presentation, the U.S. special government employee emphasized the chatbot's ambitious mission:

"Grok is to understand the universe. We're driven by curiosity about the nature of the universe—that's also what causes us to be a maximally truth-seeking AI, even if that truth is sometimes at odds with what is politically correct."

Musk described Grok 3 as "scary smart," boasting ten times the computational power of its predecessor, which was launched in August 2023. The chatbot has been trained on synthetic data and incorporates self-correction mechanisms to minimize AI-generated misinformation or "hallucinations."

The tech guru claims Grok 3 exhibits exceptional reasoning abilities, outperforming all known competitors in preliminary tests. He highlighted these advancements during a recent video call at the World Governments Summit in Dubai.

Initially, Grok 3 will be available exclusively to Premium+ subscribers on X—formerly known as Twitter—before expanding to a wider audience.

Musk's chatbot enters an increasingly

competitive AI landscape, where nations and tech giants are racing to develop cost-effective, cutting-edge solutions.

Recently, Chinese startup DeepSeek made headlines with its affordable, high-quality R1 chatbot, challenging U.S. dominance in AI. Grok 3 will also go head-to-head with OpenAI's ChatGPT, reigniting Musk's rivalry with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman.

Musk co-founded OpenAI in 2015, investing \$45 million to counterbalance Google's dominance in AI. However, he left the company in 2018. The launch of ChatGPT in 2022 marked a major technological breakthrough—one that Musk was not part of, propelling Altman to global prominence.

Since then, tensions between Musk and Altman have escalated, culminating in OpenAI's board rejecting Musk's recent proposal to acquire the company for nearly \$100 billion.

Delta flight flips upside down at Toronto airport, 18 Injured

By **Olamilekan Botti**

Delta flight flips upside down during its landing at Toronto Pearson Airport on Monday, resulting in injuries to 18 of the 80 individuals on board. The incident occurred amid challenging weather conditions, following a recent snowstorm that left the area experiencing strong winds, according to officials.

The flight, identified as DL4819, was traveling from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport when the accident took place. Among the injured, three individuals, including a child, were reported to have sustained critical injuries, as confirmed by a Canadian air ambulance official. In total, 15 other passengers were taken to local hospitals for immediate medical attention.

Delta Air Lines reported late Monday that some of the injured passengers had since been released from medical care, although further details regarding their conditions were not disclosed. The airline expressed its concern for those affected and its commitment to cooperating fully with the investigation into the incident.

The aircraft involved was a Bombardier CRJ900, operated by Endeavor Air, a regional subsidiary of Delta. The CRJ900, which has a capacity of up to 90 passengers, was carrying 76 passengers and four crew members at the time of the accident. This particular aircraft, which was 16 years old, is powered by engines manufactured by GE Aerospace.

Eyewitness accounts and video footage from the scene revealed that at least one of the plane's wings was detached following the incident, underscoring the severity of the situation. Emergency responders quickly arrived at the scene to assist those injured



and secure the area.

In the wake of the accident, Canadian authorities announced that they would launch an investigation to determine the cause of the crash. As of now, the specific factors contributing to the incident remain unclear. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) is expected to play a key role in examining the circumstances surrounding the flight's landing and the subsequent overturning.

This incident has raised concerns about safety procedures and protocols, particularly given the adverse weather conditions that may have contributed to the accident. Air travel can often be affected by severe weather, and airlines are required to implement rigorous safety measures to mitigate risks.

Delta Air Lines has a strong safety record, but this incident marks a significant event for the airline and the aviation community at large. The aftermath of such accidents often leads to heightened scrutiny of operational standards and aircraft maintenance practices.

As the investigation unfolds, both Delta and Canadian aviation authorities will be looking to gather data and insights that can help prevent similar occurrences in the future. The safety of passengers and crew remains the top priority for airlines, and incidents like this serve as a reminder of the inherent risks involved in air travel.

Passengers who were on board flight DL4819 are likely to face ongoing emotional and psychological impacts as they process the traumatic experience. Delta has pledged to provide support to those affected, including counseling services for passengers and crew members.

In conclusion, the overturning of the Delta regional jet at Toronto Pearson Airport serves as a stark reminder of the complexities and dangers associated with flying, particularly in challenging weather conditions. As investigations continue, the focus will be on understanding the causes of the incident and ensuring that measures are put in place to enhance aviation safety for all travelers.

Lebanon calls for complete israeli withdrawal from territory

By Olamilekan Botti

Lebanon has formally demanded that Israel withdraw all its military forces from Lebanese territory, stressing that any remaining troop presence would constitute an “occupation.” This urgent call comes as Tuesday marked the deadline for Israel to complete its withdrawal under a U.S.-brokered agreement aimed at ending a devastating offensive in southern Lebanon. The conflict, which began in September, followed months of cross-border skirmishes between Israel and the militant group Hizbollah.

The ceasefire deal, reached in November, brought an end to the most intense fighting between Israel and Hizbollah in nearly two decades. According to the terms of the agreement, Israel was initially given 60 days to withdraw its troops, a timeline that was subsequently extended by three weeks last month. However, Israeli officials have accused the Lebanese army of failing to deploy quickly enough to prevent Hizbollah from re-establishing its presence in the region.

On Monday, Israeli military officials announced that troops would remain stationed at five “strategic” locations in southern Lebanon. They characterized this decision as part of last year’s U.S.-brokered agreement that ended months of conflict. An Israeli military spokesperson referred to the remaining positions as “temporary deployments” that provide critical “vantage points” over Israeli communities across the border.

Israeli authorities claimed that this move had been “agreed upon” with the U.S.-led ceasefire monitoring mechanism established as part of the truce. However, it remains unclear whether Israel’s



decision was solely approved by Washington or if other members of the monitoring mechanism, including France, the United Nations, and the Lebanese government, were also in agreement.

Top U.N. officials in Lebanon expressed disappointment, stating that “another delay” in fully implementing the ceasefire agreement was not what they had anticipated. They underscored that this situation constitutes a violation of U.N. Resolution 1701, which governs the terms of the ceasefire. While Israeli forces have withdrawn from populated areas in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces are deploying under challenging conditions.

In response to these developments, Lebanon’s president, prime minister, and speaker of parliament announced that they would escalate their complaint to the U.N. Security Council, urging action against ongoing “Israeli violations” and demanding an immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Israel launched a fierce air and ground

assault against Hizbollah after the Iran-backed group began firing into Israeli territory following Hamas’s attack from Gaza on October 7, 2023. The Israeli campaign devastated Hizbollah’s arsenal and significantly impacted its leadership, resulting in the deaths of key figures including secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah. The conflict resulted in over 4,000 deaths in Lebanon and more than 140 Israeli casualties, displacing over one million people throughout Lebanon and nearly 60,000 Israelis from border regions.

Despite the ceasefire, Israel has continued to conduct strikes against Hizbollah and other targets in Lebanon, with incidents reported as recently as this weekend. As Israeli troops begin to withdraw, Lebanese soldiers have started moving into the areas vacated by Israeli forces, clearing roadblocks and searching for unexploded ordnance. While some residents are returning to areas deemed safe, many find only rubble where their homes once stood, highlighting the devastating toll of the prolonged conflict.

Top Russian, US officials meet on improving ties, ending Ukraine war — without Kyiv

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The top diplomats from Russia and the U.S. met Tuesday in Saudi Arabia to discuss improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine — talks that represented a rapid and major change in American foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which comes as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country won't accept any outcome from this week's talks if Kyiv doesn't take part. European allies have also expressed concerns they are being sidelined.

Beyond Ukraine, the meeting — attended by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other senior officials — is expected to focus on thawing relations between the two countries, whose ties have fallen to their lowest level in decades. It is meant to pave the way for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

CONCERNS FROM ALLIES THEY ARE BEING SIDELINED

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Monday that the talks will be primarily focused on “restoring the entire range of U.S.-Russian relations, as well as preparing possible talks on the Ukrainian settlement and organizing a meeting of the two presidents.” U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the meeting is aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about wanting peace and whether detailed negotiations can be started.

The recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and



Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favorable to them.

Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks has rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to discuss the war.

Bruce has said that even though Ukraine will not be at the table Tuesday, any actual peace negotiations will include the country. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of U.S. policy under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, whose administration also led international efforts to isolate Russia over the war.

White House officials have also pushed back against the notion that Europe has been left out of the conversation, noting that administration officials have spoken to several leaders.

French President, Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following the meeting he called in Paris.

“We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine,” Macron wrote on social media platform X. “To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be

accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians,” he said and vowed to “work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians.”

Peskov on Tuesday said that Putin has repeatedly expressed readiness for peace talks, and noted that a “comprehensive settlement, a long-term settlement, a viable settlement” of the conflict in Ukraine is impossible without “a comprehensive consideration of security issues” in Europe.

SAUDI ARABIA'S ROLE

The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlights de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's efforts to be a major diplomatic player, burnishing a reputation severely tarnished by the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince's direction. Like the neighboring United Arab Emirates, the prince has maintained close relations with Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

North Korea denounces 'absurd' denuclearisation pledge by US and allies

By **Olamilekan Botti**

North Korea's foreign ministry declared on Tuesday its intention to continue bolstering its nuclear capabilities, sharply criticizing a recent joint commitment made by the United States, South Korea, and Japan aimed at denuclearization

The tension escalated following discussions held on Saturday among U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, and Japanese Foreign Minister Iwata Takeshi at a security conference in Munich. During this meeting, the three diplomats issued a statement reaffirming their collective dedication to achieving North Korea's complete denuclearization.

In response, Pyongyang's foreign ministry vehemently condemned the trilateral pledge as an "outdated" and "absurd" approach. North Korean officials characterized the denuclearization efforts as misguided, cautioning against what they deemed "foolish acts inciting collective hostility and conflicts." The rhetoric underscores the deepening chasm between the North and the three allied nations, particularly in light of their ongoing diplomatic efforts to address nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula.

An unnamed spokesperson from North Korea's foreign ministry articulated the regime's stance, stating that as long as what it perceives as hostile threats from the U.S. and its allies persist, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) will view its nuclear arsenal as essential for national defense. The spokesperson emphasized that the nuclear weapons are not only a means of protecting the nation's sovereignty but also a legitimate form of self-defense as enshrined in the country's constitution.

This declaration signals a steadfast



commitment by North Korea to enhance its military capabilities, particularly its nuclear forces, despite international pressures and sanctions aimed at curbing its nuclear ambitions. The statement reflects a broader strategy by the North Korean regime to assert its sovereignty and independence in the face of what it considers external aggression.

The situation remains tenuous as global powers continue to grapple with the North Korean nuclear dilemma. The U.S., South Korea, and Japan have maintained that denuclearization is critical for ensuring regional security and stability. However, North Korea's response indicates that it views its nuclear program as a vital deterrent against perceived threats, particularly from the U.S. and its allies in the region.

Analysts suggest that North Korea's latest pronouncement may further complicate diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the nuclear standoff. The ongoing tensions underscore the challenges faced by international negotiators seeking to engage Pyongyang in meaningful discussions regarding its nuclear program.

The backdrop to this diplomatic friction is

a long history of conflict and mistrust between North Korea and its neighbors, particularly following a series of missile tests and nuclear detonations by the North. These actions have drawn widespread condemnation and intensified sanctions from the international community, which continues to call for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

As the situation evolves, the international community will be closely monitoring North Korea's actions and statements, particularly in light of the upcoming diplomatic engagements. The prospect of renewed negotiations remains uncertain, as both sides appear entrenched in their positions.

In conclusion, North Korea's commitment to enhancing its nuclear capabilities, coupled with its vehement rejection of the U.S.-led denuclearization efforts, highlights the ongoing complexity of the geopolitical landscape in East Asia. As tensions mount, the potential for further escalation remains a pressing concern for regional and global stability. The world watches as the dynamics of this situation unfold, with the hope that dialogue may eventually prevail over discord.

Japan aims for 60% greenhouse gas emission cuts by 2035

By Olamilekan Botti

On Tuesday, Japan announced an ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60 percent from 2013 levels by the fiscal year 2035. However, climate activists argue that this target does not meet the necessary benchmarks outlined in the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming.

Under the Paris accord, each nation is expected to submit a headline figure to the United Nations for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, along with a detailed plan for achieving this goal. As the world's fifth-largest emitter of carbon dioxide, following China, the United States, India, and Russia, Japan's commitment is crucial in the global fight against climate change.

The Japanese Environment Ministry stated that the country also aims for a 73 percent reduction in emissions by fiscal 2040 as part of its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), a voluntary commitment to the UN. However, only ten out of nearly 200 nations have submitted their climate plans on time, as tracked by a UN database.

Despite Japan's claims of aligning its targets with the global goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius. "This represents a significant setback in Japan's transition to a fair and just renewable energy future," Iyoda remarked. Kazue Suzuki of Greenpeace Japan echoed these



sentiments, asserting that a 78 percent reduction is necessary given Japan's status as an industrially advanced nation.

UN climate chief Simon Stiell has characterized these national pledges as "the most important policy documents of this century," yet many major polluters, including China and India, have yet to submit updated targets. While there are no penalties for late submissions, these targets serve as accountability measures to ensure countries are serious about their climate commitments.

Japan's previous commitment involved a 26 percent reduction in emissions by 2030, which was later strengthened to a 46 percent reduction. In conjunction with this latest announcement, the Japanese government also approved its Strategic Energy Plan, which aims to position renewable energy as the

primary power source by 2040.

In light of energy demands from burgeoning sectors like AI and microchip manufacturing, Japan intends to maintain a significant role for nuclear power, reversing a prior commitment to minimize reliance on it. The revised plan also includes a collaborative effort with the United States to promote renewable energy and hydrogen fuel, although specifics were altered following the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

Currently, approximately 70 percent of Japan's energy needs are met through fossil fuels, a figure the government aims to reduce to 30-40 percent in the next 15 years. Meanwhile, renewable sources such as solar and wind are projected to account for 40-50 percent of electricity generation by 2040, marking a pivotal shift in Japan's energy landscape.

How Vladimir Putin plans to play Donald Trump

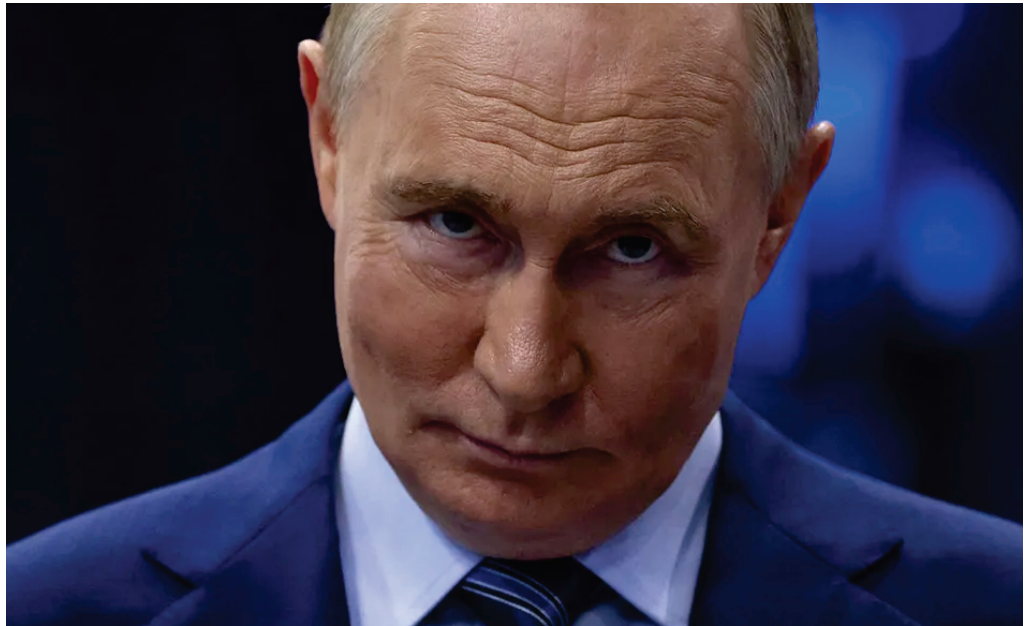
By **The Economics**

The Russian president thinks he is a better poker player

Judged by the din of Russian propaganda, Vladimir Putin has never been closer to winning his war on Ukraine. Yet three years after his invasion, it is not clear what “win” means. His goals are elusive. His “special military operation” was planned in secret. His government was kept in the dark, as were the Russian people. Mr Putin talks of defending Russian sovereignty, but what happens next depends in part on factors outside his control: politics in Ukraine, Europe’s rearmament effort, and above all Donald Trump. Negotiations with the Trump administration began formally on February 18th in Saudi Arabia.

Mr Trump has no clear plan, and his options range from cutting off Ukraine to ramping up military aid and sanctions. The dance between the American president and Mr Putin took another step in Riyadh, in the first direct meeting between American and Russian officials for three years. They agreed to a nebulous series of negotiations on Ukraine and “mutual geopolitical interests”. Preparations will begin for a Trump-Putin summit, although no date was fixed.

These open-ended talks suit Mr Putin just fine. Whereas Mr Trump views them as a way to end a “ridiculous” war, Mr Putin sees them as a stage in a larger conflict, says an American official. The Russian leader calculates he has more staying power than Ukraine or NATO, the creaking Western alliance. Like a poker player, Mr Putin excels in projecting confidence and strength. In reality, though, his cards are not as strong as he would like his opponents to believe, while an end to the war could create complications for him at home.



Any assessment of Russia’s negotiating position should start with the military situation. Its army has performed dismally. The pace of advance is excruciatingly slow: since last July it has struggled to take the town of Pokrovsk, where current losses are staggering. Most of its gains were in the first weeks of the war. In April 2022, following Russia’s retreat from the north of Ukraine, it controlled 19.6% of Ukrainian territory, and its casualties (dead and wounded) were perhaps 20,000. Today Russia occupies 19.2% and its casualties are 800,000, reckon British sources. A western official says “the two armies are fighting each other because they can’t stop, not because they are really hoping to achieve a decisive victory.”

The attrition of equipment is jawdropping. Consider Russia’s stock of Soviet-era armour, built up over decades. More than half of the 7,300 tanks it had in storage are gone. Of those that remain, only 500 can be reconditioned quickly. By April Russia may run out of its T-80 tanks. Last year it lost twice as many artillery systems as in the preceding two years. Recruiting contract soldiers is getting more expensive. A general

mobilisation would be politically risky. Public-opinion surveys clearly show that Russians want the war to end.

Russia’s economy has withstood the blow of sanctions thanks to the professionalism of its central bank, high commodity prices and fiscal stimulus. Yet the reallocation of resources from productive sectors to the military complex has fuelled double-digit inflation. Interest rates are 21%, the highest level in two decades. A shortage of labour is chronic. Figures on the economy may not be reliable: the statistics authority constantly revises growth estimates, for example. But a report by the Central Bank and the Ministry of Economy, leaked to Reuters, warns a recession may come before inflation slows. Oleg Vyugin, a former deputy head of the central bank, says the government must soon choose between cutting military spending or galloping inflation.

The sovereign wealth fund is being drained. According to Mikhail Zadornov, a former finance minister, its liquid assets have shrunk from 7.4% of GDP to below 2%. Exports, which were \$417bn last year, are under pressure from sanctions

Liverpool can handle Premier League title pressure – Slot

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Arne Slot insists Liverpool can handle the mounting pressure of the Premier League title race after the leaders were hampered by nerves in their tense win against Wolves.

Slot's side head to Aston Villa on Wednesday knowing a victory would move them 10 points clear of second-placed Arsenal in their bid to clinch a record-equalling 20th English title.

But Liverpool, in dynamic form for much of the season, have looked less secure of late and almost blew a two-goal lead in Sunday's 2-1 win over lowly Wolves at Anfield.

The Reds had already suffered a costly collapse in the Merseyside derby draw just days earlier when Everton's James Tarkowski scored a stoppage-time equaliser.

Liverpool's reserves also crashed out of the FA Cup with an embarrassing fourth-round loss at second-tier Plymouth recently, leading to fears the treble chasers are beginning to crack as expectations increase.

Reds left-back Andrew Robertson admitted after the Wolves game that it was natural for the players to be nervous as they get closer to the finish line.

But Slot pointed to Liverpool's ability to grind out several wins by a one-goal margin already this season as proof they won't crumble under pressure.



"It is because we are going to the end of the season, not because of us but what people make of it," Slot told reporters on Tuesday.

"We have won other games at home or away by one goal when it was also tight. I remember Crystal Palace away when it was tight in the end.

"If this happens at the end of the season you guys are going to talk about nerves.

"To secure a win in the Premier League, if we are winning 1-0, is going to be a lot of defending and hard work."

'Fight until the end'

Arsenal have added to the concern at Anfield with a 15-match unbeaten run in the league since their last top-flight loss at Newcastle on November 2.

Several of Liverpool's players have title race experience after winning the Premier League in 2020 under Slot's predecessor Jurgen Klopp.

Slot has also successfully navigated the anxiety of the final weeks of the season in his Dutch title-winning campaign with Feyenoord.

But the Reds boss has mixed feelings about how useful those triumphs will be in helping Liverpool this season.

"We lean a lot on the players. They have to show up and bring the performance. We don't present a meeting on how to deal with the pressure, that is not how it works," he said.

"It helps that they are used to playing big games with lots of pressure, but don't make that too big. We must not over-value experience.

Guardiola underestimating Man City UCL chances, says Ancelotti

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said Tuesday his Manchester City counterpart Pep Guardiola was deliberately underestimating the English side's hopes of reaching the Champions League last 16.

European champions Madrid hold a 3-2 lead on City, who have struggled this season and are fourth in the Premier League, ahead of the play-off round second leg on Wednesday at the Santiago Bernabeu.

After thrashing Newcastle 4-0 on Saturday, Guardiola said English champions City have only a one percent chance of ousting the record 15-time European Cup winners.

"He does not truly think that, tomorrow I'll ask him before the game — do you really think you've got a one percent chance?" Ancelotti told a news conference.

"He really thinks they've got more chance than that... we don't think we have 99 percent chance.

"We think we have a small advantage that we have to take advantage of, and try to play the same game we set up in the first leg, which went well.

Ancelotti confirmed defender Antonio Rudiger was fit to start for



the holders after injury but Lucas Vazquez would only be ready for the bench.

The coach reiterated his frustration with Spanish refereeing, following some controversial decisions which went against his side in recent La Liga matches.

Ancelotti said he was more comfortable with refereeing in the Champions League.

"Statistics speak for themselves, in Europe there's less controversy in this sense, there are less VAR interventions," said Ancelotti.

"The VAR only intervenes when it's necessary, and usually the Champions League features the best referees from each country, so the quality is very high in this sense."

England international Jude Bellingham was sent off for dissent during Madrid's 1-1 draw at Osasuna on Saturday in La Liga.

Bellingham's team-mate Federico Valverde said he did not want the midfielder to change his ways.

"What I want is players who leave their soul out on the pitch, in this case with Jude in the last game, I always want him to be like that," Valverde told reporters.

"Jude is a player who shows character, who always wants to win, who always wants to fight.

"This time he got a red card, but I like that he's giving everything, his spikiness... we have to stay united as a team."