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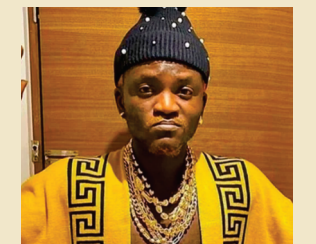
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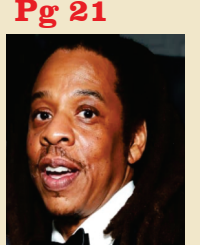


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Senate summons security chiefs over alleged terrorism funding

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



The Senate has directed the National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu along with the heads of the National Intelligence Agency and Defence Intelligence Agency, to appear before it regarding allegations that USAID is providing financial support to Boko Haram.

The decision to launch an inquiry into potential foreign sponsorship of terrorist organizations, including Boko Haram, was prompted by a motion introduced by Senator Ali Ndume.

Lawmakers raised concerns following a viral video featuring U.S. Congressman Scott Perry, a Republican from Pennsylvania, who claimed during a congressional hearing that

USAID has been implicated in financing extremist groups worldwide.

Senator Ndume emphasised that these allegations surfaced shortly after the Chief of Defence Staff, General Christopher Musa, warned that terrorist factions in Nigeria were receiving external financial and operational support.

The controversy follows statements by Congressman Perry, who alleged that USAID's \$697 million annual budget, which includes financial aid to Islamic schools, has inadvertently supported terrorist networks.

He made these claims during a session of an advisory committee established by former U.S.

President Donald Trump to review government expenditures.

Perry, a member of Trump's Republican Party, has drawn criticism for his stance, with opponents accusing the former president of attempting to undermine organizations like USAID.

In January, Trump announced a 90-day suspension of foreign aid, citing the need to reassess whether such expenditures align with U.S. national interests.

The Senate's inquiry aims to uncover any links between foreign aid and terrorist financing, ensuring that national security remains a priority.

THE NEW DAILY PRIME RATE CARD

PUBLIC NOTICE COLOUR

PRODUCT COLOUR

**EFFECTIVE FROM
DECEMBER 1, 2024**

SIZE	TOTAL RATE
FULL PAGE	372,500.00
HALF PAGE	213,000.00
QUARTER PAGE	106,500.00
14X2	118,000.00
10X6	261,585.50
10X5	255,238.00
10X4	206,890.50
10X3	179,608.00
9X6	254,977.00
9X5	225,738.00
9X4	193,500.00
9X3	166,223.50
8X6	225,368.50
8X3	106,934.50
7X4	180,173.50
6X4	100,434.50
6X3	82,750.00
6X2	52,499.50
5X6	123,749.50
5X5	110,000.00
5X4	76,833.00
5X3	66,875.00
5X2	42,916.50
4X4	60,166.50
4X3	36,499.50
4X2	29,333.50
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1X1	4,400.00

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8X6	216,000.00
8X3	98,500.00
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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
FEATURES	200,000.00	15,000.00	215,000.00

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FG moves to fast-track MSMEs growth

By Friday Omosola

The Federal Government (FG) has taken decisive steps to accelerate the growth of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria.

The steps led to the establishing a committee to interface with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and improve access to financing for small businesses.

This was a key resolution from the first meeting of the National Council on MSMEs for 2025, held yesterday at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

Vice President Kashim Shettima, who chaired the meeting, emphasised the government's commitment to supporting MSMEs, recognising their critical role in job creation and economic development.

He highlighted the administration's responsibility, in collaboration with stakeholders, to implement policies that foster sustainable business growth.

The newly formed committee, led by the Minister of State for Industry, Trade, and Investment, John Enoh, comprises top government officials and financial institution leaders.

Members include the Ministers of Science and Technology, Women Affairs, and Agriculture, as well as representatives from the Bank of Industry (BOI), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Bank of Agriculture (BOA), Nigeria Export-Import Bank (NEXIM), Development Bank of Nigeria (DBN), and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), among others.

The committee is tasked with strengthening financial support structures for MSMEs and ensuring seamless access to funding through various government and private sector interventions.



In addition, the council approved a new loan scheme known as the Syndicated De-Risked Loans for Small Businesses.

This initiative, a collaboration between state governments and financial institutions, is designed to provide MSMEs with single-digit interest rate loans, improving their financial sustainability and growth.

Shettima urged state governments to establish non-political entities to oversee the implementation of the scheme to ensure its long-term success.

"Some of these initiatives are laudable and will need to outlive the present administrations in the States. Regardless of political affiliations, Nigerians must be seen as the ultimate beneficiaries of these schemes that we are trying to put in place," he stated.

During the meeting, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MSMEs, Mr. Temitola Adekunle-Johnson, described the syndicated de-risked loans as a game-changer in ensuring affordable and accessible financing for businesses.

He emphasised President Bola Tinubu's commitment to MSME development and

job creation.

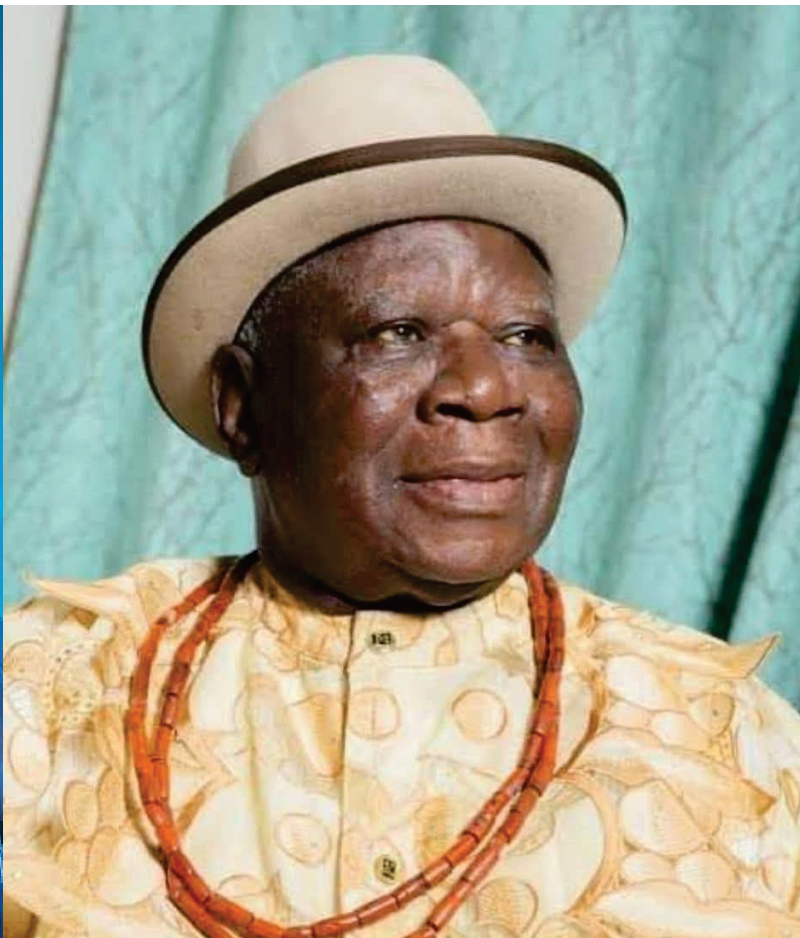
Additionally, the Director-General of SMEDAN, Charles Odii, presented the GROW Nigeria Strategy, a framework designed to provide guidance, resources, opportunities, and workforce development for the country's estimated 40 million small businesses across eight distinct sectors.

The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including the Deputy Governor of Enugu State, Ifeanyi Ossai; representatives of the Governors of Benue and Katsina States; and Ministers responsible for Industry, Science and Technology, Women Affairs, and Agriculture.

Also present were heads of financial institutions and regulatory bodies such as NAFDAC, Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), along with representatives from the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA) and the National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME).

Shettima mourns Edwin Clark, calls Him 'Fallen Iroko'

By Friday Omosola



Vice President Kashim Shettima has described the passing of elder statesman Chief Edwin Clark as a profound loss to Nigeria, likening his death to the fall of a great Iroko tree.

Chief Clark, a former Federal Commissioner for Information in the First Republic and a Senator in the Second Republic, died on Monday at his residence at the age of 97.

Until his death, he was the Chairman of the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) and a leading voice on national issues, particularly resource control and environmental justice in the Niger Delta.

In a condolence message on Wednesday, Shettima praised the late nationalist's decades-long influence on Nigeria's political discourse.

"When the giant Iroko tree falls, the landscape itself is forever altered. Today, our national horizon looks markedly different without Chief Clark's commanding presence, which has defined our political discourse for over six decades," he said.

He extended his condolences to the Clark-Fuludu Bekederemo family, describing the late statesman as a fearless advocate for justice and equity.

The Vice President also recalled

Clark's persistent calls for restructuring, noting that his unwavering stance often put him at odds with various administrations but earned him respect across political divides.

"Chief Clark embodied the resilient spirit of the Niger Delta—unbowed and unwavering in his pursuit of justice.

"The Niger Delta has lost one of its most eloquent defenders, the Ijaw nation its most prominent son, and Nigeria a truth-teller whose interventions consistently redirected our national conversation toward justice and inclusivity," he stated.

Reps probes NNPC, oil firms over unremitted \$1.6bn royalties

By Dave Oludare Oso

The non-remittance of \$1.6 billion in royalties to the Federation Account by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) and several oil companies has provoked the House of Representatives Committee on Public Accounts to initiate a high-profile investigations.

According to reports, the probe, launched on Tuesday, follows a damning audit report by the Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation (OAUFG), which flagged discrepancies in remittances linked to Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs), Repayment Agreements, and Modified Carry Arrangements.

The 2021 OAUFG report presented at the hearing, claims that NNPC Ltd and oil firms collectively owed \$1.6 billion in unpaid royalties as of December 2021.

The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) disclosed that the debts stemmed from contractual obligations under oil and gas production agreements.

Further findings revealed NNPC Ltd's counterclaims against the Federation, totaling N1.9 trillion, complicating the financial reconciliation process.

Responding to the allegations, NNPC's Group Chief Executive Officer, Mele Kyari, represented by Chief Financial Officer, Dapo Segun, defended the company's actions.

Segun explained that portions of the funds in question were legally channelled into Government Priority Projects (GPP) and petrol subsidy payments until their removal in September 2023.

These deductions, he noted, were drawn from the Federation's crude oil and gas entitlements—including royalties—as approved in national budgets passed by the National Assembly.



“No deductions were made in 2023 and 2024 for GPP, as these were contingent on the passage of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA),” Segun clarified.

He emphasized that a reconciliation process overseen by the Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun, is underway to resolve NNPC's N1.9 trillion claims against the Federation. “Once concluded, reports will be shared with relevant agencies,” he assured.

Chairman of the Sub-Committee, Hon. Akinlade Isiaq reaffirmed the panel's resolve to recover the debts, stressing that the investigation will extend through 2025 to ascertain the status of the debts as of December 2024.

“This hearing is critical to ensuring Nigeria's resources are accounted for. We will take all necessary steps to recover what is owed to the Federation,” Isiaq stated, underscoring commitments to transparency and accountability.

The committee also summoned oil companies named in the NUPRC report, which allegedly owe \$929 million as of September 2024. Key agencies,

including the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), and the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), have been invited to provide clarity on fiscal processes and legal frameworks governing the payments.

The probe marks a significant push to address longstanding opacity in Nigeria's oil sector, which accounts for over 80% of national revenue.

With public finances strained by subsidy removals and economic reforms, lawmakers and civil society groups have intensified calls for stringent oversight of NNPC Ltd's operations since its transition to a fully commercial entity under the PIA (2021).

The committee also invited the alleged oil companies indicted by the NUPRC report that owed the federal government the sum of \$929m as at 30th September, 2024.

PreCEFI begins work on Aso Accord implementation

By Friday Omosola

In a strategic move to drive Nigeria's economic reforms, the federal government has mandated the Presidential Committee on Economic and Financial Inclusion (PreCEFI) to oversee the implementation of the Aso Accord.

The committee, inaugurated by Vice President Kashim Shettima on February 10 is tasked with providing high-level strategic guidance to ensure inclusive economic growth and bridge financial gaps nationwide.

The establishment of PreCEFI aligns with President Bola Tinubu's administration's commitment to achieving a trillion-dollar economy.

To achieve this, the committee has been structured into two subcommittees: the Governance Committee (GovCo) and the Technical Implementation Committee (TechCo), supported by an implementation secretariat.

Chaired by Vice President Shettima, with Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy, Wale Edun, as Deputy Chairman, the Governance Committee (GovCo) is responsible for strategic oversight.

The committee will ensure that economic and financial inclusion (EFI) initiatives are aligned with national development strategies, approve policy frameworks, and facilitate resource mobilization.

The committee's key responsibilities include setting performance targets, monitoring progress, and acting as a liaison between the National Economic Council and EFI agencies.

Members include Deputy Chief of Staff to the President, Senator Ibrahim Hassan Hadejia; Governors of Enugu and Kaduna States, Peter Mbah and Uba Sani, respectively; Minister of Communications, Innovation, and



Digital Economy, Olatunbosun Tijani.

Others are Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Prof. Nentawe Goshwe Yilwatda; National Security Adviser, Nuhu Ribadu; and the Central Bank Governor, Olayemi Cardoso, among others.

The Technical Implementation Committee (TechCo), chaired by Director General of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), Inuwa Abdullahi, is responsible for operationalizing the strategic direction set by GovCo.

Deputy Governor of Financial System Stability at the Central Bank, Philip Ikeazor, serves as Deputy Chairman.

TechCo will design and implement frameworks for EFI initiatives, monitor budget compliance and timelines, drive technological integration, and advise GovCo on alignment with the Aso Accord's objectives.

Other members include the heads of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC),

and Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), along with private sector representatives such as Stephen Ambore and Modupe Ladipo.

The PreCEFI Secretariat, led by Technical Advisor to the President on Economic and Financial Inclusion, Nurudeen Zauro, will coordinate activities between GovCo and TechCo while liaising with stakeholders.

Other members of the secretariat include Stephen Ambore (Deputy Head), Kyuka Ibrahim Avong (Director of Digital Enablement), and Abdulfarid Yusuf O (Director of Strategy & Advocacy).

The committee is also supported by technical and research advisors, including Olayinka David-West from Lagos Business School and Prof. Nasir Abdullahi from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Traditional leaders such as Emir of Shonga, Haliru Yahaya Ndanusa, and High Chief Temitope Fawehinmi, Gbajeniye of Egband, have also been appointed as EFI Ambassadors.

Fugitive singer, Portable surrenders to Police in Lagos

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Fugitive musician, Habeeb Okikiola Olalomi, popularly known as Portable, has surrendered himself to the Lagos State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) in Yaba.

This follows an ongoing police investigation into allegations of violent conduct and assault on government officials in Ogun State.

Confirming the development, Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer (PRO), Benjamin Hundeyin via text on Wednesday, said, “Portable just turned himself in at the SCID Yaba. We have contacted Ogun State Police Command to come pick him up.”

Portable was recently declared wanted for allegedly leading a violent attack on Ogun State government officials who were carrying out their lawful duties.

The incident involved three officials from the Ogun State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Ota Zonal Office—TPL Onabanjo Abidemi, TPL Raymond Lateef, and TPL Ridwan Oyero Akinlesi—who were on an enforcement mission at Oke-Osa, Tigbo Ilu Ota.

According to reports, the officials were in the area to enforce government regulations when they were confronted by Portable and his associates.

While his nine accomplices were arrested, the controversial singer, who is recently more in the news for various



negative stories bolted away, escaping from the clutch of the police.

Responding to the news of his being declared wanted by the police authorities, the ‘Zazoo Zeh’ crooner declared that he is not surrendering to anybody on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the Ogun State Police Command while responding to claims by Portable that he is receiving psychiatric treatment at the Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Aro, Abeokuta, has maintained that the singer remains wanted.

Portable in a video on Tuesday, appealed to Nigerians and the Ogun State Government after being declared a wanted man by the police that he is currently undergoing psychiatric treatment at the famed hospital.

In the video, Portable described

himself as a “madman” and claimed he was undergoing treatment for his mental health at Aro Psychiatric Hospital.

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.

The police PRO stated, “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.”

Dangote doubles wealth, now world's 86th richest person

By Dave Oludare Oso



The President of Aliko Dangote Industries and Africa's richest man, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, has been ranked the 86th richest person in the world by Forbes magazine.

According to the renowned publication on Monday., the fortune of the Chairman of Dangote Petroleum Refinery & Petrochemicals has risen to \$23.9 billion.

Dangote's wealth increased by 85.27 percent or \$11 billion year-on-year, from \$12.9 billion net worth reported by Forbes on February 18, 2023.

According to Forbes, the fortunes of Africa's wealthiest man were

primarily due to his 92.3 percent stake in Dangote Petroleum Refinery & Petrochemicals.

The 650,000 barrels per day (bpd) facility began processing crude into products, including diesel, naphtha, and jet fuel in January 2024.

Nine months later, the refinery started processing petrol.

The refinery has since been making efforts to ramp up production, receiving about 24 million barrels of Nigerian supply in October and November last year.

Reports on January 28 said Dangote refinery is also expected to receive up to 12 million barrels of

crude oil from the United States.

On February 10, the refinery said it could begin operating at full capacity in 30 days.

Also, Forbes said Elon Musk, the chief executive officer (CEO) of Tesla, retained the top spot on the world's richest ranking.

Musk's wealth stood at \$393.2 billion.

Second on the list is Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Meta, who was valued at \$247.2 billion, while Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, was ranked third with \$240.1 billion.

LAGOS ASSEMBLY: DSS recovers guns, ammunition from Obasa's CSO office

By Dave Oludare Oso

The unsavoury political impasse ongoing at the Lagos House of Assembly appears to be getting uglier with operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS) allegedly uncovering a large cache of arms and ammunition from an office space in the Assembly complex allegedly being used by one Baruwa Idris Okeowo.

Baruwa, a retired serviceman is the Chief Security Officer (CSO) to the impeached former Speaker of the House, Mudashiru Obasa.

The House of Assembly has been embroiled in a leadership tussle following the removal of Obasa as the Speaker of the Assembly.

He was on January 13, 2025, removed by a majority of lawmakers over alleged misconduct, abuse of office, and financial misappropriations.

Obasa was replaced by former Deputy Speaker, Mojisola Meranda.

Upon his return, Obasa insisted that due process was not followed and maintained that he was still the legitimate Speaker.

Earlier on Monday, the leadership tussle took a new twist with heavy security presence at the premises during a plenary session.

Security vans and personnel were spotted in and outside the premises of the Assembly complex in the Alausa Area of the commercial city.



There was a mild drama when some of the security agents tried to gain access to the Assembly chambers. These delayed the plenary for some hours.

It was, however, discovered it was the Assembly leadership who requested DSS operatives to boost security ahead of February 18 plenary, citing potential security threats from Obasa's planned resumption as Speaker.

While the lawmakers passed a vote of confidence in Meranda, sources told journalists that men of the secret police after the plenary discovered a cache of pump action rifles and ammunition in an office used by Obasa's CSO in the Assembly complex.

"The DSS invited to the complex by the leadership during their routine sweeping exercise, discovered a stack of new arms, including pump action numbering about 47, and live cartridges neatly kept

somewhere within the Speaker's office space. The particular space was used by Baruwa Idris Okeowo, his CSO before the impeachment saga," a source said.

"They then took inventory of the arms and also took them into custody."

However, a source close to the ousted Speaker described the discovery by the DSS operatives as "jokes taken too far."

The source added that Obasa is yet to be invited by the secret police over the incident.

"He is yet to be invited by any security agencies, isn't it funny? Same office they brought prayer warriors to, same office she (Meranda) and other members had several meetings, so how come guns and arms were just discovered in same office. It's nothing but a form of blackmailing, that's what they have been doing before."

Over 12,000 Insurgents surrender since DRR programme launch – DHQ

By Helen Okechukwu

The Defence Headquarters has revealed that over 12,000 ex-insurgents along with their families has surrendered to the De-radicalisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DRR) programme since its launched.

The 12-months programme is conducted under the Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) initiative.

789 former insurgents are currently enrolled into the programme.

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Musa, disclosed this at the OPSC Stakeholders Meeting held in Abuja on Tuesday.

Represented by the Chief of Defence Policy and Plans, Air Vice Marshal Sayo Olatunde, Musa stated that the military is preparing to reintegrate 381 ex-Boko Haram fighters back into society.

Commander of the OPSC, Brigadier General Ali,



explained that the programme is a multi-agency humanitarian initiative, which operates under existing laws and aligns with international humanitarian and human rights regulations.

Meanwhile, the Nigeria Police Force has disclosed that it has paid N20.84 billion in insurance benefits to the families of 7,171 officers who lost their lives in the line of duty between 2020 and 2025.

The Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, made this announcement while

presenting cheques to the next-of-kin of deceased officers.

According to Egbetokun, the police force had earlier disbursed N17.8 billion to 6,465 beneficiaries in eight phases.

An additional N2.99 billion has now been paid to 706 more beneficiaries, covering policy years from 2020 to 2024.

This ninth phase brings the total amount paid to N20.84 billion, ensuring financial support for the families of fallen officers.

Lagos Assembly Crisis: media exaggerating situation, says APC Chieftain

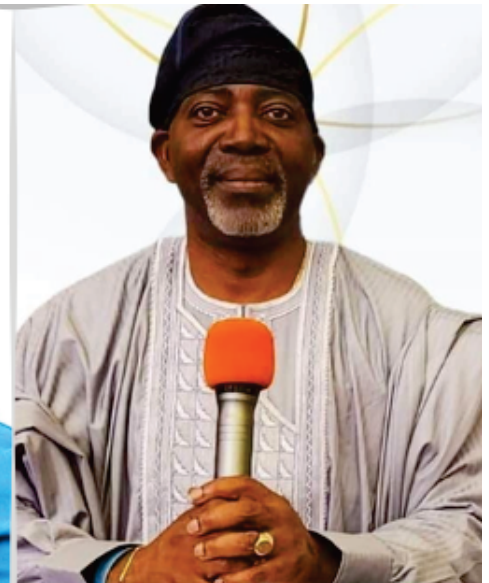
By Dr. Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

Amid rumours circulating online about her resignation, Princess Mojisola Meranda, the newly elected Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, has firmly denied stepping down. In a statement released Tuesday, the Rt. Hon. Speaker reaffirmed her position, declaring that she remains in office and has no plans to resign.

Meranda, responding to the reports, emphasized that she is actively fulfilling her legislative responsibilities and dismissed claims of her departure as baseless. Her Chief Press Secretary, Segun Ajiboye, also addressed the controversy, labelling the resignation rumours as “a lie from the pit of hell.”

“There is no truth in the story. I am doing my work as the CPS; the Speaker is in her office as we speak, and everybody is going about their business. We do not know where the story is coming from. The Speaker has not resigned, and there is no plan for that.”

The controversy gained traction following the circulation of a February 17, 2025, document, purportedly announcing Meranda’s resignation. However, investigations by the New Daily Prime revealed that the letter lacked an official signature and



stamp. It featured only the Lagos State logo, with no official letterhead or insignia from the Lagos State House of Assembly, raising doubts about its authenticity.

New Allegations Against Former Lagos Speaker

In a new development, the former Speaker, Mudashiru Obasa, has been accused of storing illegal firearms in his office. According to sources, operatives of the Department of State Services (DSS) allegedly uncovered a cache of weapons, including 47 pump-action rifles and live cartridges, hidden within the former Speaker’s office space.

The allegations, which have made front-page news across several national newspapers, have further fuelled political tensions in Lagos. However, Obasa has strongly denied the accusations, calling them “laughable, ill-conceived,

and a desperate attempt to tarnish his image.”

“This is nothing but an attempt at cheap blackmail. The case is already before the court, and I urge those spreading falsehoods to desist. The law will take its course,” Obasa stated.

The DSS has yet to officially confirm or release a statement regarding the alleged weapons discovery.

The political tension in Nigeria’s economic hub stems from a power struggle within the Lagos State House of Assembly. The crisis escalated following the January 13, 2025, removal of former Speaker Mudashiru Obasa, an ouster backed by 36 of the 40 Assembly lawmakers.

**Continue reading
on next page**

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Obasa's impeachment stemmed from allegations of gross misconduct, financial misappropriation, and abuse of office. His removal marked a major shift in Lagos State politics, as Mojisola Meranda, then Deputy Speaker, was unanimously elected to replace him—making history as the first female Speaker of the Lagos Assembly.

However, Obasa has challenged the legitimacy of his impeachment, arguing that due process was not followed, particularly as the Assembly was reportedly in recess at the time of his removal. He has since filed a legal case, seeking an accelerated hearing to determine whether his removal was constitutional.

Amid the uncertainty, security tensions have escalated. The Department of State Services (DSS), Nigeria's intelligence agency, has reportedly sealed off the offices of both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker to prevent further unrest.

APC Chieftain's Reaction

As the situation unfolds, our correspondent spoke via phone

with Hon. Tunde Doherty, Chairman of the All Progressives Congress (APC) United Kingdom Chapter, who dismissed concerns that Lagos was in political turmoil.

“Lagos State remains a democratic state, and I am confident that this issue will be resolved amicably within the APC Lagos State Stakeholders and the House of Assembly. There is no crisis—what we are seeing is a situation being exaggerated by the media.”

Doherty, an influential figure within the APC's global network, also serves as the Chairman of the APC Diaspora Committee, where he plays a pivotal role in coordinating APC chapters worldwide. His leadership has been endorsed by APC National Chairman Dr. Abdullahi Umar

Ganduje, who has reaffirmed the legitimacy of the Doherty-led executive in diaspora affairs.

The unfolding leadership battle in Lagos highlights a broader struggle within Nigeria's ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). While Meranda remains at the helm, questions persist over how long she can withstand political pressure from factions still loyal to Obasa.

With court hearings imminent and lawmakers divided, Lagos State—the economic nerve centre of Africa's largest economy—is at a pivotal moment in its political history. Whether the House of Assembly regains stability under Speaker Meranda or faces further upheaval remains to be seen.



Benue Assembly sacks Chief Judge, suspends 13 lawmakers

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

Following a petition from Governor Hyacinth Alia of Benue State, who accused the state Chief Judge, Maurice Ikpembese of abuse of office, tempering with the state local government election law, corruption, inciting judicial strikes, bribery and fraternising with politicians, the Benue State House of Assembly has removed the chief Judge.

Consequently, the assembly recommended the swearing in of Justice Theresa Igoche, who is the next most senior judge as the acting chief judge of the state.

However, lawmakers were divided on the issue as 13 out of the 31 members rejected the removal of the chief judge, distancing themselves from the decision after plenary on Tuesday, describing it as unconstitutional and a violation of judicial independence and fair hearing.

The lawmakers were promptly suspended and during an emergency session on Wednesday, the House imposed a three-month suspension on the 13 members.

The lawmakers were accused of actions that could damage the Assembly's reputation and create division.



The suspended lawmakers have also been directed to refund funds allocated for an upcoming foreign trip, as they will no longer be eligible to participate.

The Speaker, Rt Hon. Hyacinth Dajoh announced the suspension, listing the affected lawmakers, to include Douglas Akya (Makurdi South), Jonathan Agbidye (Katsina-Ala East), Beckie Orpin (Gboko East), Simon Gabo (Ushongo-Mata), Williams Ortyom (Agasha), Onah Blessed (Oju 1), and Elias Audu (Gwer East).

Others are Anyor Mato (Kwande East), Manger Manger (Tarka), Solomon Gyila (Gwer West), Samuel Agada (Ogbadibo), Abraham Jabi (Buruku), and Ezra Nyiyongo (Ukum).

Before the suspension, Majority Leader, Saater Tiseer recalled that the House had earlier received a petition from the Attorney General, accusing the Chief Judge of misconduct, bribery, and abuse of office.

Following discussions, 23 out of 31 lawmakers voted to remove Justice Ikpembese.

However, after the decision was made, the 13 lawmakers held a press conference, denying their involvement in the removal process.

The House considered their actions deceptive and a breach of legislative rules. According to Tiseer, their behavior violated Order IX, Rule 58(6) of the House Standing Rules, leading to their suspension.

No plan by 27 members to defect – Lagos Assembly

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Lagos State House of Assembly has dismissed rumours making rounds that 27 members are planning to defect to the Labour Party as untrue and a figment of imagination of its purveyors.

In a statement issued to newsmen on Wednesday, the Chairman of the House Committee on Information, Strategy and Security, Ogundipe Stephen, countered this claim, describing the news as false, misleading, and a deliberate attempt to misinform the public.

The Chairman said the report was not only offensive but also inaccurate and outright falsehood with no other purpose but to sow discord and confusion within the Assembly and among the good people of Lagos State.

He said the speakership crisis is purely an internal matter and actions were carried out in tandem with the law.

Ogundipe, therefore, assured party leaders and members of the public that they remain committed to the party.

The Chairman also called on all media partners to uphold the ethics of journalism by verifying facts before publication and refraining from spreading unverified reports.

“The Lagos State House of Assembly wishes to categorically debunk the malicious and unfounded publication alleging that twenty-seven members of the Assembly are planning to defect from the ruling party to the opposition Labour Party (LP). This publication is entirely false, misleading, and a deliberate attempt to misinform the



public.

“We find this report not only offensive but also riddled with inaccuracies and outright falsehoods that serve no purpose other than to sow discord and confusion within the Assembly and among the good people of Lagos State.

“The recent developments in the House, including the removal of the erstwhile Speaker, Hon. Mudashiru Obasa, and the election of Rt. Hon. Mojisola Lasbat Meranda as the new Speaker, are purely internal matters. These actions were carried out in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Amended.

“These events in no way suggest any intention by members to leave the party. We emphasise, without any ambiguity, that no member of the Assembly is contemplating defection.

“We were elected under the Leadership of the Ruling Party. The

ruling party remains united and focused on delivering its mandate to the people of Lagos State. The falsehood being spread originates from agents of destabilisation who seek to create unnecessary tension and division within the Assembly.

“To our party leaders and supporters across the state, we assure you that all members remain committed to the party.

“Furthermore, we reaffirm that any internal disagreements within the House will be resolved amicably through peaceful and democratic mechanisms. There is no crisis that warrants any member considering defection.

“We also call on all media partners to uphold the ethics of journalism by verifying facts before publication and refraining from spreading unverified reports that could mislead the public,” he said.

Sudan paramilitary group kills over 200 in three-day attack

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Sudanese paramilitaries have killed more than 200 people in a three-day assault south of Khartoum, according to a lawyers' network, while the army-backed government put the death toll at more than double that figure.

The Emergency Lawyers network, which has documented human rights abuses during 22 months of fighting between the rival security forces, said hundreds more were wounded or missing and feared drowned after the paramilitaries opened fire on villagers as they attempted to flee across the White Nile.

The foreign ministry of the army-backed government said 433 people, including children, had been killed in the attack by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The attack on the White Nile state villages of al-Kadaris and al-Khelwat, 100km (60 miles) south of the capital, sent thousands fleeing, witnesses said.

A spokesperson for the UN secretary general, António Guterres, said the world body had received "horrifying reports that dozens of women were raped and hundreds of families were forced to flee."

Emergency Lawyers said that for three days RSF fighters had subjected unarmed civilians to "executions, kidnappings, forced disappearances and looting."

Since the war broke out in April 2023, the army and the paramilitaries have been accused of war crimes.

The RSF also stands accused of genocide by the US for allegedly targeting non-Arab minorities in the Darfur region of western Sudan with summary executions



and systematic sexual violence.

The war has killed tens of thousands of people, uprooted more than 12 million and has created what the International Rescue Committee has called the "biggest humanitarian crisis ever recorded."

Control over the White Nile State, which extends from just south of Khartoum to the border with South Sudan, is divided by the warring parties.

The army controls the south, including the state capital, Rabak, as well as two major cities and a key military base. The RSF holds the northern parts of the state, including the villages where the latest attacks took place.

A medical source said it was nearly impossible to confirm a toll.

"Some bodies are still lying in the street, and some were killed in their homes and no one can reach them," the source said, requesting anonymity for safety reasons.

Fighting has intensified across Sudan in recent weeks as the army attempts to reclaim full control of the capital from the paramilitaries.

On Tuesday, the Emergency Lawyers accused the army of "barbaric" assaults on civilians in east Khartoum, days after its paramilitary opposition killed six civilians in the area.

The network said that civilians in the East Nile district accused of collaborating with the RSF had been subjected to "killings, forced disappearances and arbitrary arrests" by individuals linked to the army.

The UN's children's agency said children in Khartoum were trapped in "a living nightmare" of indiscriminate shooting, looting and forced displacement.

Unicef said it had also received alarming reports of families being separated, with children abducted and subjected to sexual violence.

Two Anambra lawmaker's murder suspects vanish from police custody

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Two of the suspected killers of a member of the state house of assembly, Justice Azuka, have escaped from custody, the police command in Anambra State has said.

The Labour Party (LP) member of the state House of Assembly was abducted and attacked by gunmen on Christmas eve as he made his way home for the festivities.

Few weeks ago, the lifeless body of Azuka was found on the Second Niger Bridge after being killed by his abductors after allegedly withdrawing N100 million from his account.

The police spokesperson in Anambra State, Tochukwu Ikenga, announced the escape of the suspects in a statement on Tuesday night, according to PREMIUM TIMES.



A Ikenga said the two suspects, who were assisting operatives, had gone out with them for an investigation to arrest a receiver of vehicles used by the criminal gang but escaped from the scene.

He said Ikioye Orutugu, the police commissioner in Anambra, received the report of the escape on Tuesday night.

“During the onslaught operation by the operatives, the suspect (the receiver) was arrested, and two vehicles suspected to have been snatched from the unsuspecting members of the public were recovered,” the police spokesperson was quoted as saying.

“Unfortunately, the other two suspects fled the scene.”

He added that the police commissioner has deployed “human, operational, and intelligence assets” to re-arrest the suspects.

Ikenga said he also ordered “immediate disciplinary action” against officers found wanting in the escape of the suspects.

345,000 pupils to undergo eye screening in Osun

By **Helen Okechukwu**

Over 345,000 pupils across public primary and secondary schools in Osun State are expected to undergo free eye care screening.

The screening exercise will be conducted at the Imole School Eye Health Programme and will commence on 25 February.

On Tuesday, Dr. Rasaq Akindele, the Executive Secretary of the Osun Health Insurance Agency, noted that beneficiaries will undergo comprehensive eye



screening and examinations.

Among the services to render during the exercise are treatment for refractive errors, provision of corrective spectacles, and medications.

Akindele added, “Those whose conditions necessitate surgical interventions will be accorded the opportunity.

However, corrective surgeries is scheduled to begins from 27 February to 7 March.

To this end, Akindele encouraged parents and guardians to make their wards available for the screening, marking a historic milestone to be conducted in the state.

DSS threatens AIT, Channels TV with lawsuits over Lagos Assembly crisis reports

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Department of State Services (DSS), has threatened to institute legal proceedings against two major television stations over their coverage of the Lagos State House of Assembly crisis.

The Nigeria's secret police alleged that Africa Independent Television (AIT) and Channels Television made false and damaging reports about its role in events at the Assembly on February 17.

The DSS, through its lawyer, Adedeji Adedipe, claimed that it was only helping other security forces and didn't do anything wrong.

The agency wants both TV stations to retract their reports and apologize on air for three straight days, warning that should they fail to do this within a week, it (DSS) will take them to court under Nigeria's cybercrime laws.

In a letter dated February 17, 2025, and titled 'False, Defamatory and Malicious Publication Concerning the State Security Service (aka DSS) Regarding Their Presence at the Lagos State House of Assembly on Monday, February 17, 2025,' the Service demanded a retraction of the story and an apology.

The counsel stated that should the media houses fail to broadcast apologies on their respective channels five times a day for three consecutive days within seven days of receiving the letter, the DSS would have no option but to seek redress in court.

According to the lawyer, despite clear fears that hoodlums could attack the lawmakers, leading the Clerk of the Assembly to invite the DSS and police to help secure the Assembly, the media houses still went ahead to report that their operatives invaded the Assembly Gestapo-style.

The letter dated February 17, 2025 and



addressed to the Chairman of Daar Communications Limited, reads, "We act as solicitors to the State Security Service (A.K.A. DSS) who is hereinafter referred to as our client and on whose instruction this letter is written to you.

"Our client's attention was drawn to your publication which was aired repeatedly both on the news bulletin and the news bar of AIT's' Channel on the 17th of February, 2025.

"In the said publication, it was reported that the State Security Service also known as Department of State Service (DSS) invaded the Lagos State Assembly and attempted to prevent the members of the Assembly and the speaker of the House, Rt Hon. Mojisola Meranda, from entering the chamber for plenary session.

"The above publication was equally repeated in your online news media edited by one Paul Akhagbemhe, also published on the 17th of February, 2025. First, it must be stated that our client, in carrying out its core statutory mandate of collection of intelligence for good governance and national safety and upholding and enforcing criminal laws of Nigeria, was invited to the Lagos State

House of Assembly, vide a letter dated 14th February, 2025, written to it by the Acting Clerk of the said State House of Assembly. A copy of the letter is herewith attached.

"Our client was invited by the acting Clerk to come and support the Security Operatives attached to the Lagos State House of Assembly, from Sunday, 16th of February, 2025, in order to forestall an imminent break down of law and order, following the information that the former Speaker of the House of Assembly, Rt Hon. Obasa planned to resume office on the 18th of February, 2025, a plan which he (the acting clerk) believed poses a potential security threat to the Assembly and its members.

"However, without any verification of the reason for the presence of our client's officials at the Lagos State House of Assembly on the 17th of February, 2025, your organization maliciously and falsely broadcast, both on your news bulletin and print media, that our client had invaded/stormed the Lagos State House of Assembly with a view to preventing the members and speaker from entering the chamber for plenary.

I don't want to be involved in Nedu, 'The Honest Bunch' podcast drama – Yvonne Jegede

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nollywood actress Yvonne Jegede has spoken out about the controversy surrounding The Honest Bunch Podcast and its host, Nedu.

She clarified that she has moved on from her past negative experience with the show and does not wish to be dragged into the ongoing drama.

Online harassment and social media attacks

Jegede recalled how her appearance on the podcast led to intense online harassment. She accused Nedu of posting promotional clips that encouraged trolls to attack her. The backlash, she said, became so severe that people even targeted her son's social media page, forcing her to take it down.

Denies paying for podcast feature

She also dismissed allegations that she paid to be featured on the podcast. According to Jegede, such claims are baseless since she neither produced nor owned the movie she discussed on the show. She criticized the spread of false narratives and expressed disappointment in those who twist the truth for personal gain.

Choosing forgiveness over retaliation

Despite her frustration at the time, Jegede stated that she has chosen to forgive both Nedu and The Honest Bunch Podcast. She revealed that she received calls urging her to retaliate now that Nedu is facing backlash. However, she refused to do so, emphasizing that she does not believe in kicking someone when they are already down.

Podcast's promotional tactics



criticized

She further explained how the show's promotional tactics harmed her reputation. "The clips from my episode were edited in a way that invited online attacks. While I was dealing with the trolling, Nedu—who had been privately messaging me—was at the same time sharing content that fueled the negativity."

The actress condemned the claim that she paid for her appearance. "That is completely false. I would never pay to appear on a podcast, especially for a movie that I had no financial stake in. The way the narrative was twisted only deepened my disappointment in those who spread lies."

A lesson learned and a call to move on

Jegede admitted that she was initially angry and hurt by the situation. However, with time and the support of friends and loved ones, she decided to let go of her bitterness. "I forgave both Nedu and the show sincerely and wholeheartedly," she wrote.

She also refused to take part in the backlash against Nedu. "I have

received calls urging me to speak out or take shots at him now that he is under fire. My response remains the same—I will not. The best time to kick a man is certainly not when he is down."

Jegede made it clear that she has no interest in revisiting the past. "Please, I kindly request that my name not be dragged into this drama. I have learned important lessons from this experience, particularly in dealing with people. That is my final word on the matter."

Moving forward

With her statement, Jegede hopes to put the controversy behind her and focus on moving forward. She remains firm in her stance—she has forgiven, learned, and now wishes to be left out of the ongoing drama.

"In the past few days, my name has been mentioned in the ongoing saga involving The Honest Bunch Podcast, its lead host, Nedu, and other individuals," Jegede

Dele Odule debunks death rumour, confirms health

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Veteran Nigerian actor Dele Odule has firmly dismissed false reports of his death and alleged arrest, calling them baseless, irresponsible, and deeply frustrating.

In a video posted on Instagram, the Nollywood star expressed deep frustration over the spreading of baseless claims, calling out those responsible for fabricating such stories.

Slams fake news on social media

Odule directly addressed a blogger who falsely announced his death by posting his picture with the caption "RIP." He condemned the act, calling it insensitive and malicious.

"There's nothing wrong with me. I am very much alive," Odule stated. "I don't understand why anyone would wish me dead. This is barbaric, uncalled for, and unfair."

The actor emphasized that spreading false information about someone's death can cause unnecessary panic and distress. He urged people to be more responsible with the information they share online.

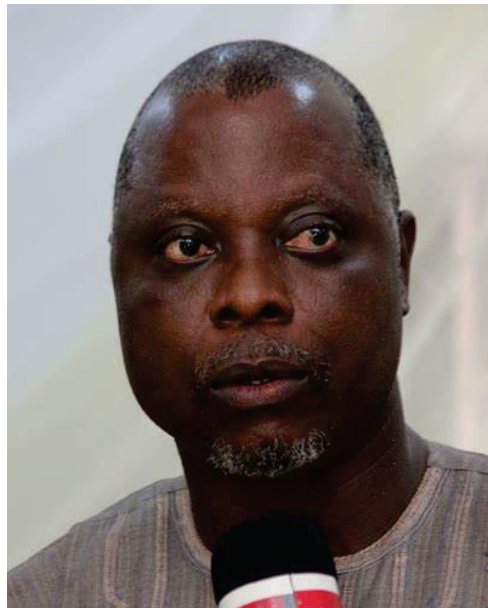
Denies arrest allegations

Odule also responded to another damaging rumour that accused him of child molestation and falsely claimed he had been arrested. The report included an image of him in handcuffs, further fueling the speculation.

Visibly angered by the accusation, Odule questioned the intent behind such falsehoods. "For what? What is your problem? Are you alright? Don't try to bring me down," he said.

He went on to express his faith, stating that those who spread falsehoods against him were fighting a bigger force. "If you come at me, you're coming at God because you are not fighting me but God," he declared.

Expresses gratitude to supporters



Despite the negativity, Odule took a moment to appreciate his loyal fans and well-wishers. He acknowledged their unwavering support and concern for his well-being.

"I love you to bits. Thank you for always being there and for your concern about my well-being. I really appreciate it. God bless you," he said warmly.

The veteran actor urged his supporters to ignore the false reports and continue spreading positivity. He reassured them that he remains strong, healthy, and focused on his career.

Calls for responsible journalism

The Nollywood icon also called on media outlets and content creators to verify the information before publishing. He warned against using people's names and images for engagement without considering the consequences.

Misinformation has become a growing problem, especially on social media. Many celebrities have been victims of fake death reports, which often cause distress among their families and fans.

Odule's case is just one of many examples of how easily false news can spread. He stressed that the public should always fact-

check information before believing or sharing it.

Fans and colleagues show support

Following his video statement, several fans and colleagues in the entertainment industry flooded his comment section with messages of support. Many condemned the spread of false news and reassured Odule of their solidarity.

"People need to stop doing this. It's wickedness," one user commented.

"Baba, we love you! Long life and good health," another fan wrote.

Other Nollywood actors also voiced their support, urging bloggers to stop using sensational falsehoods to gain attention.

Fake news in Nollywood

The Nigerian entertainment industry has witnessed several incidents where celebrities have been falsely reported dead. Social media has made it easy for misinformation to spread, often causing unnecessary panic.

Veteran actors like Pete Edochie, Olu Jacobs, and Joke Silva have also had to publicly deny similar rumours in the past. Despite repeated calls for responsible journalism, such incidents continue to occur.

Final words

Dele Odule remains undeterred by the false reports. Instead, he is focused on his craft and engaging with his true supporters. He urged his fans to remain positive and ignore the negativity.

With his strong stance against misinformation, the actor hopes to create awareness about the dangers of fake news. He encourages people to verify information before accepting it as the truth.

For now, Dele Odule is alive, well, and still very much active in Nollywood.

Rape case cost me \$20m in lost income – Jay-Z

By Dave Oludare Oso

The lawsuit accusing Jay-Z and Sean “Diddy” Combs of repeatedly raping a minor in 2000 after the MTV VMAs was dismissed on Valentine’s Day, but the bitter relationship between the Jay-Z and attorney Tony Buzbee rages on.

Filed four days before the Buzbee-represented Jane Doe “voluntarily dismissed with prejudice” her claims, Jay-Z (aka Shawn Carter) made a declaration in the docket of Los Angeles Superior Court ripping the Texas-based attorney.

Rejecting Buzbee’s attempt to have the Roc Nation boss’ defamation and extortion suit essentially gutted, Jay-Z’s February 10 filing says the “career-ending” accusations of assaulting a 13-year-old girl unsurprisingly damaged his business and his family — the former to the tune of \$20 million a year.

While not mentioning the NFL, with which Roc Nation has a recently renewed Super Bowl Halftime Show deal, Jay-Z’s declaration makes clear that even if the Roger Goodell-run league was standing by him, others were much less inclined to do so:

“Mr. Buzbee’s actions undermined my relationship, and my company Roc Nation’s relationship, with other businesses in the sports and entertainment space,” the filing states.

“We have agreements to produce entertainment programs for certain sporting events. After Mr. Buzbee filed the lawsuit, the media reported that other businesses could end their deals with Roc Nation, and forced one to speak out and address whether these false allegations would end our business relationship.

“Immediately after Mr. Buzbee went public with his false accusations, my company Roc Nation also lost other contracts in the sports and entertainment space that would have generated revenues of approximately \$20 million per year.”



The rape of the then-teen Jane Doe is alleged to have occurred on the night of September 7, 2000 during one of Diddy’s drug-fueled parties after that year’s MTV VMAs. A graphic October 20, 2024 lawsuit from Buzbee first only named Combs, but made distinct reference to accomplices cited as male “Celebrity A” and a female “Celebrity B.”

Jay-Z was named as “Celebrity A” in a December 8 refiling by Buzbee, which followed separate November 18 suit from a Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan-represented anonymous “celebrity and public figure who resides in Los Angeles” (later revealed to be Jay-Z) that went after the Texas lawyer for extortion.

After a flurry of filings, including several unsuccessful attempts at dismissal, one problematic NBC News sit-down featuring the now middle-aged Jane Doe and other media duels, the whole matter was pulled on February 14 by the plaintiff with no explanation by Buzbee.

On the other hand, Jay-Z said in a statement posted that day on Roc Nation’s X feed: “I would not wish this experience on anyone. The trauma that my wife, my children, loved ones and I have endured can never be

dismissed.”

In fact, on February 10, the multi-Grammy winner also got specific about what he viewed as a hit on him timing-wise when he was publicly named December 8.

“I was harshly criticized by others for accompanying my daughter to the premiere of her movie a day after Mr. Buzbee filed the Jane Doe lawsuit against me,” Jay-Z said of the full-tilt December 9 Los Angeles premiere of the Barry Jenkins-directed *Mufasa: The Lion King* that he attended with daughter Blue Ivy and his wife Beyoncé.

“Media outlets reported that Disney was hesitant over my attendance at the premiere because of the accusations. I feel that Mr. Buzbee purposely filed this lawsuit on the eve of my daughter’s premiere to put me in the position of having to choose between supporting my daughter or hiding to avoid the negative press coverage.

“Buzbee’s assertion that there is nothing ‘extreme and outrageous’ about his false public claims that Mr. Carter is a serial child rapist is erroneous and appalling,” states an accompanying 22-page opposition to defendant’s motion to strike.

A\$AP Rocky found not guilty in assault case

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

A California jury has found A\$AP Rocky not guilty of two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm, stemming from a 2021 shooting incident with a former friend in Los Angeles.

Attorneys for the hip-hop artist and actor, who is the longtime partner of the singer and businesswoman Rihanna, had argued the weapon was a prop gun that only fired blanks. A\$AP Rocky did not testify in the trial. Rihanna was present in the courtroom on Tuesday when the verdict was read.

After the verdict was announced, the rapper expressed his appreciation to the jury, saying, "Thank y'all for saving my life."

Attorneys for Rocky, whose legal name is Rakim Athelston Mayers, maintained that he got the gun from a music video set and carried it for security.

During the trial, Rihanna was seen at the courthouse with their two young sons, RZA, 2, and Riot, 1.

The case centered on a 2021 shooting involving Rocky and a friend from high school, who goes by A\$AP Relli. The two are both part of a creative crew they began in



New York as teens known as the A\$AP Mob.

According to Relli's testimony, things turned sour between the two men when they met up outside of a Hollywood hotel on November 6, 2021 and got into a scuffle. Relli told investigators that his knuckles were grazed by a bullet after Rocky allegedly fired shots at him.

Their mutual friend and fellow crew member, A\$AP Twelvyy, testified during the trial that Relli was the aggressor and Rocky fired the gun as a warning, according to the Associated Press. Twelvyy also testified that Rocky had been carrying a starter pistol for protection for months and the gun fired blanks.

The incident was partially captured on surveillance video.

Investigators found no weapons or

ammunition on scene, though Relli turned over shell casings he said he had recovered after the altercation.

The defence argued Relli is a man filled with "jealousy, lies and greed" who was motivated by financial interests to have Rocky charged with the shooting.

After the verdict Tuesday, LA County District Attorney Nathan J. Hochman said in a statement that while it was not the outcome they were hoping for, they respect the jury's decision "and the integrity of our justice system."

"Our office remains committed to seeking accountability for those who break the law, no matter their status or influence," Hochman added. "Fame does not place anyone above the law, and we will not waver in our pursuit of justice for victims and the community."

Trump slams Zelenskyy, calls him 'modestly successful comedian', 'dictator'

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

US President Donald Trump, who is negotiating with Russia on ending the war in Ukraine slammed his Ukrainian counterpart for going into a war that couldn't be won, in a social media post. Calling him a dictator, Trump wrote, 'Zelenskyy better move fast or he is not going to have a country left.'

President Donald Trump on Wednesday called Volodymyr Zelenskyy a modestly successful comedian and 'dictator' after the Ukrainian president said that United States President was influenced by Russian disinformation.

The remark came even as Trump administration is reaching out to Russia to pushing for a peace deal.

Earlier in the day, reacting to Trump's comment at Mar-a-Lago that Zelenskyy's rating stood at 4 per cent, the Ukrainian president alleged that Trump is living in a Russian "disinformation space".

"We have seen this disinformation. We understand that it is coming from Russia. Trump lives in this disinformation space," said Zelenskyy during a news conference in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

Meanwhile, Trump has also responded to Zelenskyy's remark and called him a dictator without elections.

"Think of it, a modestly successful comedian, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, talked the United States of America into spending \$350 Billion Dollars, to go into a War that couldn't be won, that never had to start, but a War that



he, without the U.S. and "TRUMP," will never be able to settle," said Trump in a post on X.

He added that the United States has spent \$200 billion Dollars more than Europe, and Europe's money is guaranteed, while the United States will get nothing back.

"Why didn't Sleepy Joe Biden demand equalization, in that this war is far more important to Europe than it is to us -We have a big, beautiful Ocean as separation. On top of this, Zelenskyy admits that half of the money we sent him is "MISSING." He refuses to have Elections, is very low in Ukrainian Polls, and the only thing he was good at was playing Biden "like a fiddle," said Trump.

"Dictator without elections"

Calling the Ukrainian president a dictator without elections, Trump said, "Zelenskyy better move fast or he is not going to have a country left. In the meantime, we are successfully negotiating an end to the war with Russia, something all admit only "TRUMP," and the Trump

Administration can do."

"Europe failed to bring peace"

The US President also claimed that Biden never tried, Europe has failed to bring peace, and Zelenskyy probably wants to keep the "grave train" going.

"I love Ukraine, but Zelenskyy has done a terrible job, his country is shattered, and MILLIONS have unnecessarily died – And so it continues....."

On Tuesday, Trump suggested that Kyiv was to blame for the war, which enters its fourth year next week, as talks between top American and Russian diplomats in Saudi Arabia sidelined Ukraine and its European supporters.

"Would like to meet Trump"

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he would like to meet with President Donald Trump. Putin also hailed the talks between senior Russian and US officials in Riyadh.

Brazil's ex-president, Bolsonaro charged with plotting coup

By Dave Oludare Oso

Jair Bolsonaro and 33 other suspects were hit with five charges over the alleged bid to prevent President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from taking office after a bitter election race. The Supreme Court will now weigh the charges and decide whether to initiate proceedings.

Brazil's attorney general on Tuesday, February 19, formally charged far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro and 33 others over an alleged coup attempt after his 2022 election loss.

Bolsonaro, 69, and his co-accused were hit with five charges over the alleged bid to prevent President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from taking office after a bitter election race.

Attorney General Paulo Gonet Branco filed the charges at the Supreme Court "based on manuscripts, digital files, spreadsheets and exchanges of messages that reveal the scheme to disrupt the democratic order," his office said in a statement. "They describe, in detail, the conspiratorial plot set up and executed against democratic institutions."

One of the charges is for the crime of "armed criminal organization," allegedly led by Bolsonaro and his vice-presidential candidate Walter Braga Netto.

"Allied with other individuals, including civilians and military personnel, they attempted to prevent, in a coordinated manner, the result of the 2022 presidential elections from being fulfilled," read the statement.

Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro arrives for a luncheon with senators from his support base, at the National Congress building in Brasilia, Brazil, Tuesday, February 18, 2025. ERALDO PERES/AP



The prosecutor's office based its decision on a federal police report of more than 800 pages, released last year after a two-year investigation that found Bolsonaro was "fully aware and actively participated" in the plot to cling to power.

Bolsonaro has denied the accusations and said he was the victim of "persecution."

"The attempted coup d'état... has become an empty accusation, which has absolutely no evidence against Bolsonaro," his son, Senator Flavio Bolsonaro, wrote on X.

After the announcement of his indictment, Bolsonaro's defence team said they were "shocked" and "indignant," adding in a statement that Jair Bolsonaro has "never" been linked to a "movement that aimed to deconstruct the Democratic Rule of Law."

'The final attempt'

According to the statement from Branco's office, the plot began in 2021, with "systematic attacks on the electronic voting system, through public statements and on the internet."

During the second round of the

presidential election in October 2022, security agencies were mobilized to "prevent voters from voting for the opposition candidate," said the statement.

Those involved at this stage worked to facilitate "the acts of violence and vandalism on January 8, 2023," when Bolsonaro supporters stormed the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court in the capital, Brasilia.

The attorney general's office said the criminal organization headed by Bolsonaro had pressured army chiefs "in favor of forceful actions in the political scene to prevent the elected president from taking office."

Investigations also showed a plot to assassinate Lula, vice-president Geraldo Alckmin and a high-profile judge with "the approval of" Bolsonaro. According to the statement, the January 8 riots by Bolsonaro supporters urging the military to intervene were "the final attempt."

The Supreme Court will now weigh the charges and decide whether to initiate proceedings against Bolsonaro. The Supreme Court has convicted almost 400 people over the invasion of the seats of power.

Hamas offers to free all hostages for Israel's Gaza withdrawal **By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Hamas has said it is ready to exchange its remaining Israeli hostages all at once with Palestinian prisoners during the Gaza truce's second phase as a step leading to a "permanent ceasefire" and the full withdrawal of Israel's forces from the enclave.

The militant group is attempting to hold onto its two longstanding demands as Israel's security cabinet has a stated war goal of removing Hamas, designated a terrorist group by the US and many other countries, as a governing and military force in Gaza.

Hamas spokesperson, Hazem Qasim said on Telegram that the group refuses to be either expelled from the Gaza Strip or disarmed, adding that any arrangements



for the future of Gaza will be based on national consensus.

Israel's objective to expel Hamas from Gaza is a "silly psychological warfare," he said. On Monday, Qasim said the group is ready to cede power in the war-

ravaged territory if the move serves the interests of Gazans.

Hamas said it would free six hostages on Saturday rather than over the coming two weeks, as originally planned. The decision was made in response to the mediators, Qasim said.

Israel and Hamas agreed to pause hostilities in January after months of talks overseen by the US and brokered by Qatar and Egypt. The current ceasefire framework expires in early March.

Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Gideon Sa'ar said discussions to extend the initial six-week truce and secure the rest of the hostages held by Hamas will start in coming days.

Gaza launches emergency polio vaccination to protect 591,000 children **By Helen Okechukwu**

Health officials in the Gaza Strip are launching an emergency polio vaccination campaign from February 22 to 26, 2025, to protect children from the virus.

The campaign will provide the novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) to over 591,000 children under the age of 10, following the recent detection of poliovirus in wastewater samples.

This information was shared today on World Health Organisation (WHO) website.

The presence of poliovirus in the environment poses a serious risk to children, especially in Gaza's overcrowded shelters and areas with damaged water, sanitation, and hygiene systems.

With extensive population movement



following the current ceasefire, health experts warn that the virus could spread further if immunity gaps are not addressed.

Previous vaccination rounds in September and October 2024 successfully reached over 95% of the target population.

However, in some areas, including Jabalia, Beit Lahiya, and Beit Hanoun, about 7,000 children missed

their doses due to restricted access during the conflict.

The recent ceasefire is expected to improve access and allow health workers to reach previously missed children.

There have been no new confirmed polio cases since a 10-month-old child was paralyzed in August 2024.

However, environmental samples from Deir al Balah and Khan Younis, collected in December 2024 and January 2025, confirm that the virus is still circulating.

The detected strain is genetically linked to the poliovirus found in Gaza in July 2024, prompting health authorities to take urgent action.

The campaign is being led by the Palestinian Ministry of Health with

Trump blames Ukraine for war with Russia

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

President Donald Trump has laid the blame squarely on Ukraine for “starting” the seemingly never-ending three-year-old war with Russia, saying, “You should have never started it. You could have made a deal.”

The United States President spoke as talks between the US and Russia over the war in Ukraine kicked off in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Representing the US at the meeting were Marco Rubio, US secretary of state; Steve Witkoff, Middle East special envoy; and Mike Waltz, national security adviser, while Yuri Ushakov, Russian presidential aide, and Sergey Larov, foreign minister, stood for the Kremlin.

Ukraine and other European leaders were conspicuously absent at the table.

Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky warned that he would “never accept any decisions between the United States and Russia about Ukraine.”

Asked if Ukrainians might feel betrayed by the exclusion, Trump waved it off.

“I hear that they’re upset about not having a seat. Well, they’ve had a seat for three years and a long time before that. This could have been settled very easily,” he said.

“You should have never started it. You could have made a deal,” he later added.



“I could have made a deal for Ukraine.

“That would have given them almost all of the land, everything, almost all of the land — and no people would have been killed, and no city would have been demolished.”

Trump said he was “much more confident” after the meeting in Riyadh.

“They were very good,” he said, referring to Russia.

“Russia wants to do something. They want to stop the savage barbarianism.

“I think I have the power to end this war,” he added.

The talks are an outcome of a phone call between Trump and Putin last week, a discussion the US president said was “very long and productive.”

The negotiations have also triggered an emergency meeting in Paris involving European leaders who have expressed shock at the US’ cozy warm-up to Russia.

French President Emmanuel Macron held an “informal” meeting with “the heads of government of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of NATO.”

Many European leaders fear that the US president could hand concessions to Russia and Europe’s security architecture, given that the US is a NATO member.

The US has balked at Ukraine’s desire to join the military alliance.

Cocaine worth \$15m found at bottom of Baltic Sea

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Divers in Poland discovered more than 220 pounds of cocaine on the bottom of the Baltic Sea, the nation's border guard said on Tuesday, marking the latest unusual location that drugs have been found in Europe.

Officers with the Border Guard Maritime Unit located the cocaine on the seabed in the Gulf of Gdansk in northern Poland, officials said in a news release. Seven people were detained and the border guard said it had “dismantled an organized crime group involved in smuggling significant amounts of drugs.”

Authorities released several images of the operation and said the seized drugs had an estimated street value of \$15 million. A video released by the border guard shows divers finding the alleged drugs on the seabed as well footage of armed officers making multiple arrests at various locations.

Officials said tracking down the suspects led to the discovery of another large quantity of drugs. The seven people detained face up to 20 years in prison if convicted, authorities said.

The discovery stemmed from a joint operation by the Polish border guard, Europol and the DEA to protect critical underwater infrastructure in the region, authorities said. In December, NATO announced that it would boost patrols in the Baltic Sea after



several reported incidents of underwater sabotage.

Authorities discovered a haul of cocaine worth \$15 million at the bottom of the Baltic Sea, the Poland's border guard said on Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025. Poland Border Guard

Cocaine is routinely seized at sea, but usually from drug trafficking vessels like “narco subs” in the Pacific and Caribbean.

The operation in Poland marks the latest discovery by European authorities of cocaine in unusual places in recent months. Just last week, authorities in Luxembourg seized almost a ton of cocaine hidden in a stone crusher.

In December, authorities in Spain released video showing the discovery of seven tons of cocaine buried underneath a farm. A few

weeks before that, police in Spain seized a record haul of cocaine that was concealed in a shipment of bananas from Ecuador.

Across the globe, would-be drug smugglers have hidden cocaine in everything from car mufflers and surfboards to sugar and jalapeno peppers.

Cocaine has been found in the ocean and along coastlines many times before — especially in Florida. Last August, Hurricane Debby blew 25 packages of cocaine onto a beach in the Florida Keys. A few weeks later, 16 bricks of suspected cocaine were found by tourists on a beach in the same region.

In June 2024, boaters off the coast of Florida found 65 pounds of cocaine floating in the ocean, and earlier that month, divers found 25 kilograms of cocaine about 100 feet underwater off Key West.

EU agrees new Russia sanctions as US Seeks Ukraine War End

By Olamilekan Botti

EU capitals have unanimously agreed on a new sanctions package aimed at increasing pressure on Moscow while enhancing support for Ukraine. This development comes despite a rapid initiative by U.S. President Donald Trump to negotiate an end to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

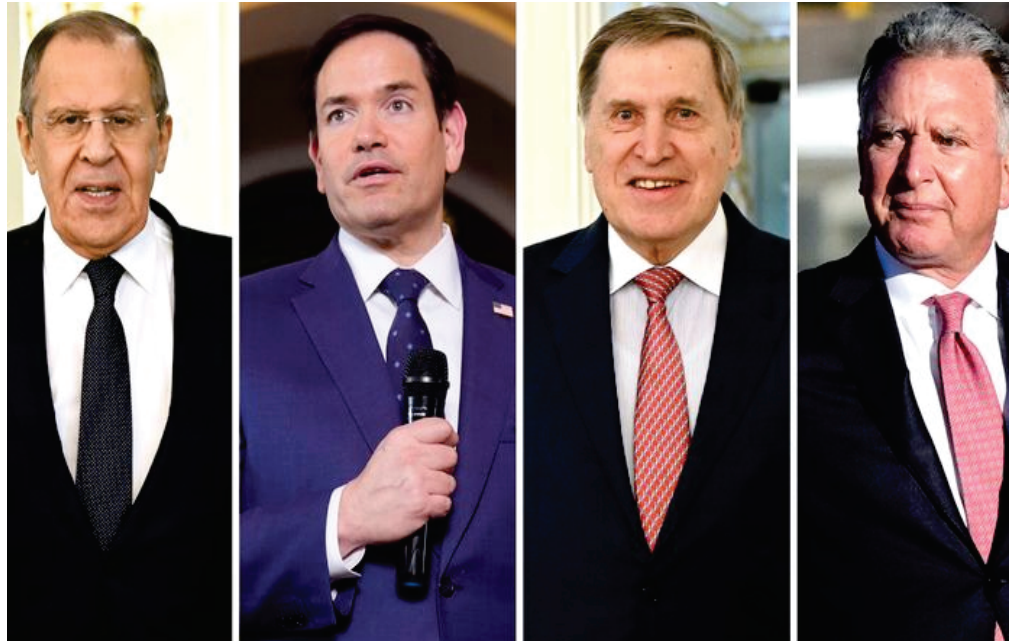
The latest measures specifically target Russia's aluminium and oil exports, signaling the EU's commitment to maintaining a robust response in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics.

Brussels is particularly concerned that Trump may consider easing U.S. sanctions on Russia as part of a potential peace deal negotiated with Russian President Vladimir Putin, possibly sidelining European interests. After the first day of formal U.S.-Russia peace talks in Saudi Arabia, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio hinted that the EU's sanctions, which encompass restrictions on Russia's economy and defense sector, could become a topic of negotiation.

"The European Union is going to have to be at the table at some point, because they have sanctions as well that have been imposed," Rubio stated to reporters, emphasizing the need for collective action.

In a statement that echoed sentiments from Moscow, the U.S. State Department remarked that the discussions would "lay the groundwork for future cooperation on matters of mutual geopolitical interest and historic economic and investment opportunities" contingent upon a peace agreement in Ukraine. This has raised alarms within the EU regarding how it might sustain economic pressure on Russia if the U.S. were to disengage its sanctions from those imposed by European nations.

"There's deep concern about how we can keep up economic pressure on



Russia if the U.S. delinks its sanctions from ours," noted one EU official involved in the discussions surrounding the sanctions package.

Since the onset of the conflict in 2022, most Western sanctions against Russia have been coordinated through the G7, striving to maximize their impact on the Russian economy.

Rubio has communicated to European diplomats that he supports the imposition of additional restrictions on Russia to ensure continued pressure on Moscow during ongoing negotiations. However, officials have acknowledged that Rubio's perspective may not fully align with Trump's approach.

The latest sanctions package marks the EU's 16th round of sanctions against Russia since the onset of the full-scale invasion in 2022. Key components of this package include a "phased-in" ban on Russian aluminium imports and strengthened measures targeting crude oil sales.

Furthermore, the sanctions will affect 73 tankers associated with Russia's shadow fleet, which have been utilized to export crude oil in violation of Western

restrictions. Thirteen Russian banks and numerous individuals and companies deemed instrumental in supporting the Russian war effort are also included in these sanctions.

The agreement was reached by ambassadors from all 27 EU member states on Wednesday and is set for formal adoption by foreign ministers shortly.

"We continue to support Ukraine and impose sanctions on the Russian aggressor because this is the right thing to do," remarked one EU diplomat familiar with the new sanctions package, underscoring the EU's commitment to upholding international law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

As the geopolitical landscape shifts, the EU's new sanctions package illustrates its resolve to maintain a unified front against Russian aggression while navigating the complexities introduced by U.S. diplomatic efforts.

The ongoing negotiations between the U.S. and Russia will undoubtedly shape the future of EU-Russia relations and the broader conflict in Ukraine.

Brazil joins OPEC two years after invitation

By Dave Oludare Oso



Brazil's Mines and Energy Minister has announced that the country has joined the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) two years after the group extended an invitation, adding, however, that its membership will not be binding with regard to production cuts.

Alexandre Silveira, the Mines and Energy Minister, after announcing the Brazilian government's decision to join the group, described OPEC as "a forum for discussing strategies among oil-producing countries."

The AP quoted the minister as saying, "We should not be ashamed of being oil producers. Brazil needs to grow, develop and create income and jobs."

Brazil is already one of the biggest oil producers in the world but it has ambitions to climb in the ranks to the number-four spot from number seven, with a production target of 5.4 million barrels daily for 2030.

Brazil has also been a focal point for non-OPEC production forecasts, regularly named alongside the United States, Canada, and Guyana as a hotspot for non-cartel production growth. Now, this will change even though the new OPEC+ member is under no obligation to comply with the OPEC+ production cuts.

OPEC's production, meanwhile, has been declining. The group booked dips for both December and January, with the January rate down by 50,000 bpd from December's daily average

of 26.53 million barrels, according to a Reuters survey. Supply from Iran and Nigeria dropped by 60,000 bpd each, the most among OPEC producers, according to the survey.

The oil producer group was scheduled to start relaxing these production cuts starting in April but there have been reports that the rollback of the output caps could be delayed once again, in line with OPEC's prioritization of actual market conditions rather than an agenda set in stone.

With oil prices wobbly amid U.S.-Russia negotiations that could lead to the lifting of U.S. sanctions, OPEC will likely not be in any rush to stick to its plans for boosting production, seeing as these plans are very flexible to serve the purposes of the group.

Iran accuses jailed British couple of spying

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Iran has charged British couple, Craig and Lindsay Foreman with espionage, accusing them of collaborating with Western intelligence services, following their arrest last month, the judiciary said Tuesday.

Judiciary spokesman, Asghar Jahangir said the pair were alleged to have entered Iran “posing as tourists” and gathered information before their arrest in the southeastern province of Kerman.

The judiciary’s Mizan Online website quoted Kerman chief justice Ebrahim Hamidi as saying the couple’s links to foreign intelligence services had been confirmed.

“Additional investigations are still ongoing,” Hamidi added.

Jahangir was quoted as saying they had been taken into custody by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on “espionage charges.”

The Foremans were accused of gathering “information from several provinces” and “cooperating with covert institutions linked to the intelligence services of hostile and Western countries”, the spokesman said.

The BBC had reported that the couple were in their early 50s and on a motorbike trip around the world when they were detained in January.

According to social media posts, they crossed into Iran from Armenia in December and were gradually making their way to Australia.

Europeans held in Iran



On Friday, Britain’s Foreign Office said it was “providing consular assistance to two British nationals detained in Iran” and was in contact with Iranian authorities.

Last week, Iran’s official IRNA news agency said British ambassador Hugo Shorter met with the couple at the Kerman prosecutor’s office.

The agency also published a photo of the meeting, with the couple’s faces blurred.

The British government advises against all travel to Iran.

Several other Europeans are held in custody in Iran, which has conducted multiple prisoner exchanges with Western governments in recent years.

In January 2023, Iran announced the execution of British-Iranian dual citizen, Alireza Akbari, prompting outrage among Western governments, including Britain which called it “barbaric.”

Akbari had been convicted of spying for Britain.

In January, Iran released Italian journalist, Cecilia Sala who was arrested the month before for “violating the law of the Islamic republic.”

Her release came days before Italy freed Iranian national, Mohammad Abedini, who was arrested in Milan in December at the behest of United States.

The US had accused him of violating US sanctions and supplying sophisticated drone navigation technology to Iran’s military. Iran had denied any link between Sala and Abedini’s cases.

French couple, Cecile Kohler and Jacques Paris have been jailed since May 2022 on charges of espionage, a capital offence in Iran.

In June, Iran released two Swedes, one of them a European Union diplomat, in exchange for a former official held in Sweden, in a swap mediated by Oman.

In 2023, Oman also brokered the release of six European detainees in Iran,