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Reps shoot down proposals for 31 new states

By Dave Oludare Oso

The House of Representatives committee on constitutional amendment has rejected all 31 proposals for state creation, citing failure to meet constitutional requirements.

NEW DAILY PRIME reports that the House received proposals for the creation of 31 new states, among which are Ibadan, Ijebu, Savannah, Ekiti, among others on February 6, 2025.

But speaking on Friday at a retreat for panel members in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, deputy speaker of the House and chairman of the committee, Benjamin Kalu, said while the proposals reflected the aspirations of various regions, none adhered to the provisions of Section 8 of the 1999 constitution, which outlines the criteria for state creation.

Kalu said, "Although we have received 31 requests for state creation, none of these requests met the constitutional requirements for amendment.

"Therefore, we have since extended the submission date to the 5th of March, 2025. But this retreat could in our resolution extend it further if we find out that there are still challenges that the people we represent in their efforts to make



their voices heard."

He added that the committee might consider further extending the deadline, depending on discussions at the retreat.

"So, at the end of this retreat, it will be one of the things we will look into, whether or not we will extend the time.

"But let it be a notice that none of the applications followed the conditions laid out by section 8 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," he said.

The deputy speaker said the committee is currently reviewing 151 constitutional amendment bills.

He noted that the committee is currently reviewing 151 constitutional amendment bills covering issues such as federal structure, power devolution, local government autonomy, revenue

allocation, judicial and electoral reforms, security, gender rights, and human rights.

"A proactive, cooperative approach will ensure seamless legislative processes and comprehensive legal reforms," Kalu said.

As part of the review process, zonal and national public hearings will be held across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, with sessions planned in Nasarawa, Niger, Borno, Gombe, Kaduna, Sokoto, Enugu, Imo, Bayelsa, Cross River, Lagos, and Ondo states.

Kalu assured that the review process would be transparent and inclusive, emphasising the need for legislative reforms that reflect the will of the Nigerian people.

"As legislators, we must ensure the voices of Nigerians are reflected in our constitutional reforms," he said.

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Tinubu hails IBB's admission on June 12, says 'we've heard the truth'

By Friday Omosola

President Bola Tinubu has commended former military president General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) for his admission that late M.K.O. Abiola won the historic June 12, 1993, presidential election.

Speaking on Thursday at the launch of Babangida's autobiography, *A Journey in Service*, and a fundraiser for the IBB Presidential Library Project in Abuja, Tinubu described the former leader's acknowledgement as an act of courage and patriotism.

The President, who was the Special Guest of Honour at the launch of Babangida's autobiography, "*A Journey in Service*," and the fundraising for the IBB Presidential Library Project, saluted the former leader's contribution to the country's history and development.

Babangida, who led Nigeria from 1985 to 1993, admitted for the first time in 32 years that Abiola had indeed won the election based on collated results.

He described annulling the election as the most difficult decision of his career, acknowledging that, in hindsight, he would have handled it differently.

Tinubu also lauded Babangida's role in shaping Nigeria's economic landscape, particularly through private-sector growth and banking sector reforms.

He credited the former leader for inspiring a generation of politicians, including himself.



President Tinubu said the former leader's admission about Abiola's victory will help to set the records properly.

"I am glad about the revelation of June 12. My General, we will not forget to pray for you. I listened to you carefully. I am not here to read a speech. I am here to pay homage.

"Let me say thank you for everything, for who you are, what you are, and how you have contributed to the history of this great country," he said.

President Tinubu reaffirmed his commitment to the nation, stating that he would continue making tough decisions to reposition the economy.

He urged Nigerians to channel their time, energy, and resources into building their homeland while remaining aware of evolving global migration laws that could hinder their pursuit of a better life.

"I am glad about what is happening in America and Europe, the contradiction you have seen now. What is it telling us? It is telling us to

wake up and make Africa a better place, particularly this country, Nigeria.

"I have seen the need to make some decisions on behalf of this country. I want to thank all of you for your mandate, patience, and perseverance. Whatever might have happened, we have heard the truth from our dear leader, father, and uncle, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida," he added.

President Tinubu praised Babangida for his foresight in fostering the growth of Nigeria's private sector.

"Without you, people like me will not be in politics. I thank you for your progressive revolution. You said you wanted young, brilliant people in politics. We met you in Dodan Barracks.

"You inspired some of us. And when you look at the programme today, the names of bankers and many of us here

**Continue reading
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Cont from page 4

“You inspired some of us. And when you look at the programme today, the names of bankers and many of us here today for this library project are all because they believe in the visionary Babangida. Thank you for what you are.”

President Tinubu noted the former military leader’s efforts to set the pace for democratic elections in the country.

“One thing that I cannot forget when you were in office. You recall that we were elected lawmakers, and you kept postponing our inauguration. You summoned us to Abuja. And when we became rancorous, you summoned us to the International Conference Centre.

“I was not expecting to say anything. I was sitting down, thinking whether you would not inaugurate us again. But when Dr Patrick Dele Cole summoned me to remark, I confronted you, saying that you had an opportunity to make history that day, and you failed to do it. Why not inaugurate us? Why are you calling us back and postponing the inauguration?”

“They all thought I would end up in jail, but you came out at the end of the remark and shook my hands. I can’t forget that day. You are courageous. That’s an inspiration that was so impactful in our own lives.

“But when we returned to the hotel, the doors were locked, and there were no keys”.

The President stated that the former President deserved the sacrifices made by many to attend the event.

“So many of the bankers—when we approached you—I was with Mobil, and we were discussing with, I believe, the late Abubakar Alhaji, who was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance.”

He acknowledged that General Babangida’s approval of operational licenses for banks and his role in deregulating the economy sparked the emergence of new-generation banks.

“Nigeria has never been the same since then. You have left an indelible mark,” he added.

In response, General Babangida expressed gratitude to the President and all guests for attending the unveiling of his autobiography.

Reflecting on his tenure, Babangida admitted that annulling the June 12 elections was the most difficult decision of his life. Given another opportunity, he said he would have handled the situation differently.

“There is no doubt that the elections held on June 12, 1993, were credible, free, and fair. However, the tragic irony of history is that the same administration that designed and conducted a near-perfect electoral process could not see it through to completion.

“That unfortunate turn of events remains deeply regrettable. The nation rightfully expects me to acknowledge this. As the leader of the military administration, I accept full responsibility for every decision made under my watch,” the former leader stated.

“June 12 happened during my administration. Mistakes, oversights, and missteps followed in quick succession, but as I explain in my book, every action taken was in the supreme national interest—to ensure Nigeria’s survival.”

He expressed relief that former President Muhammadu Buhari had officially recognized Abiola’s victory in the June 12 elections and posthumously awarded him the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR), Nigeria’s highest honour reserved for presidents.

The book’s reviewer, former Vice President Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, noted that Babangida admitted in the autobiography that Abiola secured the majority vote and achieved the required spread, winning at least a quarter of the votes in two-thirds of the states.

The event attracted a distinguished gathering of Nigerian business and political leaders, along with former Presidents of Ghana and Sierra Leone.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo presided over the event, while former Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo delivered the keynote address.

Also in attendance were General Yakubu Gowon, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former President Goodluck Jonathan, and former Vice President Namadi Sambo.

A former Minister of Works represented former President Muhammadu Buhari at the event.

FG pledges more support for farmers

By Friday Omosola

The Federal Government (FG) has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Nigerian farmers through targeted interventions aimed at reducing production costs and improving food security.

In a statement on Friday, Stanley Nkwocha, Shettima spokesperson said he made this declaration during a steering committee meeting of the Presidential Food Systems Coordinating Unit (PFSCU) at the Presidential Villa.

He emphasised the need for strategic government intervention, including single-digit loans, to protect and empower local farmers.

“We need to support our local farmers. Give them single-digit loans. The Presidential Food Systems Coordinating Unit has evolved into an incubator beyond being just an advisory body,” Shettima stated.

He further assured that the administration of President Bola Tinubu remains dedicated to reviving stalled high-impact agricultural projects, stressing that “the government will intervene robustly” to sustain and encourage farmers.

Drawing from historical economic strategies, the Vice President referenced South Korea’s transformation through strategic



industrial investments.

He highlighted how the country supported corporations like Daewoo, LG, and Samsung with financial incentives, turning them into global leaders.

“As far as I am concerned, I have read and am rereading Joe Studwell’s *How Asia Works*. South Korea, once a poor nation, became the world’s number one steel producer by offering hefty discounts and single-digit loans to its industrial giants,” he noted.

To further drive agricultural collaboration, Shettima directed Governors Umar Namadi of Jigawa State and Francis Nwifuru of Ebonyi State—two major food-producing states—to engage with a visiting Brazilian delegation on Saturday.

“I urge the Governors of Jigawa and Ebonyi to be there, have that

interface with them, and see what we can do,” he said.

Governor Namadi commended the PFSCU for its role in boosting food production and enhancing Nigeria’s agricultural landscape.

“This committee has the potential to significantly improve food security,” he stated.

Similarly, Governor Nwifuru emphasised the need for clear priorities for farmers and better preparations ahead of farming seasons.

Adding her voice, Marion Moon, Technical Assistant to the President of Agriculture and PFSCU Coordinator, reiterated the unit’s commitment to ensuring food affordability while incentivizing increased production to maintain stability in the sector.

Court seizes Emefiele's \$4.7m, N830m, multiple properties

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

The woes that have befallen former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Godwin Emefiele worsened on Friday as a federal high court in Lagos ordered the final forfeiture of \$4.7 million, N830 million, and multiple properties linked to him.

In a judgement delivered on Friday, the presiding judge, Yellim Bogoro, granted the final forfeiture application brought by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The funds, now forfeited to the federal government, were held in First Bank, Titan Bank, and Zenith Bank accounts managed by individuals and entities including Omoile Anita Joy, Deep Blue Energy Service Limited, Exactquote Bureau De Change Ltd, Lipam Investment Services Limited, Tatler Services Limited, Rosajul Global Resources Ltd, and TIL Communication Nigeria Ltd.

Properties affected by the interim forfeiture include 94 units of an 11-floor building under construction at 2 Otunba Elegushi 2nd Avenue, Ikoyi, Lagos; AM Plaza, an 11-floor office space on Otunba Adedoyin Crescent, Lekki Peninsula Scheme 1, Lagos; Imore Industrial Park 1 on Esa Street, Imoore Land, Amuwo Odofin LGA, Lagos; Mitrewood and Tatler Warehouse (Furniture Plant at Bogije) near Elemoro, Owolomi Village, Ibeju-Lekki LGA, Lagos; and two properties purchased from Chevron Nigeria, located in Lakes Estate, Lekki, Lagos.

Additional properties include a plot at



Lekki Foreshore Estate Scheme, Foreshore Estate, Eti-Osa, LGA; an estate at 100 Cottonwood Coppel Texas Drive, Coppel, Texas, owned by Lipam Investment Services; land at 1 Bunmi Owulude Street, Lekki Phase 1, Lagos; and a property at 8 Bayo Kuku Road, Ikoyi, Lagos.

Justice Bogoro held that "all these properties and funds are proceeds of unlawful activities which are bound to be forfeited to the Federal Government of Nigeria."

The judge further held: "I find that the activities of the respondents here were unlawful. Why should they have a problem of dollars immediately Godwin Emefiele left CBN as a governor of the Bank and salary could not be paid?"

"I hold that they are not legitimate business activities. I hold that Anita Omoile is a close crony of the former CBN governor Godwin Emefiele who has been given undue influence to unlawfully sway dollars from CBN.

"Consequently, I find that all the monies and properties in the schedule are finally forfeited to the Federal Government of Nigeria."

The EFCC, through its counsel, Rotimi Oyedepo, SAN, had cited Section 17 of the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Fraud Related Offences Act, 2006, and Section 44(2)(b) of the Nigerian Constitution in its application, seeking an interim forfeiture on the grounds that the funds and properties were suspected to be proceeds of unlawful activities.

Justice Bogoro, finding merit in the EFCC's application, ordered the interim forfeiture and mandated the publication of the order in a national newspaper.

Following the failure of the defendants or anyone else to prove that the funds legitimately belonged to them, the judge then made the interim order permanent.

FG woos EU to strengthen Nigeria's science, technology

By Dave Oludare Oso

In its continual drive to boost the country's development, the Federal Government has called for deeper collaboration with the European Union (EU) to strengthen Nigeria's Science, Technology, and Innovation policies and coordination mechanisms.

The Director of Media and Corporate Communications at the National Space Research and Development Agency, Dr Felix Ale disclosed the development in a statement he released on Friday.

The statement stated that the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Technology, Chief Uche Nnaji, made the call during a courtesy visit by the EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS on Thursday.

The minister stated, "To improve policy coordination, we welcome EU technical assistance for our Interministerial Committee on Research and Innovation. Additionally, we seek support for conducting an STI indicators survey and a technology foresight programme to guide our scientific and industrial advancements."

Nnaji emphasised the need for increased technology transfer and commercialisation to ensure that research findings are transformed into industrial applications.

"Nigeria seeks to strengthen technology transfer and commercialisation, ensuring that research is translated into industrial applications. We also aim for greater inclusion of our public research institutes in EU funding programmes to foster knowledge exchange and



innovation," Nnaji said.

The minister further highlighted the importance of the existing bilateral agreement on Science, Technology, and Innovation between Nigeria and the EU.

"The existing bilateral agreement on Science, Technology, and Innovation provides a structured framework for cooperation. We seek to enhance its implementation to promote joint research, knowledge-sharing, and investment in priority technological areas," he noted.

On Nigeria's clean energy agenda, Nnaji underscored the country's interest in collaborating with the EU on renewable energy projects.

"As part of our clean energy agenda, we are keen on EU collaboration in Green Hydrogen and Green Methanol projects. These initiatives align with global carbon reduction efforts and will accelerate Nigeria's energy transition," he stated.

The minister also called for EU partnerships to establish Innovation Hubs across Nigeria to support startups and research-driven entrepreneurship.

"Furthermore, we seek partnerships for establishing Innovation Hubs across Nigeria to support start-ups, research-driven entrepreneurship, and job creation," he added.

Reaffirming Nigeria's commitment to scientific and technological advancements, Nnaji expressed optimism about the outcomes of the meeting.

The minister concluded, "Your Excellency, today's meeting is an opportunity to deepen our cooperation for mutual progress. I look forward to productive discussions and reaffirm Nigeria's commitment to working closely with the EU in advancing our scientific and technological ambitions."

I know nothing of Dele Giwa's death - IBB

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

Former military president, retired General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), has denied involvement in the death of veteran journalist and Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch magazine, Dele Giwa, expressing the hope that one day, the "truth" about the person(s) responsible for the October 19, 1986 assassination would be uncovered.

Giwa, a fearless journalist and a vocal critic of Babangida's military government was killed by a bomb sent in a parcel bearing the official seal of the president. The military government then headed by IBB, remains suspected to have been behind the murder of Giwa.

But in his autobiography, "A Journey in Service," launched in Abuja on Thursday, the former military dictator denied involvement in the death of the journalist.

Two days before Giwa's assassination, a senior official of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) had accused the veteran journalist of illegally importing and stockpiling arms and ammunition to stage a socialist revolution in Nigeria.

Alarmed at the charge, Giwa quickly briefed his lawyer, the firebrand human rights advocate, Gani Fawehinmi.

The following day, a security chief, Colonel Halilu Akilu called to reassure Giwa that the accusation had resulted from a misunderstanding, that the matter had been cleared, and that Giwa should think nothing of it.

According to Ray Ekpu, Giwa's colleague at Newswatch, a government emissary arrived at Giwa's Ikeja residence a few hours later. His son, Billy, collected the parcel and handed it to his father, who was seated at the dining table in the company of Kayode Soyinka, the London correspondent of Newswatch, who was visiting from the UK. The envelope bore the seal of the Presidency and was marked "To be opened by addressee only."

However, dismissing the longtime



allegation that he was involved in Giwa's death, Babangida, in the autobiography presentation in Abuja on Thursday, noted that he expected that one day, the truth would be uncovered.

He said, "The hysteria of the media did not help the investigation of the Giwa murder. As is typical of the Nigerian media, the direction was marked by an adversarial attitude towards the government, which had remained the hallmark of the Nigerian media from its colonial heyday.

"It was an attitude of 'we versus the government' that has remained today. It is a situation in which the government is adjudged guilty even before the evidence in a case is adduced.

"When the Obasanjo civilian administration reopened the Giwa case at the Oputa Panel on Human and Civil Rights, I expected that the police and lawyers would come forward with new evidence as to their findings on the Giwa murder over the years.

"Nothing of such happened. The Giwa, like all mysterious murders, has remained unsolved after so many years. I keep hoping it will be uncovered in our lifetime or after us. More often than not, mysterious crimes are solved long after their commission."

The public presentation of the autobiography also witnessed the

launch of Babangida's presidential library.

It was attended by President Bola Tinubu, who led former presidents, Olusegun Obasanjo, Yakubu Gowon, Goodluck Jonathan; former military leaders, and captains of industry, including Alhaji Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man.

Also in attendance were former vice presidents Yemi Osinbajo, Atiku Abubakar and Namadi Sambo.

The presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 poll and former governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi and the presidential candidate of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), and former governor of Kano State, Rabiu Kwankwaso were also there.

The keynote speaker was Nana Akufo-Addo, former President of Ghana.

Former President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Koroma, also graced the occasion.

Several state governors, Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Senator George Akume, industrialists, technocrats and traditional rulers were also in attendance.

Tinubu approves new federal varsities in Osun, Ekiti

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso



President Bola Tinubu has assented to two separate bills establishing the Federal University of Agriculture and Development Studies in Iragbiji, Osun State and the Federal University of Technology and Environmental Sciences, Iyin Ekiti, Ekiti State.

The Special Adviser to the President, Information and Strategy, Bayo Onanuga in a statement on Thursday said President Tinubu noted that the specialised institutions would address the educational needs of

the populace while driving research and innovation and contributing to the country's overall economic growth and development.

Onanuga indicated that the President said the institutions would serve as training grounds for developing agriculture, science and technology professionals and enhancing Nigeria's competitiveness in the global economy.

According to the National Universities Commission (NUC),

Nigeria currently has 63 approved federal universities, 63 state universities, and 149 private universities.

On February 3, 2025, the President approved establishing the Federal University of Environment and Technology (FUET) in Ogoni town of Tai, Rivers State.

The President also consented to the Nigerian government's takeover of a forfeited private university in Southern Kaduna and its transformation into a federal university.

AGF calls for cancellation of Osun LG election amid political crisis

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye



The Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi (SAN), has urged Osun State Governor, Ademola Adeleke, to call off Saturday's local government elections, warning that the poll would be unconstitutional and invalid.

In a statement issued on Thursday, Fagbemi emphasised that conducting the election would breach the Constitution, as the tenure of the allegedly sacked local government officials remains valid according to a recent Court of Appeal ruling.

The judgement, delivered on February 10, 2025, restored the ousted chairmen, rendering any new election unnecessary and unlawful.

The political crisis in Osun State, sparked by a dispute between the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the opposition All

Progressives Congress (APC), has escalated into violence. Six people, including an APC leader, were killed earlier this week.

Fagbemi called on Governor Adeleke to respect the law and avoid further violence, urging him to prevent any actions that could exacerbate tensions in the state.

He also referenced the recent Supreme Court ruling on local government autonomy, reinforcing the legal obligation to respect the tenure of elected officials until October 2025.

In a swift rebuttal, a civil society group, Osun Democrats for Democracy (ODD), rejected the AGF's call, accusing him of overstepping his authority.

The group argued that only a court could stop the election and criticised Fagbemi for failing to mention an

earlier judgement that dismissed APC council candidates.

Meanwhile, the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, dismissed allegations of bias regarding the security situation in Osun, stressing that the deployment of additional forces was in response to requests from local authorities.

The crisis has prompted calls for intervention from the PDP Governors' Forum, which condemned the violence and called for a return to peace and the rule of law. However, the APC has asked President Bola Tinubu to intervene and prevent the election, citing the Court of Appeal's ruling that reinstated the APC chairmen.

Governor Adeleke has urged voters to participate peacefully in the upcoming election, assuring residents that security measures are in place to ensure a safe and orderly process.

NNPCL withheld N13.7trn Federation Account revenue – Report

By Dave Oludare Oso

Documents obtained from the Federal Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) following its January 2025 meeting have revealed that the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL) has withheld a whopping N13.763 trillion in revenue from the Federal Government.

According to the report released on Thursday, this amount covering 2012 and 2024, has significantly impacted the Federation Account, the central pool of funds from which the government allocates resources to federal, state, and local governments across the country.

The document domiciled with the Federation Accounts department revealed the growing financial gap between what the NNPCL should have remitted and the amount deposited into the Federation Account.

It indicated that the national oil firm revealed transactions worth N27.28tn as a balance payable from sales of domestic crude costs within the review period.

However, only N13.524tn was deposited into the Federation Account, leaving a significant shortfall of N13.763tn and creating a growing financial burden for the government.

The report also highlighted that N4.026tn was listed as certified subsidy claims, which have been a long-standing issue in the country's oil sector.

The withheld revenue raises serious concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and financial management by the national oil firm.

Recently, the NNPCL was accused by



the Auditor-General of the Federation of diverting a total sum of N2.68tn and \$9.77m in the last four years.

The office, in its annual financial statements reports published between 2017 and 2021, showed that N1.33tn was diverted in 2017, N681.02bn in 2019, N151.12bn (\$19.77m) in 2020 and N514bn in 2021 amounting to N2.68tn and \$19.77m over four years.

On Tuesday, the Senate resolved to probe the company over the N8.4tn it allegedly withheld as expenditure incurred on payment of subsidies on petroleum products.

Also, the House of Representatives Public Accounts Committee initiated an investigation into the outstanding debts worth \$1.6bn royalties owed to the Federation Account by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited and oil companies.

Another report by the Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative also accused the NNPCL of failing to remit N3.6tn in taxes to the government.

A year-by-year breakdown of the

FAAC document showed that in 2012, the company didn't remit a sum of N1.42tn but paid N1.54tn to the federation account.

In 2013, N1.58tn was paid to the federation account but N1.043tn was not remitted. N1.359tn was remitted to the federation account in 2014 but N1.17tn was withheld.

The document further stated that N768.94bn was paid to government coffers in 2015 but N586.06bn was withheld. The amount unremitted dropped to N183.58bn in 2016 and N1.18tn was paid to government coffers for disbursement to the three tiers of government.

In 2017, the corporation withheld a substantial N430.62bn from its earnings, yet it still managed to remit an impressive N1.305tn to government coffers. This pattern set the tone for what would be a recurring

**Continue reading
on next page**

Cont from page 12

theme of withholding varying amounts, sometimes substantial, yet still paying significant sums to the federal government.

By 2018, the amount withheld soared to N811.22bn, yet the NNPC contributed an even larger sum, N1.48tn, to the government. The year-to-year trend saw a peak in 2019 with N703.45bn withheld, while the corporation still managed to send N1.44tn to the federation account.

As the years progressed, however, the withheld amounts began to increase more dramatically. In 2020, N298.06bn was withheld, which was relatively lower compared to previous years.

However, the paid amount still stood at N1.21tn, highlighting the corporation's ability to pay despite some internal challenges. The situation worsened in 2021 when a staggering N1.94tn was withheld, a clear indication of increased financial pressures or perhaps more strategic financial management. Only N789.03bn was eventually paid to the government.

Then, in 2022, the NNPC withheld a massive N4.16tn, a figure far surpassing anything seen in the previous years. Also, the total paid amount to the government drastically dropped to just N245.83bn, signalling a severe crunch.

In 2024, the company paid N190.48bn into the federation account but withheld a total amount of N256.27bn.

Efforts to get clarification on what the NNPC is doing to resolve the situation were futile as the spokesperson, Femi Soneye, didn't respond to enquiries sent to his WhatsApp line.

Analysts have expressed concern over the impact this situation could have on the Federal Government's ability to meet its budgetary obligations, as well as the potential effects on state and local government finances.

As the government continues to grapple with economic challenges, the withholding of such a large sum of money by the NNPC underscores the need for urgent reforms within the country's oil sector to ensure that revenues are properly accounted for and remitted in full to the Federation Account.

Commenting on the infractions in an earlier interview with The PUNCH, the Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership (CACOL) described the NNPC as a hub of institutional corruption, alleging that powerful interests within and outside the government had shielded the organisation from accountability.

CACOL's Executive Director, Debo Adeniran, lamented that despite the enactment of the Petroleum Industry Act aimed at decentralising and unbundling the NNPC, the company's operations remained opaque and rife with allegations of corruption.

According to Adeniran, the NNPC has always been a source of liquid enrichment for government officials, even before it was converted into a limited liability company.

"The operations of the NNPC have always been shrouded in secrecy. Even the Petroleum Industry Act has not helped. Despite all the noise about decentralisation and unbundling of the NNPC, nothing has materialised.

"It is the strongest cabal in Nigeria. All the powerful elements in government and MDAs work in concert with those managing the NNPC's accounts, perhaps due to gratification.

"Even the anti-corruption agencies find it difficult to probe the NNPC. A couple of attempts were made by the ICPC and EFCC in the past, but they have not been able to uncover anything. There must be something shielding the NNPC from exposure for its corruption crimes," Adeniran said.

JUNE 12: IBB, Obasanjo, Abubakar belong in jail – Sowore

By Dave Oludare Oso

Presidential candidate of African Action Congress (AAC) in the 2023 general elections, Omoyele Sowore, has declared that former military president, retired General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB), ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo, former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar (retd), and erstwhile senate president, David Mark should be behind bars over the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential elections.

Sowore made the call in a post on his X page on Thursday after Babangida admitted that Abiola won the 1993 presidential election in his autobiography, “A Journey in Service,” launched on the same day at the Congress Hall of TransCorp Hilton Hotel in Abuja.

Sowore argued that this acknowledgment was sufficient grounds for the imprisonment of IBB, Obasanjo, Abubakar, and Mark.

The human rights activist and convener of #RevolutionNow called for the prosecution and imprisonment of the former Nigerian leaders over their roles in the annulment of the 1993 presidential election won by Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (MKO) Abiola.

The publisher of Sahara Reporters, who was among the activists who challenged Babangida in 1993, noted that those responsible for truncating Nigeria’s democratic progress must be held accountable.

He insisted that the historic election, widely regarded as the freest and fairest



in Nigeria’s history, was unjustly annulled under the military regime of General Babangida, an action that led to years of political instability and the eventual death of Abiola in detention.

Sowore said, “MKO Abiola won the June 12, 1993 election. He satisfied all the requirements to be declared President of Nigeria, says evil man Babangida.

“This is the reason these guys, Babangida, Obasanjo, Abubakar Abdusalam, and David Mark must be in jail.”

The annulment of the election sparked widespread protests and a prolonged struggle for democracy, culminating in Nigeria’s return to civilian rule in 1999.

While successive administrations have posthumously honoured Abiola — most notably with the declaration of June 12 as Democracy Day, Sowore maintains that true justice can only be served if those responsible face legal consequences.

NEW DAILY PRIME earlier reported that Babangida, during the book launch admitted that the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola won the June 12, 1993 presidential election.

However, before the winner could be officially declared, the Babangida regime had annulled the election.

According to the former military president, who spoke through former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, Abiola “satisfied all the requirements.”

Babangida also stated that Abiola, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate in the election secured the majority of votes and had the necessary geographical spread to become president.

The retired general admitted that annulling the election was the most challenging decision of his life.

Senate not for content creation – Adaramodu slams Natasha over seating row

By Friday Omosola

Senate spokesman, Yemi Adaramodu, has criticised Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan for her actions during a heated dispute over seating arrangements in the Senate chamber.

The New Daily Prime reported that there's drama in the Senate on Thursday after Natasha and Senate President Godswill Akpabio engaged in a heated dispute.

The Kogi Central lawmaker, representing the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), refused to sit in her designated seat, citing Order 10 of the Senate Standing Rules, which upholds members' privileges.

The disagreement escalated to the point where Akpabio ordered security personnel to remove Senator Natasha from the chamber.

However, the intervention of other lawmakers prevented the situation from worsening.

Speaking on Channels Television's Sunrise Daily on Friday, Adaramodu emphasised that the Senate is a place for serious legislative work, not theatrics.

Adaramodu, who represents Ekiti South Senatorial District, also dismissed Natasha's claims of bullying, maintaining that the matter was purely procedural.

“What we are saying is that the National Assembly is not for content creation in entertainment. The National Assembly is for serious



business.

“If she is talking like that being bullied or sidelined, as a first-timer, she even had three committees that she was appointed as chairman.

“You are entitled to only committee to be the chairman and she is in charge of Foreign Affairs, NGOs now,” the Senate spokesman said.

The Senate spokesperson dismissed any possibility of disciplinary action against her, noting that her colleagues from Kogi State, particularly Senator Isah Jubril, had already apologised on her behalf.

He emphasised that with the apology in place, the 10th Senate had no intention of revisiting the matter.

“The Senate as a whole has already accepted that tendered apology, so we are not going to revisit that,” Adaramodu stated.

Adding her perspective on the matter, Cynthia Mbamalu, the Director of

Programmes at Yiaga Africa, alleged that Akpabio denied Senator Natasha the opportunity to voice her concerns.

She asserted that Senator Natasha was prevented from speaking, despite the provisions of Order 10 in the Senate Standing Rules.

She expressed her belief that the response to Senator Natasha's actions reflected a low level of tolerance for even mild dissent.

Citing a similar incident in 2018 involving Akpabio and then-Senate President Bukola Saraki, she noted the contrast in reactions.

“We have witnessed far more intense and heated debates from Senators without anyone accusing them of being overly aggressive,” she said.

“Senator Natasha neither acted violently nor used offensive language. She simply referred to a specific order in their rule book and based her argument on it.”

Despite AGF's call for cancellation, Adeleke insists LG election holds Saturday

By Friday Omosola

Osun State Governor, Ademola Adeleke, has reaffirmed that the local government election scheduled for Saturday will proceed as planned under the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSSIEC).

He made this declaration while receiving a delegation from a civil society coalition in the state to monitor the election.

The governor's stance follows a statement by the Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, on Thursday, urging him to halt the polls.

Fagbemi cautioned that proceeding with the election would be unconstitutional and invalid, citing the Court of Appeal's decision to reinstate the allegedly dismissed local government officials.

Despite this, Adeleke emphasised that voters in the state are ready to exercise their electoral rights on Saturday and expressed confidence



in the level of preparedness demonstrated by the electoral commission.

“I welcome you all to Osun State. Our people are prepared for elections tomorrow. They yearn to have their choices as chairmen and councillors.

“OSIEC has also done a marvellous preparatory job according to reports at my disposal. Several political parties are participating and I believe there will be a level playing ground for all to test their popularity with the masses”, the governor told the visiting activists.

Amid the controversy surrounding the election, the governor reaffirmed that democracy is guided by the rule of law and that no individual can usurp the authority of the courts.

He called on all parties, including local and national stakeholders, to uphold democratic principles, emphasizing that both he and the citizens remain committed to the rule of law, not unlawful self-help.

“Election is going to hold, and the outcome will be a fast-tracked development at the local level. I urge our people to remain peaceful. Osun is a truly peaceful state”, Governor Adeleke noted.

Lagos govt displays draft Ibeju-Lekki Model City plan

By Friday Omosola

The Lagos State Government has announced the commencement of the public display and inspection of the Draft Ibeju-Lekki Model City Plan (2024–2044).

The initiative, led by the Office of Physical Planning, aims to make the plan's proposals accessible to the public and gather feedback from residents in line with the Lagos State Urban and Regional Planning and Development Law (2019, as amended).

The Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development, Oluyinka Olumide, disclosed this yesterday.

He emphasised that the public inspection aligns with the state's commitment to citizen participation and international best practices in urban planning.

“It is imperative to know that public inspection of the draft Ibeju-Lekki Model City Plan is in tandem with the state's culture of citizens' participation and international best practices in the preparation of Physical Development Plans.

“This is the process that the state government adopts to produce good, desirable outcomes and bring about community ownership and seamless



implementation of our Physical Development Plans,” Olumide stated.

Lagos

The inspection period is scheduled to run from February 26 to Friday, April 4, 2025.

Residents can review the draft plan at five designated centres: Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development, The Secretariat, Alausa, Ikeja, Ibeju-Lekki Local Government Secretariat, Ibeju-Lekki, Lekki Local Council Development Area (LCDA) Secretariat, Lekki—Epe Local Government Secretariat, Epe, and Lagos State Physical Planning Permits Authority, GRA, Ikeja.

Olumide encouraged residents to

participate actively in the inspection process and provide feedback between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM on working days within the stipulated period.

He stressed that public input is crucial, as the draft plan's final presentation to stakeholders is scheduled for April 11, 2025, at the Lekki LCDA Hall, marking the formal inception of the Ibeju-Lekki Model City Plan.

The Ibeju-Lekki Model City Plan is expected to guide the sustainable development of one of Lagos State's fastest-growing areas, ensuring structured urban growth, improved infrastructure, and enhanced economic opportunities.

Court okays Osun LG poll, gov restricts vehicular movement

By Friday Omosola

Osun State High Court sitting in Ilesa has ordered the Osun State Independent Electoral Commission (OSSIEC) to proceed with local government elections across the state's 30 local government areas.

The ruling follows the nullification of a previous election held on October 15, 2022.

Presiding over the case, Justice A.A. Aderibigbe granted three key orders.

Justice Aderibigbe said the previous election was invalidated and its officials removed by a Federal High Court ruling, later upheld by the Court of Appeal.

This comes as the state governor, Ademola Adeleke has restricted movement of vehicles during the period of the exercise.

The judge added that OSSIEC must conduct fresh elections, as scheduled, on February 22, 2025, to fill the vacant positions.

Furthermore, Justice Aderibigbe ordered security agencies, including the Nigeria Police, DSS, NSCDC, Nigerian Army, Amotekun Corps, and others, to ensure a peaceful electoral process.



In response to the ruling, Osun State Attorney General, Wole Jimi Bada, reaffirmed the state government's commitment to upholding the law.

He urged all stakeholders, including voters, to comply with the court order and participate peacefully in the elections.

"The judgment is explicit, and I call on all stakeholders to take part in the elections. We must remain peaceful as we exercise our voting rights in compliance with the court's decision," he stated at a press briefing.

The state government further assured the public of adequate security measures to

How Anambra lawmaker's murder suspects escaped – Police

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

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Aiyedatiwa to take oath Monday, declares holiday

By Friday Omosola

Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa will be inaugurated on Monday, February 24, 2025, at the Ondo State Sports Complex, Akure.

In preparation for the event, he has declared the day a public holiday to enable residents to participate fully in the ceremony.

In a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, the governor emphasised that the work-free day would allow citizens to engage in the inauguration activities, including the swearing-in of his deputy, Olayide Adelami.

The inauguration ceremonies commenced on Friday with a Jum'at service at the Akure Central Mosque.

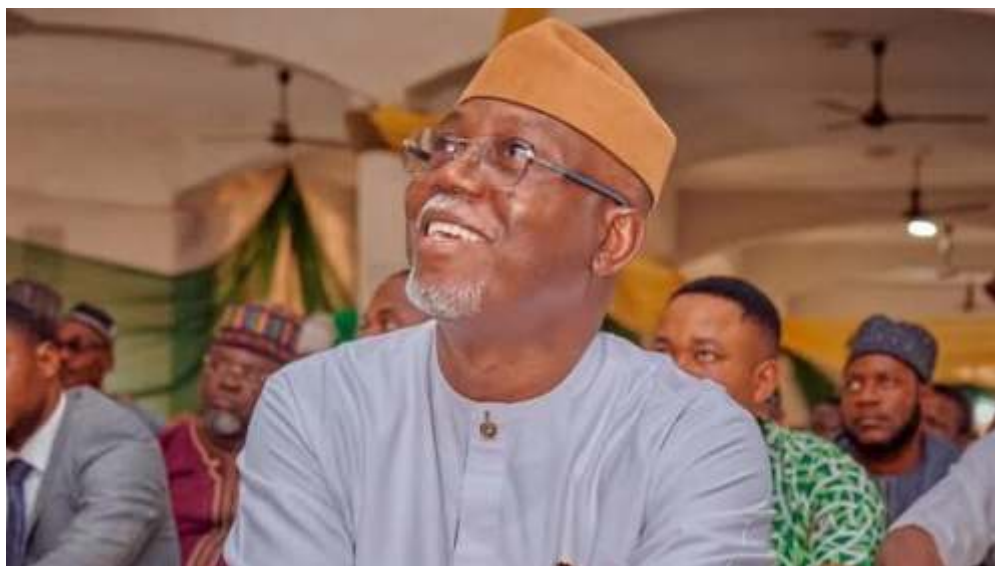
On Sunday, a Church Thanksgiving Service will be held at the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Jesus House, Oke-Ijebu, Akure, the state capital.

Following the official inauguration, a gala night and book presentation will take place at the International Centre for Culture & Events (The Dome), Akure.

Meanwhile, Governor Aiyedatiwa has lifted the restriction of movement for the monthly environmental sanitation exercise scheduled for Saturday, February 22, 2025.

However, residents are still encouraged to clean their surroundings despite the lifted restriction.

Lucky Aiyedatiwa Speaking at the Jum'at service at the Akure Central Mosque, the governor expressed gratitude to the Muslim



community for their unwavering support.

He reaffirmed his administration's commitment to fostering religious harmony and inclusivity in governance.

Governor Aiyedatiwa underscored the importance of unity and peaceful coexistence among religious groups.

He assured the Muslim community of his dedication to policies that promote development, equity, and the overall welfare of the people, regardless of religious affiliations.

He also commended the leadership of the Muslim community in Ondo State for their contributions to societal growth and moral guidance.

He pledged continued collaboration with religious institutions to ensure governance remains people-centred and progressive.

The governor further sought prayers for a successful administration and urged residents to support government initiatives aimed at advancing the state.

Earlier, the Chief Imam of Akure,

Alhaji Abdulhakeem Yayi-Akorede, offered prayers for the governor and his deputy.

He highlighted the importance of good leadership as prescribed in the Qur'an, emphasizing that Allah appoints leaders based on knowledge and physical strength.

The Chief Imam encouraged Governor Aiyedatiwa to lead with justice, fairness, and an unwavering commitment to the welfare of all citizens.

He also commended the governor's infrastructural projects across Ondo State, particularly improvements in road networks.

Additionally, Akorede expressed appreciation for the governor's support of the Muslim Welfare Board, describing it as a testament to his inclusive governance and respect for religious institutions.

He called on residents to pray for the governor's success, stressing that leadership requires divine guidance, patience, and the collective support of the people to achieve meaningful development.

NiMet warns Nigerians to take precautionary measures against heat surge

By Helen Okechukwu

Rising temperature witnessed across the country has led the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) to issue a warning to citizens to take precautionary measures against the heat surge effect.

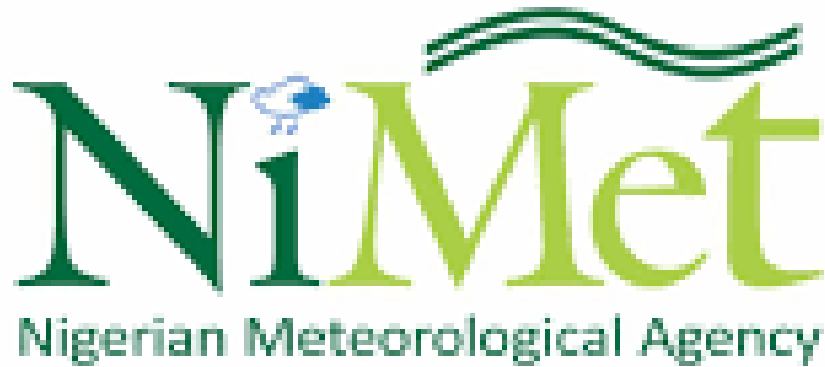
This was made known due to the increase in several states observing extreme heat conditions.

The agency revealed this in a post shared on X on Thursday, alarming that on Wednesday, with temperatures heating 38 and 40 degrees Celsius while Yelwa recorded 40 degrees Celsius, marking the highest temperature.

NiMet acknowledges that the air temperatures might remain at this level, showing the possibility to increase in some notable areas.

However, the moisture influx is expected to reach far inland up to the central states, which will fuse high temperatures, bearing discomfort levels.

Meanwhile, Port Harcourt, Owerri, Enugu, Awka, Bida, Minna, Gusau, Iseyin, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), among others, recorded 38°C.



Cities experiencing slightly higher temperatures at 39°C include Sokoto, Kebbi, Lokoja, Makurdi, Abakaliki, Ikom, Jalingo, and Yola.

NiMet added, “Early morning, day, and night temperatures will feel warmer than their real values and create more discomfort.

The most vulnerable states to witness heat stress are Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Edo, Delta, Kogi, Oyo, Kwara, Niger, and the FCT.

While the other states shown from the provided data include Bayelsa, Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba,

Adamawa, Kebbi, Osun, Zamfara, Sokoto, and Benue.

Record-Breaking Global Heat in 2024

In 2024, global temperatures soared to an all-time high, averaging 1.6°C above pre-industrial levels—exceeding the 1.5°C limit set by the Paris Agreement.

Extreme heatwaves, wildfires, and floods underscored the worsening climate crisis.

The warming trend persists into 2025, with January marking the warmest on record, despite the cooling influence of La Niña.

USAID's withdrawal from HIV/AIDS programme worries NEPWHAN chairman

By Helen Okechukwu

The Chairman of the Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (NEPWHAN), Bauchi State Chapter, Abdulahi Ibrahim, has expressed concern over the withdrawal of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from HIV/AIDS interventions.



According to the Voice of Nigeria publication, Ibrahim noted their withdrawal poses a great risk within the state and asserted that the shortage of treatment centres, lack of clinical support, and essential services can lead to the spread of the disease.

While issuing a warning, he emphasised the lack of treatment could result in drug resistance and complications.

“We have more than 22,000 volunteers in the state, many of whom are currently jobless and unable to assist with caregiving,” Ibrahim emphasised.

The Chairman of NEPWHAN stressed that the state government should include volunteers in the health system and include HIV/AIDS patients in the Bauchi State Health Contributory Scheme.

Ibrahim raised concerns about the struggles of vulnerable groups, especially the unemployed and those in remote areas, warning that the ongoing drug shortage could trigger a public health crisis.

He urged the revival of the Bauchi State Resource Mobilisation Committee to improve funding and patient care.

Also, Dr. Adamu Sambo, Chairman of the Bauchi State Agency for the Control of HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Leprosy, and Malaria (BACATMA), assured that the state government had a plan to sustain healthcare services.

He acknowledged the impact of USAID's withdrawal on community outreach but confirmed that treatment centres still had drug supplies.

Sambo emphasised the government's commitment to providing medication and working with partners to ensure continued access to care.

June 12 election: What if Abiola had become Nigeria's President?

By **Muhammed Adeniyi**

Some Nigerians have criticised former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida for annulling the June 12, 1993, presidential election, which resulted in Moshood Abiola losing his victory.

This is as Babangida expressed regret over the annulment of the presidential election, acknowledging that the candidate of the Social Democratic Party, MKO Abiola, won the poll.

In the concluding section of the 12th chapter of his autobiography launched Thursday in Abuja, titled, 'A Journey In Service,' the former leader described the annulment of the election as an "accident of history."

Recall that Abiola, a successful businessman, showed his commitment to creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and addressing poverty.

He was also known for advocating for democratic reforms and greater political freedoms, and he hoped to transform Nigeria into a more open, fair, and inclusive society. His vision was to tackle corruption and ensure that Nigeria's resources were better utilised for the welfare of its citizens.

Abiola's death in 1998 under mysterious circumstances, while still fighting for recognition as the legitimate winner of the 1993 election, left many questions unanswered.

His legacy, however, continues to inspire Nigerians who remember him as a symbol of democracy and hope.

In a conversation with New Daily Prime correspondent, lawyer Titilola Babatunde stated that the move not only thwarted Abiola's leadership but also set back the country's democratic advancement, resulting in prolonged



instability and disillusionment among the populace.

The lawyer added that Babangida's actions were widely viewed as having undermined MKO Abiola's vision for a better Nigeria.

He said, "The annulment of the 1993 presidential election, which Abiola was believed to have won and which is now also being confirmed by the military dictator himself, was a pivotal moment that obstructed the democratic process and dashed the hopes of many Nigerians and the country as an establishment."

Also speaking, a political analyst, Afeez Agunbiade, said every politician comes with a promise of making the country greater.

He expressed that with Abiola one can bask in the euphoria assumptions as regards what could have been.

Agunbiade stated, "Yes he was said to

have a good plan for the development of the country. Haven't said all that it is an established fact that IBB denied us the opportunity to witness what can now be regarded as an assumption of a greater Nigeria with Abiola as President.

"However, I noted that only a few of them had been able to make any tangible improvement."

A member of the Citadel political group, Tobi Lawal, condemned the annulment of the election, adding that it would have changed Nigeria for good.

He said, "Abiola was a revered figure. If he had served the country, it would have been better today. Nigeria would have become a wonderful country.

"Abiola had indigenous solutions to our problems. As a leader, he was not relying on western ideas and ideals alone, he understood the need to domesticate these solutions."

I will no longer cause trouble – Portable

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian singer Habeeb Okikiola, popularly known as Portable, has vowed to turn his life around and make better choices after securing bail from authorities.

The controversial artist, famous for his hit song Zazu, declared that he is done with trouble and will now focus on financial stability and personal growth.

Portable was granted bail set at ₦2 million after facing charges related to alleged assault and other offenses. His arrest sparked widespread reactions, with fans and critics debating his behavior and legal troubles. Following his release, the singer took to social media to share his thoughts and plans for the future.

Portable speaks after release

In a video posted online, Portable expressed gratitude to his fans and supporters. He acknowledged the challenges he has faced and emphasized that his focus is now on making money and paying off his bail debt. His message was clear—he wants to move forward positively.

“My fans, thank God for everything,” Portable said in the video. “If you have God, you have everything. I need money. I am not looking for trouble anymore. I am now focused on making money. I have a ₦2 million bail debt. I need more money. I am looking for money.”

A shift in attitude?

His statement marks a shift in attitude for the singer, who has been in the spotlight for his controversial lifestyle. Over the years, Portable has gained a reputation for his outspoken nature and unpredictable actions. His frequent clashes with authorities and



fellow artists have kept him in the headlines.

However, his latest remarks suggest that he is ready to take a different path. By emphasizing his commitment to financial success and stability, Portable hopes to reassure his fans that he is serious about making positive changes.

Mixed reactions from fans

Social media has been flooded with reactions to Portable’s statement. While some fans applauded his decision to focus on personal growth, others questioned whether he would truly leave behind his troubled past. Critics argue that the singer has made similar promises before, only to find himself entangled in new controversies.

Despite the doubts, Portable’s message signals a willingness to move forward. His pledge to prioritize financial success could be a turning point in his career. If he stays true to his words, the singer may regain the trust of his fans and rebuild his reputation.

Nigerian controversial singer Portable. [Photo credit: Google]

Can he stay on the right path?

Music analysts believe that his talent

remains his greatest asset. With the right focus, he could channel his energy into his craft and strengthen his career. Industry insiders suggest that avoiding unnecessary controversies and surrounding himself with positive influences could help him stay on the right track.

Meanwhile, legal experts have weighed in on his situation. They caution that repeated run-ins with the law could have serious consequences for his career. Portable’s ability to stay out of trouble will determine whether he can maintain his freedom and continue making music.

What lies ahead?

His supporters hope that this experience will serve as a lesson, inspiring him to make wiser choices. If he remains dedicated to his craft and avoids distractions, Portable could prove his critics wrong.

For now, all eyes are on the singer as he navigates this new chapter. Whether he will truly leave behind his troubled past remains to be seen. But for now, Portable insists that his focus is on financial success and a better future.

Wizkid, Davido triumph at 2025 NAACP image awards

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi



Nigerian music icons Wizkid and Davido have emerged victorious at the 2025 NAACP Image Awards, solidifying their global influence and musical dominance.

The highly regarded event, which honors excellence in arts and media, announced its winners on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Wizkid secures sixth NAACP image award

Wizkid won the Outstanding Duo, Group, or Collaboration category for his hit song with American singer Brent Faiyaz. This marks his sixth NAACP Image Award, making him the most awarded Nigerian artist in the history of the event. His consistent success further cements his status as one of Africa's biggest music exports.

Davido wins for international collaboration

Meanwhile, Davido took home the award for Outstanding International Song for his collaboration with American superstar Chris Brown. This latest achievement adds another milestone to his decorated career, proving his global appeal and influence in the music industry.

Other Nigerian stars miss out

Although several other Nigerian artists, including Burna Boy and Tems, received nominations, they did not win in their respective categories. Their recognition, however, underscores the growing impact of Nigerian music on the global stage.

NAACP image awards: Celebrating

black excellence

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organizes the Image Awards to recognize outstanding contributions in entertainment, media, and the arts. The event has become an important platform for celebrating diversity and showcasing talent.

Afrobeats continues its global rise

With Wizkid and Davido leading the way, Nigerian music continues to dominate international charts and award shows. Their victories at the NAACP Image Awards highlight the global influence of Afrobeats and the unstoppable rise of African music on the world stage.

Women who run from DNA tests hiding something – Yul Edochie

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**



Renowned Nollywood actor and self-proclaimed clergyman, Yul Edochie, has weighed in on the ongoing debate about DNA tests, stating that any woman who refuses to conduct one upon request is concealing the truth.

In a recent Instagram post, the actor stated that men should not accept any excuses from women unwilling to take a DNA test, insisting that a clear conscience has nothing to fear.

The actor wrote, “Any woman who refuses to do DNA tests on her child when it is demanded is hiding something. Don’t fall for any excuse

she gives to you. She is hiding something. A clear conscience fears nothing.”

Recall that there is an ongoing war between the father of the deceased singer, Mohbad (Ilerioluwa Aloba), and his daughter-in-law over the paternity of the late singer’s son, Liam.

According to Wikipedia, deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) testing is the use of DNA profiles to determine whether an individual is the biological parent of another individual.

Paternity testing can be especially important when the rights and duties of the father are in issue and a child’s

paternity is in doubt.

Tests can also determine the likelihood of someone being a biological grandparent. Though genetic testing is the most reliable standard, older methods also exist, including ABO blood group typing, analysis of various other proteins and enzymes, or using human leukocyte antigen antigens.

The current techniques for paternity testing are using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and restriction fragment length polymorphism (RFLP). Paternity testing can now also be performed while the woman is still pregnant from a blood draw.

Obi Cubana unveils 'Golden age with gold bar' campaign ahead of 50th birthday

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian businessman and nightlife mogul, Chief Obinna Iyiegbu, better known as Obi Cubana, is set to mark his 50th birthday in grand style.

To celebrate this milestone, the Cubana Group chairman has launched an exciting campaign titled "Golden Age with Gold Bar." The initiative promises fans and supporters incredible prizes, including a brand-new Gold Bar-branded luxury car and a ₦2 million cash reward.

Obi Cubana made the big announcement during a live Instagram session, where he invited fans, friends, and well-wishers to be part of the festivities. The birthday celebrations will take place in multiple locations, including Abuja, Lagos, and several international venues.

A celebration with exclusive rewards
As part of the "Golden Age with Gold Bar" campaign, fans who purchase Gold Bar Whiskey from select retail stores or online platforms will stand a chance to win various prizes.

These include cash rewards, VIP invitations, and the grand prize—a brand-new luxury vehicle. The campaign aims to reward loyal supporters while making the 50th birthday celebration a memorable event for all.

In addition, Obi Cubana has launched a 50th-birthday logo design competition, inviting graphic designers and artists to showcase their creativity.

The winner will receive a ₦2 million cash prize, with a panel of top industry experts selecting the best design. This initiative aims to engage talented individuals while adding a unique visual identity to the celebration.



Nigerian Business mogul Obi Cubana. [Photo credit: Google]

Obi Cubana reflects on his journey
Speaking about this significant milestone, Obi Cubana expressed gratitude for the support he has received throughout his journey. He emphasized that turning 50 is not just a personal achievement but an opportunity to reflect on the relationships and successes he has built over the years.

"This journey has been amazing, and I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of so many wonderful people," he said. "I invite everyone to celebrate with me, raise a glass of Gold Bar Whiskey, and enjoy these golden moments together."

His words reflect a spirit of appreciation and generosity, as he aims to share his joy with those who have been part of his success.

How to participate

With the countdown officially underway, fans now have the opportunity to take part in this once-in-a-lifetime celebration. To enter, they must purchase Gold Bar Whiskey from authorized retailers and follow the campaign

guidelines.

Each purchase increases their chances of winning prizes, including cash rewards, VIP experiences, and the grand prize—a luxury car.

For aspiring designers, the logo competition presents a chance to showcase their talent and compete for the ₦2 million prize.

Submissions will be reviewed by a panel of top professionals, ensuring a fair and competitive selection process.

A grand celebration awaits

As Obi Cubana gears up for his 50th birthday, excitement continues to build. The "Golden Age with Gold Bar" campaign not only celebrates a personal milestone but also gives back to fans and supporters in a remarkable way.

From luxury prizes to creative competitions, this event promises to be one of the most talked-about celebrations of the year. With the festivities spanning multiple locations and offering incredible rewards, fans and well-wishers have every reason to join in and make history with Obi Cubana.

Notorious B.I.G.'s mother, Voletta Wallace dies at 78

By Dave Oludare Oso

Voletta Wallace, the dedicated mother of the late great rapper, The Notorious B.I.G. and protector of his legacy, died Friday morning. She was 78.

Monroe County Coroner Thomas Yanac confirmed her death Friday to The Associated Press, saying she died at her home in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, after a stint on hospice care. She died of natural causes.

A representative for the estate of The Notorious B.I.G. did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Notorious B.I.G., one of the rap's greatest performers, was shot to death at age 24 in Los Angeles in 1997. The case remains unsolved. He was survived by his wife, the musician and actress, Faith Evans, and his two children, Christopher Jordan Wallace and T'yanna Dream Wallace.

Wallace was a dedicated keeper of the legacy of her son, born Christopher Wallace. When he first emerged on the scene as one of rap's most distinctive talents with songs that expertly detailed street life in Brooklyn, she labeled his music "noise."

Since his death, his gift took on a new meaning for her. She told AP in 2017, 20 years after his death, "I remembered my son said, 'Don't listen to my music.' And I never listened to his music. I heard it on the radio and it sounded good, because it was clean. But I said, 'You know what, I have to. I have to listen to that music.' And that's what I did."

"I cried so much that day just listening to the music. I remember I sat, I stood. I rested my head on the stereo and I just cried like a baby. And that was therapy for me. And I said, 'Oh my God — that was a talented young man to put those words together.' He had a beautiful voice. I love his voice," she continued.



Wallace launched the Christopher Wallace Memorial Foundation following her son's death, an organization that provides educational resources for children.

In 2003, she honored mothers of other musicians who died untimely deaths — Aaliyah, Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes, Tupac Shakur, Jam Master Jay, Big Pun, Big L and Freaky Tah — at "B.I.G. Night Out," a benefit for the foundation.

"It is our way of saying, 'Keep your head up,'" Wallace told AP at the time. "It's the foundation's way just to let these parents know that we love them."

She also took legal action on behalf of her son. In 2004, she dropped a wrongful-death lawsuit against a former suspect in the rap star's slaying — Amir Muhammad, aka Harry Billups.

The 2002 lawsuit also named the city of Los Angeles and Muhammad's former college roommate, David A. Mack, a Los Angeles policeman. It accused Mack of hiring Muhammad to shoot the hip-hop artist and police of failing to investigate properly after a fellow officer came under suspicion.

In 2021, Wallace worked as an executive producer on the Netflix documentary "Biggie: I Got a Story to Tell," and told AP about her role in the public eye.

"They never knew me. The public never knew me. I was thrust into this environment, I should say, after he passed away, because I'm a very private person. Extremely private," she said. "What he was doing out there, maybe I should have known. But honestly, I didn't. And to this day, there are people who are saying, 'Oh, she knew.' (whispers) But I never knew."

Notorious B.I.G.'s 1994 debut album for Bad Boy Records, "Ready to Die," has sold over six million units as of 2018, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, and included the hits "Big Poppa" and "Juicy."

His sophomore album, "Life After Death," released two weeks after his death, sold more than 11 million units. It launched multiple hits, including the timeless No. 1 hits "Mo Money Mo Problems" and "Hypnotize." In 1997, Wallace accepted the MTV Video Music Award for best rap video for "Hypnotize" on behalf of her son.

Sean 'Diddy' Combs' lawyer quits ahead sex trafficking trial

By **Dave Oludare Oso**



One of the lead attorneys representing embattled music mogul, Sean “Diddy” Combs in his sex trafficking case announced that he is stepping down as counsel.

Anthony Ricco filed a motion Thursday in a New York City court, saying “under no circumstances can I continue to effectively serve as counsel for Sean Combs.”

Ricco did not give an explanation but said it would not affect Combs’ May 5 federal trial date. Ricco, who was retained by Combs in September, did not immediately

respond to a request for comment.

“Without violating any aspect of the attorney/client privilege, or otherwise providing any details whatsoever on the grounds supporting the application, the government has been notified of the filing of the motion to withdraw as counsel,” the filing states. “The government takes no position on the motion seeking withdrawal of counsel for Sean Combs.”

Combs has five other attorneys on his team.

The beleaguered music executive,

55, pleaded not guilty to charges of sex trafficking, racketeering and transportation to engage in prostitution. He’s been in federal custody since Sept. 16 at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York.

Combs has been hit with more than 30 civil lawsuits accusing him of sexual assault and misconduct over the decades. A federal indictment alleged Combs orchestrated and recorded coerced sex acts during gatherings known as “freak offs.” He has denied all allegations.

'Queen of Pop' Madonna lambasts 'King' Trump

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Pop superstar, Madonna has reignited her campaign against President Donald Trump, upbraiding the US leader for calling himself "the King."

Horror author, Stephen King also laid into Trump on Friday in his return to the X platform, calling the president "traitorous" over his dealings with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump has issued a wave of executive orders and started contacts with Putin since taking office on January 20.

He declared "LONG LIVE THE KING" to end a social media message on Wednesday stating that he had killed off a New York plan to impose a peak congestion charge of \$9 for cars entering much of Manhattan.

The White House reposted the message on its social media with an illustration showing Trump wearing a diamond-studded crown.

"I thought this country was built by Europeans, escaping living under the rule of a King, to establish a New World governed by the people," Madonna, widely known as "The Queen of Pop," said late Thursday on the X platform.

"Currently we have a president who calls Himself Our King. If this is a joke, I'm not laughing," added the 66-year-old singer.



Madonna criticized Trump during his first term as president and took part in a demonstration by Trump opponents after his January 20 inauguration. She has highlighted attacks on LGBTQ rights by the new administration.

Opponents frequently criticize Trump for adopting a regal tone. He said in his inaugural address that he was "saved by God to make America great again," after surviving an assassination attempt in July.

The Republican leader campaigned against New York's congestion charge, the first in the United States, during his presidential campaign.

The US Department of Transportation directed New York authorities this week to halt the charge. New York Governor Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, said lawyers have initiated court action to halt the

federal order.

But Trump triumphantly said on his Truth Social platform that "CONGESTION PRICING IS DEAD. Manhattan, and all of New York, is SAVED. LONG LIVE THE KING!"

King, one of the world's best-selling authors and a prolific social media user, left the X platform of Trump ally Elon Musk three months ago saying it had become "too toxic" following Trump's election victory.

"I'm baaaaack! Did you miss me?" he said in a post Friday. "I did tbh (to be honest)," Musk responded in a post.

"Just wanted to say that Trump is a traitorous, Putin-loving dipshit! Goes double for Elon!" added King, a longtime critic of the president and Musk.

Macron tells Trump: 'You can't be weak in face of Putin'

By Dave Oludare Oso

French President Emmanuel Macron said that he intends to tell his U.S. counterpart, Donald Trump that it's in the joint interest of Americans and Europeans not to "be weak" in the face of Russian leader, Vladimir Putin amid U.S.-led negotiations to end the nearly three-year war in Ukraine.

Macron will travel to Washington to meet with Trump on Monday, the White House said.

In a one-hour question and answer session on social media Friday, Macron said he would tell Trump: "You can't be weak in the face of President Putin. It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest. How can you then be credible in the face of China if you're weak in the face of Putin?"

Trump's recent statements that echo Putin's narrative and plans to have direct negotiations with Moscow have left European allies and Ukrainian officials worried. But Macron suggested Trump's strategy to create "uncertainty" in talks with Russia could actually make Western allies stronger in these talks.

Putin "doesn't know what he



(Trump) is going to do, he thinks (Trump) is capable of anything," Macron said. "This uncertainty is good for us and for Ukraine."

Macron said that he would seek to persuade Trump that U.S. interests and Europeans' interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstoppable."

That means any peace deal must be negotiated with Ukrainians and Europeans around the table, Macron said.

"We want peace. But we don't want a ceasefire that means Ukraine surrendering, because that's dangerous. And we know that would lead to Russia going further. We've already experienced it," he said.

Macron also appeared ready to answer Trump's call to boost defense spending. "Us, Europeans, we must increase our war effort," he said.

Asked about whether he's considering sending French troops to Ukraine, he said he wouldn't send soldiers to fight in Ukraine but rather to be part of a security force meant to bring "guarantees" once a peace deal is achieved.

"We don't rule out, within a framework planned with our allies, the possibility of having forces which, once peace has been negotiated, could contribute to guaranteeing Ukraine's security," he said.

Illegal crossings at US-Mexico border down 94% from 2024

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Unlawful crossings at the U.S. southern border are down 94 percent from the same period last year, Border Patrol Chief Mike Banks told CBS News in his first sit-down interview, crediting the Trump administration's government-wide crackdown on illegal immigration.

Over the past seven days, Banks said, Border Patrol agents have apprehended an average of 285 migrants per day along the entire southern border, compared to roughly 4,800 during the same time last year.

Banks attributed the dramatic drop in illegal immigration to a slew of executive actions taken by President Trump.

They include an order that has effectively closed the U.S. asylum system and allowed for summary deportations, as well as the cancellation of Biden administration policies that allowed some migrants to enter the country with the government's permission.

Formerly Texas' border czar, Banks also cited the Trump administration's deployment of additional troops to the southern border and a decision to deputize Texas National Guard soldiers as immigration officers, to help Border Patrol agents in the field.

Taken together, Banks said the actions have virtually halted releases of migrants into the U.S. interior and sent a strong warning to those thinking about traveling to the American border that they will most likely be deported if they enter the country without permission.

"The greater the punishment, the larger the deterrent," Banks said during an interview at Customs and Border



Protection's headquarters in Washington.

Since Trump took office, Banks added, only two migrants have been released from Border Patrol custody after crossing the southern border unlawfully. He said they were released to assist with criminal prosecutions as witnesses.

"I can tell you this: anyone that has crossed the border between the ports of entry since this administration has taken office has not been released," Banks noted.

One of the Biden-era policies the Trump administration rescinded allowed prospective asylum-seekers in Mexico to use a phone app, known as CBP One, to request a time to enter the U.S. at a legal border entry point.

Asked if asylum is no longer an option for migrants at the U.S. southern border given the policy changes, Banks responded, "At the border, right, crossing in between the ports of entry, which is what the Border Patrol focuses on? No."

"You do not cross the border illegally and

then make an asylum claim," he said. "You can go to the port of entry, or you can go to one of the embassies in your country and make your claim for asylum."

While illegal crossings along the border with Mexico have dropped precipitously since Trump's inauguration, they had been on a downward trend over the past year, since soaring to record highs in late 2023.

Officials at the time credited Mexico's increased efforts to interdict migrants, and a Biden administration policy, enacted in June 2024, that restricted asylum, though not as broadly as the current rules.

In fact, in December, the Biden administration's last full month in office, Border Patrol recorded 47,000 migrant apprehensions, down 81% from December 2023, during a record-breaking surge in unlawful crossings, government figures show. That number dipped to just over 29,000 last month.

Israel claims Hamas killed infant hostages with ‘bare hands’

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has said that Hamas terrorists murdered children, Ariel and Kfir Bibas “with their bare hands” weeks after their kidnapping on 7 October 2023.

“We can confirm that baby Kfir Bibas, just 10 months old, and his older brother Ariel, aged four, were both brutally murdered by terrorists while being held hostage in Gaza no later than November 2023. These two innocent children were taken hostage alive, along with their mother, Shiri, from their home on 7 October 2023,” IDF spokesperson, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said.

Hamas insist that the Bibas boys and their mother, Shiri, were killed by an Israeli airstrike. However, Hadari says those claims are lies, that Ariel and Kfir Bibas were “murdered in cold blood.”

Hagari said, “The terrorists did not shoot the two young boys – they killed them with their bare hands. Afterward, they committed horrific acts to cover up these atrocities. This assessment is based on forensic findings and intelligence that supports these conclusions. We have shared this intelligence and the forensic findings with our partners around the world so they can verify it.

“The entire world must know exactly how the Hamas terrorist organization operates. Ariel and Kfir were murdered, and then yesterday, their bodies were returned in a cynical and cruel ceremony in Gaza. Shiri Bibas, who was meant to be returned with her children to Israel as part of the agreement, was not returned by Hamas. Hamas lied and violated the



agreement.

“The body that Hamas falsely claimed was Shiri’s was not hers, nor was it any other hostage. Instead, Hamas sent over the body of an unidentified woman. This is yet more evidence of Hamas’s barbaric cruelty.”

Hagari says Israel demands that Shiri Bibas be returned to Israel swiftly.

It is worth noting that Israel’s claims have yet to be verified by independent sources.

Netanyahu threatens hell for Hamas for not returning captive

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has condemned Hamas after the Israeli military said one of the bodies released by the militant group did not belong to Shiri Bibas or any of the captives held in Gaza, accusing it of violating the ceasefire. The cruelty of the Hamas monsters knows no bounds,” he said in a video statement.

Netanyahu added that his government will “ensure Hamas pays the full price for this cruel and evil violation of the agreement.”

Bibas family says Netanyahu abandoned their loved ones

Relatedly, Israel’s Bibas family accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday of failing to protect their loved ones during Hamas’s 2023 attack and of failing to bring them home.

“There is no forgiveness for abandoning them on October 7, and no forgiveness for abandoning them in captivity. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, we did not receive an apology from you in this painful moment,” Ofri Bibas said in a statement.

She said the family was still waiting to know the “fate” of her sister-in-law Shiri Bibas and was “not seeking revenge right now.”

Brazil's Supreme Court fines X \$1.4m for non-compliance

By Dave Oludare Oso

Brazil's Supreme Court Justice, Alexandre de Moraes ordered X to pay 8.1 million Brazilian reais (\$1.4 million) in fines for failing to comply with judicial orders, according to a judicial ruling.

The ruling, signed on Wednesday and made public by the court on Friday, said the social media platform refused to provide registration data for a profile attributed to Allan dos Santos, an ally of former President Jair Bolsonaro accused of spreading falsehoods.

In July 2024, De Moraes ordered both X and Meta to block and ban the account and provide the data. X said it had blocked the account but could not deliver the requested information, arguing that its operators didn't collect it and that the user had "no technical connection point with Brazil."

De Moraes rejected the argument and, in early August, imposed a daily fine of 100,000 Brazilian reais (\$17,500) if the social media platform failed to provide the data. By October, the total fine for noncompliance had reached 8.1 million Brazilian reais.

X appealed but later notified the court that



it would pay the fine. In Wednesday's ruling, the justice ordered the company to pay the full amount immediately. It is unclear from the decision reviewed by The Associated Press whether X provided the requested registration data.

The company didn't immediately reply to AP's request for comment.

Last year, De Moraes ordered X's nationwide shutdown after the company said it was removing all remaining Brazil staff in the country, saying de Moraes had threatened its legal representative in the country with arrest.

The country's law requires foreign companies to have a local legal representative to receive notifications of court decisions and swiftly take any

requisite action — particularly, in X's case, the takedown of accounts.

The social media was reinstated a month later, after complying with orders to block certain accounts from the platform, name an official legal representative and pay fines imposed for not complying with earlier court orders.

Elon Musk, the social media owner, and De Moraes, a foe of former president Jair Bolsonaro, sparred for months over free speech, far-right accounts and misinformation.

Musk called the judge an enemy of free speech and a criminal but de Moraes' decisions have been repeatedly upheld by his peers — including his nationwide block of X.

Caribbean leaders vow to keep pursuing slavery reparations

By Dave Oludare Oso

Caribbean leaders have defended the region's pursuit of slavery reparations, describing the compensation for centuries of enslavement and oppression as a matter of simple justice.

Speaking at the Caribbean Community (Caricom) heads of government meeting in Barbados on Friday, the Antigua and Barbuda prime minister, Gaston Browne, said Caribbean states were not seeking "a handout."

"What we're seeking here is a final resolution of this issue and a reset in the relationship between the Caribbean and Europe – one in which there's an apology for the wrongs of their forebears, and at the same time, some form of restitution," he said.

Between the 15th and the 19th century, more than 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped, forcibly transported to the Americas and sold into slavery.

Browne said: "Our forebears were treated as chattels, they worked for hundreds of years and were not paid. That created a debt, along with the fact that resources of the Caribbean and the profits of these resources were sent to Europe, to North America, to build their cities, their universities, to develop the technologies, to advance their economies, and they left the Caribbean region bereft of necessary institutions for development – not even have proper educational facilities or healthcare facilities."

The issue of transatlantic slavery reparations dominated headlines last October when the British prime minister, Keir Starmer resisted pressure from member states to include reparations on the agenda at the Commonwealth summit.

The move has triggered months of criticism and speculation about Britain's engagement with Caribbean nations on the topic.

Browne's sentiments were echoed by the St Vincent and the Grenadines prime minister, Ralph Gonsalves, who was a founding member of the Caribbean reparations movement.

"Reparations are about addressing the legacies of underdevelopment which have been caused by native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies. We are asking those who benefited from slavery –



including the European countries – for some recompense, some reparation, some repairing," he said.

Confirming reports that Caricom's 10-point plan for reparatory justice was being updated, he said that the slavery reparations movement is making progress: "It's [been] raised in the US Congress, in the European Union and the British parliament, and the archbishop of Canterbury has addressed it, families from the past have addressed it. People thought when it started it was some little fringe thing, but it is moving to centre stage."

Exact reparations figures have not been agreed, the leaders said, but the focus now is on constructive collaboration on the issue, which they confirmed was raised during closed meetings on Thursday, which were also attended by the UN secretary general, António Guterres, and the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen.

In his final address as Caricom chairman, the Grenadian prime minister, Dickon Mitchell, said: "Your excellency, Ursula von der Leyen, I don't mean to be impolite, but I will say to you that the issue of reparations for the transatlantic slavery ... is an issue that we will take up with you."

He stressed that Caricom's demand for reparations was not just about historical redress but about securing a commitment to justice that would prevent any form of human exploitation in the future.

"As long as we do not openly and explicitly reject the idea that one human being can own another human being, we run the risk that that idea may somehow take root again and be allowed to flourish," he warned.

"And so, as descendants of people who fought for their freedom from chattel slavery, we owe it to ourselves and to future generations of humanity to ensure that the transatlantic slave trade and the enslavement of Africans in the Caribbean, Latin, Central, South and North America is accepted as a crime against humanity and that the appropriate apology and compensation is paid."

Mitchell also cited the issue of chattel slavery as he advocated for continued support of Haiti, where rampant gang war has plunged the country into bloody anarchy.

"Make no mistake, Haiti symbolises the revolution that changed this part of the world," Mitchell said.

"Had it not been for Haiti, the idea that one human being could own another human being as chattel slavery and put him to work for their profit may very well still be persisting.

"And so we owe it to that island, all of us who are freed – the descendants of freed men and women who fought for their freedom – to ensure that we continue supporting and advocating for the partnership and the support to bring Haiti back from the brink."

China backs Trump on peace talk with Russia, Ukraine

By New Daily Prime

BEIJING – In a major geopolitical shift, China has expressed support for U.S. President Donald Trump’s efforts to negotiate a peace deal with Russia to end the ongoing war in Ukraine. The announcement came during the G20 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in South Africa on Thursday, where U.S. allies reaffirmed their backing of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Less than a month into his presidency, Trump has drastically altered U.S. policy on Ukraine, reversing a long-standing strategy to isolate Russia. His approach has included direct engagements with Russian President Vladimir Putin and high-level discussions between U.S. and Russian officials—moves that have largely sidelined Ukraine from the negotiation process.

Trump Calls Zelensky a “Dictator”; US Allies Defend Ukraine
On Wednesday, Trump escalated tensions by referring to Zelensky as a “dictator,” a statement that sparked swift reactions from key G20 members. Countries like Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom quickly reaffirmed their support for Ukraine and condemned any actions that would undermine its sovereignty.

“China supports all efforts conducive to peace in Ukraine, including the recent consensus reached between the United States and Russia,” said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the summit in Johannesburg. He further added, “China is willing to continue playing a constructive role in the political resolution of the crisis.”

Interestingly, Wang did not repeat the stance he had taken at the Munich Security Conference last week, where



he emphasized that all stakeholders—including Ukraine—should be included in peace negotiations.

Beijing’s support for Trump’s peace initiative is not just about diplomacy—it’s about strategic positioning. Analysts suggest that China wants a seat at the table for any potential resolution in Ukraine.

Why?

China aims to keep Russia within its sphere of influence. With Moscow diplomatically isolated, Beijing sees an opportunity to strengthen its leverage over Russia and prevent it from seeking alternative alliances.

China is positioning itself for post-war reconstruction. A Chinese role in rebuilding Ukraine would give Beijing a vested interest in Europe’s security and expand its global economic footprint.

“By going straight to Putin, President Trump has erased what Beijing had hoped could be a key piece of initial leverage,” said Ruby Osman, a China expert at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

She added, “Instead, China might shift its focus towards securing a role in Ukraine’s eventual reconstruction and peacekeeping—something that would give Beijing a more significant stake in European security.”

Russia Hardens Stance as Trump Seeks More Talks

As part of his aggressive push for a peace deal, the Trump administration confirmed that the U.S. has agreed to further talks with Russia following a 4.5-hour meeting in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Russia acknowledged the discussions as “useful” but toughened its demands—most notably, its firm opposition to NATO granting membership to Ukraine.

While Trump’s strategy remains controversial, one thing is clear: his direct engagement with Moscow has reshaped global diplomatic alignments, with China actively positioning itself as a key player in whatever comes next.

Philippines officials offer cash for mosquitoes after dengue cases surge

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

People in village near the capital line up with their haul, where a mosquito zapper and some pesos await

Village officials in the Philippines are handing out cash rewards to residents who capture mosquitoes in a bid to combat an outbreak of dengue.

At the midweek launch, residents from the village of Addition Hills in metropolitan Manila lined up with plastic cups and bags containing their captures as they waited to receive their bounty: one Philippine peso (1.7 US cents) for every five mosquitoes.

Organisers handed out coins to participants and used an ultraviolet mosquito zapper to kill off live mosquitoes. One resident walked away with nine pesos, worth approximately 15 US cents, for the 45 larvae he turned over.

Village chair, Carlito Cernal said in a social media post that the village had organised the programme due to an increase in dengue cases in the area.

Cases of the potentially deadly viral infection have been increasing across the country. The department of health recorded more than 28,000 cases in January, an increase of 40% compared with the same time period last year.



One resident shows the 9 pesos he received from the 45 mosquito larvae he captured. Photograph: Aaron Favila/AP

Earlier this week, the department announced a “concerning rise” in dengue in nine areas in the Philippines. Quezon City, the country’s most populous city, declared a dengue outbreak on Saturday after 10 deaths since the beginning of the year.

However, there are concerns the village bounty programme may inadvertently backfire, if people start propagating mosquitoes to reap the rewards, department spokesperson Albert Domingo said.

Domingo said he was not condemning the move, but added: “If you are willing to give prize money

for something, maybe we could consider contests for cleanliness,” with neighborhoods competing to clear away areas with stagnant water.

The project also sparked concern on social media, with commenters warning of potential mosquito farming for profit.

“We must make sure that our solutions are sustainable and have no unintended consequences,” read one comment on one of Cernal’s posts about the initiative.

“Reevaluate this project because I don’t find it effective” another comment read.

In response to the criticisms, Cernal emphasised in a Facebook post that he had “no ill intentions” with the programme.

Shiri Bibas: Hamas committed 'cruel and evil' violation of truce – Netanyahu

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused Hamas on Friday of committing a “cruel and evil” violation of the Gaza ceasefire deal by failing to return the captive, Shiri Bibas.

“We will act with determination to bring Shiri home, along with all of our captives – both the living and the fallen – and ensure that Hamas pays the full price for this cruel and evil violation of the agreement,” Netanyahu said in a video statement.

Hamas on Thursday handed over bodies it said were of four hostages, including three members of the Bibas family – Shiri Bibas and her two young sons – along with an elderly captive.

While the identities of the Bibas boys and the elderly hostage were confirmed by Israeli forensic experts, the fourth body was not that of Shiri Bibas, according to Israeli officials and as claimed by Hamas.

While Hamas has claimed that Shiri Bibas was killed early in the war, Israel has never confirmed her death.

Netanyahu said the fourth body was, in fact, that of a Gazan woman.

“The cruelty of the Hamas monsters knows no bounds,” he said.

“Not only did they abduct the father, Yarden Bibas, the young mother, Shiri, and their two small infants in an unimaginably cynical manner, but they also failed to return Shiri to



her small children, the little angels, and instead placed the body of a Gazan woman in a coffin,” he said.

The two boys – Kfir and Ariel – had become symbols of the hostage crisis along with their mother.

During their attack on October 7, 2023, that triggered the Gaza war, Hamas filmed and later broadcast footage showing the Bibas family’s abduction from their home near the Gaza border.

Ariel was then aged four, while Kfir was the youngest hostage at just nine months old.

Their father, who was also seized during the attack, was released earlier this month.

An Israeli group advocating for the release of all hostages from Gaza said on Friday it was “horrified” that Hamas had not returned Shiri Bibas.

“We are horrified and devastated by

the news that their mother, Shiri, was not returned – despite the agreement and our desperate hopes,” the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement.

The elderly hostage whose remains were returned on Thursday was identified as Oded Lifshitz, a veteran journalist and long-time defender of Palestinian rights.

Palestinian militants staged a ceremony to return the four bodies at a former cemetery in the southern Gazan city of Khan Yunis.

The repatriation of the bodies was part of the six-week initial phase of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which took effect on January 19 and has so far led to the release of 19 living Israeli hostages in exchange for more than 1,100 Palestinian prisoners.

Who will build Britain? future of UK infrastructure, economy

By The Financial Times

After months of delivering confidence-sapping messages on the British economy, the Labour party has begun to change its tune. Last week, Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer unveiled plans to build new towns across the country; part of a broader promise to construct 1.5mn homes within the current parliament. That followed announcements last month to revive the development of a third runway at Heathrow airport and the science-rich Oxford-Cambridge Arc. Forthcoming plans to cut red tape in the planning system could also unlock the government's goals to decarbonise the energy grid, raise new data centres and build better transport infrastructure.



The ambition is welcome. But Britain's dearth of construction skills throws an almighty spanner in the works. The Construction Industry Training Board estimates that over 250,000 additional workers will be required by 2028 to meet demands. The shortage spans all specialisms and layers of the construction industry, from senior project managers to the steel fixers, welders and labourers needed on site. New towns need roads, grids and plumbing, not just homes.

Employment in the UK's construction industry is near a two-decade low. Many workers left the sector following the financial crisis as major projects dwindled. Tighter immigration rules following Brexit made it harder to recruit and retain workers in the industry, which relied heavily on hiring foreign workers. Low numbers entering construction apprenticeships, high course dropout rates, and the retirement of older UK-born workers has made things worse.

What can the government do? Labour's plan to develop a long-term list of forthcoming infrastructure projects would be a good start. That would allow construction firms to synchronise their

training and recruitment efforts. Industry experts argue that Britain's building agenda has been too unpredictable for too long, which has hindered the development of skills and experience in the sector.

Next, training would benefit from more investment. Plans to develop fast-track construction apprenticeships and a proposal to make the apprenticeship levy more flexible, so that employers can use it for a wider range of courses, are promising. But technical courses need beefing-up both to handle a potential influx of construction trainees and evolving demands for green and digital skills in the sector. A construction skills strategy — across government and industry — should also assess how to better attract young talent, retain the experience of older workers, utilise transferable skills from other engineering professions and boost productivity.

Still, given the time it takes to train new construction workers, there's a risk that shovel ready projects fail to take off due to the lack of manpower. That might require the government to make tweaks to the immigration system to make it simpler

and cheaper to recruit talent from abroad. One option might be to grant companies access to a two- to three-year special construction visa on the condition they also train UK workers.

Hiring construction workers from abroad is, however, only a stop-gap measure. To sustain high building rates for projects ranging from reservoirs to small modular reactors over the coming years and decades, Britain needs to develop a long-term pipeline of talent and knowledge. After all, with countries across the world embarking on their own renewable energy and infrastructure renewal programmes, the supply of migrant workers will be unreliable.

Getting Britain building again is the right way to boost its economic growth. Labour has promised progress on two fronts; slashing bureaucracy in the planning system and developing a 10-year road map of public projects. But it is yet to seriously grapple with the country's dearth of bricklayers, architects and engineers. Until it does, the government's building boom will remain on shaky foundations.

Samurai-wielding killers jailed 67 years for Croydon murder

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Four men have been sentenced to a total of 67 years in prison following a Metropolitan Police investigation into the fatal stabbing of 22-year-old Lavaun Witter in Croydon.

Lavaun was found collapsed and seriously injured on Wisbeach Road at around 8:08 pm on 5 February 2021. Despite emergency response efforts, he died at the scene from a stab wound to the leg.

A Met Police investigation revealed that Lavaun's flat had been forcibly entered by four armed men wielding long knives and swords.

The intruders demanded drugs and slashed through an internal door before attacking Lavaun and a 16-year-old boy.

Both victims were stabbed, and fled the scene, but Lavaun collapsed a short distance away and succumbed to his injuries.

According to the Met Police, CCTV footage led police to identify the attackers as Tyreece Riggon, Julian Russell, Tyreece Wolfries-Parkin, and Alex Pasley.

Officers arrested Riggon and Russell on 18 February 2021, recovering a Louis Vuitton bag belonging to Lavaun from an address linked to Russell.

Pasley and Wolfries-Parkin were arrested in the following weeks. All



four were charged with Lavaun's murder, as well as attempted murder and grievous bodily harm concerning the 16-year-old victim.

A trial at the Old Bailey, which began on 17 July 2023, resulted in Julian Russell and Tyreece Wolfries-Parkin being found guilty of murder, while Alex Pasley was convicted of manslaughter.

A re-trial on 4 November 2024 found Tyreece Riggon guilty of attempted GBH, while Pasley was also convicted of attempted GBH for his role in the attack on the 16-year-old.

On 19 February, 2025, the four men were sentenced at the Old Bailey. Julian Russell was handed a life sentence with a minimum term of 24 years, minus four years spent on remand.

Tyreece Wolfries-Parkin received life imprisonment with a minimum term of

20 years, minus time spent on remand.

Alex Pasley was sentenced to 17 years in prison, while Tyreece Riggon was sentenced to six years. Both Pasley and Riggon were given credit for four years already served.

Detective Chief Inspector Mike Nolan, who led the investigation, described the crime as an act of extreme violence.

He stated that the attackers were willing to take Lavaun's life to seize drugs they believed were inside the property. He added that Lavaun stood no chance against the four men, who were each armed with large knives, including a Samurai sword.

Commending Lavaun's family and community for their resilience throughout the lengthy trial process, he acknowledged the devastating impact the crime had on them.

Varane rips into Man United with brutal Real Madrid comparison

By Dave Oludare Oso

The defender departed Old Trafford last summer after his contract expired. He has opened up on his experience at United and pointed out a host of flaws

Raphael Varane made a brutal comparison between Manchester United and Real Madrid as he laid bare the problems from top to bottom at Old Trafford.

Varane departed United last summer after his contract expired and won the Carabao Cup and FA Cup during his three-year stay, having joined from Madrid in 2021.

The defender won no less than four Champions League trophies and three LaLiga titles at the Bernabeu while in comparison, United were last crowned Premier League champions in 2013, Sir Alex Ferguson's final season at the club.

After making the jump from one heavyweight to a fallen giant, Varane was able to witness first-hand the stark differences between the operations at both clubs.

In a damning indictment of United's owners and leadership team, he even revealed that the players had no idea who was making the decisions internally.



'From the inside as a player, there wasn't a clear structure on how things were going to work,' he told The Athletic. 'There hasn't been a fixed methodology for years.'

Varane won four Champions League trophies at Madrid before joining United in 2021

'At Madrid, they have a defined way of doing things at every level of the club.

'At Manchester (United), it was not clear or defined enough to know how to recruit, how to play, how to communicate. There weren't the same procedures, processes, structure. It's not one person's responsibility.

'That's the problem – we don't even know whose fault it is. It has

to be in the overall structure of the organisation.

'There were too many people involved in the decision-making process, so we didn't know who was really making the decisions. I can't say who was responsible, I don't know. It was a bit of everyone and a bit of no one.'

Sir Jim Ratcliffe has led a dramatic overhaul of United's hierarchy since Ineos acquired a 27.7 per cent stake in the club in May 2024. Omar Berrada was lured from Manchester City to become the CEO while Jason Wilcox was also snapped up.

Dan Ashworth briefly arrived as sporting director before being sacked after 159 days.

Pep Guardiola says Erling Haaland still a doubt for Premier League clash

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola said Erling Haaland remains a doubt for Sunday's Premier League clash against Liverpool after sitting out his side's Champions League exit to Real Madrid.

The Norwegian was named on the bench at the Santiago Bernabeu but did not make an appearance as City were outclassed in a 3-1 defeat on Wednesday to crash out 6-3 on aggregate.

"Tomorrow we will know," said Guardiola at his pre-match press conference on Friday.

The January signing of Omar Marmoush at least means Guardiola does have a back-up option should Haaland fail to recover in time to face the league leaders, but Guardiola could not hide the importance of his 27-goal star striker.

"It's better to have Erling on the pitch than not," he added. "Of course with Erling we are stronger."

The battle for supremacy between Guardiola's City and Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool marked an era in the Premier League.

But Arne Slot has seamlessly succeeded Klopp to have the Reds on course for the title in his first season in charge.

"For me it's an exceptional team. I have said many times, they have been the biggest rival in my tenure here," said Guardiola.

"Arsenal right now in the last years have been involved as well, but I could not expect differently that Liverpool



(would) be in the position that they are."

Liverpool hold an eight-point lead over Arsenal, who have a game in hand and are favourites to cut the gap to five when they host West Ham on Saturday.

After four consecutive title triumphs, City's defence of their crown is realistically over as they are 17 points adrift of Liverpool in fourth.

Injuries have played a major role in City's decline.

John Stones is set for another couple of months on the sidelines after limping off with a thigh tear early on against Madrid, while Rodri and Manuel Akanji may also not play again this season.

Guardiola pointed to a brutal schedule as the cause and pointed out that Arsenal, Real Madrid and Tottenham are among other clubs battling a number of serious muscle injuries this season.

City's season could stretch into mid-July due to their participation in the Club

World Cup, with the next Premier League season starting barely a month later.

Guardiola said he is already fearing a repeat situation next season that could hinder City's hopes of bouncing back and competing for major honours.

"Of course, I'm concerned. So, next season, everybody will be fit? I don't know what's going to happen," he added.

"We have already a lot of players that cannot sustain what we have in the past. Week in, week out, playing a dozen different competitions, travels. Without the problems.

"More than 50 games, it's too much for the players. It's too much for the human being, the body cannot sustain without a medical issue.

"And we arrived at 65, 70 games and, at the end, look what happened. It's not just Man City. It's all the clubs."