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# Alleged sexual harassment: Submit yourself for open probe, Saraki tells Akpabio

By Dave Oludare Oso

Former Senate President Bukola Saraki has reacted to the ongoing allegations of sexual harassment leveled against the current Senate President, Godswill Akpabio by the Senator representing Kogi Central, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan.

In a statement personally signed by him and titled "Akpabio-Natasha: Let's Protect the Institution, Not Individuals," Saraki called for "an open, transparent, and honest investigation by the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions" to determine the accuracy of the allegations raised by Senator Natasha.

Saraki, who presided over the Eighth Senate, emphasized that only an open and honest investigation would prevent the Parliament from being perceived as an institution that condones sexual harassment, gender bias, abuse of office, disregard for standing orders and rules, and general disorderliness.

His statement reads in part:

"I have watched from afar the recent developments in the Senate involving the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio, and the Senator from Kogi Central, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan. This situation saddens me because of its negative impact on the integrity, sanctity, image, and public perception of the institution.

"I believe that everyone who has been associated with the National Assembly—whether as a leader, member, or staff—should strive to protect these values, which make the institution the foremost among the three arms of government.

"For these reasons, I believe that both parties in this dispute, as well as their supporters inside and outside the chamber, should be mindful of the impact of their actions, inactions, reactions, claims, and counterclaims. They must ensure that nothing is done to tarnish the institution.

"The constitution, the country's laws, Senate rules, and parliamentary conventions and practices should be strictly followed in resolving this matter. The resolution should be conducted transparently, without any bias toward either party. The goal should be to



uncover the truth and uphold the integrity of the legislative body, ensuring it is not wrongly perceived as tolerating or participating in any form of lawbreaking.

"Given the public claims made by Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan, the appropriate step now is to initiate an open, transparent, and honest investigation by the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions.

"Both parties must submit to the investigation, fully cooperate with the committee, and present their cases before it. This would not be the first time a Senate President has appeared before the committee to facilitate a transparent inquiry.

"I recall that during the 8th Senate, a Senator alleged that I imported an official car for my use as Senate President without paying customs duty. Since I knew the claim was false, I supported the referral of the matter to the Ethics Committee and personally testified before it, in full view of the media.

"My testimony proved that the Senator who made the allegation had misrepresented the facts and was acting mischievously.

"Furthermore, on the day the committee presented its report for debate on the Senate floor, I stepped aside and allowed my deputy to preside. The transparent manner in which the investigation and

subsequent debate were handled reassured everyone that there was no wrongdoing. This is a precedent that the leadership of the 10th Senate should follow.

"In my case, the decision to allow an open investigation and to subject myself to scrutiny was not an easy one. It was humbling, but I knew it was the right decision. In the end, I am glad I took that route.

"We must not allow the Senate to be viewed as an institution that tolerates sexual harassment, gender bias, abuse of office, disregard for rules, and disorderliness. A transparent, open, and unbiased investigation should prevent this. Due process must be followed so that if any wrongdoing is found, it is addressed and corrected, with appropriate remedies implemented.

"Let me be clear: I am neither asserting that Akpabio is guilty nor implying that Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan is right in her claims. My stance is that an investigation is necessary to establish the truth and protect the integrity of the Senate.

"To me, the Senate as an institution is of paramount importance. It is sacred and preeminent. All proponents of democracy should work to strengthen it. No leader or member should be allowed to openly or covertly undermine its sanctity."

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# Tinubu honoured as Akwa Ibom's Otuekong, calls for national unity

By Friday Omosola

President Bola Tinubu has been conferred with Akwa Ibom State's highest traditional title, Otuekong (Commander-in-Chief of Akwa Ibom), by the State Council of Traditional Rulers.

The conferment ceremony took place on Friday at the State House, Abuja, and was led by the President General of the council, Nteyin Solomon Etuk, Okuibom Ibibio III.

The event saw a delegation of 104 members, including Akwa Ibom State Governor Umo Eno, Senate President Godswill Akpabio and his wife, Ekaette, former ministers and lawmakers, religious leaders, and representatives of women and youth groups.

Expressing his gratitude, President Tinubu reflected on his past connection to Akwa Ibom, recalling his time in Eket as an auditor for Mobil.

He emphasised the need for political leaders to prioritize national development over party loyalty.

"I accept all the honours and the conferment. I am one of you. The country's full potential can be better realized when political leaders look beyond party loyalty in serving the



nation."

He praised Akwa Ibom's consistent developmental strides, attributing them to a shared vision and commitment to progress.

"I have just signed the 2025 budget. I am happy that the uncertainty over the economy is fading, and hope is rising," Tinubu said, urging continued collaboration between the federal and state governments.

Commending Governor Umo Eno, President Tinubu lauded his leadership, selflessness, and commitment to the people, urging other leaders to emulate his approach.

He acknowledged Eno's concerns regarding the Ibom Deep Sea Port

and assured him of federal government attention.

Senate President Akpabio reinforced the call for unity in Akwa Ibom, noting that the state's political leadership would work towards reconciliation and collaboration.

Governor Eno, in his remarks, presented his administration's achievements and reaffirmed the state's readiness to partner with the federal government, particularly in infrastructure development and ecological interventions.

He also expressed gratitude to President Tinubu and First Lady Sen. Oluremi Tinubu for their support following his wife's passing.

# S'Court Ruling: Wike mocks Atiku, PDP govts backing Fubara

By Dave Oludare Oso

The minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, has ridiculed former vice president Atiku Abubakar, and Peoples Democratic Party Governors Forum (PDPGF) Chairman, Bala Mohammed following the Supreme Court ruling that went against the Rivers State government.

The minister questioned whether Atiku and Mohammed would continue to praise Rivers State Governor Sim Fubara for disregarding court orders, as they had previously done, now that the Supreme Court had intervened.

In a ruling delivered by Justice Emmanuel Akomaye Agim on Friday, the Supreme Court ordered the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Accountant General of the Federation to halt fund allocations to the Rivers State government.

The court stated that the restriction would remain until Fubara ceases all illegal, unlawful, and unconstitutional activities.

Additionally, the Supreme Court ruled that funds could only be released to the Rivers State government once a lawful Appropriation Law is enacted under the Martin Amaewhule-led Speakership.

The judgment also reinstated the 27 members of the Rivers House of Assembly, directing them to resume their legislative duties immediately.

Reacting to the ruling, Wike described it as a confirmation that lawlessness in Rivers State must end.

Speaking at a press conference in



Abuja, he remarked, "These are some of the things we see in this country, when you say something, people will start to cry blackmail and many would fall into the trap."

He added, "For me, it's happiness for Rivers people and Nigerians that yes, this impunity must stop, enough is enough. You are aware when the issue of local government came up, a governor elected who has taken oath to abide by the constitution, came out to say that it's a corrupt judgment."

Wike expressed satisfaction with the Supreme Court's stance, stating, "But we thank God, today the apex court had said it all, go back you have no budget; Central Bank and Accountant General, you can't continue to release money when there is no government. Until you present your budget to the appropriate assembly, which is the 27 members, no money should be released."

He also criticised Fubara's refusal to comply with electoral laws

concerning local government elections, saying, "You refused to follow the electoral act in terms of conducting the local government election, what was the issue? INEC doesn't release voters' register if you don't comply with court given order, you said no that you won't obey and Nigerians were clapping."

Mocking Atiku and Bala Mohammed, Wike questioned their stance in light of the apex court's ruling.

"People like Atiku were hailing that yes you have done well, I hope they will also hail him today. I hope the Chairman of PDP governors forum will also hail him today," he said.

Wike concluded by stressing the importance of upholding democratic principles, stating, "The Supreme Court has said enough is enough, we must not truncate our democracy. If they had allowed this, one day one member would constitute an assembly and there is nothing you can do."

# Ramadan: IGP calls for reflection, prayers for peace, unity

By Friday Omosola



**T**he Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Kayode Egbetokun, has extended warm Ramadan greetings to the Muslim Ummah across Nigeria.

He urged them to use this sacred period for deep reflection and fervent prayers for peace, unity, and national progress.

In a statement on Saturday, the IGP emphasised the importance of Ramadan as a time for spiritual renewal, self-discipline, and communal solidarity.

He encouraged Muslims to

strengthen their faith and contribute to fostering harmony in society.

Recognising the nation's diversity, IGP Egbetokun underscored the significance of interfaith tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

He called on religious and community leaders to promote mutual respect and understanding among Nigerians, stressing that unity remains essential for national development.

Furthermore, the police chief has directed all officers to uphold the

highest standards of professionalism and respect for the religious practices of the Muslim community throughout the holy month.

He assured Nigerians that the Nigeria Police Force is committed to ensuring a safe and secure environment for all worshippers.

The IGP wished all Muslim faithful a blessed and peaceful Ramadan, urging all Nigerians to embrace the values of love, compassion, and unity that define the holy season.

# Akpabio's wife slams N350bn suits against Sen. Natasha

By Dave Oludare Oso

The wife of the Senate President, Unoma Akpabio, has dragged Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan to the Federal Capital Territory High Court, Abuja, over alleged defamation and violation of fundamental human rights.

The Senate president, Godswill Akpabio's wife instituted the legal action following recent claims by Akpoti-Uduaghan, who represents Kogi Central, that her troubles in the Senate started following her refusal to have a sexual relationship with her husband.

Mrs Akpabio, in the first suit on fundamental rights violation (Suit No: CV/814/25), accused the senator of making false and scandalous statements that caused emotional trauma for her and her children, leaving them in fear for their lives.

She asked the court to declare the statements a violation of her right to dignity under the Constitution and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The senate leader's wife is also seeking ₦250 billion in compensation and a perpetual injunction to stop Akpoti-Uduaghan from making further damaging claims.

In a separate defamation Suit No: CV/816/25, Mrs Akpabio challenged the senator's claim that her husband made sexual advances towards her.

She described the allegations as false, malicious, and damaging, saying they had brought her family into disrepute and public shame.

As part of her demands, she asked the court to order Akpoti-Uduaghan to issue a public apology in two national



newspapers, The Guardian and ThisDay, and pay ₦1 billion in damages.

"The allegations have caused untold pain and emotional trauma to me and my family," Mrs. Akpabio said in the suit.

The court has yet to fix a date for the hearing of both suits.

The disagreement between both lawmakers began after Akpoti-Uduaghan discovered that her seating position in the Senate chamber had changed without her knowledge.

She protested the action, causing a brief disruption during a plenary session.

The Senate later referred her case to the Committee on Ethics, Privileges, and Public Petitions, led by Senator Neda Imaseun from Edo South, for investigation.

The committee was given two weeks to submit its report.

In response, Akpoti-Uduaghan filed a ₦100 billion lawsuit against Akpabio and his senior legislative aide, Mfon Patrick, for defamation.

Her lawyer, Victor Giwa, said the alleged defamatory statement was published on Patrick's Facebook page with the title, 'Is Local Content Committee of the Senate Natasha's Birthright?'

The post accused Akpoti-Uduaghan of thinking that being a senator was all about wearing makeup and transparent outfits to the chamber.

Describing the statement as provocative and damaging, Giwa said it had lowered his client's reputation among her colleagues and the public.

On Friday, the controversy deepened when Akpoti-Uduaghan appeared on Arise Television's Morning Show and accused Akpabio of sexually harassing her.

She claimed that some of her colleagues had warned her to accept the seat change because it was part of a plot against her.

Meanwhile, Akpabio's wife denied the allegations, describing them as false and baseless, saying, "My husband is a disciplined man who respects women."

# Afenifere youth leader released after 12 days in captivity

By Friday Omosola

**E**niola Olajuni, the National President of the Afenifere Youth Council, has regained his freedom after spending 12 days in the custody of his abductors.

The National Secretary of the Youth Council, Biodun Aderohunmu confirmed his release.

The New Daily Prime reported that Olajuni was kidnapped on Monday, February 17, 2025, while travelling to Abuja for a scheduled meeting.

His captors initially demanded a ransom of N100 million and two tricycles in exchange for his release.

It will be recalled that on Wednesday, the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, directed the Intelligence Response Team to intervene following the circulation of a distressing video in



which Olajuni, held at gunpoint, pleaded with Nigerians to help secure his freedom by raising funds.

In a statement, Aderohunmu said Ojajuni was released on Saturday after the payment of ransom to the abductors and currently receiving medical attention, noting that his safety is of

critical importance.

The statement read: “We are delighted to announce that our president, Prince Eniola Joseph Ojajuni, has been released from captivity. He was freed today, March 1, 2025, at approximately 6:00 pm,” the statement reads.

“The Afenifere National Youth Council expresses its profound gratitude to all individuals, organizations, and well-wishers who stood by us during this challenging period. Your support, prayers, and solidarity were invaluable to us.

“Prince is undergoing medical care now. We would also want to emphasise that security is key, and the government holds it a responsibility to her people.”

## Eight killed, many kidnapped as gunmen attack food-laden trailer in Zamfara

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**A**rmed bandits launched a deadly attack on a trailer transporting food items at Matashayi Zaki community along the Dansadau/Gusau road, resulting in the deaths of eight people and the abduction of several others.

According to reports, the assailants struck around 6:00 am Saturday, shortly after military escorts had left the trailer behind.

The Dansadau/Gusau route is known for its security challenges, and no vehicle reportedly moves along the axis without military protection.

However, sources indicate that military escorts do not wait for any vehicle that falls behind.



Additionally, it has been alleged that security personnel demand large sums of money from travelers seeking safe passage to Gusau or Dansadau, given the high-risk nature of the road.

One Ishiaku Muhammad said the villagers were losing a lot due to the money they pay to the military escorts for security.

“We have no option, because we are afraid of the bandits, and the army authorities claimed they have installed a military station at Dansadau but there has been no positive effect,” he lamented.

NEW DAILY PRIME learnt that incessant attacks by bandits on Dansadau/Gusau road forced the Federal Government to establish a military station in Dansadau town to reduce the movement of the bandits. But the military presence had not stopped the attacks.

# Tinubu reaffirms Nigeria-Namibia bond at Nujoma's state funeral

By Friday Omosola

President Bola Tinubu has honoured the legacy of Namibia's founding president, Dam Shafiishuna Nujoma, describing him as a warrior, nation-builder, and symbol of Africa's fight for freedom.

Speaking at Nujoma's state burial on Saturday at Heroes' Acre in Windhoek, Namibia, President Tinubu, represented by Vice President Kashim Shettima, highlighted the late leader's pivotal role in Namibia's independence and his enduring influence on the African continent.

"We have not come to this sacred ground to bury a man. We have come to enshrine a legacy," President Tinubu declared in his tribute.

"Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma was not just the founding father of a nation that needed a hero; he was a warrior in the age of chains. He looked into the face of oppression in the most dangerous time to do so and declared that no African shall ever be a second-class citizen on his own soil."

Nujoma, who passed away on February 8, 2025, at the age of 95, was instrumental in leading Namibia to independence and laying the foundation for democracy and stability.

President Tinubu praised his leadership, emphasising that his commitment to Namibia extended far beyond the liberation struggle.

"But even after victory, you did not rest. Independence was not the destination; it was only the beginning. You built this



nation from the ashes of occupation. You turned resistance into governance, turned a dream into reality," Tinubu stated.

The Nigerian leader also reaffirmed the historic bond between Nigeria and Namibia, stressing that Nigeria actively supported Namibia's struggle against apartheid and colonial rule.

"Nigeria was not a bystander in the Namibian struggle. When the world turned its back, we stood. When your voice was drowned by the guns of apartheid, we spoke. When your hands were tied, we reached out.

"We did not do this as charity. We did not do this as a favour. We did this because your struggle was our struggle. Your pain was our pain. Your freedom was our freedom," he said.

Tinubu assured the Namibian people of Nigeria's continued solidarity, emphasising that the shared struggle between the two nations has formed the foundation of an unbreakable friendship.

"Namibia, you do not grieve alone. Africa grieves with you. The free world grieves with you. But more than that, we celebrate you. Because in this land, in this soil, we did not just lose a man. We gained a legend."

The state burial was attended by several African heads of state, including Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, Félix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania, Lazarus Chakwera of Malawi, and John Mahama of Ghana. Former presidents and diplomatic representatives from across the continent also paid their last respects.

The solemn event not only marked the passing of a revered leader but also reinforced Africa's enduring commitment to unity, freedom, and justice—values that Nujoma championed throughout his life.

# How I escaped Natasha Akpoti's false accusations – Reno Omokri

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

**A** former presidential aide, Reno Omokri has weighed in on the sexual harassment saga going on in the Senate.

The former Special Assistant to President Jonathan Goodluck said due to the fact that the woman in the eyes of the present storm, Senator Natasha Akpoti had likewise accused him of the same allegations, several media outlets had been pestering him to hear his take on the unfolding drama.

The author, columnist, and social media influencer wrote on his X page on Saturday afternoon: "Please leave me out of the Natasha Akpoti affair. I have been inundated with calls from almost all major media outlets in Nigeria to interview me about the issues involving the Senate President, Senator Godswill Akpabio, and Senator Natasha Akpoti. These media organisations wanted my take, seeing that I was once accused by Senator Natasha Akpoti of the exact grave allegations that she is now accusing the Senate President of.

"Against my will, I have been trending on various social media platforms, and for the sake of my family, it would be best to put this matter to rest.

"Rather than speak with multiple media outlets, perhaps I can ease the pressure on me by putting out this statement.

"I do not know if what Senator Natasha Akpoti accused the Senate President of is true, as I was not physically present when the alleged events took place.

"However, I can testify that Senator Natasha Akpoti once had an altercation with me on social media over a post where a woman made advances at me and I rejected her and stated that my



wife is a beauty queen and is more than enough for me.

"Apparently the woman is or was a friend of Senator Akpoti. And after I had scorned her friend's advances, Senator Akpoti accused me of sexually harassing her at Aso Rock Presidential Villa, during a reception held for the visiting Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, when he visited Nigeria between May 4 and May 7 2014.

"Unfortunately for Senator Akpoti, during those dates, I was sent to the United States of America as President Jonathan's special envoy. I met and was photographed with multiple U.S. officials, including State Department officials, in Washington, D.C.

"I then published a First Class British Airways ticket and my passport (which was a different class of passport from the regular Nigerian passport and requires a special kind of stamp), proving that I was not in Nigeria on the dates Senator Akpoti alleged I sexually harassed her.

"After I published that evidence, Miss Natasha Akpoti, as she then was, deleted every trace of her allegations against me and the video she had made insulting me, my wife and my newborn daughter.

"As I was pondering the next steps to take, a very influential and respectable man from my ethnic nationality reached out to a prominent Christian clergyman, who mediated between him and I. The gentleman greeted me in my mother tongue, Itsekiri, and was most gentlemanly and expressed regrets over the incident, and I was prevailed on by the clergyman to reach an out-of-court settlement.

"Thereafter, I dropped the matter since my name had been cleared, and the out-of-court settlement was adequate.

"That is the extent of my encounter with Senator Natasha Akpoti. I hope the media can now leave me alone, as I am reluctant to grant any interviews or get entangled in this matter, seeing as I have the highest respect for the man who reached out to me to settle the matter.

"As for the Senate, I have the highest respect and confidence in that institution and its leadership and believe that the right thing to do would be to institute a Senate investigation by the appropriate committee to determine the veracity of the present allegation."

# Despite assurances, FG fails to pay NYSC members new N77,000 allowance

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The federal government has continued to pay members of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) the old N33,000 stipend, despite promises to increase corps members' monthly allowance to N77,000 starting February 2025.

Several corps members confirmed receiving their February allowance on Friday night, only to find out that it remained unchanged at N33,000 — less than half of the new amount that was supposedly approved.

The development contradicts the assurances given in January by the NYSC Director-General, Brigadier General Yushau Ahmed, who had publicly stated that the allowance increment was a done deal, only awaiting the passage of the 2025 budget.

Ahmed had told corps members in Katsina State, vowing that by February, they would start receiving N77,000, "The Federal Government has already approved the increment of your allowance. It is no longer news; we have the approval in our hands. What we are waiting for is just the passage of the budget."

However, February has come and gone, and the promise remains unfulfilled.

The federal government has not



provided any official explanation for the failure to implement the increase, leaving corps members stranded and frustrated in the face of a worsening economic crisis.

With Nigeria's inflation rate soaring and the cost of living becoming unbearable, it is obvious that the N33,000 allowance is no longer enough for corps members to meet even their basic needs.

Many struggle to afford food, transportation, and accommodation, as prices of essential commodities skyrocket due to bad economic policies and naira depreciation under Tinubu's administration.

A corps member serving in Oyo expressed his disappointment, saying, "How do they expect us to survive on ₦33,000 when everything has become so expensive? They told us we would get ₦77,000 this month, and now

they have failed again. This government keeps making promises but never delivers."

Another corps member in Kano lamented that the delay in the allowance increment is yet another example of the government's insensitivity to the struggles of young Nigerians.

"We are serving our country, yet we cannot even afford decent meals. The government knows that ₦33,000 is not enough, but they don't care. They keep making empty promises while we suffer," she said.

The failure to implement the promised allowance increase has further eroded trust in the Tinubu administration, which has been widely criticised for its economic policies that have worsened inflation, unemployment, and poverty across the country.

# Natasha to Akpabio's wife: Allow your husband defend himself

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

**W**oman in the eye of the storm, Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, has told wife of Senate President, Mrs. Unoma Akpabio to stay out of the allegations of sexual harassment and intimidation against her husband, Godswill Akpabio.

The Senator representing Kogi Central got enmeshed in a dispute with Akpabio began after she refused to sit in a designated seat during a Senate session, citing Order 10 of the Senate Standing Rules.

Therefrom, all hell broke loose when the PDP senator, appearing on Arise News on Friday, accused the senate foremost figure of blocking her motions, maligning her, and intimidating her after she allegedly rejected his sexual advances.

Dismissing the allegations, Mrs Akpabio held a press conference in Abuja, where she defended her husband's integrity.

Mrs Akpabio said Akpoti-Uduaghan was gathering TikTok contents, maintaining that the senator was lying through her teeth.

She went ahead and slammed a defamation and human rights infringement suits totaling N350 billion on the woman senator in court on Friday.

She asserted that both families had shared a cordial relationship for years, long before Akpoti-Uduaghan's marriage, and suggested that the claims were baseless.



However, in a letter dated March 1, 2025, addressed to Mrs Akpabio through her lawyer, Victor Giwa, Akpoti-Uduaghan advised her to refrain from getting involved in the matter.

The letter, titled "Stay Away from Sen. Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's Sexual Harassment and Intimidation Allegation Against Sen. President Godswill Akpabio; To Safeguard Your Sanity and That of Your Family," stressed that the accusations were personal to the Senate President and that he should be left to defend himself.

Akpoti-Uduaghan said she had endured harassment from Akpabio but was now compelled to speak out.

It partly read, "Our Client is not desirous of calling you out into the unfortunate saga concerning her allegations against the Senate President, and wishes that you restrain yourself from delving into the obscene circumstances.

"While she has tolerated all the harassment from the Senate President,

she was constrained to reveal the unfortunate torture and victimization which she has been going through in the red chambers under the hand of the Senate President.

"Consequently, we would like to state that the allegations of our client are personal to the Senate President, and our client believes the Senate President has the capacity to defend himself and refute any of these allegations against him."

Akpoti-Uduaghan said she has enough evidence to back up her claims, urging the wife to allow her husband to defend himself for the sake of her sanity and family.

"Our client has concrete evidence to substantiate her allegations. We will suggest that you leave the defense of the allegations for the Senate President to maintain your sanity and that of your family.

"Our client remains resolute in the defense of Nigerian women and as a family woman, she will continue to maintain our common heritage and family values."

# My security details yet to return – Meranda

By Dave Oludare Oso

The speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly, Mojisola Meranda has stated that the full complement of her security had yet to be restored.

Speaking on Friday after a court hearing of a suit filed by Obasa to challenge his removal at the Lagos State High Court, Ikeja, Meranda said, “I have my people and God with me. Three or four policemen are also with me. Whereas, in my normal convoy, my team comprises two policemen, four DSS, and two anti-bomb operatives. But I don’t have that with me this morning.”

When a reporter asked Meranda, “Can you respond to what happened yesterday when the speaker (Obasa) was at the Assembly...?” she responded by asking, “Which speaker?”

The other lawmakers behind her also joined in querying the reporter.

The reporter retracted, saying, “The removed speaker,” after which Meranda responded to her question.

She said, “I think he (Obasa) is still a member of the Lagos House of Assembly, so he has every right to come. But invasion and breaking into my office is really a big one.”

Meranda declined to comment on whether the House would institute any suit against Obasa for his actions at the Assembly on Wednesday.

She described the plenary held by Obasa on Wednesday as a show of shame.

“To me, that was just a show of shame. Because in our job, we have numbers that form a quorum. So, if you are sitting with three or four members, you’re only doing a drama,” she added.

Meranda said the lawmakers would soon hold their sitting, contrary to Obasa’s declaration that the House had gone on recess.

Also speaking after the court proceedings, the spokesperson for the Assembly, Ogundipe Olukayode, declared that a total of 35 lawmakers, including Meranda, were



resolute on the ongoing crisis.

“We are 35 as we speak, including Madam Speaker. The House will reconvene. We are consulting with our leaders, and I know the party is also taking steps. The right thing will be done at the right time. But let’s assure Lagosians that we are still committed to our party, our leadership, and to serving the people of Lagos State.”

Lawmakers demand respect from party leaders

Meanwhile, in separate interviews with Saturday PUNCH, some other lawmakers urged leaders of the party to respect their decision.

The lawmaker representing Badagry Constituency II, David Setonji, said he was fully in support of Meranda’s leadership.

Setonji, who spoke through his media aide, Posu Davies, said Obasa was rejected and would not return as speaker.

He said, “Meranda is the recognised Speaker. Obasa was rejected, and he is not coming back as Speaker of the Lagos State House of Assembly. We are fully in support of Madam Speaker.”

Another lawmaker, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Obasa’s action showed that he could no longer be trusted with power, insisting that the ousted speaker was just grandstanding.

A lawmaker, who asked not to be identified for safety reasons, alleged that the President was backing Obasa.

He said, “Obasa cannot be that confident if there is no one backing him. It is President Bola Tinubu who is backing him. The GAC has divided into two; while some support Obasa, others support Meranda. But the larger number supports Meranda.”

A senior legal practitioner, who begged not to be named, said the Federal Government was behind the crisis in the House.

He said, “Where did Obasa get the power to control the police? In the last few days, the DSS director was changed, the Commissioner of Police in Lagos was changed, three House of assembly members were charged. All these point to Abuja.”

GAC, APC react

Meanwhile, the Chairman of GAC, Tajudeen Olusi, said members of the group had already advised the warring parties.

He said, “The GAC is an advisory body, and we have given our advice privately to those involved. What we told them is not meant for the public; the party is in the best position to intervene when things are getting out of hand.”

The Publicity Secretary of the APC in Lagos State, Seye Oladejo, called for peace.

He said, “It is like a quarrel between siblings of the same parents and the parents should not be seen taking sides while trying to make peace. They (lawmakers) were still at the party secretariat yesterday (Thursday) and we are trying to make everybody see reasons that we are all members of the same family.”

“While trying to resolve the issue, we are trying to respect the independence of the legislature, so it remains the business of the lawmakers to find an amicable solution and let things return to normal.”

Oladejo denied the involvement of the President in the crisis.

# Kidnapped NYSC member regains freedom after ransom payment of N1.1m

By Helen Okechukwu

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member, Rofiat Lawal, who was kidnapped along the Benin-Ore Expressway on Tuesday, has been freed by her abductors after a ransom of N1.1 million was paid.

Lawal's friend, identified as Agbakwara, disclosed this on Saturday.

It was gathered that the corps member was abducted while traveling from Benin, Edo State, to resume her place of assignment in Oyo State.

Earlier reports indicated that her abductors initially demanded a ransom of N20 million for her release, but her family pleaded that the amount was beyond their capability.

Subsequently, the kidnappers reduced their demand to N5 million.

Providing an update, Lawal's friend, Agbakwara, confirmed that she regained her freedom and was reunited with her family on Saturday morning.

Giving further details in a video post, he wrote: "In the early hours of Friday, the kidnappers pressured us, warning that if we failed to meet their demands, we should not expect her return.



"In desperation, I reached out to everyone I could her colleagues in school, the Muslim association, her friends from her hometown, my fans, and her family.

"Through the collective efforts and generosity of so many, we were able to raise ₦1.1 million, which was sent at 4:20 PM on Friday to an account provided by the kidnappers.

"The recipient, Isaac Ayo, claimed that his sister had also been kidnapped and assured us he would deliver the ransom alongside his own.

"For hours, we anxiously waited. Finally, at around 10 PM, we received the long-awaited call: they had been released and taken to the hospital.

"This morning, we got another call confirming that Rofiat was on her way home, and the others had also safely returned to their families.

"I want to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed, shared the news, and tagged the necessary authorities. Your support made this possible.

## Only Six Were Kidnapped

In a video shared, Lawal stated that out of the ten passengers in the vehicle, only six were kidnapped, including some market women. She added that the kidnappers took their money and her NYSC uniform before taking them to their hideout.

# Lagos man sentenced to death for killing wife, brother-in-law

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**A** Lagos State High Court, presided over by Justice Sherifat Sonaïke at Tafawa Balewa Square, has sentenced Benjamin Ogundero to death by hanging for the gruesome murder of his wife, Chinyere Ogundero, and her brother, Ifeanyi Joseph in April 2022.

The court found Ogundero guilty of setting both victims on fire while they slept in their home in Abule Ado, Lagos, following a heated domestic dispute.

Delivering the judgment on Friday, Justice Sonaïke ruled that the prosecution had proven beyond a reasonable doubt that Ogundero deliberately planned and carried out the attack.

Describing the act as “wickedness of the highest order,” the judge condemned his actions as one of the most heinous crimes a person could commit.

During the court proceedings, Justice Sonaïke emphasized that the evidence presented proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Ogundero committed the heinous act.

“He devised, prepared, and executed the act. This is



wickedness of the highest order,” the judge stated, condemning the defendant’s actions as one of the worst a person could inflict upon another.

In addition to the murder charge, Ogundero was also found guilty of arson and sentenced to life imprisonment, which will start from the date of conviction

The prosecution team, led by Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) Mr. Martins Babajide, argued that the man had been angry over the fact that his wife owned the house they lived in, which she had purchased while working in the banking sector.

This anger, it was said, was a key factor in his decision to commit

the crime.

Witnesses described the horrific scene, with one testifying that Chinyere’s body was so badly burned that her limbs fell off. Ifeanyi Joseph died from severe burns that caused his body to stop circulating blood.

The court also heard from a neighbor who saw Ogundero running from the burning house with a fuel gallon, further solidifying his involvement in the crime.

Benjamin Ogundero’s actions were deemed to be driven by personal grievances and anger, with the court finding no remorse throughout the trial.

# All 12 passengers burnt to death in Edo accident

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

At least 12 people were burnt to death in a fatal road crash that occurred in the early hours of Saturday in Edo State.

The tragedy struck around 5 a.m. at Igueoviobo community, near an Army checkpoint along the Benin-Auchi Road.

Edo Sector Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Cyril Mathew, confirmed the crash, which involved a Toyota Hiace commercial bus and an articulated truck.

According to Mathew, all passengers in the bus were burnt beyond recognition, while the truck driver and his conductor escaped unhurt in the crash

“The bus departed from Zuba, Federal Capital Territory, en route to Benin but collided with a truck heading toward Auchi. Unfortunately, all occupants of the



bus lost their lives,” he said.

Mathew suggested that driver fatigue may have contributed to the accident.

“The crash happened in the early morning hours, and it is likely that the bus driver, coming from Abuja, fell asleep at the wheel, leading to the collision with the truck,” he explained.

Rescue officials retrieved the vehicle’s manifest, enabling them to contact the families of the deceased.

The FRSC commander urged drivers to take breaks whenever they feel fatigued to prevent similar tragedies.

# Nigerian woman arrested in India for trafficking N256m cocaine

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Margret Mgbudom, a 37-year-old Nigerian woman, has been arrested and detained in India for allegedly importing cocaine valued at Rs 1.49 crore (N256 million).

The Nigerian woman was arraigned before the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Navsari, Gujarat, India, for the alleged offence on Wednesday.

According to the Indian Express, Gujarat’s State Monitoring Cell (SMC) intercepted the illicit substance, estimated to be worth N256 million, last Wednesday. Mgbudom has remained in SMC custody since her arrest.

Mgbudom, who resides at Meera Road in Mumbai, was said to have been charged under various sections of the



Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act after law enforcement received intelligence on Tuesday.

She was arrested after the law enforcement agents stopped her car in Maharashtra and conducted a search

that led to the discovery of 149.51 grams of cocaine. Her passport was also seized.

Commenting on the case, SMC Police Inspector V.C. Jadeja, said, “After primary interrogation, she disclosed that the drug is owned by a person named Elder in Nigeria.

”She said she got the drug from one Emmanuel of Mumbai, to get it delivered to a person in Surat. She hired a car from Mumbai and was on her way to Surat.”

The Police Inspector added, ” The cocaine might have come from Nigeria through peddlers but it is the local members of the cartel in India who identify the customers and sell it at high rates.”

## Kogi PDP chieftain, Okai imprisoned for defaming Gov Ododo

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

A Kogi State Magistrate Court in Lokoja, has remanded an activist and a member of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Mr Austin Okai in prison to enable the Department of State Services (DSS) conclude their investigations into the allegations of cyberstalking and criminal defamation of Kogi governor, Usman Ododo filed against him.

The Court remanded the PDP chieftain based on the demand of the prosecution.

The decision of the DSS to seek for the remand in prison custody was to ensure compliance with the law by not keeping the accused beyond 48 hours in custody without the lawful permission of the court in line with the



criminal justice system of Nigeria.

In his ruling on the matter, Magistrate Mobah Abdullahi of the Chief Magistrate Court 1 sitting at Lugard Court granted the application of the prosecution.

Okai has been remanded at the Federal

Correctional Centre, Kabba, while the case was adjourned to March 13, 2025.

Okai is facing trial for his allegation on the social media that the Governor Ododo allegedly stole billions of naira meant for the Local Government councils in the state as well as some agencies under the state government.

The former spokesperson for PDP Presidential Campaign and gubernatorial campaign councils in Kogi state was also a member of PDP National Convention.

He was an aspirant for Dekina-Bassa House of Representatives seat under the platform of his party in the 2023 election.

## Bandits free ex-NYSC boss after 22 days in captivity

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

A former Director-General of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Maharazu Tsiga, on Friday regained freedom from his kidnappers after spending 22 days in captivity.

According to Channels Television report on Friday night, Tsiga is receiving medical attention at an undisclosed hospital for security reasons.

The former NYSC boss was abducted by an unspecified number of bandits at his residence in Tsiga village, Bakori Local Government Area of Katsina State on 6th February 2025.

During the attack, two persons sustained varying degrees of injuries, while one of the gunmen died of



'friendly fire' after he was mistakenly shot dead by a member of his gang.

The gunmen led by notorious bandit kingpin, Babaro had demanded N250m for Tsiga's release.

However, the report said it was

unclear if any money was paid for his freedom.

Government officials and security agencies, including the Katsina State Police Command were yet to comment on Tsiga's freedom.

# Wabara's purported suspension from PDP stopped by court

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

An Abia State High Court in Obehie, Ukwa West LGA, has halted the enforcement of the alleged suspension of former Senate President and Peoples Democratic Party, (PDP) BoT Chairman, Senator Adolphus Wabara.

Presiding over the court, Justice LTC Eruba, in an order, restrained Elder Abraham Amah, who is laying claim to the Abia State chairmanship of the PDP, from enforcing the said suspension.

The former Senate president had in a suit marked HUK/8/2025, dragged Amah to the court, seeking the order of the court to restrain the defendant from enforcing the purported suspension.

Granting the prayers of the Claimant, the Court ordered: "The defendant is restrained from enforcing the suspension of the Claimant/Applicant from the People's Democratic Party, or in any way, affecting his position as the Chairman, Board of Trustees of the PDP till the motion on notice is determined."

Recall that Amah, a former Vice Chairman of the PDP, Abia North, had penultimate week, in Umuahia, announced the purported suspension of Wabara, accusing the former Senate President of engaging in anti-party activities.

Amah cited a complimentary remark by the BoT Chairman on Gov. Alex Otti for awarding contract for the reconstruction of the long-abandoned Port Harcourt Road Aba, in October 2023, as anti-party.

But the National Working Committee, NWC, of the PDP, had in a swift response, declared the purported suspension as "null and void and of no effect."

The NWC posited that the said suspension was a violation of the party's constitution, and did not hold any water.



Similarly, a pressure group known as PDP Frontiers for Change and Progress, had also said that Amah lacked the constitutional powers to suspend a BoT Chairman of the party.

Meanwhile, the PDP Frontiers for Change and Progress, has blasted a former Commissioner for Information, Abia State, Chief John Okiyi Kalu over his recent media attacks on Wabara.

The former Information boss, had on a live radio programme in Umuahia, alleged that Senator Wabara had a secret meeting in London with Governor Alex Otti to perfect plans to bring the Governor to the PDP ahead of 2027.

He further claimed that Wabara's intention in wooing Otti, was to chase former governor Okezie Ikpeazu (who Kalu served under), away from the 'Big Umbrella'.

But the National Coordinator of the PDP pro-group, Mr Emeka Yellow Ikpegbu, challenged Kalu to substantiate his claims with evidence.

He accused Kalu and his co-travellers of resorting to blackmail to frustrate the genuine efforts of "Senator Wabara and other progressives" to rebuild the party which he said, "was destroyed by APC moles in the PDP."

Ikpegbu argued that even if efforts were made to bring Governor Otti back to the PDP, such efforts were not strange in politics, and should not in any way pose a threat to any genuine lover of the party.

He regretted that "some individuals acting as moles for the APC" were making "futile attempts to hijack the leadership of the PDP in Abia State", but vowed never to give them "any breathing space."

He said, "We will not allow people who claim to be in PDP but their spirit is with the APC to destroy our great party. They go to Abuja and lobby for appointments in an APC-led federal government but come to Abia to destroy the PDP so they can use it as bargaining instrument in 2027."

"It's better they formally defect to the APC and leave the PDP alone so we can rebuild our party. Abia is a PDP state and nobody will stop the genuine efforts of progressives to rebuild the party and open it up for good persons to join us."

"What's wrong if Gov. Otti, who everybody can see is performing, decides to join the PDP? APC is wooing him, APGA is wooing him. What is wrong if PDP also woos him? A performing governor is always a beautiful bride, and his joining the PDP will brighten our fortunes in 2027."

# Kano LG chairman arrested over illegal N100m land sale

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

The Chairman of the Kiru Local Government Area in Kano State, Abdullahi Mohammed, has been arrested for illegally selling land originally designated for a mini stadium, which was to be named “Kafin Maiyaki Mini Stadium.”

The council chairman was arrested following an investigation by the Kano State Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission.

According to the commission’s findings, the land was sold to a company identified as Mahasum for more than ₦100 million.

The anti-graft agency’s Public Relations Officer, Kabir Abba Kabir, confirmed the arrest, revealing that Mohammed’s account received a total of ₦240 million between November 1, 2024, when he assumed office, and February 27, 2025, saying the commission has since recovered the funds.

Mohammed is reportedly cooperating with investigators as authorities work to unravel the details of the fraudulent land sale and hold those responsible accountable.

The commission reaffirmed its commitment to combating corruption and ensuring transparency in governance, with the suspect currently in custody as investigations continue.

In another development, a Federal High Court in Warri has set aside its earlier judgment on a case of financial fraud filed against a BDC operator, Julius Oluwafunmisho Okedele, by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

The court ruled that the addition of Okedele’s name in an alleged fraud and cybercrime case marked



FHC/WR/110C/2019, without due notice to him, constituted a breach of his fundamental human rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Striking out his name from the lawsuit, the court ordered the EFCC to tender a public apology to Okedele for including it in the first instance.

The commission on December 2, 2019, charged Akegor Godbless Omamuyovwi at the Warri Division of the Federal High Court, accusing him of alleged cybercrimes and internet fraud.

Two other defendants in the suit including Okedele were tried in absentia by the EFCC who told the court they were at large.

Unknown to the court, Okedele was never informed by the EFCC that he was a defendant in the suit before the court.

Facts of the case indicated that Okedele had foreign exchange transactions with Akegor between 2018 and 2019 as part of his business activities.

Following the arraignment of the

suspects in absentia, the EFCC’s Edo State office in Benin extended an invitation to Okedele on December 5, 2019, which he honoured and provided useful information regarding his business dealings to the investigation team.

After his second visit on December 10, 2019, the EFCC concluded that there was no case and released him from further inquiry.

But the commission never requested the court to strike out his name from the criminal proceeding in which he was arraigned in absentia and listed as a fugitive on the charge sheet.

The case proceeded without his knowledge until the court delivered judgment which the EFCC published through their website and other media outlets.

Having been brought to disrepute and after suffering reputational damage as a result of the published information, Okedele approached the same court with evidence that showed he was neither a fraudster nor a fugitive.

# Drake reaches settlement with iHeartMedia over Kendrick Lamar's diss track

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

**D**rake has reached a settlement with Texas-based iHeartMedia in his ongoing legal dispute over Kendrick Lamar's diss track "Not Like Us," according to court records.

In November, Drake filed a legal petition in Bexar County, Texas, where San Antonio is located, alleging that iHeartMedia had received illegal payments from Universal Music Group to boost radio airplay for "Not Like Us."

UMG is the parent record label for both Drake and Lamar.

The petition, a precursor to a potential lawsuit, had sought depositions from corporate representatives of both companies.

In a court document filed Friday, attorneys for Drake said the rapper and iHeartMedia had "reached an amicable resolution of the dispute" but did not offer any other information.

"We are pleased that the parties were able to reach a settlement satisfactory to both sides, and have no further comment on this matter," Drake's legal team said in a statement.

In an email Friday, iHeartMedia declined to comment on the settlement.

The claims against UMG remain active, and a hearing on a motion by UMG's lawyers to dismiss the petition was scheduled to be held Wednesday in a San Antonio courtroom.

Drake has alleged UMG engaged in "irregular and inappropriate business practices" to get radio airplay for "Not Like Us."



The petition also alleges that UMG knew "the song itself, as well as its accompanying album art and music video, attacked the character of another one of UMG's most prominent artists, Drake, by falsely accusing him of being a sex offender, engaging in pedophilic acts, harboring sex offenders, and committing other criminal sexual acts."

An email to a UMG representative seeking comment was not immediately answered.

In January, Drake filed a defamation lawsuit in federal court in New York City against UMG over what he alleges are false allegations of pedophilia made in "Not Like Us." Lamar is not named in the lawsuit.

The feud between Drake, a 38-year-old Canadian rapper and singer and five-time Grammy winner, and Lamar, a 37-year-old Pulitzer Prize winner who headlined

the Super Bowl halftime show on Feb. 9, is among the biggest in hip-hop in recent years.

The Federal Communications Commission sent a letter Monday to iHeartMedia's CEO and chairman, Robert Pittman, saying the commission is looking into whether the audio company is forcing musicians to perform at its May country music festival in Austin for reduced pay in exchange for favorable airplay of their songs on iHeart radio stations.

"We look forward to demonstrating to the Commission how performing at the iHeartCountry Festival – or declining to do so – has no bearing on our stations' airplay," iHeart Media said in a statement. "We do not make any overt or covert agreements about airplay with artists performing at our events."

# Mark Zuckerberg performs as Benson Bonne for his wife's birthday, stuns many

By Eyitayo Jemimah Ajayi

The Meta founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg has proved the saying, "All work but no play makes Jack a dull boy" correct. Mark Zuckerberg continually shows full adoration for his wife, Priscilla Chan over and over again. But for her 40th birthday party, he did something extraordinary.

The billionaire literally impersonated the fast rising star, Benson Bonne, borrowing the singer's Oscar jumpsuit to perform for his wife during her birthday celebration.

He decided to make his wife's birthday memorable as he says, "Your wife only turns 40 once".

In a video released by Mark through his Instagram, one can see Mark striping from his black suit revealing Benson's blue shimmering jumpsuit he was wearing underneath. It was indeed hilarious seeing Mark perform Benson's stunts for the just concluded Grammy Awards ceremony.

On the other hand, his wife,



Priscilla was shrieking in excitement. The comment section of the post by Mark was all frenzy. Starting from Benson Bonne who couldn't believe his eyes to other folks who were admiring Mark's playfulness and how his love for Priscilla has made him do things one won't expect. It was a sweet act of romance.

Comments on Mark Zuckerberg's post on Instagram

This is not the first time Mark is pulling up a something unusual to

make his wife happy. He worked with T-Pain in 2024 to make their version of "Get Low" song. Get Low was the song playing when Mark met Priscilla in a college party back in 2003.

Mark and Priscilla met at a Harvard University fraternity party in 2003. After dating for nearly ten years, they duo got married on May 19,2012 in Palo Alto, California. Their union has produced 3 daughters, born in 2015, 2017 and 2023.

# Elon Musk announces birth of his 14th Child – Seldon Lycurgus

By New Daily Prime

**B**illionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk has welcomed a new addition to his ever-growing family, announcing the birth of his 14th child, a son named Seldon Lycurgus. The baby is his fourth child with Shivon Zilis, a Canadian executive at Neuralink, Musk's neurotechnology firm.

Ms. Zilis shared the news on X, the social media platform owned by Musk, also revealing the previously unknown name of their third child.

"Discussed with Elon and, in light of beautiful Arcadia's birthday, we felt it was better to also just share directly about our wonderful and incredible son, Seldon Lycurgus," Zilis wrote. "Built like a juggernaut, with a solid heart of gold. Love him so much." Musk responded to the post with a heart emoji.

Known for bestowing unique names on his children, Musk's growing brood includes Exa Dark Sideræl, Strider, Azure, and X Æ A-12, known simply as X. He has long expressed concerns about declining birth rates, calling them "the biggest danger civilization faces by far."

"Bravo to big families," the 53-year-old tech mogul once said, reinforcing his commitment to expanding his lineage.

Musk has children with at least three different women:

Justine Wilson (his first wife) – Six children

Grimes (Claire Boucher, Canadian electropop musician) – Three children



Shivon Zilis (Neuralink executive) – Four children

Allegations of Another Child with Influencer Ashley St Clair

Controversy has recently emerged as Ashley St Clair, a 26-year-old conservative influencer, has filed a lawsuit claiming Musk is the father of her five-month-old son. She alleges that there is no doubt about the paternity and has included text messages purportedly from Musk as evidence.

"Five months ago, I welcomed a new baby into the world. Elon Musk is the father," she wrote on X. As part of her lawsuit, she insisted: "I did not have sexual intercourse with any other male during the time the child was conceived."

In the legal documents, St Clair provided text messages allegedly sent by Musk, including one in which he reportedly wrote: "I look forward to seeing you and

him this weekend."

Musk has yet to respond publicly to these claims.

Who is Ashley St Clair?

At the time of meeting Musk, St Clair was working for The Babylon Bee, a conservative satirical website often described as a right-wing version of The Onion. She is a frequent guest on conservative news outlets and shares Musk's concerns about declining birth rates in developed nations.

With Musk's latest announcement and ongoing paternity allegations, public and media attention remains high. While his influence in technology, business, and space exploration continues to dominate headlines, his personal life and growing family continue to spark intrigue and debate.

# 2025 Oscar Awards likely winners and other expected record breaking awards

By Eyitayo Jemimah Ajayi

The 2025 Oscar Awards could witness several historic moments. “Emilia Pérez,” with 13 nominations, has the potential to surpass the record for most Oscars won by a single film (currently 11) and a non-English language film (currently 4). Individual records are also in play: Sean Baker or Jacques Audiard could equal Walt Disney’s four wins in a night.

Expected record-breaking 2025 Oscar wins  
Timothée Chalamet may become the youngest Best Actor winner, while Cynthia Erivo could become the second Black Best Actress winner and youngest EGOT. Fernanda Torres, Sebastian Stan, and Isabella Rossellini could make history as the first Brazilian, Romanian, and Italian acting winners, respectively. Finally, Diane Warren aims to break her long-standing record of most nominations without a win.

## Cynthia Erivo

Nominated for “Wicked”, the actress stands poised to potentially become the youngest competitive EGOT recipient. With prior victories including a Tony for Best Actress in a Musical (“The Color Purple”), a Grammy for Best Musical Theatre Album (“The Color Purple” cast), and a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Musical Performance in a Daytime Program, an Oscar win would cement her place in history at the age of 38, surpassing the current record held by Robert Lopez (39).

## Disney Movies’ likely 2025 Oscar wins

“Emilia Pérez,” boasting 13 nominations, is on track to potentially rewrite Oscar history. The film could tie or break the current record of 11 wins, held jointly by “Ben-Hur,” “Titanic,” and “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King.” To match the record, “Emilia Pérez” requires 11 wins, and to claim the top spot, it needs 12.

In 1954, Walt Disney achieved four remarkable Oscar wins in a single night. Now, in 2025, Sean Baker (“Anora”) and Jacques Audiard (“Emilia Pérez”) each have the potential to match this feat. Baker is nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Editing, and Best Original Screenplay, while Audiard is nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Song, and Best Adapted Screenplay.



## The Substance

“The Substance” could become only the second horror film to ever win Best Picture following “The Silence of the Lambs” which won Best Picture more than 30 years ago in 1992.

## Dune: Part Two for 2025 Oscar Awards

“Dune: Part Two” could become only the third sequel to win Best Picture, following “The Godfather Part II” and “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King” “Wicked” could become only the third fantasy film to win Best Picture following “The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King” & “The Shape Of Water”.

## Anora

“Anora” could become the 4th movie to win the Palme d’Or from the Cannes Festival as well as the Best Picture Oscar (thus joining “The Lost Weekend”, “Marty” & “Parasite”)

## Dede Gardner for the 2025 Oscar Awards

Dede Gardner would become the first female producer to win Best Picture on three occasions (as of now, she is the only woman that has managed to win Best Picture twice and she is tied with Kathleen Kennedy as the most nominated woman in the Best Picture category with 8 nominations)

## Best Actor in a Leading Role

Timothée Chalamet (“A Complete

Unknown”) could become the youngest actor to win in the Best Actor in a Leading Role category – the current holder of the record is Adrien Brody who was 29 years, 11 months old when he won for “The Pianist” and Chalamet will be 29 years, 2 months old; additionally, Chalamet who is French-American would become only the second French actor to win in the Best Actor in a Leading Role category following Jean Dujardin.

## Sebastian Stan

Sebastian Stan Wins Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy during the 82nd Annual Golden Globes held at The Beverly Hilton on January 05, 2025 in Beverly Hills, California.

Sebastian Stan (“The Apprentice”) could become the first Romanian actor to win in the Best Actor in a Leading Role category (Stan was born in Constanta, Romania and he is Romanian-American) and the first Romanian to win for a leading acting performance.

## Adrien Brody for the 2025 Oscar Awards

Adrien Brody (“The Brutalist”) could join an elite group of 10 actors who have won the Best Actor in a Leading Role Oscar 2 or more times – Brody previously won for “The Pianist” in 2003 so a win in 2025 would be his second

## Best Actress in a Leading Role

Karla Sofia Gascón

# U.S. terminates Ukraine energy security project

By Dave Oludare Oso

The State Department has terminated a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initiative that has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to help restore Ukraine's energy grid from attacks by the Russian military, according to two USAID officials working on the agency's Ukraine mission.

Power outages have been applied overnight in some regions of Ukraine due to the attacks on energy facilities. The country's systems have sustained near-constant impact throughout the course of the three-year war.

"It significantly undercuts this administration's abilities to negotiate on the ceasefire, and it'd signal to Russia that we don't care about Ukraine or our past investments," one USAID official involved in the Ukraine mission told NBC News.

The official continued: "Russia is fighting a two-pronged war in Ukraine: A military one but also an economic one. They're trying to crush the economy, but USAID has played a central role in helping it be resilient, [including] shoring up the energy grid.

"We've provided vast amount of support to the Ukrainian government to avoid a macro economic crisis."

In addition to ending the Ukraine



Energy Security Project, USAID is also dramatically downsizing its presence in Ukraine.

Before the Trump administration's latest moves, 64 American government employees and contractors were serving on the ground in Ukraine for the agency.

Just eight of those personnel are slated to remain on the ground in the war-torn country after the Trump administration placed its remaining global workforce on administrative leave and ordered those workers not deemed "critical" to return to the U.S.

The two officials warned that USAID withdrawing from Ukraine would leave its energy grid vulnerable in the heart of the winter as it endures assaults from further Russian missiles.

A State Department spokesperson did not immediately respond to a

request for comment.

Both officials also asserted that USAID plays the foremost role in ensuring financial aid provided to Ukraine is spent for its intended purposes.

Based on a document obtained by NBC News, the State Department has also ordered the termination of a program focused on "financial sector reform activity."

"We won't have the eyes on where this money has gone over the last few years," one of the officials said.

USAID's Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, which oversees the Ukraine mission, has 115 staff based in Washington, D.C. The bureau's staff has been told that number would be pared down to 29 employees remaining active, according to the two USAID officials.

# UK minister resigns over PM Starmer's decision to cut aid budget

By Dave Oludare Oso

The UK's International Development Minister, Anneliese Dodds, has quit her post over Prime Minister Keir Starmer's decision to slash the international aid budget by almost half to pay for an increase in defence spending.

She warned that it could enable Russia and China to further their global influence.

The senior Labour MP, who attended cabinet, predicted that the UK pulling back from development would bolster Moscow, which has already been aggressively increasing its presence worldwide, as well as encourage Beijing's attempts to rewrite global rules.

Her departure, just hours after Starmer returned from a widely lauded trip to Washington for crucial talks with Donald Trump on Ukraine, came as a blow to the prime minister as concerns grew that the aid cut could damage the UK's national security interests.

In a further setback to Starmer's commitment to maintain development spending in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, Dodds predicted the government would find it impossible with the diminished budget, which will fall by about £6bn by 2027.

She said she firmly believed, however, that Starmer was right to increase defence spending, because the postwar consensus had "come crashing down" after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

She recognised there were "not easy paths" to boosting defence spending, saying she had been prepared for some cuts to the aid budget to help pay for the plan to increase military spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 – and an ambition to hit 3% in the next parliament.

But the former shadow chancellor said she believed Starmer's 3% ambition "may only be the start", given the tumultuous global picture, and urged the government to look at ways of raising the money other than through cutting departmental budgets, including looking again at borrowing rules and taxation.



There is understood to be a growing sense in the cabinet that the government should not let adherence to the fiscal rules scupper its wider agenda, with further painful departmental cuts on the cards in June as Rachel Reeves, the chancellor, attempts to balance the books.

Starmer replied with his own letter several hours after Dodds announced her resignation, in which he praised the departing minister but defended his decision to cut the aid budget.

Jenny Chapman has been appointed the new minister for international development, Downing Street said.

Cabinet ministers are among those who voiced concern over plans to cut aid spending by 46%, from 0.56% of gross national income to 0.3%, after Trump's own drastic cuts to the US aid budget. In a cabinet meeting, several spoke of the risk of unintended consequences.

David Lammy, the foreign secretary, said earlier this month that the US's plan to cut aid funding could be a "big strategic mistake" that would allow China to step into the gap and extend its global influence.

Starmer has been accused of pandering to the US president.

Dodds, the MP for Oxford East, said she was told about the decision by Starmer only on Monday, but delayed resigning so as not to overshadow the prime minister's trip to Washington to make the case to Trump for security guarantees for Ukraine.

Starmer made his surprise announcement in the Commons, telling MPs that Britain would "fight for peace in Europe" with a generational increase in defence spending.

The announcement, two days before the prime minister was due to meet Trump, raised immediate concerns that he was following the US's lead and prompted fury from aid groups, who said it could cost lives in countries that relied on UK support.

Richard Dannatt, a former head of the British army, said the decision to cut foreign aid was a "strategic mistake" that would ultimately add to the burden on Britain's armed forces, and risked making the UK "weaker not stronger."

# Black people refuse to sympathise with blackman killed by white girlfriend

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**A** black man who clearly made his hate for black people known has died, after being shot by his white girlfriend.

Telbo Rackins Osborne, 30, was allegedly fatally shot by Hannah Grace Cobb on Sunday morning, Feb. 23, in Midville, Georgia, yet she was not immediately arrested because she claims it was an accident.

His family took to social media to demand justice for him and a number of black people lent their voice to the call, leading to Hannah Grace Cobb being charged with the fatal shooting of her boyfriend, Telvin "Telbo Rackins" Osborne.

However, more details have now emerged and this is making the case trend across social media platforms.

Osborne, a father of two, was killed early Sunday morning following a heated argument with Cobb after a night of drinking.

Initially, Cobb claimed the shooting was accidental, stating she had been cleaning her firearm after a night out. However, after further investigation, Cobb was charged with involuntary manslaughter.

According to Burke County Sheriff's Office, the shooting occurred at approximately 5:45 a.m. in the 800 block of Four Points Road near Waynesboro.

Deputies found Osborne suffering from a single gunshot wound to the chest, and he was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

The Burke County Sheriff's Office is investigating the incident, with the Criminal Investigation Division interviewing witnesses and gathering



evidence.

Cobb, who is cooperating with the investigation, remains in custody at Burke County Jail.

Sheriff Alfonzo Williams confirmed that both Cobb and Osborne had been drinking before their argument escalated.

He emphasized that introducing a firearm into an already volatile situation while intoxicated was reckless. Cobb now faces charges of simple battery, family violence, and reckless conduct in connection to the shooting.

In the wake of Osborne's death, his past comments about Black women have resurfaced on social media. Osborne had previously made controversial remarks, including expressing a preference for white women over Black women.

He said white women were superior to black women.

He added that he would rather have sexual relations with a dog than with a black woman, as long as the dog was white.

On X, he referred to himself as "Team\_Whitegirls".

He even endorsed a comment made by his friend, likening to a black goat he snapped with to black women.

He also hated black men and said he could let things slide with a black man but would deal with any black man who tried him.

Photos also show that most of his male friends were white men.

Meanwhile, he never missed a chance to hail and uplift his white girlfriend.

Many likened his case to that of Christian Obumseli, a US-based man of Nigerian descent who expressed his hate for black women only to be killed by his white girlfriend, an OnlyFans model.

Black people have now said they are not joining to call for justice for Telbo and they will sit this one out the way they did in the case of Obumseli.

Meanwhile, Telbo's family have stepped in and they are calling out the black community while telling them they don't need them.

# Trump officials fume at Zelensky for disregarding advice before meeting

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**O**fficials say minerals deal would serve as commitment to US security guarantee and Ukraine leader shouldn't have pressed issue

White House officials blamed the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky for the meltdown in the Oval Office on Friday, and expressed frustration that he pushed for security guarantees even though the US had made clear they wanted to negotiate that later, according to people familiar with the matter.

The officials had told their Ukrainian counterparts in advance of the meeting that Trump wanted to sign an economic partnership this week at a ministerial level, as aides worked on the details about security guarantees.

Trump saw the minerals deal as the first phase of a broader economic partnership and told aides it showed the US was effectively making a commitment on security guarantees, because the agreement deal would mean the US had a vested interest in Ukraine's economic prosperity.

The officials believed that had all been communicated to Ukraine, as was the advice that senators gave Zelensky on Friday morning to praise Trump and not litigate the issue of wanting stronger security guarantees to his face.

To Trump's aides, Zelensky did not heed that advice when he expressed skepticism at JD Vance's view of making peace with Russia and, in their view, lectured the US vice-president on the history of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine that started in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea.

That set off a downward spiral in the Oval Office as Vance took issue with being questioned about his description of diplomacy, and clapped back at Zelensky: "I'm talking about the kind of diplomacy that's going to end the



destruction of your country.”

Vance cut into Zelensky with opprobrium that would have been objectively harsh for an adversary, much less for a putative ally. He appeared to interpret Zelensky's remarks to him as an insult to the US.

But the fury with which Vance castigated Zelensky for being ungrateful appears to have been the moment when Vance and his team's personal views about the Ukraine conflict came to the fore.

On Thursday, when the prospect of completing the minerals deal was considered more of a probability, Trump had played down his comment calling Zelensky a dictator last week. "Did I say that? I can't believe I said that. Next question," Trump told reporters.

That brief moment of levity masked the reality that Trump had workshopped the "dictator" post on Truth Social with Vance before it was sent out last week, according to two people briefed on the matter.

Vance had settled on the insult on the basis that Zelensky had suspended elections, the two people said, apparently ignoring the fact that Ukraine's constitution decrees that elections cannot be held during a period

of martial law, like the one Zelensky declared when Russia launched its full-scale invasion in 2022.

While other US allies, such as the UK prime minister, Keir Starmer, and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, effusively praised Trump in the Oval Office this week, Zelensky took a different approach and perhaps unknowingly careened headfirst into Vance's personal skepticism of him.

Trump officials said privately on Saturday that Trump still wants to sign the minerals deal, but an immediate reset appeared unlikely with Trump scheduled to attend a fundraising dinner for the Maga Inc super political action committee in Palm Beach and Zelensky's departure from the US for the UK.

There had been one attempt by Ukraine to save the deal after the meeting blew up when Zelensky's aides suggested that Trump meet with Zelensky one-on-one to calm tensions. But Trump officials declined the offer, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Trump's view immediately after the meeting was that it was unproductive to engage in further talks because, to him, Zelensky was unwilling to sign a peace agreement with Russia.

# Mexico deports 29 drug cartel figures to U.S.

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

**M**ore than two dozen drug cartel suspects from Mexico — including the man charged in the 1985 slaying of a U.S. drug agent — are in U.S. custody after Mexican officials agreed to send them to the United States, four sources familiar with the matter told NBC News.

The 29 people accused of violence and drug trafficking were deported as the Trump administration has turned up pressure on Mexico to curb illegal immigration, cartel activity and fentanyl production with a promised 25% tariff on all Mexican imports set to start next week.

“For those of us who have investigated Mexican cartels for many generations, this is truly an historical moment,” said Ray Donovan, the former chief of operations at the Drug Enforcement Administration. “We have never seen this many sent from Mexico to the U.S. in one day.”

Among those deported by Mexico is Rafael Caro Quintero, who U.S. officials believe is responsible for the 1985 murder of DEA agent Enrique “Kiki” Camarena and others.

Caro Quintero has been on the DEA’s most-wanted fugitives list for four decades. “Today we can proudly say he has arrived in the United States where justice will be served,” acting DEA Administrator Derek S. Maltz said.

The suspects sent to the United States included members of five of the six Mexican organized crime groups the Trump administration designated this month as “foreign terrorist organizations.”

Those sent to the United States on Thursday were taken from prisons across Mexico to board planes at an airport north of Mexico City that took them to eight U.S. cities, according to the Mexican government.

Among them were two leaders of the now-defunct Los Zetas cartel, Mexicans Miguel Treviño Morales and his brother Omar Treviño Morales, known as Z-40 and Z-42.

U.S. authorities have accused the brothers of running the successor Northeast Cartel from prison.



The removal of the Treviño Morales brothers marks the end of a long process that began after the capture in 2013 of Miguel and two years later of his brother Omar.

Mexican Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero had described the delay as “truly shameful.”

## A who’s who of Mexican cartels

Besides Caro Quintero, there were cartel leaders, security chiefs from both factions of the Sinaloa cartel, cartel finance operatives and a man wanted in connection with the killing of a North Carolina sheriff’s deputy in 2022.

Vicente Carrillo Fuentes was among those turned over to the United States. He is a former leader of the Juárez drug cartel, based in the border city of Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, Texas, and brother of drug lord Amado Carrillo Fuentes, known as “the Lord of the Skies,” who died in a botched plastic surgery procedure in 1997.

According to prosecutors in both countries, the prisoners sent to the United States on Thursday faced charges related to drug trafficking and in some cases homicide, among other crimes.

“We will prosecute these criminals to the fullest extent of the law in honor of the brave law enforcement agents who have dedicated their careers — and in some cases, given their lives — to protect

innocent people from the scourge of violent cartels,” U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said in a statement.

The deportation of the drug cartel figures coincided with a visit to Washington by Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretary Juan Ramón de la Fuente and other top economic and military officials, who met with their U.S. counterparts, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

In exchange for delaying tariffs, President Donald Trump had insisted that Mexico crack down on cartels, illegal immigration and fentanyl production, despite significant dips in migration and overdoses over the past year.

## A longtime DEA target

Mexico’s surprise handover of one of the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives was weeks in the making.

Caro Quintero had walked free in 2013 after 28 years in prison when a court overturned his 40-year sentence for the kidnapping and killing of Camarena, the DEA agent, in 1985. The brutal murder marked a low point in U.S.-Mexico relations.

Caro Quintero, the former leader of the Guadalajara cartel, had since returned to drug trafficking and unleashed bloody turf battles in the northern Mexico border state of Sonora until Mexican forces arrested him in 2022.

# Starmmer told Zelensky: Go back, patch things up with Trump

By New Daily Prime

Sir Keir Starmer urged Volodymyr Zelensky to return to the White House and patch up his relationship with Donald Trump after the shouting match in the Oval Office, it has emerged.

The televised showdown between the US President and his Ukrainian counterpart on Friday saw Mr Trump accuse Mr Zelensky of “gambling with World War Three” and being “disrespectful” towards America. The Ukrainian delegation was then ejected from the White House.

Later that evening, Sir Keir telephoned Mr Zelensky to try to persuade him to return to the White House, and then called Mr Trump in an attempt to lower the temperature. His efforts came to no avail, as the Americans told him that tempers needed calming before any return to discussions.

Mr Zelensky has since come under pressure from other European leaders to try and make up with Mr Trump. Mark Rutte, the Nato Secretary General, said that he also urged a rapprochement.

Mr Rutte told the BBC: “I said: I think you have to find a way, dear Volodymyr, to restore your relationship with Donald Trump and the American administration. That is important going forward.”

He also reminded the Ukrainian leader that it was Mr Trump who provided Javelin anti-tank weapons to Kyiv in 2019, which enabled the country to fight back against Russia.

“Without the Javelins in 2022, when the full-scale attack started, Ukraine would have been nowhere.

“I told him we really have to give Trump credit for what he did then, what America did since then and also what America is still doing.”

He would not be drawn on the US President’s specific comments to Mr Zelensky, instead telling the broadcaster: “I am absolutely convinced that the US wants to bring Ukraine to this durable peace”, adding: “What they need to get there is to make sure that we’ll all work together on this.”



Trump’s support is ‘crucial’

Mr Zelensky appeared to express regret for how talks unfolded in the White House on Friday, and said that it was “crucial” for Ukraine to have Mr Trump’s support.

He wrote on X on Saturday morning: “We are very grateful to the United States for all the support.

“I’m thankful to President Trump, Congress for their bipartisan support, and American people. Ukrainians have always appreciated this support, especially during these three years of full-scale invasion.

“America’s help has been vital in helping us survive, and I want to acknowledge that. Despite the tough dialogue, we remain strategic partners. But we need to be honest and direct with each other to truly understand our shared goals.”

However, he added that he wanted the US to “stand more firmly on our side” and called for the US to play a role in “defining security guarantees” by helping to answer “what kind, what volume and when”.

“We are ready to sign the minerals agreement, and it will be the first step toward security guarantees. But it’s not enough, and we need more than just that. A ceasefire without security guarantees is dangerous for Ukraine.

We’ve been fighting for three years, and Ukrainian people need to know that America is on our side.”

Mr Zelensky landed in the UK on Saturday afternoon and headed to Downing Street where he was warmly embraced by Sir Keir, who told him that he was “very, very welcome” in No10.

The Prime Minister is one of a handful of leaders who are seeking to act as mediator between the US and Europe.

Giorgia Meloni, the Italian prime minister, demanded an “immediate” summit between the US, European Union and Western allies in the aftermath of the Oval Office showdown.

She said: “Every division of the West makes us all weaker and favours those who would like to see the decline of our civilisation.

“Not of its power or influence, but of the principles that founded it, first and foremost freedom. A division would not benefit anyone.”

‘The great challenges of today’  
Ms Meloni said that the meeting would be needed so that all partners could “talk frankly about how we intend to deal with the great challenges of today, starting with Ukraine, which together we have defended in recent years, and those that we will be called upon to face in the future.”

# PKK declares ceasefire with Turkey after 40 years conflict

By Dave Oludare Oso

Outlawed Kurdish militants on Saturday declared a ceasefire with Turkey after a landmark call by the jailed PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, asking the group to disband.

It was the first reaction from the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK) after Öcalan this week called for the dissolution of the group and asked it to lay down arms after fighting the Turkish state for more than four decades.

"In order to pave the way for the implementation of leader Apo's call for peace and democratic society, we are declaring a ceasefire effective from today," the PKK executive committee said, referring to Öcalan and quoted by the pro-PKK ANF news agency.

"We agree with the content of the call as it is and we say that we will follow and implement it," the committee, which is based in northern Iraq, added. "None of our forces will take armed action unless attacked."

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the US and the EU, has waged an insurgency since 1984 with the aim of carving out a homeland for Kurds, who account for about 20% of Turkey's 85 million people.

Since Öcalan was jailed in 1999 there have been various attempts to end the bloodshed, which has cost more than 40,000 lives.

After several meetings with Öcalan at his island prison, on Thursday the pro-Kurdish DEM party relayed his appeal for PKK to lay down its weapons and convene a congress to announce the



organisation's dissolution.

The PKK said on Saturday it was ready to convene a congress as Öcalan wanted, but "for this to happen, a suitable secure environment must be created" and Öcalan "must personally direct and lead it for the success of the congress."

The group also said Öcalan's prison conditions must be improved, adding that he "must be able to live and work in physical freedom and be able to establish unhindered relationships with anyone he wants, including his friends."

After the last round of peace talks collapsed in 2015, no further contact was made until October when a hardline nationalist ally of the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, offered a surprise peace gesture if Öcalan rejected violence.

While Erdoğan backed the rapprochement, his government cranked up pressure on the opposition, arresting hundreds of politicians,

activists and journalists.

On Friday, Erdoğan said Öcalan's appeal was a "historic opportunity". He added that Turkey would "keep a close watch" to make sure the talks to end the insurgency were "brought to a successful conclusion."

"When the pressure of terrorism and arms is eliminated, the space for politics in democracy will naturally expand," Erdoğan promised.

Iraq has welcomed Öcalan's call, saying it was "a positive and important step towards achieving stability in the region."

The PKK's presence in Iraq has been a recurrent source of tension between Baghdad and Ankara.

The group holds positions in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, where Turkey also maintains military bases and often carries out ground and air operations against the Kurdish militants.

# Man jailed 14 years for removing condom during sex

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The Met's Public Protection team's investigation has resulted in a lengthy sentence of 14 years for a man who was convicted of a sex offence.

Laurence Rafter, 43 of Bittacy Hill, Barnet appeared at Snaresbrook Crown Court on Friday, 28 February where he was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment after officers were able to prove that he had removed a condom during sex without consent.

He was convicted at the same court on 18 October 2024 for all offences in a unanimous verdict by the jury. He also pleaded guilty last year to harassment against the same victim.

The court heard that on 15 July 2021 the 32-year-old survivor was contacted by the defendant on a dating app. He posed as a man called "Jay Lincoln" and met the victim at her home address in Islington.

The defendant then proceeded to rape the victim who specifically requested the defendant wear a condom, despite him repeatedly requesting not to wear one.

As he left the address he stated that he was HIV-positive which was later revealed to be a lie. The victim reported the incident to the Met who launched an immediate investigation and supported the victim.

Detectives from the Public Protection Serious Sexual Offences Team were able to identify Rafter through a distinctive tattoo on his arm recorded by police on a previous arrest which matched photos he had sent to the victim in this case.

Enquiries showed the level of pre-



planning that Rafter had done to commit his offences, creating an alias, setting up a false address and bank statement and using a disposable 'pre-paid' mobile phone in a bid to avoid police detection.

His false driving licence included a pseudonym and he claimed to live in a prosperous area of London in a multi-million pound house. In reality he was employed as an HGV driver and lived in a flat.

The court also heard that the defendant was previously known for sexual predatory behaviour towards women.

In February 2022 he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment after pleading guilty to malicious communications and threats to disclose a private image relating to two separate victims.

In those cases he also posed online using an alias, met the women and subsequently became abusive and threatening towards both women via text messages as well as demanding explicit images.

After appearing in court on Friday, 28

February, Rafter was sentenced to 14 years in prison. He was ordered to serve two thirds of his sentence before being eligible for parole.

Detective Chief Inspector Paul Ridley said: "I would like to commend this survivor for the bravery she demonstrated in this case and the evidence she provided.

"The robust sentence delivered by the judge clearly demonstrates the significant dangerousness that this man poses to women.

"The investigation team carried out an expansive, diligent and relentless investigation to identify Rafter and secured the evidence to bring him to justice ensuring that the victim was supported throughout.

"Rafter is a predatory offender who exploited social media to facilitate his violent and abusive behaviour. He devised a fictitious profile posing as a wealthy businessman with multiple businesses around the world in a calculated campaign to violate, threaten and harm the women he met."

The Met is putting extra people into specialist Public Protection teams to prioritise this critical work and target offenders, with officers and staff working more closely with partners across London to protect victim survivors and bring offenders to justice.

Police are aiming to do much more to identify and tackle the most dangerous and prolific perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls, identifying high risk and high harm locations, and making better use of police powers to protect women and girls from perpetrators.

# Russia applauds Trump for not hitting 'scumbag' Zelenskyy

By Dave Oludare Oso



Russia has praised United States President, Donald Trump, after his Friday meeting with Ukraine President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Washington.

Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova after the parley noted that Trump showed "restraint" by not hitting Zelenskyy during their shouting match in the White House.

NEW DAILY PRIME had earlier reported that President Donald Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy openly argued in the White House on Friday, February 28, as they clashed on the need for compromising with what the Ukrainian president called Russia's "killer" leader.

Trump berated Zelenskyy as they sat in the Oval Office, telling him to be more "thankful" and saying, "You're in no position to dictate what we're going to feel."

And he told the Ukrainian president that he either "make a deal" with Russia "or we're out."

Speaking on the clash between the two leaders, Zakharova wrote on Telegram on Saturday, "I think Zelenskyy's biggest lie of all his lies was his assertion in the White House that the Kyiv regime in 2022 was alone, without support."

She added, "How Trump and Vance held back from hitting that scumbag is a miracle of restraint," she said.

Also on the visit, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who

is now deputy head of Russia's Security Council, described Zelenskyy as "insolent pig" who had received "a proper slapdown in the Oval Office."

Kirill Dmitriev, head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund, called the heated confrontation between Trump and Zelenskyy "historic."

Dmitriev was one of Moscow's negotiators in the Russian-American talks held on February 18 in Saudi Arabia — the first since Russia began its Ukraine offensive in 2022.

Zelenskyy met Trump in Washington on Friday to discuss issues surrounding the peace deal that would bring the war between Ukraine and Russia to an end.

# Goalkeepers to be punished for holding ball for too long

By Dave Oludare Oso

Goalkeepers who waste time by holding on to the ball are to be penalised with the award of a corner, the law-making International Football Association Board (IFAB) has confirmed.

The new law, which will be introduced this summer, will mean goalkeepers have eight seconds to claim and redistribute the ball before they are penalised, with the referee giving a five-second countdown to warn them of incoming punishment.

This will replace the current system whereby a keeper has six seconds to move the ball on and is punished with an indirect free-kick if they do not.

“Goalkeepers holding on to the ball for too long have been a bane of many people’s lives for quite some time, so some action has been taken,” said Patrick Nelson, the chief executive of the Irish FA, who chaired Ifab’s AGM in Belfast on Saturday.

“The results of the trials have been very, very positive, so we’re going to move forward and put that into the laws of the game as soon as possible.”

Ifab is to implement the change following trials at more than 400 matches, including in the academy competition Premier League 2, after a sense the previous law was not being properly enforced.

Officials see the change as potentially revolutionary, as it will be the first time an infringement in live play will be punished by something other than a free-kick or penalty.

David Elleray, the former Premier League referee and now IFAB’s technical



director, cited Brighton’s victory at Manchester United last season as an example; whereas the United keeper held on to the ball for an average of 4.8 sec, the Brighton goalkeeper’s average was 14.8 sec.

“Good law changes are where you have a very strong deterrent which everybody implements and then the problem effectively disappears,” he said. “If it speeds up the game, if it’s more positive, it means that it could be one of those very effective deterrents.”

A new approach to time-wasting was just one of several incremental but potentially transformative developments that were announced.

Another is confirmation that trials of a new approach to offside are to continue, with the possibility that the law ends up finding an attacking player outside if any part of their torso is in line with a defending player.

Currently a player is offside if any body part that can legally score a goal is in advance of a defender. Current trials,

championed by Fifa’s chief of global development, Arsène Wenger, are flipping that approach and finding attackers outside if any part of their body is in line with a defender.

But moving the line back, to where the player’s torso is in line, is gaining favour among lawmakers, with the rationale that not only would it be a more balanced cut off point, but that the torso is easier to capture using tracking software, potentially allowing for quicker decisions.

A further change is a rule to allow referees to wear body cameras in Fifa competitions. Already successfully trialled at grassroots level in England, with the aim of pushing back against player abuse of officials, the system will be tried at the Club World Cup this summer.

The expectation is that the technology can aid not only referees but television viewers, with footage used as part of coverage to provide new angles on in-game incidents.