



A New Dawn - Kabiyesi-elect pledges unity, progress for the people of Sango Pg 14 & 15

S'Court verdict: Fubara orders LG chairmen to hand over today Pg 11



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Expert warns of rising insecurity, vandalism over Rivers FAAC suspension

IGR alone might not be enough - Expert Pg 4 & 5



Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi under fire for shutting schools over Ramadan Pg 8



Cracks as Tinubu's Lagos seen crumbling through its Assembly Pg 9 & 10



Kemi Badenoch needs to work out who her friends are Pg 23

WORLD

Pg 20

Trump names cryptocurrencies in strategic reserve, sending prices up



SPORTS

Pg 24

Fulham defeat Man Utd on penalties in FA Cup fifth-round



ENTERTAINMENT

Pg 17

I didn't know my dad was rich - DJ Cuppy



Ramadan: NAPTAN faults Bauchi, Katsina for shutting down schools

By Alade Adisa

The National Parent Teacher Association of Nigeria (NAPTAN) has criticized the decision by the Bauchi and Katsina state governments to shut down primary and secondary schools during the ongoing Ramadan fasting.

The association has called for an immediate reversal of the decision.

Speaking in an interview with New Daily Prime, NAPTAN National President, Alhaji Haruna Danjuma, described the move as unnecessary and warned that it would further set back the education system.

**“This decision is unnecessary. In the end, it will bring further setbacks to the education system. Firstly, not all pupils and students in these states are Muslims. Additionally, these are not the only states with Muslim students.

“It will disrupt the academic calendar and interfere with the curriculum. Many students in these states are currently preparing for their external



examinations, such as WASSCE, NECO, NABTEB, and others. This decision will negatively impact their preparations.

“How does it make sense for students to be asked to stay home for a month and then return only to be administered terminal examinations? These students resumed their second term barely a month ago,”** he stated.

Parents Strongly Oppose the Decision
NAPTAN emphasized that parents are strongly opposed to the school closures and urged the two state governments to reconsider their stance.

**“If the goal is to encourage

pupils and students to observe fasting, there are better ways to do so. The government can provide food items for breaking the fast or even offer financial support.

“Asking students to stay home for a month is a disservice to the education system, especially in a region where children are already being persuaded to attend school,”** Danjuma added.

It should be recalled that Bauchi State was the first to announce, a few days ago, that all public and private primary and secondary schools in the state would be closed for the duration of Ramadan.

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Expert warns of rising insecurity, vandalism over Rivers FAAC suspension

By: Helen Okechukwu and Friday Omosola

Political analyst Dr Bayo Fasanwon has expressed concerns over the Supreme Court's decision restricting the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Accountant General of the Federation, and other financial agencies from disbursing funds to the Rivers State Government.

The court directive halted the state's share of the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) funds following a statement by Accountant General Bawa Mokwa in November 2024 confirming that no allocation was made to Rivers in October due to a legal order.

This development unfolds amid the escalating conflict between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike.

Speaking exclusively to this newspaper, Mr Fasanwon cautioned that withholding the state's funds as a means of penalizing Governor Fubara could inflict severe hardship on Rivers residents.

The political science lecturer at Adekunle Ajayi University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA), Ondo State, warned that failure to resolve the situation might trigger a resurgence of criminal activities, including banditry and kidnapping.

He said: "Kidnapping and other crimes may resurface; pipeline vandalism could return if people decide to take the wrong path, and they might also attempt to sabotage



the Federal Government's (FG) revenue. The Federal Government should tread carefully because Nigeria is not fully prepared to endure another round of crisis at this time.

"If the state governor believes that political solutions may fail, then a resurgence of banditry could be the next consequence. There may be protests, depending on how much the people of Rivers love Fubara. When hunger sets in, people may return to the creeks, bombing Federal Government pipelines in an attempt to sabotage the administration."

Governance and fiscal challenges

Mr Fasanwon warned that various sectors within the state could face a breakdown, which would put significant pressure on the state's financial resources.

He emphasised that due to inadequate funding, the government might struggle to maintain public infrastructure and essential services

for residents.

At the start of the year, Rivers State Governor Fubara signed the state's N1.1 trillion budget for 2025 after it received legislative approval from the House of Assembly under Speaker Victor Oko-Jumbo.

"However, if they start looking inward, it could make life even more difficult. This is because the cost of governance may rise, prompting the state to increase taxes and take other measures to generate revenue.

"But there is another perspective to consider. If the state decides to let the federal government hold onto its funds and see how it can manage independently, it may expose the extent of corruption within the system. In reality, the little revenue the state generates might have been sufficient to meet the people's needs if not for financial mismanagement.

**Continue reading
on next page**

Cont from page 4

“So, while this situation has both advantages and disadvantages, I believe it will ultimately help the Rivers State Government and its people recognize past financial wastage and take steps to curb it. This could be a wake-up call, but at the same time, key sectors will inevitably suffer due to the lack of funds.”

The political analyst added that the non-release of funds does not mean the state is entirely cut off.

He explained, “What the federal government is saying is that unless certain conditions are met, the funds will not be released. That is the implication.

“The state may choose to comply with these conditions to access the funds, but this could further deepen divisions. If the governor is pressured into making decisions he is reluctant about, it may lead to more political manoeuvring in the future.”

Arguing that the Supreme Court’s decision has not truly resolved the issue, he stated, “We have a connection to access the funds, but once they arrive, they will likely be spent more on targeting those seen as opponents of Fubara rather than on the state’s development.

“In the end, whether the funds are disbursed or withheld, I doubt the people will benefit significantly in terms of infrastructure or quality public services.”

IGR alone might not be enough

Responding to a question about whether the state could rely solely on internally generated revenue (IGR), Mr Fasunwon

noted that, given the high cost of living in Rivers State, IGR might fall short of fully supporting the economy.

However, he emphasised that this challenge presents an opportunity for the state government to explore alternative revenue streams and reduce its dependence on FAAC allocations.

“If you examine Nigeria closely, you will realize that all states rely on federal allocations for survival. However, considering the unique economic potential of Rivers State, one could argue that it can sustain itself through internally generated revenue, which is why it has been able to generate funds at the local level.

“But not all governments may be willing to take on this challenge. In my view, it is a positive development as it would encourage strategic thinking. Every state government must develop a sustainable approach to increasing its internally generated revenue. This also raises concerns about the continuous demand for the creation of more states.

“From what we are witnessing in Rivers State, those advocating for new states should look beyond federal allocations and consider how these states would sustain themselves without relying on federal revenue,” Mr Fasunwon added.

Analytical reasoning

Furthermore, he stated that the suspension of FAAC allocations would push the state to explore innovative ways to boost its internally generated revenue.

He suggested that a thorough review of their spending patterns could help identify gaps, allowing them to curb

unnecessary expenses and cut down on waste, acknowledging that the process might be challenging.

“Remember that at a point in Lagos State, during the period of conflict between the state and the Federal Government when Tinubu was governor, allocations to local governments were withheld.

“Despite this, Lagos State managed to move forward. Similarly, the Rivers State Government can explore internal revenue sources. However, as I mentioned, the state’s high expenditure may make it difficult to generate the needed funds in critical times.”

Next steps

Although the Supreme Court’s decision is final under the Nigerian Constitution, the scholar noted that the state government still has options if it wishes to pursue justice.

He suggested that Fubara and his allies could explore legal avenues through their legal team. However, he lamented the entire situation, calling it regrettable.

“Sometimes, when political alternatives should be explored, they are not used at the right time. Once the court has delivered its judgment, those options may no longer be effective. However, we understand that Nigerian politicians are birds of a feather—they know how to joke among themselves and reconcile,” the don said.

“So, they can still find a way to reconcile, understand each other, and communicate. The political options are still available.”

SERAP urges Tinubu to halt CBN's ATM fee hike pending court verdict

By Friday Omosola

The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has called on President Bola Tinubu to instruct the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Olayemi Cardoso, to put a hold on the newly introduced Automated Teller Machine (ATM) transaction fee increase.

The group emphasised that the suspension should remain in place until the Federal High Court in Lagos delivers its ruling on the legality of the policy.

Additionally, SERAP urged the president to consult the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Lateef Fagbemi, to determine whether the CBN is legally obligated to uphold the rule of law by deferring the implementation of the fee hike while the lawsuit is ongoing.

Last month, SERAP took legal action against the CBN for failing to revoke what it described as an “illegal, unjust, and unreasonable” increase in ATM transaction charges.

This lawsuit came after the CBN announced that withdrawals from ATMs not located within a bank's branch would now attract a N100 charge per N20,000 withdrawn, while transactions at shopping malls, airports, and standalone cash points would include an additional surcharge of up to N500.

In a letter dated March 1, 2025, signed by its deputy director Kolawole Oluwadare, SERAP argued that halting the fee hike would ensure the Federal High Court has the opportunity to review the case and make a fair determination.

The organisation further stated that suspending the new charges aligns with both the Nigerian Constitution and the president's repeated commitment to



upholding the rule of law.

SERAP warned that going ahead with the ATM fee increase while the lawsuit remains unresolved would undermine the judiciary and set a dangerous precedent for disregarding legal proceedings.

The group insisted that the CBN must respect due process and put the policy on hold until the court reaches a verdict.

The letter read in part: “The CBN has the responsibilities to uphold the due process of law, protect the integrity of the judicial process, and ensure that its practices and operations do not make nonsense of the rule of law or the Court.

“The CBN has the duty to maintain the status quo as of 26 February 2025 when the court processes were duly served on it, and during the pendency of the lawsuit filed by SERAP on the ATM fee hike before the Federal High Court, Lagos.

“Once the CBN has been duly served with the court processes on the ATM fee hike, the bank cannot resort to self-help.

“The CBN is not permitted to do or take any action or omission that would overreach the public interest or foist a situation of complete helplessness or ‘fait accompli’ on the Federal High Court.

“Nigerian courts frown upon any act of self-help and are always swift in repelling such conduct by sending a strong signal that they are not being used as a mere subterfuge to tie the hands of one party while the other helps himself extra-judicially.

“Implementing the increase in ATM transaction fees while the duly served and acknowledged interlocutory application and the substantive lawsuit on the matter are pending before the court would pose a direct threat to the integrity of the country's judicial system and the rule of law.

“The credibility and relevance of the judicial system risk being undermined, potentially encouraging other ministries, departments and agencies [MDAs] to adopt dismissive attitudes toward pending cases in court.

Jonathan pays tribute to late Pa Adebajo, hails his bold legacy

By Friday Omosola

Former President Goodluck Jonathan on Sunday visited the residence of the late Afenifere leader, Pa Ayo Adebajo, to offer his condolences.

Speaking at the Lekki, Lagos home of the revered statesman, Jonathan praised Adebajo's steadfast commitment to truth and justice.

He called him a fearless advocate for national progress.

He stressed that societies can only flourish when such principles are upheld, emphasising the lasting impact of Adebajo's leadership and advocacy.

He said, "When we learned about the death of our leader I issued a statement. Some of you must have read that statement, but I said that statement in newspapers was not enough, we must find time to come and pay this condolence to the family and the leaders of Afenifere.

Goodluck Jonathan (PHOTO CREDIT: Channels Television) "Our dear leader was not the leader of our Afenifere alone, he



was a leader of this country. He was a man with enormous wisdom, courage and the willingness to do the right thing for this country.

"He believed in truth, and he believed in justice. And no nation can grow when there's no truth, when there's no justice, and those are the things he was known for. I am not surprised that he led the Afenifere very well."

Jonathan recognises Pa Adebajo's significant contributions to advancing democracy and justice in Nigeria.

Among those who visited the late Pa Adebajo's residence were Chief Bode George, former

Sierra Leonean leader Ernest Koroma, Troyka Group Chairman Ayo Shobajo, former Lagos Deputy Governor Kofowola Bucknor-Akerele, lawyer Dele Farotimi, and key figures from Afenifere.

Pa Adebajo breathed his last at home on Friday, February 14, 2025, at 96 years old.

Many prominent individuals have since honored his memory, including former Vice President Yemi Osinbajo, Labour Party's 2023 presidential contender Peter Obi, and the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Enoch Adeboye.

Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi under fire for shutting schools over Ramadan

By Adeniyi Yusuf

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Middle Belt Forum (MBF), and some Nigerians have condemned four northern governors for ordering school closures during Ramadan.

The governments of Katsina, Kebbi, and Bauchi states have directed all schools—public and private—to go on holiday for the entire month of Ramadan, during which Muslims observe strict fasting.

The governments stated that the holiday was intended to allow students, teachers, and other stakeholders to observe the holy month, which begins on Saturday, March 1, 2025.

According to Kebbi State's revised 2024/2025 academic calendar, the second term will conclude on February 28, 2025, and Ramadan will commence on March 1, 2025.

Ahmed Idris, the Chief Press Secretary to the state governor, said the state government approved the break to enable the Muslim communities in the state's educational institutions to fully engage in fasting, prayers, and other religious activities associated with Ramadan.

The Katsina State government also directed all schools in the state to shut down for Ramadan.

The Commander-General of the state's Hisbah Board, Dr. Aminu Usm, issued a statement specifically ordering private schools to close and warning against non-compliance.

The holiday directive in Bauchi State, issued by the Ministry of Education, stated that all schools operating in the state, including private and faith-based institutions, are expected to remain closed for the next 40 days.

Meanwhile, The New Daily Prime reported that data from the National Bureau of



Statistics revealed that the four states have some of the highest percentages of out-of-school children in the country.

In a statement on Sunday, CAN President, Archbishop Daniel Okoh, described the school closures as a threat to educational continuity, equity, and national unity.

He condemned the decision by the governments of Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, and Kebbi states to shut down all public and private schools to accommodate Ramadan fasting.

The association emphasized that education is a fundamental right and the foundation of societal progress, warning that prolonged school closures would disrupt academic schedules and exacerbate the already critical issue of out-of-school children in the affected states.

“Bauchi, Katsina, Kano, and Kebbi already face alarming rates of out-of-school children, averaging 44%—far above the national average. Closing schools for an extended period will only deepen this crisis and undermine efforts to ensure quality education for all,” the statement read.

“Policies affecting diverse populations—Muslims, Christians, and others—must result from inclusive dialogue. Unfortunately, that has not

happened, and such unilateral decisions erode trust and unity in our pluralistic society,” CAN stated.

Drawing comparisons with Islamic-majority nations like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, CAN pointed out that these countries do not shut down schools for the entire fasting period but instead implement adjusted schedules or flexible learning arrangements.

“If Islamic heartlands can maintain a balance between education and religious observance, Nigeria's northern states should follow suit. A five-week closure is excessive and lacks global precedent,” CAN argued.

The association urged the governors of Bauchi (Bala Mohammed), Katsina (Dikko Umar Radda), Kano (Abba Kabir Yusuf), and Kebbi (Nasir Idris) to open channels of dialogue with religious bodies, school owners, parents, and civil society to reassess the directive.

CAN further warned that it would seek legal recourse if the closures persist.

While urging Christians, Muslims, and all residents of the affected states to remain peaceful, CAN reaffirmed its commitment to promoting interfaith harmony but insisted that the rights of students and families who do not observe Ramadan must be respected.

Cracks as Tinubu's Lagos seen crumbling through its Assembly

By Friday Omosola and Damilola Olufemi

The Lagos State House of Assembly has been a hub of political activity since its inception. The once eyed Assembly by opposition with a history of conflicts and power struggles that have shaped the state's politics.

From its early days to the present, the Assembly has been a battleground for politicians seeking to assert their influence and control.

Founded in 1979, following the introduction of the presidential system of government in Nigeria, the first Assembly was dominated by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), with the party's candidate, Lateef Jakande, serving as the first Governor of Lagos State.

However, the Assembly's early years were marked by conflicts between the UPN and the opposition National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

The conflicts often boiled over into physical altercations, with lawmakers trading blows and insults on the floor of the House.

The return to democracy in 1999 after the military regime abolished the Assembly brought a new era of politics to Lagos State, with the Alliance for Democracy (AD) emerging as the dominant party.

The Alliance for Democracy (AD) candidate, Bola Tinubu, was elected



Governor of Lagos State, establishing a powerful political structure that has significantly influenced the state's governance.

However, Tinubu's dominance was not without challenges. Internal conflicts and rivalries within the AD frequently spilled into the Lagos State House of Assembly, leading to heated exchanges, verbal clashes, and accusations among lawmakers.

Following the 2007 general elections, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) emerged as the leading political force in Lagos. However, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), which maintained a strong foothold in the state, fiercely contested ACN's control. This PDP-ACN rivalry often led to political conflicts and power struggles within the Assembly, disrupting legislative activities and deepening divisions among lawmakers.



In recent years, internal party disputes and factional conflicts have continued to create instability in the Assembly. The most recent political standoff, which began on February 13, has once again resulted in bitter confrontations and public accusations, underscoring the persistent tensions shaping Lagos' political landscape.

Lagos new power tussle

The Assembly has been embroiled in a fresh controversy, with the impeachment of Speaker Mudashiru Obasa and the election of Mojisola Meranda as his successor.

However, the crisis took a new turn when Obasa refused to accept his impeachment, claiming that the process was not followed.

**Continue reading
on next page**

Cont from page 9

As the crisis deepened, the Assembly's Clerk, Olalekan Onafeko, was also caught in the crossfire. Onafeko was suspended by the Assembly's leadership, allegedly for his role in the impeachment saga. However, in a surprise move, the court ordered the reinstatement of Onafeko.

In a motion ex-parte dated 17th February, 2025 and filed 18th February, 2025 to the National Industrial Court of Nigeria, Lagos Judicial Division with Suit No NICN/LA/23/2025 the claimant/applicant, Mr. Olalekan Biliamin Onafeko, in a lawsuit through his counsel, Barrister Yusuf Temilola Nurudeen, prayed for an order of interim injunction granting status – that is, the event of Monday 13th January, 2025) in this case pending the hearing of the motion on notice for Interlocutory Injunction already filed in this suit.

The six defendants/respondents in the lawsuit include: Lagos state government, Lagos state civil service commission, Lagos state House of Assembly Service Commission, The Speaker, Lagos

state House of Assembly, Attorney General of Lagos State, and Mr. Ottun Abubakar Taiwo Babatunde as defendants 1 -6, respectively.

The order of interim injunction also include restraining the 3rd, 4th and 5th Defendants/Respondents, whether by themselves, their agents servants, privies and assigns or any means howsoever from acting or continuing to act or putting or continuing to put into effect the process of appointing the 7th Defendant/Respondent; the acting Clerk, or any other person as the substantive Clerk of the Lagos State House of Assembly pending the hearing of the motion on notice for Interlocutory Injunction already filed in this suit.

In the document shared with New Daily Prime, it further prayed for the order of interim injunction “restraining the 3rd, 4th and 5th Defendants/Respondents, whether by themselves, their agents servants, privies and assigns or any means howsoever from acting or continuing to act or

putting or continuing to put into effect the process of rectifying or passing a resolution for the appointment of the 7th Defendant/Respondent; the acting Clerk, or any other person as the substantive Clerk of the Lagos State House of Assembly pending the hearing of the motion on notice for Interlocutory Injunction already filed in this suit.”

In an order by Hon Justice M.N Esowe, ordered the reinstatement of Onafeko as Clerk of the Lagos House of Assembly.

“Both parties shall maintain the peace and status quo ante bellum until the motion on notice is heard and determined,” the verdict read.

The case is thereby adjourned to 11/3/2025 for hearing of the motion on notice before the court.

“The reinstatement of the Clerk is a welcome development, but it's also a reminder that the Assembly still has a long way to go in terms of stability and good governance,” said a source close to the Assembly.

S'Court verdict: Fubara orders LG chairmen to hand over by Monday

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Rivers State Governor, Siminalayi Fubara, has ordered the Heads of Local Government Administration (HLGA) to immediately assume control of the administration of all 23 local government areas in the state.

This directive follows the Supreme Court judgment mandating the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to withhold the state's allocations.

In a statewide broadcast on Sunday, Governor Fubara directed the outgoing local government chairmen to officially hand over to the HLGAs by Monday, March 3, 2025.

The governor said, "Furthermore, given the outlawing of caretaker arrangements in the local government system, I hereby direct the Heads of Local Government Administration to immediately take over the administration of the 23 local government councils pending the conduct of fresh elections by the Rivers State Independent Electoral Commission.

"I further direct the outgoing local government chairmen to formally hand over the levers of power to the Heads of Local Government Administration by Monday, 3rd March, 2025."

The governor stated that this action was necessary because the court had outlawed caretaker arrangements in the local government system.

The governor emphasized that while his administration disagrees with the Supreme Court's decision, it is committed to obeying the ruling as a law-abiding government.



Fubara said, "We are all aware of the recent Supreme Court judgments and pronouncements regarding aspects of the lingering political disputes in our dear State.

"Although we disagree with the judgments, we are bound to obey the orders made therein as a law-abiding government.

"Since inception, we have conducted the affairs of government within the framework of our Constitution, due process and the rule of law.

"While we are not above mistakes because we are humans, we believe that we have not, as a government, done anything deliberately to trample on the rule of law or the hallowed principles of constitutional governance.

"Accordingly, I have had a meeting with my team of lawyers, and they have assured me that the certified true copy of the judgements may be available to them by Friday, March 7, 2025.

"I assure you that upon the receipt of certified judgements, we shall study their ramifications and implement them without reservations to move the state forward."

Fubara assured the people that his government would carefully study the certified true copy of the judgment once it becomes available and take the necessary steps to implement it.

Although the governor expressed regret that the state seems to be back in trying times, he urged citizens to remain calm and continue their daily activities peacefully. He reiterated the government's commitment to advancing good governance for the welfare of the people.

He said: "Although our dear State seems to be back in trying times, I urge everyone to remain calm and peacefully go about with their legitimate daily activities as we continue to do everything in our power to advance our responsibilities to the citizens."

Women's education is essential to defeating extremism in Africa

By Abdoulie Ceesay

It has been a deadly start to the year in Nigeria, where jihadist organisation Boko Haram and other militias murdered over 220 people in January alone. Their atrocities continue more than a decade after the Chibok girls were abducted, exposing leadership and policy failures in parts of western Africa. Boko Haram's ideology — rooted in a grotesque distortion of Islam — declares education forbidden. The group targets women's empowerment through violence, knowing that education is key to a just society.

Elsewhere in the wider Muslim world, similar mistakes are being made — 1.4mn girls are currently barred from classrooms in Afghanistan, and similar restrictions are unfolding in Libya and Syria, where morality police and curriculum purges are erasing women's access to education.

As a proud African and Muslim leader, I know what's at stake. Boko Haram, besides being responsible for tens of thousands of deaths, has forced girls into marriages, and even groomed them into committing suicide attacks.

African governments like mine have promised to protect citizens from such violence. Only last summer, the African Union and the Multinational Joint Task Force worked to oust Boko Haram from the Lake Chad Basin. Yet internal corruption and fragmented responses allowed the militants to regroup and expand into Cameroon, Niger and elsewhere in western Africa. They are bolstered by global jihadist networks like al-Qaeda and Isis.

If Muslim-majority countries falter now, the consequences could be catastrophic. Africa's struggle underscores a hard truth: force alone fails. Military action can disrupt terrorist operations, but victory demands a broader strategy — peacebuilding, economic stability and theological dialogue. We must engage with those that have been radicalised:



challenging extremist narratives and offering pathways back into society. Studies show that education and faith-based support can help fighters abandon radical ideologies, cutting terrorism off at its source. Only by addressing the grievances that fuel extremism can Africa and the wider Muslim world forge a sustainable path to peace.

An example of that broader vision came to life last month in Islamabad, where Islamic scholars, political leaders and activists convened for the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities. Organised by the Muslim World League under secretary-general Sheikh Mohammad Al-Issa, the event included voices like Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai and culminated in the historic Islamabad Declaration, which reclaims Islam's core principles by declaring girls' education not just a religious obligation but a cornerstone of societal progress. More than rhetoric, it envisions unprecedented collaboration between Muslim nations, international organisations, and educational institutions to counter jihadist ideologies.

However, the Muslim world cannot fight

this battle alone. Africa's experience illustrates the cost of disunity. In Nigeria, some faith leaders preached forgiveness and reintegration, but without broad support, those efforts faltered, leading to a decade of terror and lost potential for millions of girls. Co-ordinated resolve can help stem the tide of extremism.

The battle for girls' education is a battle for dignity, opportunity and justice. An educated girl strengthens her community and contributes to her nation's growth. Denying that violates her rights and stalls societal progress.

From Nigeria to Afghanistan, the message is clear: no girl's potential should be extinguished in the shadows. The Muslim world has a chance to lead and make education a universal right rather than a privilege. But it demands more than words; it requires determined engagement from governments, faith leaders and civil society.

The writer is deputy majority leader in Gambia's National Assembly

Source: Financial Times

PANDEF faults Supreme Court over Rivers fund suspension

By Friday Omosola

The Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) has urged the Supreme Court to reconsider its recent ruling that halted the release of Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) funds to Rivers State.

PANDEF, in a statement issued by its National Publicity Secretary, Obiuwevbi Ominimini, warned that the decision could have dire consequences for the state's economic growth and residents' well-being.

PANDEF described the ruling as a major setback that disproportionately affects the people of Rivers State, who depend on these funds for essential services, infrastructure, and social programs.

“Undoubtedly, the primary casualties of this judicial restraint will be the innocent citizens of the state, for whom these funds serve as a lifeline for economic, social growth, and infrastructural development,” the statement read.

PANDEF stressed that the state, a key contributor to Nigeria's oil and gas revenue, should not be financially strangled due to ongoing political disputes.

“Withholding the state's legally entitled funds imposes unnecessary hardship on a people whose contributions have been instrumental to national economic sustenance,” the group stated, urging the judiciary to reconsider the verdict in the interest of justice, national unity, and economic stability.

The forum warned that the Supreme Court's decision could derail ongoing



peace and reconciliation initiatives in the Niger Delta, including efforts led by the Obong Victor Attah-led Peace and Reconciliation Committee.

“This ruling threatens the delicate peace-building processes we have worked tirelessly to foster in the region,” PANDEF cautioned, calling on the judiciary and political stakeholders to approach such matters with fairness and a long-term perspective.

Drawing a parallel to a similar incident during the administration of then-Governor Bola Tinubu, PANDEF recalled how the Federal Government, under President Olusegun Obasanjo, withheld local government funds from Lagos State.

“The Supreme Court ruling brings to mind the unjust withholding of Lagos State's local government funds years ago—a decision that was widely criticized.

“It is troubling that such a scenario is being repeated on an even larger scale in this era, with serious implications for peace and security in the Niger Delta,” the statement noted.

Reaffirming its commitment to justice and sustainable development, PANDEF called on the Federal Government, political leaders, and the judiciary to ensure that Rivers State is not unfairly penalized due to political disagreements.

The Supreme Court, in its ruling on Friday, barred the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the Accountant General of the Federation, and other relevant agencies from disbursing FAAC funds to Rivers State, citing the government's continued defiance of court orders.

Additionally, the apex court nullified the recently conducted local government elections in the state, declaring them invalid due to significant violations of the Electoral Act.

A New Dawn – Kabiyesi-elect pledges unity, progress for the people of Sango

By Dr. Olaoluwa Vincent Ajayi

New Daily Prime sits down with the newly selected traditional ruler of Sango, Kabiyesi, Dr. Oba Olusanjo Adebola Olurebi, to discuss his journey to the throne, the rich history of Sango, and his vision for the town's future.

Sir, may we have the pleasure of meeting you?

I am Prince (Dr.) Olusanjo Adebola Olurebi, an indigene of Abeokuta, specifically from the Owu Kingdom, and a member of the Lagbedu Ruling House. From a young age, I was raised in Sango before moving to Lagos, where my father had earlier relocated to serve as the first Paymaster of Lagos Island Local Government.

I spent most of my childhood with my grandfather and uncles in Sango, where my family, the Olurebi family, had migrated decades ago. To this day, our family compound remains in Sango. I have deep-rooted connections and an extended family presence in Sango, and I rarely stay away for long without visiting.

My educational journey began in Lagos, where I completed my primary, secondary, and university education. I attended the University of Lagos and Ogun State University. In 1986, I joined First Bank Nigeria Ltd as a Bank Clerk and worked my way up to the position of Senior Banking Officer.

In the year 2000, I relocated to the United Kingdom with my family in pursuit of further academic and professional growth. I attended several professional courses in Business



Management and Management Consultancy and also pursued a Ph.D. in Entrepreneurship. I later established my first consulting firm in the UK, focusing on helping struggling businesses recover and thrive.

In addition to my consulting work, I also owned a healthcare staffing agency that employed multiple staff members, including healthcare assistants (HCAs), support workers, administrative staff, and nurses. Furthermore, I run a charity organization that provides educational support to disadvantaged individuals in the UK.

I am blessed with a loving wife and three beautiful daughters.

Tell us about your journey to the throne

Becoming the Onisango of Sango is a responsibility I have always prepared for, though I did not anticipate it

happening so soon. My dedication to service, community development, and leadership made me realize that when the time came, I had to step up.

As Kabiyesi-Elect. What was the traditional process for selecting you as the new ruler?

There has been some curiosity about how an Egba indigene can become an Oba in Sango. Historically, Sango was predominantly inhabited by the Egba people, particularly the Owu clan. The town was once under the governance of Ota, within the Ado-Odo Local Government, and ruled by the Olota of Ota. However, as Sango grew in prominence, its leaders sought autonomy, leading to the establishment of the Onisango of Sango stool as its own traditional rulership.

**Continue reading
on next page**

Continue from page 15

The selection process begins with the people—it is initiated by the grassroots because, without their confidence and trust in both God and the chosen candidate, nothing can be done. Once selected by the people, the name is forwarded to the relevant authorities for approval and confirmation.

Following the passing of the most recent Onisango of Sango, a new selection process was conducted with great care and adherence to tradition. The first step involved eminent chiefs consulting the Ifa oracle, which plays a sacred role in Yoruba culture. Initially, I did not take the result seriously, but when another Ifa oracle from a different town confirmed the same outcome—choosing my name—I began to realize the weight of the calling.

Since my life has always been dedicated to service and the betterment of my people, I embraced the call to leadership. The chiefs then formally introduced me to the people of Sango, who overwhelmingly accepted my selection.

Following this, my name was forwarded to:

The Alake of Egbaland, who holds prescribed authority over the region, and
The Olowu of Owu, under whose jurisdiction Sango falls, as the Owu people have a dominant presence in the town.
Both revered Obas endorsed my selection, further affirming the legitimacy of my appointment.

Have all the traditional rituals been completed?

The next step in the process is to formally communicate my appointment to the Governor of Ogun State, which I believe is ongoing. I trust that our hardworking and resilient Governor, His Excellency Dapo Abiodun, will do the right thing in due course.

However, what matters most to me is that the people of Sango have accepted my leadership. I have already begun engaging with various groups within the town to understand their concerns and aspirations.

You mentioned that you have met with various groups within the town to understand their concerns and aspirations. Can you highlight some of them?

Yes, Sango faces several critical challenges, but the most pressing issues include:

1 Decline in Economic Activity – Sango was once a thriving business hub, but many businesses have relocated to other areas due to infrastructural deficiencies and a lack of support.

2 High Unemployment Rate – Many young people in Sango lack job opportunities, leading to frustration and economic stagnation.

3 Lack of Infrastructure Development – There is an urgent need for better roads, healthcare facilities, schools, and security.

To address these issues, I intend to:

Leverage my global network to attract

investors and businesses back to Sango.

Engage with government and private sector stakeholders to create employment opportunities.

Ensure infrastructural development projects that will transform Sango into a model town in Ogun State.

We must revive Sango's economy, and I am fully committed to making this happen.

I want to assure the great people of Sango that this is a new dawn. The moment my inauguration is completed, expect to see positive changes take place.

I urge everyone to come together as one—this is not just about me, but about our collective future. Together, we will build a stronger, more prosperous, and peaceful Sango.

I appreciate the overwhelming support and acceptance I have received so far, and I promise to serve with honor, integrity, and commitment.

Final Thoughts

With a clear vision for economic revitalization, infrastructure development, and youth empowerment, Kabiyesi-Elect, Prince (Dr.) Olusanjo Adebola Olurebi, is set to usher in a new era for Sango.

His leadership represents a blend of tradition and modernity, promising progress for the town and its people. The coming months will reveal how his reign transforms Sango, but one thing is certain—a new chapter has begun.

Lamborghini saga: Lots of Nigerian women are in survival mode – BBNaija Vee

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

BBNaija star Vee weighs in on the controversy involving Burna Boy and Sophia Egbueje, sparking debates on relationships, money, and transactional sex.

Recently, an audio recording surfaced online where Sophia accused Burna Boy of breaking a promise. She alleged that the singer had a one-night stand with her and failed to deliver on his commitment to buy her a Lamborghini.

Vee responded to the matter through a TikTok video, sharing her perspective on relationships and financial dependence in Nigeria. She pointed out that many Nigerian women rely on men for financial support, emphasizing that relationships in the country have become highly transactional.

“Sex has become business”

In her video, Vee addressed the leaked conversation, noting that Sophia’s expectation of receiving a Lamborghini in exchange for intimacy highlighted a deeper issue.

“She wanted to sleep with someone in return for a Lamborghini,” Vee said. “That’s fantastic.”

However, she shifted focus to the person who secretly recorded the discussion. “Who was behind the recording? Show yourself,” she demanded. “That’s the real issue here.



The person who instigated that conversation while secretly recording it is dangerous. That’s the devil’s friend.”

She argued that Sophia had already exposed her situation. “We’ve heard everything straight from the source. She spoke for herself,” Vee remarked.

“This cycle will continue”

Vee dismissed the idea that society could change this dynamic anytime soon. She said people have different opinions and moral values regarding such situations. “This is how things have always been, and this is how they will continue,” she stated. “It’s simply a matter of demand and supply.”

She criticized the normalization of transactional relationships, warning that the consequences will follow. “We have accepted this way of life, but we will pay for it later,” she said. “There’s no need to argue for or against it—it is

what it is.”

A call for reflection

The reality star acknowledged that men willing to pay for sex will always exist, just as there will always be women willing to engage in such arrangements. “This cycle will not stop,” she said.

She pointed out that financial struggles in Nigeria force many women into survival mode, pushing them to make tough choices. “It’s bringing out the worst in people,” she observed. “And it needs to be checked.”

Her remarks have sparked mixed reactions online, with some agreeing with her perspective, while others argue that personal choices should not be judged. The controversy surrounding Burna Boy and Sophia Egbueje continues to trend, fueling debates on relationships, money, and morality in Nigerian society.

I didn't know my dad was rich – DJ Cuppy

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian DJ and music star Florence Otedola, popularly known as DJ Cuppy, has spoken openly about recognizing her privileged background.

The daughter of billionaire businessman Femi Otedola admitted that, for much of her life, she did not fully understand the extent of her wealth and comfort.

Taking to social media, DJ Cuppy shared how her perspective has shifted over time. In a heartfelt post on X, she wrote,

“Growing up, I didn't fully realize just how privileged I was. I never had to worry about anything. Thank God I see it now. What felt normal to me is something someone else was praying for. Gratitude changes everything.”

Her statement resonated with many fans, sparking discussions about privilege and gratitude. Some praised her for acknowledging her fortunate circumstances, while others shared their reflections on the topic.

Luxury lifestyle in the spotlight

DJ Cuppy has often been in the spotlight for her luxurious lifestyle. From driving high-end cars to vacationing in some of the world's most exotic locations, her social media presence showcases a life of wealth and glamour. However, her latest post suggests a deeper self-awareness about the opportunities she has enjoyed.

Many social media users applauded her honesty. Some expressed appreciation for her newfound perspective, saying it showed maturity and growth. Others, however, questioned why it took her so long to realize her privilege.

One user commented,

“Some people are born into struggle,



while others are born into wealth. What matters is what you do with your privilege.”

Another added,

“It's good she realizes it now. Some never do.”

Beyond wealth: Hard work and criticism

DJ Cuppy's journey has not been without challenges. Despite her wealth, she has worked hard to establish herself as a DJ and musician. Over the years, she has faced criticism, with some accusing her of using her family's name to advance her career. However, she has consistently emphasized her dedication to her craft.

In addition to her music career, DJ Cuppy is also known for her philanthropy. She founded the Cuppy Foundation, which focuses on education and welfare for underprivileged children. Through this initiative, she has provided scholarships, medical aid, and support to those in need.

A broader conversation on privilege

Her recent statement highlights a growing awareness of the contrast between her life and the struggles faced by many Nigerians. The country continues to grapple with economic challenges, with millions living in poverty. Her words serve as a reminder of the stark differences in social and economic realities.

As discussions continue, DJ Cuppy's message encourages reflection. It reminds people to acknowledge their privileges, no matter how big or small, and to practice gratitude. In a world where social media often highlights only the glamorous side of life, her openness about self-realization stands out.

While some may argue that she should have recognised her privilege earlier, others see this as an important step toward greater awareness. Either way, DJ Cuppy's words have sparked a conversation—one that goes beyond wealth and touches on the universal lesson of gratitude.

Kcee's "Limpopo" nearly featured Beyoncé - Soso Soberekon

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Music executive Soso Soberekon revealed that Beyoncé was initially set to feature in Limpopo, Kcee's 2013 hit song, but the collaboration fell through.

Limpopo became an instant sensation when it was released, propelling Kcee to stardom. However, Soberekon recently disclosed in an interview with media personality Daddy Freeze that the song was initially planned as a collaboration between Kcee and Beyoncé.

A billionaire's bold plan

According to Soberekon, a wealthy businessman, unfamiliar with the entertainment industry, wanted to bring Beyoncé to Nigeria. He had the financial resources to make it happen but lacked the necessary connections. To navigate the process, he reached out to Soberekon and his team.

"There was a billionaire who wanted to bring Beyoncé to Nigeria," Soberekon explained. "He didn't know anything about entertainment, so he asked us to travel with him to New York. He said he was negotiating a deal for Beyoncé to record a song with Kcee."

The search for Beyoncé's contact

The team arrived in New York and immediately started searching for ways to contact her. Their journey took them to Jay-Z's nightclub, where they hoped to gather useful information. After persistent efforts, they eventually got in touch with an agent representing Beyoncé.



"The deal was that Beyoncé would come to Nigeria for a concert, a meet-and-greet, and a song collaboration with Kcee," Soberekon said. "The agent told us they would get back to us with further details."

Recording Limpopo in anticipation

Upon their return, the businessman instructed them to record a track that she could easily be added to. With high hopes, Kcee and his team proceeded to create Limpopo, envisioning it as a potential duet with the American singer.

"We recorded the song thinking Beyoncé would be on it," Soberekon admitted. "At that point, we believed it would happen. We had no idea the song would become a hit on its own."

The deal falls apart

Despite their optimism, they soon received disappointing news. The

agent eventually reached out, delivering an update that crushed their hopes.

"The agent called us and said Beyoncé would not stay in Nigeria but in Ghana instead," Soberekon revealed. "That changed everything because the original deal was for her to come to Nigeria for a show. The song feature was just an extra promise."

Limpopo becomes a hit anyway

With the deal falling apart, Kcee and his team had no choice but to release Limpopo without her. To their surprise, the song became a massive success, dominating the airwaves and solidifying Kcee's place in the Nigerian music industry.

While her collaboration never happened, Limpopo proved it didn't need an international feature to be a hit. The song stood on its own, becoming one of the biggest tracks in Nigeria's music history.

Lamborghini saga: Burna Boy took advantage of Sophia - Angela Okorie

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nollywood actress Angela Okorie has criticized Grammy-winning artist Burna Boy for allegedly failing to keep his promise to socialite Sophia Egbueje.

The singer reportedly assured Sophia that he would buy her a Lamborghini after a one-night stand but did not follow through.

A leaked audio recording recently surfaced, revealing a conversation between Sophia and a friend. In the recording, Sophia accused Burna Boy of failing to honour his promise after their alleged encounter. The revelation sparked online debates, with many questioning both parties' actions.

Angela Okorie calls out Burna Boy

Reacting to the controversy, Angela Okorie did not hold back. She condemned Burna Boy for what she described as an abuse of power and influence. In a video posted on her Instagram page, she expressed disappointment in the singer's actions.

"This is the worst thing any celebrity could do," Okorie stated. She emphasized that Burna Boy, as a public figure, has a responsibility to set a good example. According to her, many people look up to him, and his actions should reflect integrity.

"She told you her price"

Okorie further argued that Sophia had been clear about her expectations. "She told you her price," she said. "She said she is as big as a Lamborghini. If you could afford it, then you could have her. That was the



deal. But instead of keeping your word, you took advantage of her."

The actress also criticized those attacking Sophia for making such a demand. She insisted that Sophia was simply being honest about what she wanted. "People are blaming her, but she was upfront. If you didn't agree with it, you could have walked away," Okorie added.

Celebrities must lead by example

Okorie called on celebrities to use their influence responsibly. "God made you a superstar for a reason," she said, directing her words at Burna Boy. "You are supposed to help those who can't speak for themselves. Instead, you chose to exploit someone."

Her remarks have sparked mixed reactions. Some fans supported her stance, agreeing that Burna Boy

should have kept his word. Others, however, argued that the entire situation was problematic, questioning why material rewards should be part of personal relationships.

Burna Boy remains silent

As the debate continues, Burna Boy has yet to respond to the allegations. His silence has only fueled more speculation. Meanwhile, Sophia's claims remain a trending topic, with social media users taking sides in the controversy.

This incident has once again highlighted the blurred lines between personal choices, celebrity culture, and public responsibility. Whether Burna Boy will address the accusations remains uncertain. For now, the public watches and waits.

Trump names cryptocurrencies in strategic reserve, sending prices up

By Oluwatosin Ologun

U.S. President, Donald Trump on Sunday named five cryptocurrencies under consideration for a new US “strategic reserve,” sending their values skyrocketing and partly reversing a recent slump.

In a post to his Truth Social network, the US president said a working group he set up shortly after taking office is moving forward with the reserve, which will include three smaller cryptocurrencies: XRP, Solana, and Cardano.

The value of all three digital currencies shot up on the news, with XRP trading up around 34 percent at 1:00 pm local time in Washington (1800 GMT). Solana gained around 22 percent and Cardano rose more than 63 percent.

A few minutes later, Trump posted again, noting that other valuable cryptocurrencies including bitcoin and ether would be at “the heart of the Reserve,” causing the price of the two major digital currencies to rise more than 10 percent and 12 percent respectively.

Trump’s posts helped spur a broad rally among cryptocurrencies, which had plummeted in recent days as Trump’s tariff threats and new scandals affecting the sector shook investor confidence in the highly volatile assets.



Sunday’s posts are not the first time that Trump and those in his orbit have weighed in on the crypto sector.

Both Trump and his wife Melania recently launched their own branded meme coins, sparking accusations that they were seeking to make money from his political success.

And the billionaire chief executive Elon Musk — a close political ally whom Trump has tasked with leading a government efficiency drive — has frequently promoted cryptocurrencies on his own social media network, X

XRP is cryptocurrency company Ripple Labs’ token. Ripple backed a so-called super PAC to influence congressional elections in November in favor of the crypto industry, Reuters reported.

"This move signals a shift toward active participation in the crypto economy by the U.S. government," said Federico Brokate, head of U.S. business at 21Shares, a digital assets investment management firm. "It has the potential to accelerate institutional adoption, provide greater regulatory clarity, and strengthen the U.S.’s leadership in digital asset innovation."

James Butterfill, head of research at asset manager CoinShares, said he was surprised to see digital assets other than bitcoin included in the reserve.

"Unlike bitcoin...these assets are more akin to tech investments," Butterfill said. "The announcement suggests a more patriotic stance toward the broader crypto technology space, with little regard for the fundamental qualities of these assets."

European leaders gather in London as pressure mounts on Kyiv to consider Trump's proposal

By New Daily Prime

European leaders, led by UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, have agreed to work with Ukraine on a plan to end the war. Starmer confirmed that the UK, France, and possibly other allies will collaborate with Kyiv on a roadmap for peace, which will then be presented to the United States.

"I think we've taken a step in the right direction," Starmer told Laura Kuenssberg on the BBC. "We must find a way to work together because, after three years of bloody conflict, the focus must now be on securing a lasting peace."

"The United Kingdom, along with France and possibly one or two others, will work with Ukraine on a plan to stop the fighting, and then we'll discuss that plan with the United States," he added.

London Summit Focuses on Ukraine's Defense and Peace Efforts

The London summit has brought together representatives from France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Türkiye, NATO, and the European Union. The key discussions center on:

- Continued military aid to Ukraine.
- Strengthening sanctions on Russia to curb further aggression.
- Developing a strategy for a long-term peace agreement to safeguard Ukraine against future threats from Moscow.
- Tensions with Washington

The summit follows a tense Oval Office exchange between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Donald Trump, where Vice President JD Vance accused Zelenskyy of rejecting a proposed ceasefire and failing to show gratitude for American assistance. Trump warned that Ukraine's resistance to compromise could escalate the war into a global conflict.

Despite the heated exchange, Zelenskyy reaffirmed Ukraine's commitment to



diplomacy.

"Despite tough discussions, we remain strategic partners," Zelenskyy posted on X after his meeting with Trump. "Honesty and directness are essential to understanding our shared goals."

Concerns Over Trump's Stance on Russia
Trump's direct negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, bypassing traditional diplomatic channels, have alarmed Kyiv and European leaders. Many fear that Washington may concede too much to Moscow, undermining Ukraine's defense efforts.

Last week, Trump claimed "significant progress" toward a peace deal in Ukraine, though specific details remain undisclosed. As Zelenskyy departed Washington, Trump stated on social media that Ukraine was not ready for peace as long as the U.S. was involved.

European Leaders Reaffirm Support for Ukraine

In response to these developments, European leaders have rallied behind Ukraine, making strong declarations of support:

Friedrich Merz, expected to be Germany's next chancellor, wrote on X: "We stand

with Ukraine in both good and testing times. We must never confuse the aggressor and the victim in this terrible war."

Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock accused Trump of "reversing the roles of victim and aggressor," warning that his approach could mark the beginning of a "new age of infamy".

French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated: "Russia is the aggressor in this war, and Ukrainians are the victims."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk reassured Ukraine on X, stating: "Dear Ukrainian friends, you are not alone."

However, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has called on European Council President António Costa to begin peace negotiations with Russia. Meanwhile, Sir Keir Starmer has urged Zelenskyy to return to Washington and repair ties with Trump following their heated confrontation in the Oval Office.

As Kyiv faces mounting diplomatic pressure, the London summit is expected to reinforce Europe's long-term commitment to Ukraine's defense while advocating for a united stance against Russian aggression. The outcome of these discussions will significantly influence the next phase of Western engagement in the war and the path toward a potential peace agreement.

China's partnership with Russia needs to have limits

By Yu Jie

While Europe remains outraged by the Trump administration's controversial groundwork on ending the war in Ukraine, some officials have questioned whether China might be able to step up its peace brokering efforts. Beijing's continued approach of cool distance makes it a reticent yet critical potential player in negotiating a ceasefire — but the situation is complex.

As has been shown by its interventions on the Israel-Hamas conflict, China is keen to raise its stature as a global peacemaker. However, in the case of Ukraine, it seems to want to do this without burdening itself with the substantive responsibility of providing security guarantees.

China enjoys a close relationship with Russia. Weeks prior to Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the two reaffirmed the "no limits" partnership first mentioned by Beijing in 2021. Nato considers China a "decisive enabler" of the Kremlin's war effort, with Beijing providing critical support to Moscow's defence industrial base.

This strong inclination to sustain ties with Russia is driven by geographic and strategic necessity. The two countries share a border of 4,300km, almost equivalent to the length of Europe. Beijing's long rivalry with the US and the American-led world order, heightened by the first Trump administration's pursuit of a China containment strategy, colours its view of its bond with Moscow. In recent years the two have been able to demonstrate great-power status together on the world stage through joint military exercises and co-ordination within multilateral organisations,



counterbalancing US dominance.

Yet, in light of Trump's sudden U-turn on policy towards Ukraine, Beijing is now worried about a rapid US-Russia rapprochement. While nominally supportive of the "consensus" between Washington and Moscow, closer ties between the two would make Beijing uncomfortable after investing so much both in trade expansion and diplomatic capital in its bilateral relations with Russia. As Moscow's top trading partner, China wields substantial economic leverage over the Kremlin. It could use this to encourage Russia to accept a ceasefire. Having a voice — albeit a smaller one — in a potential ceasefire deal would not run against China's interests. It might actually present a confluence of interests with the US.

Beijing's reluctance to be an active peace broker is also due to its trust deficit with European political elites. Chinese leaders' several recent trips to Europe were intended to prevent further damage to ties with the continent since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Yet Beijing's

efforts did not go down well with the European audience, most of whom perceive Russia and its allies in black and white terms. The more Beijing tries to explain its relationship with Moscow, it seems, the deeper the mistrust Europe feels towards it. The EU's talk of "de-risking" in economic terms has added further strains to its relations with Beijing.

China also has to be cautious not to overtly exploit the current breakdown of the transatlantic alliance. Doing so might rattle Trump to press for an even more stringent China containment strategy globally.

Beijing's limited engagements in brokering peace might not meet expectations from Europe and Ukraine, but it has never been China's real intention to get involved in the back and forth of negotiations. It can continue to 'make the right noises' while navigating a conflicting set of interests, simultaneously responding to Trump's unorthodox diplomatic strategy coupled with his thinly veiled threats of economic warfare against China.

Kemi Badenoch needs to work out who her friends are

By Stephen Bush

She attacks those whose aims she shares in a failed attempt to gain the support of those who oppose her

What is Kemi Badenoch's problem with 1995, anyway? During a recent speech on foreign policy, the Conservative leader attacked "the inevitable pearl clutching of those who wish it was still 1995". The remark was unusual for many reasons, not least because what followed was so banal and incoherent that it is difficult to imagine who, exactly, might need to clutch their pearls in response, other than opponents of cliché. (Were political speeches better in 1995?)

More important is that anyone with half a brain should, as far as foreign policy is concerned, wish it were still 1995. This, after all, was an era in which a democratic US, broadly at ease with itself, was the world's unchallenged superpower and the Soviet Union had been defeated in the cold war. Quite why people who yearn for those geopolitical conditions should be the subject of pre-emptive verbal assault from the leader of the UK Conservative party is unclear.

Domestically, too, it is not obvious why people who yearn for 1995 should be considered beyond the pale. By the mid-1990s the UK had embarked upon what was set to be its longest period of consecutive growth. At home and abroad, the country was benefiting from decisions taken by conservatives. For Badenoch to talk of wishing for 1995 as if it were automatically self-discrediting makes one wonder what, exactly, she thinks Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were fighting for.



Still, half-formed thoughts that don't bear up under scrutiny are becoming a staple of Badenoch's speeches. So too, is a lack of clarity about in whose interests she seeks to govern. Her leadership has been long on lists of enemies, ranging at this point from people who work in human resources to people who quite liked the US's unipolar moment to basically everyone.

Another recurring theme is that she doesn't seem to know who her friends are. In the same speech this week she claimed the title of "conservative realist" — a term first popularised by US Republican Senator Rand Paul when setting out foreign policy. Yet Paul's policies, whatever you think of them, are light years away from the ones that Badenoch presents. He opposed the US contribution to the defence of Ukraine and advocates for precisely the retreat from American leadership that Badenoch's party opposes. Badenoch has much more in common with the positions taken by Sir Keir Starmer, whom she labels a "progressive internationalist".

Earlier in February, Badenoch delivered a speech at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship, a gathering of conservative politicians, businesspeople and commentators hailed as the antithesis of Davos. The remedies she offered there, talking up the importance of free trade and free markets, sounded rather like the list of policies that helped to create the world as it was in 1995. In fact, they might have won more applause at Davos.

Speaking to a hostile crowd is part of leadership, but Badenoch doesn't appear to realise when that is what she is doing. Trying to convert your opponents is a good thing, but it's important to be able to differentiate heretic from choirboy.

Unsurprisingly, Badenoch's tour of "alternative media" largely seems to have succeeded in driving critical comments about her and the Conservatives on YouTube. She recently appeared on a podcast whose host would later question whether or not her predecessor Rishi Sunak is truly English, a position that is confined to a fringe of British politicians.

Fulham defeat Man Utd on penalties in FA Cup fifth-round

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Manchester United are out of the FA Cup after a penalty shootout defeat to Fulham at Old Trafford.

The two sides could not be separated after regular time and extra time in a game that offered little in quality from either team – but it's Marco Silva's side who will advance to the quarter-finals after the holders were beaten 4-3 on penalties.

Ruben Amorim's side trailed to Calvin Bassey's first-half opener at Old Trafford before Bruno Fernandes equalised to force a 1-1 draw after extra time.

Fulham keeper Bernd Leno was the hero in the shoot-out as he saved from Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee, with the visitors converting all four of their kicks.

Booed off at half-time, it was another wretched result for United in a season that sees them languishing in 14th place in the Premier League.

The 13-time FA Cup winners had reached the final for the last two seasons and beat Manchester City



to lift the trophy last year.

But there will be no trip to Wembley this season for United, who have only the Europa League left as a silverware chance.

It has been another testing week at Old Trafford, with 200 job cuts announced and United struggling to draw with Everton and barely beat lowly Ipswich.

Amorim admitted that life is “hard” just now for United and this was the latest hammer blow to the under-fire Portuguese coach, who only arrived in November to replace the sacked Erik ten Hag.

United head to Real Sociedad for the Europa League last 16 first leg on Thursday before hosting Arsenal in the Premier League.

It didn't take long for Amorim to realise United were in for another dispiriting afternoon.

Rasmus Hojlund fired over from an acute angle after Christian Eriksen's cross found the much-maligned United striker, whose goalless drought has now reached 18 games.

Eriksen's curler was fisted away by Leno, but that did little to satisfy fans frustrated by years of underachievement.