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Senate suspension: FG intervenes, groups root for Natasha, Akpabio

By Dave Oludare Oso

The Federal Government has promised to wade into the leadership problem rocking the Senate following the suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, the member representing Kogi Central Senatorial District.

The Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs Iman Suleiman-Ibrahim, who disclosed the government's intention, told State House correspondents during the Meet-the-Press Programme at the Presidential Villa, Abuja on Friday, "We're engaging all the stakeholders to ensure that they temper justice with mercy."

The minister spoke a day after the 10th Senate suspended Natasha for six months.

The Kogi lawmaker had submitted a petition alleging she had been sexually harassed by the Senate President, Godswill Akpabio.

Senator Akpoti-Uduaghan first raised the alarm on February 28.

However, the Senate dismissed her petition on procedural grounds as the ethics committee recommended her suspension, saying she had brought ridicule to the upper chamber.

Reacting to the development, the women affairs minister said, "It's an unfortunate incident that should not happen. In the last Assembly, we had nine senators who were women.

"We don't want to lose any woman member in the Senate or decrease in number.

"We're going to be brokering peace. We'll engage all the stakeholders to ensure that they temper justice with mercy."

Suleiman-Ibrahim said she was emboldened by the Senate President's openness to talk.

"I was at the National Assembly



yesterday, at the Senate where we marked the International Women's Day.

"The last thing the Senate president said was that 'we're open to broker peace.'

"So, we're going to be the intermediary between the two parties to see that we broker peace; for peace to reign, and then we'll continue to sensitise everyone so that we learn to work better together as women and men."

WIMBIZ, others berate Senate, threaten protest

This comes as some women groups on Friday rejected the suspension of Natasha, describing it as an assault on democracy and a deliberate attempt to silence women in leadership.

The groups include a coalition under the Coalition for Women in Governance and the Women in Management, Business, and Public Service.

The coalition threatened to mobilise women for a massive protest if the decision was not reversed.

Addressing journalists in Abuja on Friday, one of the coalition leaders, Zainab Mohammed, condemned the Senate's action, calling it a blatant disregard for the rule of law.

She noted that the suspension defied a court order explicitly halting any disciplinary action against Natasha, making the move illegal and a direct attack on democratic principles.

Mohammed said, "The Senate's decision is not just an injustice against one woman; it is an attack on the democratic rights of the people she represents. This is a dangerous precedent that sends a message to every Nigerian who dares to challenge power."

She demanded the immediate reinstatement of Natasha and called on the Senate to respect judicial authority by reversing its decision.

"The true test of democracy is not in words but in action. We will not stand by while democracy is undermined. We will take to the streets if necessary to ensure justice prevails," she added.

The President and Founder of the Pan African Young Women Development Initiative, Dr Jophia Gupar, stated that the issue transcended Natasha as an individual and affected all women.

She criticised the three female senators for failing to support Natasha.

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9X3	166,223.50
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8X3	106,934.50
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Tinubu rejects N942bn census proposal, seeks cost-cutting measures

By: Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

President Bola Tinubu has rejected a N942 billion proposal from the National Population Commission (NPC) for the upcoming national housing and population census, insisting that significant cost-cutting measures be implemented.

At a meeting with NPC officials at the State House, Tinubu stressed the need for the census to be conducted within the government's current financial limitations.

He proposed the deployment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members to reduce personnel costs, while promising to set up a committee to reassess the census budget.

The President expressed support for the census but noted that the proposed cost of nearly N1 trillion was excessive.

He emphasised that the government must ensure that the financial burden was reduced before proceeding with any plans.

“We must ascertain who we are, how many we are, and how to manage our data. Without an accurate census, we can't successfully plan for



employment, agriculture, and food sovereignty,” Tinubu said, stressing the importance of reliable data for national planning.

The President also highlighted the need for biometric data capture, including facial and voice recognition, to enhance the accuracy and transparency of the census process.

He further noted that government incentives, such as fertiliser distribution, could benefit from more precise demographic data.

The census, which has faced delays since its last occurrence in 2006, continues to be fraught with logistical and funding

challenges, including insecurity in certain regions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tinubu's administration has yet to finalise plans, with questions remaining over the timing, methodology, and inclusion of displaced populations.

The Minister of Budget and Economic Planning, Sen. Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, indicated that census data would be crucial for future planning and resource distribution.

However, it remains unclear when the census will proceed, with ongoing discussions about the necessary resources and support.

Atiku, Obi rally support for Natasha on Int'l women's day as advocacy groups seek justice

By Adeniyu Yusuf

Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar and Labour Party Presidential candidate Peter Obi have voiced their support for Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan as part of the celebration of International Women's Day 2025.

Also, some women groups have called for justice for the embattled senator.

Akpoti-Uduaghan had formally submitted a sexual harassment petition against Senate President Akpabio. The petition was presented on the floor of the Senate after the upper legislative chamber resumed plenary.

In response, Akpabio denied the allegations, asserting that he had not harassed Akpoti-Uduaghan or any other female senator. He urged Nigerians to refrain from making premature judgements.

The controversy deepened when the Upper Chamber suspended Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan for six months for a total violation of the Senate Standing Rules. However, many Nigerians, including the opposition party, have condemned her suspension

Speaking on this occasion, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar released a statement advocating for women's rights, emphasising the need for greater empowerment and inclusion of women in governance.

Atiku shared this in a statement on X.com on Saturday as he celebrated International Women's Day.

Atiku stated, "On this special occasion of International Women's Day, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the resilient, hardworking, and courageous women of Nigeria.



The former vice president voiced concern over the persistent suppression of women's voices in leadership positions in Nigeria, highlighting the recent suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan as a notable example.

Atiku state, "It is deeply concerning that in a democratic society, attempts are still being made to silence the voices of women in leadership. The recent suspension of Senator #NatashaAkpoti is an unfortunate example of such suppression, which undermines the principles of fairness, representation, and gender inclusivity.

"Women must be encouraged and empowered to participate fully in governance, not stifled when they dare to lead."

He stressed saying, "A nation can only progress when its women are given the space and opportunity to thrive."

In his response, the former governor of Anambra State painted a stark picture of the state of women's rights in Nigeria, highlighting how women, despite their immense resilience, continue to be trapped in cycles of poverty.

In his statement, Obi highlighted the

underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, describing the political system as a "brutal reality for women" which not only resists their inclusion but actively works to push them out.

"Even for the few women who break through these systemic barriers and secure positions of power, the challenges are relentless," he wrote.

"Senator Irete Kingibe and Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan are just two examples of women who, despite their electoral victories, continue to face the harshest forms of discrimination and hostility in our public space," he added.

However, in an interview with The New Daily Prime, the Convener and Director-General of Ojo Women Action for Political Actualization, Barrister Oluyomi Coker condemned totally the process of the suspension of Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan by the senate describing it as a shameful shenanigan.

She said, "Where an accused person is allowed to rule over a matter is been accused of where is this done? Where two hefty men were assigned to command a female senator out of the hallow chamber?"

WISH GRANTED: Nnamdi Kanu's case reassigned to another judge

By Dave Oludare Oso

The case of Nnamdi Kanu, detained leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has been reassigned to another judge.

The Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Justice John Tsoho effected the reassigning following the recusal of the Judge that was conducting it.

Confirming the reassigning in a release on Saturday, Nnamdi Kanu's lead lawyer, Aloy Ejimakor Ejimakor disclosed that Kanu was ready to face his trial because he was convinced of his innocence.

Ejimakor, speaking for Kanu's legal team, said, "Yesterday, before the legal team conducted our routine visitation to Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, we received two separate official letters regarding his case. The letters are momentous and somewhat pyrrhic.

"One letter was from the Honourable Chief Justice of Nigeria, responding to a recent letter we had written to her, seeking her prompt administrative intervention (as the administrative head of Nigerian judiciary) on the matter of a proper and lawful reassignment of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's case, following the recusal



of the Judge that was conducting it.

"The other letter was from the Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, informing us that the case has been reassigned to another Judge of the Federal High Court.

"Consequent upon these latest developments, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu instructed the legal team to publicly convey his sincere gratitude to the Chief Justice of Nigeria for her sound administrative discretions and the despatch with which she responded to our request.

"He also expressed his profound appreciation to members of the general public who publicly expressed their support to our righteous demands that Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's case be reassigned to another Judge, as the law demands.

"To be sure, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu has always been ready to take his trial because he is firmly convinced of his innocence. But the perverse events of the past six months (from September 2024, when the recusal happened) posed portent dangers to his constitutional rights, particularly his right to fair and speedy hearing. It was in view of these untoward developments that we were propelled to resort to taking extraordinary measures to ensure that his case is properly reassigned and conducted in accordance with the law.

"So, now that the first steps have been taken by the authorities to do the lawful thing, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his legal team shall take stock and hanker down to the zealous preparation of his defence."

Opposition senators pay consolatory visit to embattled Natasha

By Dave Oludare Oso

Senators from opposition political parties on Friday visited senator representing Kogi central, Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, who was recently suspended at her home.

A former governor of Bayelsa State, Seriake Dickson led the delegation.

Dickson, a member of the senate's ethics and privileges committee that recommended Akpoti-Uduaghan's suspension, shared a photo of the visit on his social media pages.

He said his engagement with the tax reform bills kept him away from senate proceedings on the day of Akpoti-Uduaghan's suspension.

The former governor said, "The public may recall that, for the past three days, I was attending the three-day workshop on the Tax Reform Bills which started on Wednesday 5th of March and ended this evening, Friday 7th of March.

"This is why I was not available yesterday to sit as a member of the Committee on Ethics, Code of Conduct, Privileges and Public Petitions in respect of the issues concerning our colleague, Distinguished Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan's suspension, having been assured by the Committee Chairman that the hearing would hold on Wednesday the 11th of March for which notices



had already been issued. I was not notified of the emergency seating yesterday.

"This evening, after concluding the retreat, I led a delegation of some senators of opposition parties on a visit to our colleague Senator Natasha and met with her and her husband at their home."

Dickson said as humans, senators have their low and high moments "and it is a tradition for Senators to support each other during these moments.

"We offered words of encouragement, prayers and advice on a quick resolution of the issues surrounding her suspension."

The PDP senator added, "Having heard more from her and her husband for the first time, I will discuss with other colleagues on how to intervene

and engage with the leadership of the senate to resolve the issues as soon as possible."

Akpoti-Uduaghan was suspended on Thursday for six months after she refused her new seat in the upper legislative chamber.

The dispute escalated into allegations of sexual harassment by the Kogi senator against Senate President Godswill Akpabio.

Her suspension has sparked widespread debate and criticisms, particularly from women's rights groups and civil society organisations.

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has condemned Akpoti-Uduaghan's suspension, saying the move reeks of a grand cover-up attempt from Akpabio.

International Women's Day: Sanwo-Olu pledges more empowerment for women

By Friday Omosola

Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, has reaffirmed his administration's commitment to empowering women and promoting inclusiveness as part of efforts to achieve gender equality and sustainable development in the state.

Speaking yesterday at the 2025 International Women's Day (IWD) celebration, themed 'Accelerate Action', at the Mobolaji Johnson Arena, Onikan, Lagos, the governor emphasised the need for bold, decisive steps beyond mere rhetoric in advancing women's rights.

Sanwo-Olu highlighted that the event coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark global framework for promoting gender equality.

He stressed that Lagos State is actively translating this vision into reality through deliberate policies aimed at bridging the gender gap across various sectors.

"As a government, we are committed to fostering an inclusive society where women are seen, heard, and empowered.

:Through initiatives like He for She, we are creating a platform for gender inclusivity, ensuring that women thrive in leadership, business, and governance," the governor stated.

Governor Sanwo-Olu outlined several interventions designed to uplift women in Lagos, including tuition-free training in 19 Skills Acquisition Centers and the Women Development Centre.

He noted that these programs equip women with essential skills for self-sufficiency and economic participation.

Additionally, the state government has introduced measures to protect women



from gender-based violence while expanding their access to credit facilities and entrepreneurial support.

"Women are key drivers of economic growth and innovation. By investing in their development, we are laying the foundation for a more prosperous and equitable society," he said.

As part of efforts to support women and promote sustainable living, the Governor announced the distribution of thousands of climate-friendly and eco-efficient stoves to women in Lagos.

The initiative, set to commence at the local government level on Monday, aligns with the state's commitment to environmental sustainability.

Sanwo-Olu also urged women to prioritize their mental health, acknowledging the challenges they face in balancing multiple responsibilities.

In a lecture at the event, Professor Olurotimi Coker, a Consultant Psychiatrist at Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), stressed the importance of mental well-being for women.

He recommended practical stress management techniques, such as dancing, laughing, and journaling, to help women cope with societal pressures.

The governor praised his wife, Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, for her tireless advocacy in maternal and child healthcare, noting that her initiatives have amplified the voices of women in Lagos.

He also acknowledged the support of Deputy Governor Obafemi Hamzat, his wife, Oluremi Hamzat, and the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, Bolaji Cecilia Dada.

Speaking earlier, Mrs Sanwo-Olu reiterated the administration's commitment to strengthening policies that ensure equal opportunities for women in governance and business.

Bolaji Dada, in her welcome address, commended the Lagos State government for its numerous initiatives that promote financial independence for women.

She also announced that the Lagos State Executive Council has approved the domestication of the Economic Empowerment Policy in higher institutions across the state.

PDP forms caretaker committee in south-south, challenges Wike's leadership

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleyei

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has announced the formation of a caretaker committee to manage its affairs in the South-South zone, challenging the leadership of the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike.

In a statement issued on Friday, March 7, PDP National Publicity Secretary, Debo Ologunagba, explained that the decision was made by the National Working Committee (NWC) to prevent a leadership vacuum in the zone, which would occur after the expiration of the current zonal executive's tenure on March 9, 2025.

The move follows a legal setback in the Rivers State High Court, which had restrained the PDP and the South-South National Vice Chairman, Dan Orbih, from holding a zonal congress.

The case, filed by Rivers State PDP members, Tonu Ejiogu and Field Nkor, sought to prevent the congress from taking place.

Despite the court's ruling, the PDP went ahead with the congress in Calabar, Cross River State, with Wike in attendance. He supported



the congress and asserted that the South-South remained the PDP's strongest base.

Wike further stated that no other congress would be held in the region, maintaining that the congress was legally organised and reaffirming Orbih's position as National Vice Chairman.

However, the NWC, led by Acting Chairman Umar Damagum, appointed Emma Ogidi as the Chairman of the South-South Zonal Caretaker Committee, overriding Wike's position.

The new committee will oversee the party's activities in the zone for a period of three months, or until a new zonal executive is elected, in accordance with the party's constitution.

Along with Ogidi, the PDP appointed Chief Damiete Herbert-Miller as Secretary and several other members, including Nicholas Ayuwa, Godwin Akpan Udonta, Bekewei Ashanti, Idehen Ebomoyim, and Dame Vivian Ahanmisi.

In the statement, the PDP said: "The NWC's decision is aimed at avoiding any vacuum and ensuring the smooth running of the party's affairs in the South-South Zone after the expiration of the current Zonal Executive's tenure."

The developments have further heightened tensions within the PDP, especially in the South-South region, as both Wike and the NWC appear to be on a collision course over control of the party's leadership in the zone.

We know nothing about N700bn fraud allegation against Udom – Gov Eno

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State has dissociated the state government from the ₦700 billion fraud allegation leveled against his predecessor, Udom Emmanuel by the Network against Corruption and Trafficking.

Uno said neither he nor his government has hands in the ordeal of his immediate predecessor, who is being probed by anti-graft agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Speaking at a town hall meeting in the Abak area of the state on Saturday, the governor said, “I don’t know where they get those figures from because it can’t be from Akwa Ibom State; it can’t be from us – we don’t have such figures.”

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governor condemned what he described as a vilification of the past governors of the oil-rich South-South state since the return to democracy in 1999.

Eno said, “I begin to feel that how we treat our leaders after they have put in all their efforts to serve can be very discouraging.

“We have done this consistently from Obong Attah, even the distinguished Senate President (Godswill Akpabio), we also vilified him; we went to EFCC. Now, we are



doing it to Gov Udom Emmanuel.”

The governor said subjecting leaders to fraud probes after they have served their people well in office would discourage those currently in office from giving their best whilst in service.

He said, “I’m already expecting that it will happen to me but what this does is to discourage leadership; it discourages you from giving your best, from burning out yourself because at the end of the day, the people don’t show you that gratitude.

“When a man has served his state meritoriously like Governor Udom Emmanuel did, honestly, they should be honoured and respected.

“I don’t see a place for this kind of vilification that is going on; it is not correct – I don’t believe it should go on.

“It is not correct, it is not truthful and we need to just dismiss it with a pinch of salt.”

On Tuesday, March 4, 2025, operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) detained Emmanuel for alleged ₦700 billion fraud.

This followed the petitioner’s allegations of money laundering and diversion of funds preferred against Emmanuel, who was Akwa Ibom State governor from May 2015 to May 2023.

The petitioner alleged that Emmanuel received ₦3 trillion from the federation account in eight years but left a debt profile of ₦500 billion and unpaid ongoing projects worth ₦300 billion. He was also alleged to be unable to account for ₦700 billion.

Nigeria to showcase economic progress at France business forum – Minister

By **Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye**

Nigeria will use the upcoming France Business Forum in Paris to highlight the economic strides made under the administration of President Bola Tinubu, according to the Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris.

The Minister's remarks came on Friday during a courtesy visit by the French Ambassador to Nigeria, Marc Fonbaustier, to the Minister's office in Abuja.

Idris was presented with an invitation to the forum, which is set to take place on April 10, 2025.

In a statement signed by his media aide, Rabi Ibrahim, the Minister expressed confidence that the forum would serve as an ideal platform for showcasing the tangible progress made in Nigeria's economy under President Tinubu's leadership.

The Minister highlighted that key indicators, such as reductions in food prices and the stabilisation of the naira, reflect the success of Tinubu's reform agenda.

He further emphasised that the government is committed to consolidating these gains throughout 2025.

"We will use the platform of the France Business Forum to communicate the message of consolidation that the President is focused on this year," Idris stated.

"2025 is the year of economic and social consolidation for Nigeria, as promised by Mr. President. The economy is beginning to turn the corner. Food prices, which were once high, are now beginning to drop, and the exchange rate is showing signs of stability."



The Minister continued by underlining that despite the challenges typically associated with socio-economic reforms, Nigeria's reform process has been relatively smoother compared to other countries.

This success, he attributed to President Tinubu's pragmatic approach, focus, and determination to ensure the reforms lead to sustainable prosperity for the nation.

"Every country that has embarked on any form of social and economic reform will go through some turbulence. However, Nigeria's own reform process has been smoother than expected due to the President's focused leadership and conviction," Idris said.

Idris also praised France for being a key ally of Nigeria in its reform efforts and called for continued support from the French government.

He thanked French President Emmanuel Macron for offering a rare state visit to President Tinubu in November of the previous year, which served to strengthen bilateral relations between the two nations.

In his remarks, Ambassador Fonbaustier reiterated France's commitment to

furthering the partnership between the two countries.

He noted that the purpose of his visit was to ensure the successful implementation of agreements made during President Tinubu's state visit to France. The ambassador also highlighted France's willingness to assist Nigeria in enhancing its public communication capabilities through technology and expertise.

"We must ensure that there is practical follow-up on the state visit of President Bola Tinubu to Paris last November. The two presidents have set out an ambitious roadmap for scaling up our partnership, and communication and information are crucial in this regard," Fonbaustier said.

The French Ambassador also commended Minister Idris for his role in advancing Nigeria's public communication efforts, calling him a "game-changer" in promoting Nigeria's economic potential and investment opportunities.

He expressed confidence that the France Business Forum would serve as a significant opportunity for both Nigerian and French business leaders to engage and explore further collaboration.

IWD: Aiyedatiwa unveils grants for 1,000 low-income women

By Friday Omosola

Ondo State Governor, Lucky Aiyedatiwa, has launched the Odatiwa Women's Initiative's Grant, a financial empowerment scheme designed to support 1,000 low-income women across the state.

The initiative was unveiled on Saturday during the 2025 International Women's Day (IWD) celebration at the International Culture and Event Centre (The Dome) in Akure.

The event, themed "For All Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, and Employment," emphasised gender equality, inclusiveness, and women's empowerment.

Speaking at the event, Governor Aiyedatiwa reaffirmed his administration's commitment to prioritizing the welfare and development of women, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds.

He underscored economic empowerment as a key strategy for ensuring that women thrive in business, leadership, and other sectors.

"The economic empowerment of women is a top priority for this administration. We believe that when women are supported, families flourish, communities grow, and society progresses.

"That is why we are rolling out initiatives like this grant to provide women with the financial backing needed to expand their businesses and improve their economic status," the governor said.

He further pledged to increase women's participation in leadership and governance, stating:

"As we move forward, we will ensure that women are actively involved in decision-making at all levels. The empowerment of women is not just a goal; it is a necessity for a thriving



society."

Governor Aiyedatiwa also acknowledged the critical role women played in the political and socio-economic development of the state, particularly in his victory in the November 16, 2024, gubernatorial election.

"The new dawn we all crave is here, and I want to thank all women in Ondo State for their loyalty and commitment. We will continue to prioritize matters affecting women and the girl-child, ensuring they have opportunities to reach their full potential," he said.

He assured that his administration would continue to uphold and expand women's inclusivity in governance, citing the recent appointments made at the state and local government levels as evidence of this commitment.

The governor emphasised that achieving gender equality requires a collective effort from the government, institutions, and individuals.

He urged stakeholders to support initiatives that promote the rights and empowerment of women.

However, the Special Adviser to the governor on Women's Affairs and convener of the event, Seun Osamaye, described the initiative as a major step toward closing the gender gap in Ondo State.

"This initiative is timely and impactful, as it reflects the commitment of the Aiyedatiwa administration to ensuring that no woman is left behind.

"By empowering women, we are not just supporting individuals but also strengthening families, communities, and the entire state's economy," she stated.

More so, the former Secretary to the State Government (SSG), Princess Oladunni Odu, encouraged women to be bold, resilient, and proactive in pursuing leadership roles and economic independence.

Temiloluwa Okin, a student of Fiwasaye Girls Grammar School, Akure, also commended the governor's administration for initiatives such as free student transportation and the payment of WAEC fees, which have eased financial burdens on families.

Osun govt seeks EFCC probe into Oyetola over alleged \$20m health grant misuse

By Gbenga Oluranti Olaleye

The Osun State Government has formally petitioned the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate former governor and current Minister of Blue Economy, Gboyega Oyetola, over claims of misappropriation of a \$20 million World Bank health grant.

The petition, filed on March 7, 2025, accuses Oyetola of financial misconduct, money laundering, and violations of the Public Procurement Act (PPA) during his tenure as governor.

According to the petition, the funds were intended to improve the state's health sector, but they were allegedly diverted and misused.

The Osun government claims that Oyetola, as the chair of a special Health Intervention Committee, oversaw the allocation and disbursement of the grant intended for the renovation of 320 primary health care centres across the state.

The government's lawyer, Pelumi Olajengbesi, alleges that Oyetola's committee, which included figures such as Remi Omowaye, Dr. Rafiu Isamatu, and Bola Oyebamiji, opted to use the entire grant on renovations.

However, instead of following due process, the petition claims that the committee violated the PPA by failing to invite bids for the projects, thus sidestepping competitive tendering.

The government further argues that Oyetola awarded the contracts to close associates, cabinet members, and business partners with no prior experience in construction, leading to substandard work and misappropriation of funds.

Among the companies named in the



petition are Poshpreneurs Nig., reportedly owned by the children of the former Head of Service, Olowogboyega Oyebade, and Dotfam Multiventures Ltd., connected to the siblings of the former APC State Chairman.

Other firms linked to the scandal include The Ice Firms Nig. Ltd., allegedly owned by Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Adebayo Adeleke, and Afamoks Web International, linked to former Amotekun Field Commander, Amitolu Shittu.

The petition claims that these businesses, which had no expertise in construction, received full payments for the alleged substandard renovation works.

The result, the Osun government contends, was the misappropriation of the \$20 million grant, intended for improving health care facilities in the state.

In addition to the renovation allegations, the state government has

raised concerns of money laundering, claiming that over ₦1.5 billion was funneled through the Osun chapter of the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON) between January and October 2022.

The petition alleges that financial transactions from ALGON's account at Zenith Bank were made to a private account linked to Akeem Ibitoye, a local government employee.

According to the petition, these transfers involved daily withdrawals ranging from ₦30 million to over ₦10 million, with no clear evidence that the funds were used for any official purpose.

Former Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Adebayo Adeleke, a key figure named in the petition, has denied the allegations.

10,000 LP members decamp to ADC in Kaduna

By Dave Oludare Oso

Ten thousand Labour Party (LP) members officially dumped the party for the African Democratic Congress (ADC) in Kaduna State on Saturday.

Welcoming the decampees in Kaduna on Saturday, the state chairman of ADC, Alhaji Tijjani Mustapha, said, “To our 10,000 decampees from the Labour Party, we welcome you with open arms to the ADC family. Your decision to join us is a testament to our shared vision for a better Kaduna State and Nigeria, and we are excited to have you on board.”

He stated that their presence in the party marks a significant milestone in the journey towards creating positive democratic change in Kaduna State and the nation at large.

The state chairman of the party also



presented Alexander Adanu as the party’s candidate for the 2025 by-election for the Chikun/Kajuru Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives.

Speaking on behalf of the decampees, Alexander Igoji Adamu thanked the ADC for welcoming them with open arms, saying that their willingness to embrace

them is a testament to the party’s commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

According to him, “Our decision to join the ADC is a reflection of our shared desire for a better Nigeria, where transparency, accountability, and good governance reign supreme.”

He also expressed gratitude to the ADC for adopting him as its candidate for the House of Representatives 2025 by-election for the Chikun/Kajuru Federal Constituency.

Adamu assured, “As we embark on this new journey, let us remember that our collective goal is to build a Nigeria that works for all its citizens—a Nigeria where every individual has access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.”

Gunmen abduct PETROAN chairman, kill 2 persons in Abia

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Gunmen have abducted the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Petroleum Retailers Outlet Owners Association of Nigeria (PETROAN), Chief Obasi Lawson, in the Azumini area of Abia State.

Confirming the incident on Friday, Public Relations Officer of Abia State Police Command, Maureen Chinaka in a statement she signed, noted that the abduction took place on March 4, 2025, at approximately 7pm.

The police spokeswoman disclosed that a dark blue Sienna vehicle carrying unidentified gunmen ambushed Lawson’s convoy while he was returning to Port Harcourt through Azumini Ndoki, Ukuwa East Local Government Area.



“While the officers were repelling the attack, another set of gunmen forcefully took Chief Lawson, ordered him into their vehicle, and took him to an unknown destination, leaving his driver and one other person dead,” she said.

The state Commissioner of Police, CP Danladi Isa, who visited the scene

alongside the Deputy Commissioner of Operations and other security teams, urged residents to remain calm and vigilant.

He assured the public that intensive patrols had been activated across the area to track down the assailants.

Authorities have deployed police tactical teams to comb the region for the kidnappers, while security agencies are working to ensure the safe rescue of Chief Lawson.

The police have also called on the public to report any individuals with gunshot wounds or any sightings of the dark blue Sienna vehicle to the nearest police station or through the Command’s emergency lines.

IWD: Okpebholo approves N1bn soft loans for Edo women

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State has announced the approval of the sum of N1 billion as soft loans to market women in the state.

The governor disclosed this in Benin City at an event commemorating the 2025 International Women's Day (IWD) celebration on Saturday.

According to reports, the governor opined that the approved N1 billion soft loan for market women would help boost their businesses, improve their lives, and enhance the state's economy.

Okpebholo said the loans were in appreciation of their steadfastness, dedication, and commitment to moving the state forward.

The governor said, "Since I assumed office as Governor of Edo State, this is the first event that has been very colorful. I have been coming to the Festival Hall in Government House but have never seen a colorful event like this.

"We can actually do nothing as men without the women, and that was why when a memo came before me on soft loan approval, I quickly approved N1 billion for our market women.

"The process is already ongoing, and we are talking to the relevant financial institution for disbursement, as the money is ready and is credited only to Edo women.

"The women are truthful and straightforward. When they assure you of their backing, just relax and be



assured that you will get their backing, especially during the election. Their words are firm."

Earlier, the Coordinator, Office of the First Lady, Edo State, Edesili Anani Okpebholo, urged Edo women never to be silent, pushed back, shut down, or stifled, emphasizing that their voices must be heard because they matter.

Anani, however, urged the women to add value and be committed in all they do in their careers, communities, and other life endeavors.

She commended Governor Okpebholo for taking decisive steps to ensure that no Edo woman is left behind in the quest for equal opportunities and justice.

"We are all gathered here to celebrate the achievements of women and renew the call for transformative change. The celebration reminds us of the incredible progress made by women and the world.

"This year's theme, 'Accelerate

Action', is not a mere slogan but a call for urgent inclusion, decisive change, and collaborative efforts.

"We must come together to end the barriers that still deny thousands of women their fundamental human rights—systemic inequality, violence against women and the girl child, and economic disparity—which have held back women's progress around the globe. It is our duty to dismantle these obstacles in our environment," she added.

She posited that IWD is an annual celebration of the achievements of women across the globe, as well as an avenue to strategize on ending barriers to women's advancement.

The 2025 IWD celebration, with the theme "Accelerate Action", emphasizes the urgent need to take decisive steps towards achieving gender equality, addressing the slow pace of progress, and empowering women and girls worldwide.

Police arrest three suspected killers of LASU graduate

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Three suspects linked to the murder of a 2024 graduate of Lagos State University (LASU), Adedamola Ogunbode, have been arrested.

Disclosing the development, the Lagos State Police Command, through its spokesperson, Benjamin Hundeyin also said they are currently searching for five others in relation to the death of the ex-LASU man.

Ogunbode, LASU Political Science Education graduate, had been missing since January 16, 2025, amid speculation that his mutilated body had been found.

Among those arrested were Whepetoji Sunday, a pastor who allegedly received N70,000 from the victim's account; and Sheriff Adebayo, a church member accused of also receiving N300,000.



Hundeyin said, "Significant progress has been made in the investigation, and all efforts are being directed towards locating the body of the deceased and determining the exact cause of death."

He disclosed that the state Commissioner of Police, Olohundare Jimoh, assured the public of the command's commitment to ensuring justice.

Also, Omolara Ajisomo, who allegedly helped her children, Teniola and Olaoluwa Ajisomo escape to Cotonou, Benin Republic, after each received N300,000 from the victim's account was arrested.

Hundeyin clarified that the case, initially treated as a missing person's report, was now a suspected murder investigation.

"The command is fully committed to resolving the matter and bringing the perpetrators to justice," he said.

In response to students' concerns, he disclosed that Jimoh had directed the State Criminal Investigation Department to take over the case to ensure a more thorough probe.

Ogun govt to strengthen Amotekun Corps with 500 new recruits

By Friday Omosola

In a bid to enhance security across Ogun State, Governor Dapo Abiodun has approved the recruitment of 500 additional operatives into the Ogun State Security Network Agency, popularly known as the Amotekun Corps.

The State Commander of Amotekun, Brigadier General Alade Adedigba announced the development in a statement on Saturday.

He emphasised that the move aligns with the government's ongoing efforts to fortify security within the state.

This latest recruitment drive follows the graduation of 690 operatives just two months ago, further demonstrating the administration's commitment to ensuring



the safety of residents.

According to Adedigba, interested applicants can apply for free through the official portal: ogunstateamotekun.com.ng (<http://ogunstateamotekun.com.ng>).

"The application window will remain open from Monday, March 10, 2025, to

Friday, April 4, 2025. Prospective applicants are encouraged to adequately prepare and adhere to the guidelines that will be provided throughout this critical process.

"This recruitment initiative marks a significant advancement in our continuous efforts to enhance the capacity of the Amotekun Corps, enabling our operatives to serve and protect the citizens of Ogun State more effectively.

"We strongly encourage all eligible individuals to participate in this important undertaking and play a vital role in fostering a secure community environment."

Davido to feature on King Charles III's Commonwealth Music playlist

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian music star David Adeleke, known as Davido, has earned a spot on British monarch King Charles III's personal music playlist.

The playlist, featured in a new Apple Music show titled The King's Music Room, highlights the King's diverse taste in music.

Recorded in his Buckingham Palace office, the show reveals the monarch's love for different genres, including disco, reggae, and Afrobeats. It features artists from across the Commonwealth, such as Bob Marley, Kylie Minogue, Grace Jones, Davido, and Raye.

The special program will air next Monday in celebration of Commonwealth Day. King Charles III, who serves as the Head of the Commonwealth, described the playlist as a reflection of his life's journey.

"Throughout my life, music has meant a great deal to me. I know that is also the case for so many others," the King said. He emphasized that the playlist includes songs that have brought him happiness over the years.

"This seemed such an interesting and innovative way to celebrate this year's Commonwealth Day," he added.

A royal love for music

King Charles III has long been known for his appreciation of the arts. Over the years, he has attended various musical events, supported young artists, and promoted cultural exchange. His new show offers a glimpse into his personal musical preferences, making it a rare opportunity for the public to connect with him on a more personal level.

The playlist's mix of classic hits and contemporary tunes demonstrates the King's broad taste. Including Davido, a leading figure in Afrobeats, highlights the genre's growing influence on the global



stage. Davido, known for hits like Fall and If, has played a key role in taking African music to an international audience.

The significance of the playlist

The inclusion of artists from different Commonwealth nations symbolizes unity and cultural diversity. With Bob Marley representing reggae, Kylie Minogue bringing Australian pop, and Davido showcasing Afrobeats, the playlist reflects a blend of musical influences from various regions.

For Nigerian music, this recognition is another milestone. Afrobeats continues to gain popularity worldwide, and its presence on such a prestigious platform strengthens its impact. Davido's feature on the King's playlist further validates the genre's success and global reach.

Commonwealth Day celebration

The release of the playlist is part of the upcoming Commonwealth Day celebrations. Observed annually on the second Monday of March, the day honors the shared values and cultural ties between the 56 member nations.

This year, the King has chosen music as a medium to bring people together. His selections aim to create a sense of connection across borders. By sharing the

soundtrack of his life, he hopes to inspire listeners to find joy in music, just as he has.

Davido's Reaction

Although Davido has yet to comment publicly on the recognition, his inclusion in the playlist is a testament to his influence. As one of Africa's biggest artists, his music has reached millions across different continents.

Fans of the singer see this as another proud moment for Nigerian and African music. The honor places Afrobeats on a global stage, reinforcing its place in mainstream music.

A new chapter for royal engagement

King Charles III's approach to engaging with the public through music marks a new chapter in royal outreach. Unlike traditional speeches or formal addresses, this initiative allows people to connect with him through a shared love of music.

As the show airs, many will be eager to tune in and explore the King's personal playlist. For artists like Davido, this recognition adds another layer to their already impressive careers.

Music has always had the power to unite people, and The King's Music Room is set to do just that.

Wumi Toriola recalls setbacks before Queen Lateefah triumph

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Popular actress and filmmaker Wumi Toriola has shared the struggles she faced before achieving success with her blockbuster film Queen Lateefah.

The movie became one of Nigeria's highest-grossing films of 2024, earning an impressive ₦350 million at the box office.

The struggles behind the success

In a recent interview, Toriola revealed that bringing Queen Lateefah to life was not easy. She faced multiple setbacks, including disappointments and unexpected delays. Despite these challenges, she remained determined to create a film that would leave a lasting impact.

"I would have shot Queen Lateefah four years ago, but it didn't happen," she admitted. "I kept working on the story, rewriting it over and over. I faced disappointments, but I learned that preparation is key. When you finally step out, you must do it well."

Lessons learned from delays

Toriola's dedication paid off. Queen Lateefah not only broke



records but also earned praise from critics and audiences. She credits the delay for allowing her to refine the script and produce a film that resonated with viewers.

Looking ahead to 2025

With the success of Queen Lateefah, the actress is now looking ahead to bigger projects. She hinted at exciting collaborations and ambitious plans for 2025.

"We have something huge coming up — more collaborations, but on a bigger scale," she revealed.

The pressure to do better

However, she acknowledged the

pressure of surpassing her latest achievement. Setting a new record, she said, would require even greater effort.

"It feels amazing, but at the same time, it's a big responsibility," she stated. "Once you reach a milestone, you have to push yourself to do even better."

A story of persistence

Toriola's story is one of persistence, patience, and passion. From facing setbacks to breaking records, she has proven that success often comes to those who refuse to give up. As she moves forward, fans eagerly await what she has in store for the future.

Why I can't sign artistes – Tiwa Savage

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian music star Tiwa Savage explains why she chooses not to sign up-and-coming artists, stating that artist management is not her strength.

In an interview with Forbes Africa, the award-winning singer revealed that artist management is not her strength.

Tiwa, 45, explained that she lacks the ability to handle the challenges that come with mentoring young musicians. She believes managing artists requires patience and skill, which she admits she does not possess.

Managing artists is too stressful

“People always ask me, ‘When will you sign an artist?’ But I don’t think I have that gift,” she said. “Managing artists is stressful. I could wake up one morning and see that my artist is trending for the wrong reasons.”

Instead of signing artists, Tiwa prefers to focus on helping young talents in a different way. She revealed plans to establish a music school where aspiring singers can develop their skills before signing with record labels that can support their careers.

A different approach to artist development

“I have the gift to help,” she continued. “That’s why I want to set up a music school. Artists can go there, learn, and later sign with a label that can truly guide them.”



Tiwa’s comments highlight the difficulties of artist management in the music industry. While many successful musicians create record labels to mentor new talents, she has chosen a different approach. Her focus is on education and skill development rather than direct management.

Challenges of nurturing young talent

The singer’s decision reflects her understanding of the pressures that come with nurturing rising stars. Many young artists struggle with discipline, publicity, and the challenges of fame. Without the right support, their careers can face setbacks.

Tiwa’s music school initiative could bridge the gap between raw talent and professional success. By providing structured training, young artists will have a better foundation before stepping into the industry.

A new model for artist growth

Her vision aligns with a growing trend where artists invest in the future of music beyond personal record labels. Some musicians launch academies, mentorship programs, or talent discovery platforms instead of managing artists directly.

Tiwa remains one of Nigeria’s most successful musicians, known for her powerful voice, hit songs, and international recognition. Over the years, she has worked with global stars and won numerous awards.

With her experience in the industry, she understands the difficulties new artists face. By choosing to educate rather than manage, she hopes to make a lasting impact on the next generation of Nigerian musicians.

Her plan for a music school could inspire other artists to explore alternative ways of supporting upcoming talent. If successful, it could become a model for artist development in Africa’s thriving music industry.

L.A.X, Bisola Aiyeola, Mimi Onalaja pay tribute to Sound Sultan

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

On March 5, 2025, Nigerian celebrities, close associates, and family gathered to honour the late musician and entertainer, Sound Sultan, at a special event.

The event, known as the Sound Sultan Ramadan Lecture, marked its fourth edition and was held at the headquarters of Temple Company Management.

Celebrities pay tribute

Among the notable attendees were popular entertainers L.A.X, Bisola Aiyeola, and Mimi Onalaja. They joined the late singer's immediate family, including his widow, Faridah Fasasi, and their three children, Mayowa, Bidemi, and Zara. The gathering served as a heartfelt tribute to Sound Sultan, whose legacy continues to inspire many in the entertainment industry and beyond.

A solemn yet reflective gathering

The atmosphere was solemn yet reflective. Attendees shared fond memories of the late singer, known for his deep storytelling, impactful lyrics, and dedication to social change. His music resonated with millions, making him a beloved figure in Nigerian entertainment.

Prayers were offered for the peaceful repose of his soul. Religious leaders led special supplications, emphasizing the importance of remembering and honoring the legacies of those who made meaningful contributions to society. The event also reinforced the spiritual significance of Ramadan, a time of reflection, gratitude, and giving.

Remembering Sound Sultan's legacy



Sound Sultan, born Olanrewaju Fasasi, passed away on July 11, 2021, in the United States after battling Angioimmunoblastic T-cell lymphoma. His death was a major loss to the music industry, but his influence remains strong through his work, values, and family.

The Ramadan lecture has become an annual tradition to celebrate his life and impact. It brings together people from different walks of life to reflect on his teachings, music, and the values he upheld. Over the years, the gathering has served as both a tribute and an avenue for inspiring positive change in society.

A man of music and purpose

Friends and colleagues spoke about his kindness, humility, and passion for uplifting others. They recalled how he mentored young artists, advocated for social justice, and used his music as a tool for change. His songs addressed real-life struggles, from corruption to unity and hope, making him a voice for the people.

Beyond his music, Sound Sultan was also a devoted family man. His widow, Faridah Fasasi, expressed gratitude for the continued love and support shown to their family. She acknowledged that while the pain of his absence remains, the outpouring of love from fans and colleagues has been a source of comfort.

Keeping his memory alive

Attendees left the event with a renewed sense of appreciation for Sound Sultan's contributions to music and society. His legacy lives on not only through his songs but also in the hearts of those he inspired.

The annual Sound Sultan Ramadan Lecture continues to grow, drawing more people each year who come to pay their respects and keep his memory alive. Through prayers, reflections, and shared stories, his impact remains ever-present, ensuring that his voice and vision endure.

Davido's cousin Nikos makes music debut with "DND"

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Adenike Adeleke, widely known as Nikos, has officially stepped into the music industry with the release of her debut single, marking a bold new chapter.

The daughter of Osun State Governor Ademola Adeleke released her debut single, "DND", on March 7, 2025, marking the beginning of her career as a recording artist.

Nikos comes from the influential Adeleke family, known for its strong presence in both politics and entertainment. She is the cousin of Afrobeats megastar Davido and sister to musicians B-Red and Sina Rambo. While her family name carries weight, Nikos is determined to carve her own path in the industry.

From content creator to musician

Before pursuing music, Nikos gained public attention through her popular YouTube channel, "Keeping Up with Nikos". She built a loyal audience by sharing lifestyle content, beauty tutorials, and personal experiences. Over time, her engaging personality and creative storytelling helped her stand out.

Now, she is channeling that storytelling ability into music. Her debut single, "DND" (Do Not Disturb), delivers a bold message of self-preservation and



confidence. With this track, Nikos encourages listeners to set boundaries, prioritize their well-being, and block out negativity.

A strong debut with "DND"

"DND" is more than just a song—it's a statement. The track features hypnotic beats, sharp lyrics, and a confident delivery that reflect her artistic vision. Her transition from content creator to musician feels natural, as she brings the same energy and authenticity that made her YouTube channel a success.

Listeners have praised the song's catchy rhythm and relatable message. Fans appreciate the empowering theme, which encourages self-worth and personal growth. With its vibrant production and compelling lyrics, "DND" has the potential to resonate with a wide audience.

What's next for Nikos?

She has made it clear that music is not just a one-time experiment—it's a passion she intends to pursue seriously. In interviews, she has hinted at more releases in the near future, suggesting that "DND" is just the beginning of a promising career.

As the music industry takes notice of her talent, fans are eager to see what she does next. Will she collaborate with other artists? Will she explore different sounds? One thing is certain—Nikos is ready to make her mark.

With a powerful debut and a clear artistic vision, Adenike "Nikos" Adeleke is stepping into the spotlight on her own terms. Her journey from YouTube star to recording artist is just beginning, and all eyes are on what she will do next.

English fluency doesn't measure intelligence – Singer Charles Onyeabor

By Ifedamola Joseph Fayomi

Nigerian musician and cultural advocate Charles Onyeabor has ignited a powerful conversation about the importance of indigenous languages in Africa.

He challenges the widespread belief that fluency in English defines intelligence. Instead, he urges Africans to embrace their native languages as a core part of their identity.

Criticizing society's language bias

Onyeabor condemns the societal bias that places English above African languages. He argues that many Africans have been conditioned to think that speaking perfect English reflects intelligence. According to him, this mindset unfairly devalues Africa's rich linguistic heritage.

"Perfect English is not proof of intelligence; it only shows linguistic ability," Onyeabor stated. "We Africans have been programmed to think that speaking better English makes you smarter. But I know people who speak flawless English and are not as smart as a goat."

The importance of embracing native languages

Onyeabor expressed disappointment in Africans who neglect their mother tongues while prioritizing English. "You should be ashamed if you are Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, or from any other tribe and cannot speak your native language fluently. Instead, you choose to speak a foreign language," he said.

While he acknowledges that learning other languages is beneficial, he warns against disregarding native tongues. "Don't get me wrong, speaking multiple languages is good," he explained. "But do not act as if your native language has no value. It is part of your identity."

Comparing Africa to Europe

Onyeabor highlighted how European countries take pride in their languages.



"Go to France. They do not care about English or any other language. Italians also prioritize their language over others," he said.

The double standard in language perception

The musician pointed out an irony in African societies. Foreigners who try to speak African languages are praised. However, Africans who do not speak perfect English are often mocked.

"In Nigeria, people say things like, 'He or she can't even speak good English,' as an insult. But this should not be the case," he said. "Instead, people should start saying, 'You can't even speak your own language.' No one should be insulted for not speaking another country's language fluently."

Sparking a national conversation

Onyeabor's statements have sparked discussions on social media and beyond. Many support his views, arguing that African languages should be preserved and celebrated. Others believe English remains important for global communication.

The role of indigenous languages in culture

Language experts agree that indigenous

languages play a crucial role in preserving culture. They argue that when a language dies, traditions and histories disappear with it. Some also point out that many developed nations prioritize their native languages without compromising global influence.

Educators weigh in

Educators have also weighed in, stressing the need for schools to promote African languages alongside English. Some suggest making native languages compulsory in education systems. They believe this could help younger generations appreciate and speak their mother tongues fluently.

A call for change

Despite differing opinions, Onyeabor's message remains clear—Africans should take pride in their languages. He calls for a shift in mindset, where indigenous languages are not seen as inferior. Instead, they should be viewed as valuable aspects of African heritage.

His bold stance challenges long-standing perceptions and encourages a new way of thinking. As the debate continues, one thing is certain language is more than just communication. It is identity, culture, and history.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah rejects Trump's nuclear talks

By Dave Oludare Oso

Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said he rejects a U.S. push for talks between the two countries because they would be aimed at imposing restrictions on Iranian missile range and its influence in the region.

Speaking to a group of officials on Saturday, Khamenei did not identify the United States by name but said a “bullying government” was being persistent in its push for talks.

“Their talks are not aimed at solving problems, it is for ... let’s talk to impose what we want on the other party that is sitting on the opposite side of the table,” he said.

Khamenei’s remarks came a day after President Donald Trump acknowledged sending a letter to Khamenei seeking a new deal with Tehran to restrain its rapidly advancing nuclear programme and replace the nuclear deal he withdrew America from during his first term in office.

Khamenei said U.S. demands would be military and related to the regional influence of Iran.

“They will be about defence capabilities, about international capabilities of the country,” he said. They will urge Iran “not to do things, not to meet some certain people, not to go to a certain place, not to produce some items, your missile range should not be more than a certain distance. Is it possible for anybody to accept these?”

Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters, said such talks would not address



solving problems between Iran and the West. Although Khamenei did not name any person or country, he said the push for talks creates pressure on Iran in public opinion.

“It is not negotiation. It is commanding and imposition,” he said.

Trump, in comments to reporters in the Oval Office on Friday, did not mention the letter directly. But he made a veiled reference to possible military action, saying, “We have a situation with Iran that, something’s going to happen very soon. Very, very soon.”

Trump’s overture comes as Israel and the United States have warned they will never let Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, leading to fears of a military confrontation as Tehran enriches uranium at near-weapons-grade levels — something done only by atomic-armed nations.

In this photo released by an official website of the office of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he speaks in a ceremony meeting a group of

officials in Tehran on March 8, 2025. Khamenei refused potential nuclear talks between Iran and the United States.

Tehran has long maintained its program is for peaceful purposes, even as its officials increasingly threaten to pursue the bomb as tensions are high with the U.S. over its sanctions and with Israel as a shaky ceasefire holds in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Iran’s accelerated production of near-weapons-grade uranium puts more pressure on Trump. He has repeatedly said he’s open to negotiations with the Islamic Republic while also increasingly targeting Iran’s oil sales with sanctions as part of his reimposed “maximum pressure” policy.

Late in August, Khamenei in a speech opened the door to possible talks with the U.S., saying there is “no harm” in engaging with the “enemy.” However, more recently the supreme leader tempered that, saying that negotiations with America “are not intelligent, wise or honorable,” after Trump floated the possibility of nuclear talks with Tehran.

Trump threatens reciprocal tariffs on lumber, dairy from Canada

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

U.S. President Donald Trump said Friday that Canada has been “ripping off” the United States for years with tariffs on lumber and dairy products and threatened to place reciprocal tariffs on Canada immediately.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, Trump said the “tremendous tariffs” Canada imposes on U.S. dairy and lumber products made it impossible for the U.S. to sell its products in Canada. He said unless Canada agrees to drop them, he would impose the same tariff on Canada.

Trump on Thursday delayed for four weeks his new 25% tariffs on most Mexican and Canadian exports to the United States. He said he delayed Mexico’s tariffs after hearing directly from Mexican President Claudia



Sheinbaum who said her government had helped curb the flow of migrants and the deadly opioid fentanyl into the U.S.

One day earlier, Trump announced he was pausing the tariffs on vehicle imports from the two countries after the three biggest U.S. automakers said the tariffs would have a severe financial impact on them.

Trump said Friday, “India charges us massive tariffs” and that the U.S. could not sell anything in India. India’s Foreign Ministry announced Friday, however, that it was working on a bilateral trade agreement with the U.S. that would “reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepen supply chain integration between the two countries.”

IWD: Women’s rights still under attack, says top UN official

By Fatimah Idera

Amid International Women’s Day celebrations, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a stark warning that women’s rights remain under attack and urged women to fight back as the world cannot stand by while progress is reversed.

Speaking at a United Nations event on the eve of International Women’s Day, Guterres highlighted that centuries of discrimination against women are now being worsened by new and emerging threats.

“Digital tools, while brimming with promise, are also often silencing women’s voices, amplifying bias, and



fuelling harassment,” he said. “Women’s bodies have become political battlegrounds.”

Guterres also warned that online violence is increasingly translating into real-life violence, further exacerbating gender inequalities. Instead of mainstreaming equal rights,

he noted that chauvinism and misogyny are becoming alarmingly widespread.

He urged global action to push back against these trends, emphasizing that gender equality is not just about fairness, but also about power and representation.

“It is about power – who gets a seat at the table, and who is locked out,” Guterres stated.

He further stressed the need to dismantle systems that perpetuate inequality, stating:

“It is about ensuring a better world for all.

Clashes, revenge killings leave more than 600 dead in Syria

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

The death toll from two days of clashes between security forces and loyalists of ousted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 600, a war monitoring group said Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power.

The government has said it was responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed "individual actions" for the rampant violence.

RETRIBUTION KILLINGS

The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades.

Residents of Alawite villages and towns spoke to The Associated Press about killings during which gunmen shot Alawites, most of them men, in the streets or at the gates of their homes. Many homes of Alawites were looted and then set on fire in different areas, two residents of Syria's coastal region told the AP from their hideouts.

They asked that their names not be made public out of fear of being killed, adding that thousands of people have fled to nearby mountains for safety.

ATROCITIES IN ONE TOWN

Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns



worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them. One resident said that the gunmen prevented residents for hours from removing the bodies of five of their neighbors killed Friday at close range.

Ali Sheha, a 57-year-old resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said that at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one neighborhood where Alawites lived were killed in their shops or homes.

Relatives and neighbors attend the funeral procession for four Syrian security force members killed in clashes with loyalists of ousted President Bashar al-Assad in Al-Janoudiya, Syria, on March 8, 2025.

Sheha called the attacks "revenge killings" of the Alawite minority for the crimes committed by Assad's government. Other residents said the gunmen included foreign fighters and militants from neighboring villages and towns.

"It was very, very bad. Bodies were on the streets," Sheha said as he was fleeing,

speaking by phone nearly 20 kilometers from the city.

He said the gunmen were gathering less than 100 meters from his apartment building, firing randomly at homes and residents and, in at least one incident he knows of, asked residents for their IDs to check their religion and their sect before killing them. He said the gunmen also burned some homes and stole cars and robbed homes.

DEATH TOLL TRIPLES

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor, said that 428 Alawites have been killed in revenge attacks in addition to 120 pro-Assad fighters and 89 from security forces. Observatory chief Rami Abdurrahman said that revenge killings stopped early Saturday.

"This was one of the biggest massacres during the Syrian conflict," Abdurrahman said about the killings of Alawite civilians.

The previous figure given by the group was more than 200 dead. No official figures have been released.

Trump confident Putin wants peace despite 'bombing the hell out of Ukraine'

By Dave Oludare Oso

Russia's latest aerial barrage against targets in Ukraine is not dampening expectations by U.S. President Donald Trump that he can broker a deal to end the fighting between Moscow and Kyiv.

Ukrainian officials Friday accused Russia of launching more than 200 overnight missile and drone strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure across a broad swath of the nation, hitting targets in five regions while damaging residential buildings and injuring residents.

But Trump, speaking to reporters Friday in the Oval Office, said he takes Russian President Vladimir Putin at his word when Putin says he wants peace.

"I believe him. I think we're doing very well with Russia," Trump said, acknowledging that for the moment "they're bombing the hell out of Ukraine."

"He's doing what anybody else would do," the U.S. president said of Putin. "I think probably anybody in that position would be doing that right now."

Trump also expressed continued frustration with Kyiv.

"I'm finding it more difficult, frankly, to deal with Ukraine. They don't have the cards," he told reporters.

When asked if the United States would consider giving Ukraine additional air defenses, Trump said it depended on Ukraine.

"I have to know that they want to settle. I don't know that they want to settle," he said. "If they don't want to settle, we're out of there because we want them to settle."



Other U.S. officials, meanwhile, have pushed back against the notion that Trump's tactics to bring Russia and Ukraine to the negotiating table — which has included a pause on military aid and intelligence sharing with Kyiv — have made Ukraine more vulnerable.

U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard told Fox News late Thursday that the pause on intelligence sharing is designed only to prevent Ukraine from launching offensive operations against Russia.

"Any intelligence going toward defending Ukraine against attacks coming into their country would continue," Gabbard said.

A U.S. defence official Friday confirmed to VOA that there has been no pause on intelligence that would allow Ukraine to defend itself, adding that Ukraine also maintains access to Starlink, the satellite internet system owned by Trump ally, Elon Musk.

As for the overnight attack by Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted on social media that many of the drones were taken out by anti-aircraft defences.

He said that for the first time, French-made Mirage fighter jets were deployed in air defence, and that U.S.-made F-16s were also used.

Zelenskyy, in a statement on his X social media account Friday, said that despite the Russian attacks, Kyiv is committed to seeking peace.

"Intense work with President Trump's team has been ongoing at various levels — numerous calls," he wrote. "The topic is clear — peace as soon as possible, security as reliably as possible. Ukraine is fully committed to a constructive approach."

A resident smokes near his apartment building damaged by Russian military strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in the frontline town of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region, Ukraine, March 6, 2025. A resident smokes near his apartment building damaged by Russian military strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in the frontline town of Pokrovsk in Donetsk region, Ukraine, March 6, 2025.

In a separate statement on Telegram, however, Zelenskyy expressed frustration with Moscow.

UN urges Taliban to end restrictions on girls on International Women's Day

By **Dave Oludare Oso**

Four years ago, Yalda never imagined that she would not be able to continue her education or achieve her dream of graduating from school.

“My parents would often talk about the Taliban’s first rule [in the 1990s],” recalled Yalda, who requested that her full name not be used for security reasons. “I used to think it was fortunate I wasn’t born during those days. Sadly, we ended up experiencing the same fate.”

Yalda, who was in 10th grade when the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, is one of the 1.5 million girls deprived of an education in Afghanistan.

Like most school-age girls, she is now confined to her home.

“I think I live in a prison. I am so hopeless, and wish I had not been born a girl,” Yalda said.

In addition to banning girls from secondary and university education, the Taliban have barred them from working with government and nongovernment organizations, traveling long distances without a close male relative, and going to parks, public baths and salons.

The U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in a statement issued on March 8, condemned the “progressive erasure of women and girls from public life” and called on the Taliban to lift restrictions on Afghan women.

“These restrictions are not only violations of human rights but also barriers to Afghanistan’s progress, deepening poverty and isolation for millions,” said UNAMA’s statement.

The Taliban rejected the U.N. call, saying



that women in Afghanistan are given their due rights “in accordance with Islamic Sharia law.”

“At present, Afghan women reside in a state of complete physical and psychological security,” they said.

An Afghan teacher, who did not want her identity to be disclosed for fear of reprisal, told VOA that Afghan women do not feel safe in the country.

“We don’t have safety. I can’t teach anymore. We don’t have any future,” said the teacher. “We are not considered as equal human beings in this country.”

Afghanistan is listed last — 177th out of 177 countries — on Georgetown University’s global Women Peace and Security Index of inclusion, justice and security for women.

The teacher said that women in Afghanistan are filled with despair, saying that “any change by the group is unlikely.”

Hoda Jaberian, the UNESCO programme coordinator for education emergencies in Paris, called the Taliban’s restriction “a

war against women.”

She told VOA that women’s rights in Afghanistan should remain a top priority for the international community.

“This is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the rights of Afghan women and girls are restored without any delay,” Jaberian said.

No country has yet formally recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

Adela Raz, a former Afghan ambassador to the United States, told VOA that one of the main reasons for not recognizing the Taliban’s government is the group’s failure to grant women their rights.

She added that, alongside the United Nations, Muslim-majority nations and neighbouring countries should pressure the Taliban to respect women’s rights in Afghanistan.

“The neighbouring countries, to an extent, have ties with the Taliban and their position is important” to apply pressure on the Taliban to uphold women’s rights.

Man kills WhatsApp group admin for removing him as member

By **Elizabeth Jenrola Oso**

Police said Saturday that a Pakistani man has been charged with murder after allegedly shooting the administrator of a community WhatsApp group who removed him from the chat.

According to the police, the admin, Mushtaq Ahmed was shot dead on Thursday evening in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province that borders Afghanistan, which has a history of bloody sectarian violence.

A man named only as Ashfaq has been charged with his murder, according to police documents seen by AFP and a local police official.

Mushtaq allegedly kicked Ashfaq out of the WhatsApp group following an argument, according to a statement by Mushtaq's brother seen by AFP.

He said that both parties had arranged to meet and reconcile but alleges that Ashfaq turned up with a gun and opened fire, killing his brother.

Ashfaq was angry "in reaction to his removal from WhatsApp group," according to his statement.

The availability of firearms, the influence of tribal customs, and sometimes weak law enforcement contribute to the frequency of such incidents.

A similar incident occurred in 2023, though not extreme as the Pakistan's case. Herbert Baitwababo, a Ugandan



filed a lawsuit after being removed from WhatsApp group.

It was discovered that everyone left the space and formed a new one without Herbert soon after he was re-included in the group. And this reportedly made the man go back to court.

Mzilikazi wa Afrika, an investigative journalist that hailed from Mpumalanga, South Africa, tweeted a video of Baitwababo talking to local media about the incident.

Mzilikazi tweeted: "This guy was removed from a WhatsApp group, he went and got a court order to be added back. They added him back and made him administrator then one by one left the group and created a new one. He is now heading back to court to get the members back on his WhatsApp group like the beginning."

According to the court order by the Chief Magistrates' Court of

Makindye, that Mzilikazi also shared on Twitter, the name of the concerned WhatsApp group was "Buyanja My Roots."

The Free Press Journal reported that the WhatsApp group was reportedly established to support residents of the Buyanja sub-county in the Rukungiri district of Uganda by donating to charities, expressing sympathy, and offering support. Members like Herbert and others registered and paid for membership.

Herbert's inquiries into specifics, such as the management and audit of the group since its founding in 2017 did not go down well. It was discovered that the response was impolite because, on May 20, 2023, admin Asinguza removed him from the group.

They later pointed out that such actions violate the person's rights and freedom of association as he approached the court.

Russian airstrikes on Ukraine kill 20

By Elizabeth Jenrola Oso

Russian airstrikes on Ukraine have killed at least 20 people, officials said Saturday, as heavy aerial attacks continued into the second night following a U.S. decision to stop sharing satellite images with Ukraine.

The decision to withhold intelligence and military aid came on the heels of a tempestuous White House visit last week by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Without U.S. satellite imagery, Ukraine's ability to strike inside Russia and defend itself from bombardment is significantly diminished.

At least 11 people were killed in multiple strikes on a town in Ukraine's embattled Donetsk region late Friday, regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin said.

The attack damaged eight apartment blocks in the town of Dobropillya, which is close to the front where Russian troops have been making steady advances.

Ukraine's State Emergency Service said a Russian drone damaged a Ukrainian fire truck while rescuers fought to extinguish the burning buildings.

Another six people were killed in the front-line towns of Pokrovsk, Kostyantynivka, Myrnohrad and Ivanopillya, Filashkin said, while emergency services reported that three others died when a Russian drone hit a civilian workshop in the northeastern Kharkiv region.

Filashkin declared Saturday a day of mourning in the region and warned that more victims could still be found in the rubble.

Zelenskyy said at least five children were among the injured in Dobropillya.



“Last night, the Russian army fired two ballistic missiles at the center of Dobropillya,” he said. “After emergency services arrived at the scene, they launched another strike, deliberately targeting rescuers. It is a vile and inhumane intimidation tactic to which the Russians often resort.”

The wave of attacks took place just 24 hours after Russia hit Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones, hobbling its ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defences.

The barrage came after the U.S. suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration.

When asked Friday by a reporter during an Oval Office exchange if Russian President Vladimir Putin was taking advantage of the U.S. pause on intelligence-sharing to attack Ukraine, President Donald Trump responded: “I think he’s doing what anybody else would.”

Zelenskyy did not reference the intelligence-sharing deal, but did seem to appeal to other statements Trump made Friday related to financial sanctions

against Moscow.

Writing on social media, the U.S. president proposed imposing large-scale banking sanctions and tariffs on Russia until a cease-fire and final peace settlement was reached.

Zelenskyy welcomed the prospect of additional sanctions on Moscow, saying, “Everything that helps Putin finance the war must be broken.”

Ukraine's air force reported Saturday that Russian troops launched three Iskander missiles and 145 drones over the country overnight.

The bombardment contained a mix of attack and decoy drones intended to confuse air defences. One missile and 79 drones were shot down, while 54 more drones were lost without causing damage, the Ukrainian air force said.

Meanwhile, Russian troops shot down 31 Ukrainian drones overnight, including 26 over the country's Krasnodar region, Russia's Defence Ministry said Saturday.

Falling debris from one drone sparked a blaze at the KINEF oil refinery in Russia's northern Leningrad region, local Gov. Aleksandr Drozdenko said in a statement. No casualties were reported.

Manchester United progress to Women's FA Cup semi-finals

By Dave Oludare Oso

Holders Manchester United cruised past Women's Championship opponents, Sunderland to reach the Women's FA Cup semi-finals.

It was a dominant and impressive display from Marc Skinner's side, who showed their superiority as a Women's Super League side at Leigh Sports Village.

Sunderland, the only quarter-finalist not competing in the top tier, were up against it straight away when Leah Galton nodded United into the lead after seven minutes.

Captain Maya Le Tissier doubled their lead, heading in Gabby George's corner delivery, as Sunderland failed to record a shot on target in a testing first half.

United continued to be on the front foot but Sunderland were given a huge slice of luck when a clearance rebounded back off substitute Louise Griffiths and rolled past goalkeeper Phallon Tullis-Joyce to halve the deficit.

It rocked United for a few minutes but the hosts quickly regained control and saw out a comfortable victory in the end, with Ella Toone adding a third goal in stoppage time.

Sunderland head back up north with their positive cup run at an end, while in-form United target a trip to Wembley as they continue to build momentum.

"They made it tough. It was just about making sure we could finish our chances," said United boss Skinner afterwards.

"They scored a freak goal where we could have controlled things better, but all in all in the last three years we've only lost one game in the FA Cup.

"It's been an incredible run so far and we want to carry that on and get to Wembley."

United show quality as Sunderland's run



ends

Skinner warned his players beforehand that it would not be an easy task to beat Sunderland and they would have to earn their place in the semi-finals.

But United made it look easy for large periods as they dominated from start to finish, moving the ball around quickly and limiting Sunderland's attacking options.

It was the two starting centre-backs Le Tissier and Millie Turner who dictated things, spraying passes from left to right and finding team-mates in behind Sunderland's backline.

Galton's opener came from the right-hand side as she stooped low to meet Celine Bizet's cross.

Captain Le Tissier immediately sprinted over to the sidelines to collect a shirt from a member of the coaching staff and Toone held it up to cameras in the corner of the stadium, displaying the name of Poppy Atkinson – the 10-year-old girl who was fatally hit by a car on a football pitch this week.

An applause by supporters in the 10th

minute was another touching tribute, while United continued to create chances and entertain at Leigh Sports Village.

Had they been more clinical, the scoreline could have been humbling for Sunderland as Melvine Malard skewed a volley on to the crossbar and Bizet twice missed from close range.

Le Tissier, who was easily the standout performer on the night, capped off her display with a perfectly-placed header on the stroke of half-time, making it 2-0 before the bizarre clearance that bounced off Griffiths for Sunderland's goal threatened a nervy ending.

However, there was little danger of United losing their lead as Sunderland tired and struggled to get out of their own half before Toone punished them with a crowning third goal.

This is a competition that United have enjoyed in recent seasons, reaching back-to-back finals before getting their hands on the trophy in 2024.

Salah penalty brace seals comeback for Liverpool over Southampton

By Oluwatosin Ologun

Liverpool are 16 points clear on the Premier League table after another comeback win against Southampton on Saturday.

Despite the 3-1 win over 20th spot holders, Arne Slot said he could see warning signs with Paris Saint-Germain on the horizon.

“When I look at the first game against PSG, we have to go one step up in terms of intensity,” said the Liverpool head coach. “And compared to the game today, we need to go five, six, seven steps up in terms of intensity if we want to have any chance of reaching the next round.”

The French champions will not be as obliging as the Premier League’s bottom club in Tuesday’s Champions League last-16 second leg should Liverpool repeat this display. Slot insisted this was a one-off.

The Premier League leaders required two Mohamed Salah penalties to move closer to the title after Darwin Núñez cancelled out Will Smallbone’s opener for Ivan Juric’s doomed side. The hosts also needed an injection of energy and quality from a triple half-time substitution to rouse themselves from a lethargic and sloppy opening. Southampton were able to grow in confidence and menace before stunning Anfield by taking the lead. They would ultimately bemoan three video assistant referee reviews that went against them.

Slot had labelled Southampton’s visit as the first of three finals this week. “I’m hoping we play a bit better in the



next two finals than we did in the first one,” he admitted after serving the final game of his touchline ban.

The Liverpool head coach had his head in his hands when a calamitous mix-up handed Southampton the breakthrough. That Virgil van Dijk and the hero of Paris, Alisson, were involved heightened the unease inside Anfield. The Liverpool captain attempted to shepherd a Ryan Manning throw-in back to his goalkeeper but Alisson, off balance after a Mateus Fernandes challenge, failed to collect. The ball squirmed loose to Smallbone, who squeezed a low shot through the Brazilian’s legs and in from a tight angle.

Liverpool could have been in a worse position before half-time. The VAR checked a possible red card offence by Núñez after he was booked for taking a swipe at Kyle Walker-Peters. Núñez made no attempt to play the ball but the VAR stuck with the on-field decision of the new Premier League referee Lewis Smith.

Slot’s half-time changes said everything about Liverpool’s performance. His selection appeared risky from the off with only Andy Robertson, Alexis Mac Allister and Diogo Jota rested from the team that started at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday. There was no reward of a first league start of the season for Harvey Elliott, though he was among the half-time replacements for Dominik Szoboszlai, Curtis Jones and Kostas Tsimikas. The impact was immediate.

Elliott almost repeated his PSG performance by scoring within seconds of his arrival. Aaron Ramsdale, who saved well from Trent Alexander-Arnold but was relatively untroubled in the first half, turned the 21-year-old’s drive wide of the far post. There was a sharpness and aggression to Liverpool that had been absent before the changes. Now Slot witnessed the intensity he had called for.