

Nigeria's inflation hits 34.80% in December —NBS report

Nigeria's inflation rate rose slightly to 34.80% in December 2024, reflecting a marginal increase from November's 34.60%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The rise was attributed to increased demand for goods and services during the festive

season, coupled with existing economic challenges. Compared to December 2023's rate of 28.92%, the December 2024 figure represents a significant year-on-year increase of 5.87 percentage points. This continues the trend of rising consumer prices driven by factors such as currency deprecia-

tion, high energy costs, and supply chain disruptions. The report revealed that food prices remained the primary driver of inflation, contributing 18.02% to the overall figure. Other key contributors included housing, water, electricity, and gas (5.82%) and transport (2.26%). Urban

areas experienced higher inflation rates than rural ones, with urban inflation standing at 37.29% year-on-year compared to 32.47% in rural areas. Food inflation reached 39.84% year-on-year in December, up from 33.93% in December 2023. The rise was largely due to increased prices of staples

like rice, yams, and maize. However, month-on-month food inflation eased slightly to 2.66% from November's 2.98%. Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, stood at 29.28% year-on-year, up from 23.06% in December 2023. The sharpest increases were recorded in transportation

fares, restaurant meals, and personal care services. Among states, Bauchi recorded the highest inflation rate at 44.06%, followed by Sokoto (42.43%) and Kebbi (41.47%). Sokoto also led in food inflation at 57.47%. Katsina posted the lowest overall inflation rate at 28.33%.

The Nigerian Observer



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Edo govt accredits Aruna Mohammed as ANNEWATT Chairman —Pg 2

PUBLISHED SINCE MAY 29, 1968 VOL. 46, NO. 923 THURSDAY 16TH JANUARY, 2025. ₦200

ARMED FORCES REMEMBRANCE DAY:

Shettima, Okpebholo, others honour fallen heroes • *call for unity, peace*



ARMED FORCES REMEMBRANCE DAY: Governor Monday Okpebholo of Edo State taking salute at the Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration in Benin City.

ESOHE AIFUWA, ERHUVWU ETARHIENYO, AKINTIMOYE AJOKE

Edo State Governor, Senator Monday Okpebholo, delivered a moving tribute to Nigeria's fallen heroes as Vice President Kassim Shettima and other members of the Federal Executive Council honour the fallen heroes and their families with the laying of wreaths among other military rituals, including gun salute during the 2025 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration.

The ceremony, marked by somber reflection, recognized the ultimate sacrifices made by members of the Nigerian Armed Forces in the service of their country.

Governor Okpebholo commended the fallen soldiers for their patriotism, courage, and unwavering commitment to national unity and peace. In his speech, the governor highlighted that the freedom and stability enjoyed by Nigerians today were made possible by the sacrifices of these heroes, urging everyone to never forget the heavy price they paid for the nation's peace.

He said, "The unity and peace that Nigeria enjoys today are direct results of the selflessness of these gallant men and women who laid down their lives for our well-being.

We will continue to honor their memories, for no honor is ever enough to quantify their

sacrifices."

Reflecting on the solemn nature of the day, the governor called for unity among all Nigerians, particularly the people of Edo State, to ensure that the sacrifices made by the fallen heroes were never in vain.

He urged that all efforts be directed at preserving the peace and unity of the nation, warning that the events that led to the Nigerian Civil War should never be repeated.

Governor Okpebholo added that in a time of growing global and domestic challenges, it was essential to continue building bridges of peace and understanding among Nigeria's diverse people.

During the ceremony, Governor Okpebholo was joined by a distinguished group of dignitaries, including his deputy, Rt. Hon. Dennis Idahosa; Speaker of the Edo State House of Assembly, Rt. Hon. Blessing Agbebaku; Chief Judge of Edo State, Justice Daniel Okungbowa; Chief of Staff, Gani Audu; the Commander of the 4 Brigade Nigerian Army, and a representative of the Oba of Benin.

Widows of some of the fallen heroes also attended the event, adding a personal and poignant touch to the day's commemoration.

A key highlight of the occasion was the laying of wreaths in honor of the fallen soldiers. Governor Okpebholo, along with other state officials, par-

ticipated in this moving gesture to pay respects to the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

The governor's wreath-laying, accompanied by a solemn moment of silence, was a pow-

erful reminder of the price paid for Nigeria's peace and unity.

In addition to commemorating the fallen heroes, Governor Okpebholo reiterated his ad-

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PDP, APC trade blames over gunshots as Edo election petition tribunal begins hearing

The Edo State Governorship Election Petition Tribunal in Benin City was marred by violence on Wednesday as gunshots erupted outside the venue, causing panic and forcing many to flee for safety.

The tribunal had commenced hearing petitions challenging the September 21, 2024, governorship election, which declared Monday Okpebholo of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as the winner with 291,667 votes.

His closest rival, Asue Ighodalo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), polled 247,274 votes, while Olumide Akpata of the Labour Party (LP) trailed with 22,763 votes.

Reports indicated that hoodlums brandishing weapons gathered near the tribunal, creating an atmosphere of fear. Inside the courtroom, tension remained high as parties presented their arguments amidst the backdrop of the commotion outside.

The APC and PDP have

since traded accusations over the incident.

APC State Chairman, Emperor Jarret Tenebe, described the violence as "disturbing and unacceptable," alleging that it was orchestrated by PDP supporters to intimidate the tribunal and disrupt proceedings.

"The Tribunal is a sacred institution meant to administer justice impartially. Violence undermines its integrity and threatens the safety of all involved. We urge security agencies to ensure the perpetrators face swift justice," Tenebe said.

In response, the PDP Caretaker Committee Chairman, Anthony Aziqebemi dismissed the claims, accusing the APC of orchestrating the chaos.

"We condemn this incident and reaffirm our commitment to the rule of law," Aziqebemi said.

The shooting incident underscores the heightened political tension in Edo State as both parties prepare for a prolonged legal battle over the election results.

Police recover N125bn in fake foreign currencies —Pg 3

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Korea impeached president arrested after investigators scale walls —Pg 4

I've no plans to return to NPFL, says Omeruo —Pg 6

Edo govt accredits Aruna Mohammed as ANNEWATT Chairman

The Edo State Government has officially recognized Comrade Aruna Destiny Mohammed as the State Chairman of the All Commercial Motorcycles and Keke Riders Association (ANNEWATT).

This recognition was formalized through a letter signed by the Secretary to the State Government, Barr. Umar Musa Ikhilor, and addressed the Edo State Internal Revenue Service.

Expressing gratitude, Comrade Mohammed thanked

Governor Senator Monday Okpehlo for entrusting him with the leadership of ANNEWATT. He pledged to deliver on his responsibilities and outlined the association's commitment to fostering order and efficiency in the state's revenue collection process.

According to Comrade Mohammed, ANNEWATT aims to eliminate revenue-related hooliganism by ensuring compliance among its members while collaborating with local government pensionable staff

responsible for revenue collection. He emphasized that ANNEWATT's role is primarily to mobilize members to fulfill their tax obligations, thereby supporting the government's drive for economic stability.

"Firstly, I give all glory to God and my heartfelt thanks to Governor Okpehlo for his confidence in me.

ANNEWATT was estab-

lished to address issues of revenue hooliganism and to stop the disruptive activities of street urchins, popularly known as Agberos. We aim to streamline the revenue process and ensure all dues are paid to the appropriate authorities," Mohammed stated.

He highlighted that ANNEWATT already has a solid structure in place and is

strengthening it to undertake a massive revenue drive that aligns with the state government's vision for development.

Comrade Mohammed also assured members of ANNEWATT that their welfare and operational interests would remain a priority. "We have a formidable team working to promote a peaceful and organized environment for our members.

"By working together, we can create a structure that benefits the union, our members, and the government alike," he said.

The recognition of Aruna Mohammed marks a significant step in ensuring accountability, proper revenue generation, and the reduction of illegal activities within the state's commercial motorcycle and tricycle operations.

Edo govt to tackle land grabbing

The Edo State Government has unveiled plans to curb land grabbing and strengthen measures against land racketeering, with a particular focus on tackling illegal activities in Auchi and other parts of the state.

At his maiden meeting with the staff of the Edo State Geographic Information Service (EdoGIS), the new Managing Director, Dr. Tony Ikpasaja, highlighted the government's resolve to address this issue swiftly.

He noted that land racketeering not only undermines the rule of law but also deprives legitimate owners of their rights.

Dr. Ikpasaja identified the menace of land grabbing as a significant concern, particularly in government-owned lands in Auchi, Edo North Senatorial District.

He warned staff against colluding with racketeers, stating that such acts would be met with strict disciplinary measures.

"Our primary focus is to eliminate this menace and broaden the Agency's revenue

base, as directed by His Excellency, the Governor. At the same time, we will prioritize the welfare of our workforce through incentives that motivate and improve productivity," Dr. Ikpasaja stated.

The Managing Director also announced plans to reward excellence among staff and create a positive work culture where punctuality, dedication, and transparency are upheld.

The interactive session allowed staff to voice their concerns and seek clarifications on pressing issues. Dr. Ikpasaja reassured them of his commitment to transparency and accountability, promising to run an open-door policy built on trust and confidentiality.

Dr. Ikpasaja, who resumed office on January 6, 2025, immediately engaged with the Agency's Management Team, toured various departments and units, and interacted with staff at their duty posts. He reiterated his determination to lead the Agency toward achieving its targets while ensuring staff welfare remains a top priority.

Police recover N125bn in fake foreign currencies

Operatives of the Nigeria Police Force have arrested four suspects who counterfeited foreign currency in Kano and Nasarawa states.

In Kano State, operatives were said to have apprehended one Nura Ibrahim and discovered counterfeit currency, including N129,542,823,000 in counterfeit currencies, on December 8, 2024.

A statement on Wednesday by the Force Spokesperson, Muyiwa Adejobi, said a breakdown of the recovered fake money included \$3,366,000 in counterfeit US dollars, 51,970 counterfeit CFA francs, and N1,443,000 in counterfeit naira notes.

Adejobi noted that two additional suspects, identified as Muhammed Muntari and Usman Abdullahi, were also arrested in connection with the case.

He said, "As a testament to the zeal to curb financial crimes and boost national security, the police recently made significant arrests in Kano and Nasarawa states.

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Gwale, Kano, operatives, acting on credible intelligence, apprehended Nura Ibrahim and discovered counterfeit currency, which included the sum of N129,542,823,000 in counterfeit currencies, with a breakdown of 3,366,000 in Counterfeit US Dollars, 51,970 in Counterfeit CFA franc, and 1,443,000 in counterfeit Naira.

"The arrest led to further arrests of accomplices Muhammed Muntari and Usman Abdullahi."

Similarly, Adejobi said operatives arrested a 53-year-old man identified as Ephraim Barde in Nasarawa State with \$160,000 on January 13, 2025.

He said, "On January 13, 2025, the Force arrested 53-year-old Ephraim Barde in New Karu, Nasarawa State, with counterfeit U.S. dollar notes totalling \$160,000.

"Following the arrest, further investigations are underway to determine the full scope of Barde's involvement and identify any accomplices. The Police are committed to preventing further threats to the nation's financial system."



COURTESY VISIT:

The Deputy National President, Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Dr. Abimbola Oyetunde (right); Secretary, NUJ, Edo State Council, Andy Egbon and Chairman of council, Comrade Festus Alenke, during NUJ's courtesy visit to Governor Monday Okpehlo, at Government House, Benin City.

EDHA confirms 6 commissioners, 7 EDSIEC nominees

KEN ABU

The Edo House of Assembly on Wednesday confirmed six commissioners and seven Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDSIEC) nominees as commissioners and members respectively.

It was noted that Governor Monday Okpehlo had on January 8, 2025 forwarded the six commissioner nominees

for screening and confirmation

Their confirmation followed the recommendation of the House Committee on Rules, Business, and Government House, chaired by the Majority Leader, Hon. Charity Aiguoabarueghian.

The commissioner nominees include Paul Ohonbamu, Washington Osifo, Paddy Iyamu, Andrew Ijegbai, Henry Oladisi Idahomen, and Lucky Esegibe.

Presenting the report of the committee on the screening to the House, Hon. Charity Aiguoabarueghian, committee chair, stated that the nominees were educationally qualified for appointment as commissioners in the state.

The House adopted the committee's recommendation in a motion moved by Hon. Charity Aiguoabarueghian and seconded by Hon. Henry Okaka, (APC, Owan East), the Minority Leader.

In a similar vein, the House confirmed Jonathan Aifuobhokhan as EDSIEC Chairman and Anthony Aigbokhomhan, Suleiman Ikhuria, Umoru Frank, Imafidon Osarodion, Ojo Asein, and Ighomo Egharevba as members.

Meanwhile, the House also passed the Secret Cult Prohibition Law, along with a bill to extend the retirement age for magistrates and Presidents of Area Customary Courts in Edo State.

EDSOGPADEC Per Sec urges staff on effective service delivery

The Permanent Secretary of the Edo State Oil and Gas Producing Areas Development Commission (EDSOGPADEC), Mrs. Stella Agbonghede Eshieshi, has charged staff to uphold strong work ethics and improve job efficiency to achieve the Commission's goals for 2025.

Addressing workers during a meeting held at the Commission's headquarters in Benin

City, Mrs. Eshieshi outlined the key vision of EDSOGPADEC: to enhance the quality of life for residents in Edo State's oil-producing areas through the provision of essential amenities and empowerment programs.

She stressed the importance of teamwork, punctuality, and adherence to policies, urging staff to work with unity of purpose like a cohesive family.

"Your punctuality and pres-

ence at work demonstrate your respect for constituted authority and your commitment to the goals of this Commission.

Let us focus on delivering impactful results that will transform the lives of our people," she said.

Mrs. Eshieshi also assured staff that management remains dedicated to creating a conducive work environment and equipping them with the

necessary tools to perform effectively.

The meeting, which included the Management Team and the entire workforce, provided an avenue for discussions about the Commission's objectives. Staff pledged their unwavering commitment to the success of EDSOGPADEC, promising to work collaboratively to ensure that the mandate of the Commission is met efficiently.

Armed Forces Remembrance Day: Shettima, Okpehlo,...

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ministration's commitment to supporting the families of these courageous men and women.

He announced plans for new welfare initiatives aimed at providing financial and emotional support to the surviving families of the fallen soldiers.

These efforts, he emphasized, would continue to be a priority for his administration.

The ceremony also featured

a series of reflective speeches and prayers for the souls of the fallen heroes, with attendees offering tributes to the men and women who gave their lives for the country.

Governor Okpehlo reaffirmed that Nigeria must continue to honour its fallen heroes through meaningful actions and efforts to maintain national unity, peace, and progress.

Vice President Shettima represented President Bola

Tinubu who has been away attending the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in the UAE.

Aside from Shettima and other members of the cabinet the leadership of the Senate and House of Representatives, as well as service chiefs, the Inspector General of Police, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, and others were in attendance at the annual event.

Ministers, senior government officials, senior military officers,

members of the diplomatic corps, widows of gallant officers, and the wives of military officers were also present at the occasion.

Earlier, in a statement, the Senate commended the selfless sacrifices of the military.

The upper legislative chamber also commended "serving officers and soldiers who are currently maintaining the peace and ensuring that our nation is secured and safe from internal and external aggression".

Eight farmers killed in Niger road crash

Eight farmers lost their lives in a tragic road accident on Monday night along the Batati/Lanle Road in Niger State.

The collision involved a Toyota Corolla and a tanker trailer en route to Lagos for fuel loading.

Eyewitnesses reported that the Corolla, speeding and at-

tempting to overtake another vehicle, collided head-on with the oncoming tanker.

The impact was so severe that all passengers in the Corolla were crushed beyond recognition.

The victims, identified as farmers displaced from Zone B of Niger State due to insecurity, had migrated to Dasu village

in Lavun Local Government Area to continue their farming activities.

The accident has left the community in mourning, with many describing the incident as devastating.

"It was a horrifying sight. The victims were men of different ages, and their bodies were unrecognizable," said an

eyewitness.

The Assistant Commander of the Road Transport Employees Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), Kutigi branch, Mohammed Sanusi, confirmed the accident and expressed grief.

"This tragedy is a painful reminder of the dangers on our roads. May their souls rest in peace," he said.

Sanusi commended the coordinated efforts of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Red Cross, and RTEAN personnel in evacuating the victims and retrieving their remains.

The bodies were buried in Dasu village on Tuesday according to Islamic rites.

Despite the severity of the

incident, neither the Niger State Government nor relevant authorities have issued official statements.

The crash has reignited calls for stricter enforcement of traffic laws and increased public awareness on safe driving practices to prevent such avoidable tragedies.



2025 ARMED FORCES REMEMBRANCE DAY:

Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, GSSRS (middle), releasing the pigeons, during the 2025 Armed Forces Remembrance Day celebration yesterday, in Port Harcourt.

Military bans drone operations in North-East over security concerns

The Air Component of Operation Hadin Kai has announced an immediate ban on the use of drones, also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles across the North-East region, citing serious security concerns.

Air Commodore U. U. Idris, the Air Component Commander of Operation Hadin Kai, issued the directive on Wednesday, stressing that unauthorised drone operations in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states posed significant threats to safety and security.

Idris expressed concern over the proliferation of drones for domestic and commercial purposes, including their use by government agencies and private individuals without proper authorization from the Air Component.

The statement read, "The proliferation of drones for domestic and commercial purposes has led to serious security concerns.

"These concerns mainly

stem from their possible use by non-state actors and criminal elements for subversive and offensive activities."

It further noted, "More disturbing is that government agencies and private individuals operate these drones without due regard to the extant regulations on their operations."

According to the commander, non-state actors have increasingly employed drones against military targets and critical national infrastructure, a trend that has been observed globally.

He cited a recent incident on January 7, 2025, when a drone was discovered during a routine security check on a passenger travelling aboard an NGO flight from Maiduguri to Monguno.

The device was confiscated, and investigations are ongoing.

"These incidents, among others, reveal a troubling trend where individuals operate drones without due consideration for safety and security, leading to potentially detrimental consequences," Idris added.

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Adejebi noted that two additional suspects, identified as Muhammed Muntari and Usman Abdullahi, were also arrested in connection with

the case.

He said, "As a testament to the zeal to curb financial crimes and boost national security, the police recently made significant arrests in Kano and Nasarawa states.

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"Following the arrest, further investigations are underway to determine the full scope of Barde's involvement and identify any accomplices. The Police are committed to preventing further threats to the nation's financial system."

Adejebi also said the Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, has established the Anti-Money Laundering Units of the Nigeria Police Force, appointing a financial expert, CP Hyacinth AEdozi, with officers of the rank of Chief Superintendents of Police to lead the units in all State Crim-

inal Investigation Departments across the country.

"This initiative is a strategic move to strengthen the Police's role in national security, specifically in combating financial crimes. It is also critical in countering the sophisticated methods used by terrorist organizations and other criminal entities to finance their activities.

"The establishment underscores the Force's commitment to safeguarding national security by preventing and detecting illicit financial activities that could undermine the country's stability.

"It also enhances the operational capacity of law enforcement agencies, especially the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit, in furtherance of its global oversight functions to address various security threats," Adejebi added.

Tinubu calls for global unity in tackling climate challenges

OLUWATUNMISE OMOSEYIN

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has emphasised the need for global cooperation to achieve sustainable development, stating that no nation can address climate challenges in isolation.

In a statement on Wednesday, January 15, Bayo Onanuga, the Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, revealed that the President highlighted the importance of collective action and knowledge sharing in addressing climate change during the 2025 Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week in the United Arab Emirates.

Addressing the session titled "From Climate Imperatives into Economic Prosperity: Bridging Africa with the Global Energy Future," President Tinubu described the fight against climate change as both a necessity and an opportunity for economic growth.

"The fight against climate change is not merely an environmental necessity but a global economic opportunity to reshape the trajectory of our continent and the global ener-

gy landscape.

"To succeed, we must innovate, collaborate and act decisively as one global community," he said.

The President outlined his administration's commitment to reducing carbon emissions through policies focused on energy transition, climate resilience, and sustainable development.

He highlighted efforts to diversify Nigeria's energy sources, including investments in Compressed Natural Gas and electric vehicles, and promoting climate-smart agriculture to enhance food security.

"We have embraced a vision of sustainability that aligns with global aspirations while addressing local realities," he stated.

President Tinubu urged international partners to support Africa's green economy through investment and technology transfer.

He also noted that Nigeria had initiated Sovereign Green Bonds to fund green projects and called on investors to partner in this effort.

The President commended the UAE for hosting the event, which brought world leaders together to address global challenges.

Yuletide: NIDCOM rejects \$500 tax proposal for returning Nigerians

The Nigerians in Diaspora Commission on Wednesday dismissed a proposal to impose a \$500 tax on Nigerians and tourists returning home during the festive season.

The proposal, submitted by Nigerian socialite, Chief Dokun Olumofin, to President Bola Tinubu, suggested the tax be applied between November and January to boost revenue.

In a statement by NIDCOM's Director of Media, Public Relations, and Protocols, Abdur-Rahman Balogun, the

commission criticised the idea as exploitative and detrimental to diaspora engagement efforts.

NIDCOM argued that such a tax would discourage Diasporans from visiting, reconnecting with their homeland, and contributing to the economy.

Citing the significant economic contributions from the Nigerian diaspora, including record remittances in 2024 and the N54bn revenue generated by Lagos hotels during December, NIDCOM noted that taxing returnees would undermine these benefits.

"Such advice will no doubt mitigate efforts of the Diaspora Commission in encouraging the Diasporans to visit home, invite others, and invest. It is also seen by NIDCOM as some sinister move to damage the image and revenue streams of the government just as its enforcement will equally pave the way for corruption.

"Besides, the remittances of the diaspora in 2024 alone were the highest so far into the economy; they have been investing massively in various

sectors of the economy.

"The said N54bn that Lagos hotels alone raked in December 2024, according to a report by an advisory firm MO Africa Company Limited, is domiciled in the Nigerian economy, so why tax Nigerians coming to their country for various reasons and promoting their country positively?" he stated.

Instead, the commission urged the government to focus on creating an enabling environment that fosters tourism and investment.

Foreign

NEWS

Korea impeached president arrested after investigators scale walls

Yoon Suk Yeol has become South Korea's first sitting president to be arrested after investigators scaled barricades and cut through barbed wire to take him into custody.

Yoon, 64, is being investigated on charges of insurrection for a failed martial law order on 3 December that plunged the country into turmoil.

He has also been impeached by parliament and suspended - but will only be removed from office if the Constitutional Court upholds the impeachment.

However, Yoon's dramatic arrest on Wednesday brings to

an end a weeks-long standoff between investigators and his presidential security team.

Investigators from the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) failed to arrest him on 3 January after being locked in a six-hour stand-off with his security detail.

But just before dawn on Wednesday, a much larger team of investigators and police arrived at his residence in central Seoul, armed with ladders to climb over buses blocking its entrance and bolt cutters to remove barbed wire.

Other officers in the arrest team, which numbered around

1,000, scaled walls and hiked up nearby trails to reach the presidential residence.

After several hours, authorities announced that Yoon had been arrested.

In a three-minute video released just before his arrest, the 64-year-old leader said he would co-operate with the investigators, while repeating previous claims that the warrant was not legally valid.

"I decided to appear before the CIO, even though it is an illegal investigation, in order to prevent any unsavoury bloodshed," he said, adding that he witnessed officials "invade" his home's security perimeter with fire equipment.

On Wednesday afternoon, investigators said Yoon had remained silent throughout questioning.

Yoon's lawyers have said his arrest was "illegal" because the CIO, as an anti-corruption agency, has no power to investigate the insurrection allegations against Yoon. They also claim the warrant was issued by the wrong jurisdiction.

The same court later dismissed an injunction filed by President Yoon to invalidate the arrest warrant, which the authorities maintain is lawful.

The opposition Democratic Party's floor leader, Park Chan-dae, said Wednesday's arrest

showed that "justice in South Korea is alive."

This arrest "is the first step toward restoring constitutional order, democracy and the rule of law", he said during a party meeting.

The country is currently being led by Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok as acting president. He was thrust into power after the first acting president, Han Duck-soo, was also impeached by parliament, where the opposition has a sizeable majority.

What's next for Yoon?

The clock has started ticking for investigators.

Under the current warrant, they can hold Yoon for up to 48 hours from the point of arrest, after which they need a new warrant to detain him while he continues to be investigated.

If that warrant is granted, they can detain him for up to 20 days before he is brought to trial. Without a new warrant, Yoon must be released.

He is expected to be detained at the Seoul Detention Centre in Uiwang, Gyeonggi Province, approximately 5km (3 miles) from the CIO's office.

Pro-Yoon supporters have continued to protest against the arrest outside the investigating office, where he was taken for questioning.

They had gathered outside his house since before dawn on Wednesday, along with those opposing him.

The anti-Yoon crowd blasted out a "congratulations and celebrations" song when his arrest was announced, cheering and clapping at what they see as a success for law enforcement.

Yoon's supporters, however, were dismayed. "We are very upset and angry. The rule of law has broken down," one of them told the BBC.

The contrasting scenes between these two camps on Wednesday reflect deepening polarisation within the country, which has long been marked by stark divisions between conservatives and progressives.

The political saga has also pitted two branches of executive power against each other: law enforcement officers armed with a legal arrest warrant and presidential security staff, who say they are duty bound to protect the suspended president.



Palestinians inspect damaged tents following a strike in Deir el-Balah on 4 January which is within the "humanitarian zone" in Gaza.

LA faces 'extreme fire danger' as high winds forecast

Winds that have fanned wildfires in the US city of Los Angeles are again expected to kick up on Wednesday - after a 25th death from the huge, week-long outbreak was confirmed.

Forecasters have again identified an area of "extreme fire danger", emphasising the risk level in a region to the north-west of the city centre.

In some mountainous areas, it is possible for winds to reach speeds of 70mph (113km/h), which would be nearly hurricane-force if they are sustained.

The anticipated increase in speeds threatens to spread the remaining four blazes, which firefighters have made further progress in tackling during a few days of calmer conditions.

Wind speeds began a slow and steady climb on Wednesday morning in parts of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. They are expected to peak during the day on Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

Compared with last week's conditions, winds are "weaker but still strong", the NWS cautions.

There are hopes of another drop over the subsequent days - but officials have highlighted the need for rain that would help fire crews in their battle.

"The anticipated winds combined with low humidities and low fuel moistures will keep the fire threat in the LA region critical," Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said during a news conference.

Areas to the north-west of Los Angeles - including Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks - have been deemed to be particularly dangerous.

An improvement in conditions is forecast later on Thursday and into Friday, says BBC Weather forecaster Sarah Keith-Lucas.

But no rainfall is forecast for at least the next week - and the Santa Ana winds that have been blamed for stoking the blazes could again develop from Sunday.

The fire chief for the city of Pasadena echoed the need for precipitation.

There had been no "real rain in southern California" for more than 250 days, Chad Augustin told BBC Radio 4's

Today programme.

His firefighters would spend Wednesday on "standing guard ready to ensure that we hold our containment lines and we don't burn up any more structures", Mr Augustin added.

An extreme weather attribution study from climate scientists at 'Climameter' has concluded that the Californian wildfires have been fuelled by meteorological conditions

strengthened by human-induced climate change.

The study found that current conditions have been up to 41F (5C) warmer, 15% drier and 20% windier compared to the past, in the areas affected by the fires.

The 25th death from the fires was confirmed by the LA County Medical Examiner's Office. Thirteen other people remain missing.

Pope drama and Spanish-language musical lead Bafta race

Conclave, a film about a gossipy and scheming group of cardinals who gather in Rome to elect a new Pope, leads this year's Bafta film award nominations with 12 nods.

It is followed closely by Netflix's Spanish-language musical Emilia Pérez, which tells the story of a Mexican cartel leader who leaves the world of crime to live a new life as a transgender woman.

The frontrunners in the Bafta acting categories include Cynthia Erivo and Demi Moore for lead actress and Adrien Brody and Timothee Chalamet for lead actor.

But Denzel Washington and Daniel Craig failed to make the shortlist for Gladiator II and Queer respectively.

Hugh Grant's nomination in the lead actor category for horror film Heretic, and Saoirse Ronan as leading actress for The Outrun, are among some of the surprises.

Jamie Lee Curtis is nominated in the supporting actress category for The Last Showgirl, but the film's main actress Pamela Anderson, who plays an ageing Las Vegas performer, missed out on a nomination.

The leading films in the Bafta nominations

12 nominations - Conclave
11 - Emilia Pérez
9 - The Brutalist
7 - Anora, Dune: Part Two and Wicked
6 - A Complete Unknown and Kneecap
5 - Nosferatu and The Substance

Another film tipped for success in the current awards season is Anora, which has seven Bafta nominations including best film.

It follows the whirlwind romance between a New York sex worker and the son of a wealthy Russian oligarch.

Mickey Madison is nominated as leading actress and is also

up for the rising star award, which is voted for by the public.

Her co-star Yura Borisov is nominated for best supporting actor, and director Sean Baker has his first Bafta best director nomination.

Half of those nominated in the best director category are first-time nominees and also include The Brutalist's Brady Corbet, who won the same award at the Golden Globes.

The film, about a Hungarian architect who is hired by a wealthy American after World War Two, has nine nods in total and is also tipped to be a big contender at the Oscars.

Separately, SpaceX is also conducting its seventh orbital flight test of its Starship rocket, which is due to take off from Texas at 16:00 local time (22:00 GMT).

SpaceX rocket launches private missions to moon

Two lunar landers built by private companies in the US and Japan have left Earth aboard a SpaceX rocket as part of a rideshare to the Moon.

The Falcon 9 took off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida at 01:09 local time (06:09 GMT) on Wednesday, carrying landers belonging to America's Firefly Aerospace and Japan's ispace.

The landers will eventually separate once they reach the Moon's orbit and conduct independent explorations.

They are the latest in a growing number of commercial missions to the Moon.

Firefly's rover, Blue Ghost, is expected to take about 45 days to reach the Moon, once it has separated from the SpaceX rocket.

It will then drill, collect samples and also take X-ray images of the Earth's magnetic field to "advance research for future

human missions on the Moon and provide insights into how space weather impacts the planet", according to SpaceX.

Meanwhile, ispace's Resilience lander will take up to five months to reach the Moon's surface, where it will deploy a rover for exploration and attempt to scoop up loose surface material known as regolith.

Nasa is backing the endeavour, which, if successful, will be its biggest commercial delivery to the Moon so far.

Intuitive Machines last year became the first commercial outfit to put a lander on the Moon, a feat only previously accomplished by the US, the Soviet Union, China, India and Japan.

NEWS

Foreign

Gaza 'humanitarian zone' struck almost 100 times since May, BBC Verify finds

The area in Gaza which Israel's military has told people to go to "for their safety" has been hit by 97 strikes since May, BBC Verify analysis has revealed.

The findings come as negotiations for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas appear to be nearing a breakthrough. Mediators in Qatar say talks are in their final stages,

raising hopes that an agreement could be reached soon.

The "humanitarian zone" was first established by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in October 2023 to protect civilians and keep them out of harms way.

On 6 May 2024, the IDF significantly expanded the zone to include the cities of Khan Younis and Deir al-Balah.

The area - much of which is a strip of land along the Mediterranean sea - is densely populated and is estimated to have over a million people living there according to international humanitarian organisations. Many people are living in tents, with limited infrastructure and limited access to aid.

Local media reports indi-

cate more than 550 people have been killed in the 97 strikes mapped by BBC Verify.

In a statement to BBC Verify, the IDF said it was targeting Hamas fighters operating in the "humanitarian zone" and accused the group of violating international law while "exploiting" civilians as human shields and launching rockets from the area.

Israel launched a campaign to destroy Hamas in response to the group's 7 October 2023 attack, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage.

The conflict has caused widespread damage to infrastructure across Gaza, with satellite images showing areas flattened by Israeli strikes. The Hamas-run health ministry also says more than 46,600 people have been killed within the enclave since the start of the war.

BBC Verify analysis suggests that attacks within the "humanitarian zone" have intensified since May 2024, with at least 22 strikes already recorded so far this month.

We also cannot confirm that all incidents are the result of IDF attacks. Locations of strikes documented by BBC Verify were provided to the

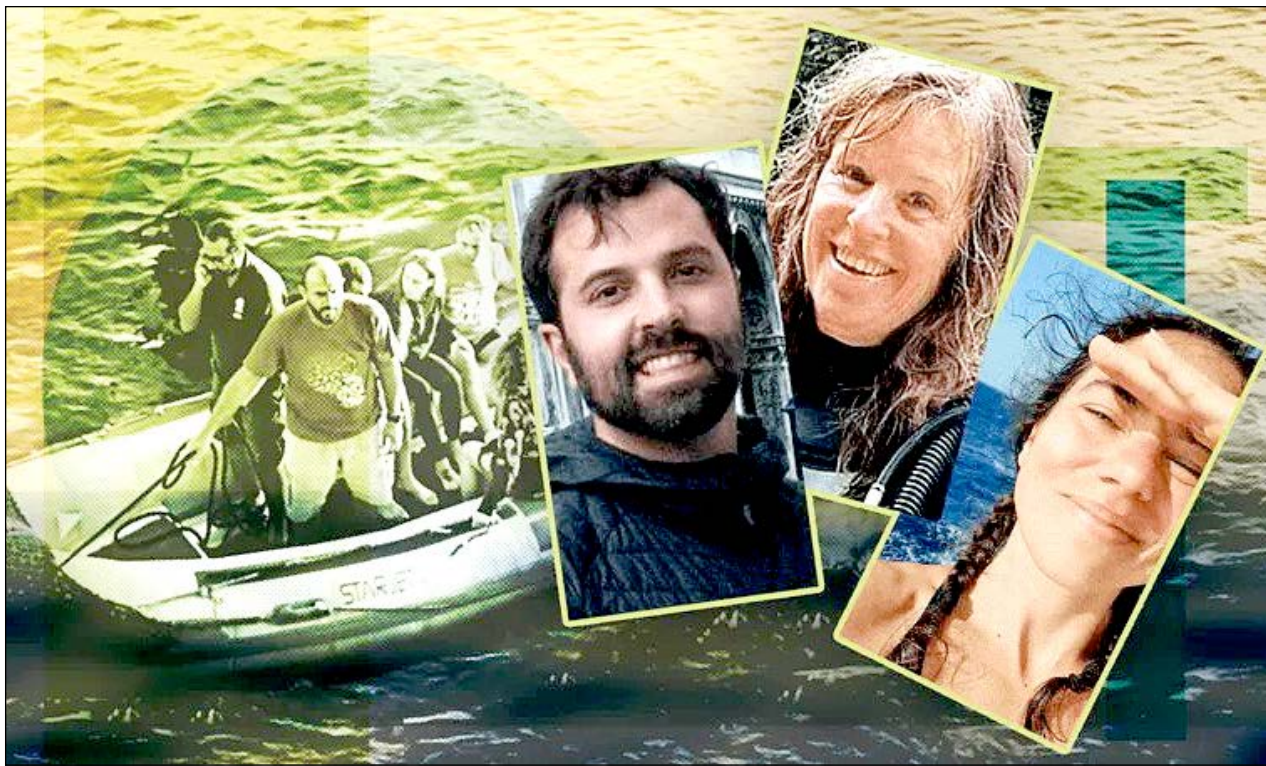
IDF but they did not confirm or deny their involvement. Israeli military officials have only publicly acknowledged 28 attacks since 6 May.

Israel historically has not publicly acknowledged every strike it has carried out in Gaza.

Gavin Kelleher, an access manager in Gaza for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said there were "near daily" strikes within the zone, including from Israeli ships and quadcopters, or small drones.

He added that "heavy fire is recurrent in this area despite its [Israel's] unilateral 'humanitarian' designation."

"The Israeli military appears keen to maintain the illusion of a Humanitarian Zone that remains a certain size, yet that zone can be subject to 'evacuation orders' at any time and be targeted," Mr Kelleher said.



Justin, Frøydis and Lisa were all rescued from the Sea Story and later spoke to the BBC

Red Sea dive-boat survivors accuse authorities of cover up

Survivors of a deadly dive-boat sinking in the Red Sea say they were pressured to sign official witness statements in Arabic - which they couldn't understand and had been translated from English by an employee of the boat company.

They say the man also tried to get them to sign waivers which they did not accuse anyone of "criminal wrongdoing."

The 11 survivors who have spoken to the BBC have also accused the Egyptian authorities of trying to cover up what happened, saying investigators were determined to blame it on a huge wave.

The Sea Story had been carrying 46 people when it sank in the early hours of 25 November last year - four bodies were recovered and seven people are still missing, including two British divers.

Neither the Egyptian government nor the boat operators - Dive Pro Liveboard, based in Hurghada - have responded to our questions.

On Tuesday, the BBC revealed multiple accusations from survivors of safety failings on board the vessel. A leading oceanographer who analysed weather data also said it was not plausible that a huge wave had hit the vessel.

'Interrogated' from hospital beds

Within hours of being brought ashore, survivors say they were subjected to what one described as "an interrogation", some from

their hospital beds, by people they were told were judges.

Those who didn't need hospital treatment were interviewed at a nearby resort, said other survivors, who reported the same feelings of being pressured.

"We were told we couldn't leave the room until they'd done everybody's statements," says Sarah Martin, an NHS doctor from Lancashire.

The judges were part of an Egyptian investigation into what caused the sinking - though survivors say it was not clear exactly who was leading it.

The survivors say having their initial statements translated into Arabic by an employee of the company that owned the Sea Story was a clear conflict of interest.

Spanish diver Hissora Gonzalez said the man did not initially introduce himself as an employee. "He just said, 'You have to tell me what happened, and then you have to sign this piece of paper.'"

It was not until later, say several people we spoke to, that the man told them he worked for Dive Pro Liveboard.

The survivors say that, after being translated by the man, their statements were handed to investigators - something that shocked Lisa Wolf. "A normal judge can't take a translation from someone that's obviously totally involved in the process."

Israel and Hamas make final push for Gaza ceasefire deal

Negotiators from Israel and Hamas are making a final push to seal a Gaza ceasefire in Doha, with all sides suggesting an agreement is almost done.

There were reports of a breakthrough on Wednesday, with unnamed Israeli officials cited as saying that Hamas had agreed to the latest draft presented by Qatari, US and Egyptian mediators.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office however swiftly denied the reports. There was also no immediate comment from the Palestinian armed group.

On Tuesday night, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said they were "on the brink" of an agreement and awaiting "final word from Hamas."

A senior Hamas official later told Reuters news agency it had not delivered its official response to the draft because Israel had yet to submit maps showing how its troops would withdraw from areas of Gaza.

However, Israel's Haaretz newspaper cited an Israeli source as denying Hamas's claim about the maps.

The proposed three-phase deal would begin with an initial six-week ceasefire.

A Palestinian official told the BBC that Hamas would release three hostages on the first day of a deal, after which Israel would begin withdrawing troops from populated areas.

More hostage releases would then be staggered over the following weeks, he said, with Israel allowing displaced residents to return in northern areas.

Israel has said it expects 33 hostages to be released in the first phase and that it will free a yet to be determined number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails in return.

Negotiations for the second phase - which should see the remaining hostages released, a full Israeli troop withdrawal and a "sustainable calm" - would start after two weeks.

Qatar's foreign ministry spokesman said on Tuesday that there were no major issues were blocking a deal and that he was hopeful the talks would "very soon lead to an agreement."

However, he also warned that that "the most minor detail" could yet undermine the process.

The Israeli military launched a campaign to destroy Hamas in response to the group's unprecedented attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, in which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage.

More than 46,700 people have been killed in Gaza since then, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry. Most of the 2.3 million population has also been displaced, there is widespread destruction, and there are severe shortages of food, fuel, medicine and

shelter due to a struggle to get aid to those in need.

Israel says 94 of the hostages are still being held by Hamas, of whom 34 are presumed dead. In addition, there are four Israelis who were abducted before the war, two of whom are dead.

Relatives of the remaining hostages have urged the Israeli government to do whatever it takes to get a deal over the line and bring all of them home.

"We can't miss this moment. This is the last moment; we can save them," said Hadas Kalderon, the wife of Ofer Kalderon, a 54-year-old.

Palestinians also dared to hope that an end to the devastating 15-month war was close.

"We are waiting for the ceasefire and the truce. May God complete it for us in goodness, bless us with peace, and allow us to return to our homes," said Amal Saleh, 54,

told Reuters news agency.

"Even if the schools are bombed, destroyed, and ruined, we just want to know that we are finally living in peace."

There has been no let-up in the intensity of the war as the negotiations have continued.

The Israeli military said on Wednesday morning that it had carried out strikes on more than 50 targets across the territory in the past day.

Gaza's health ministry said at least 62 people had been killed over the same period.

Overnight, a strike on a home in the central town in Deir al-Balah killed 11 people, including four children, the Civil Defence agency told AFP news agency.

As she picked through the rubble of the destroyed building, Kifaya Shaqoura said the dead included her uncle and aunt, their children and their grandchildren.

Kenyan minister alleges intelligence agency behind his son's abduction

A Kenyan government minister has alleged that the country's national intelligence agency was behind the abduction of his son last year, as criticism against the rising cases of abductions continues.

Public Service Cabinet Secretary Justin Muturi said that it took a call by President William Ruto to have his son released by the National Intelli-

gence Service (NIS).

Muturi is the first member of the cabinet to publicly criticise the government's handling of the spate of abductions in Kenya.

In a statement to the police crime investigations unit on Tuesday, Muturi gave a detailed account of how his son, Leslie, was abducted on 22 June last year.

Mr Ruto and the intelligence

agency have not commented on his allegations.

At least 80 people, including the minister's son, have been abducted in the last six months, according to a state-funded rights group.

The wave of abductions started after protests against tax hikes last June, and have continued since then.

Some of those abducted have been released following

public pressure.

Earlier this week, the minister told journalists that he had not received answers about the abduction of his son, despite reaching out to top security officials.

Muturi said the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) subsequently urged him to record a statement with them, telling him the matter was still under investigation.

Sports

● Football ● Athletics ● Gulf ● Basketball ● Tennis ● Boxing

Showtyme Hoopers CEO, Durojaiye vows continued support for Ibadan Basketball championship

The 4th edition of the Ibadan Basketball Championship (IBC) will take place this weekend at the Adamasingba Sports Complex in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

The two-day tournament, which is set for Friday and Saturday, will feature male and female categories, drawing top basketball talent from across the region.

The Ibadan Basketball Championship has become an annual highlight in the sports calendar of Ibadan, attracting players, coaches, and fans from various parts of Oyo State and beyond.

“As in previous years, this edition promises to be thrilling, with a high level of competition.

Shola Durojaiye, the CEO of Showtyme Hoopers BC and a key advocate for the championship, expressed his excitement about the event. Durojaiye, who is also a member of the Oyo State Basketball Association (OSBA), emphasized the championship's aim of providing a platform for basketball players in the state to showcase their skills and enhance their development.

“The goal of the championship is to create opportunities for male and female players in Oyo State to improve their game, display their talents, and engage in competitive play.

“We want to ensure that players leave with valuable experiences that will help them grow in the sport,” Durojaiye said.

He also highlighted that the event would feature several side attractions, including musical performances by guest artists, making the weekend a celebration of both basketball and culture.

Durojaiye explained that the event was made possible by the support of former Ibadan basketball players from the diaspora, who have come together to give back to the city that nurtured their passion for the sport.

“The brains behind this event are former basketball players from Ibadan who are now in the diaspora.

They wanted to give back to the city by organizing this championship. It's all about encouraging and nurturing the next generation of

basketball stars,” he stated.

As a long-time supporter of Oluyole Warriors, Durojaiye spoke passionately about the wealth of young talent in Oyo State, stressing the importance of continued support for these aspiring athletes.

He noted, “In the past, one of the major challenges we faced was the lack of basketball competitions.

Now, we're here to support the young players and complement the efforts of the dedicated coach-

es in the state who are working hard to develop these talents.”

This year's edition of the IBC is set to be a major event, with over 850,000 naira in prize money up for grabs.

The basketball community, particularly the Ibadan Ballers in the diaspora, have pledged their continued support for the growth of the sport in the region.

The tournament promises to deliver not just fierce competition, but also an unforgettable experience for players and fans alike.



Rivers State Sports Ministry and University of Port Harcourt partner as Team Rivers gear up for 2025 NSF

The Rivers State Ministry of Sports and University of Port Harcourt have reached a partnership which will see Athletes of the State camp and train at the facilities of the Insti-

tution ahead of the participation of Team Rivers at the upcoming 2025 National Sports Festival.

Speaking at a brief ceremony to seal the partnership at the University of Port Harcourt on Tuesday,

the Rivers State Sports Commissioner, Barr. Christopher Green described facilities at the Institution as some of the best, not just in Nigeria, but across the continent.

He added that he was confi-

dent that the benefits of the alliance will be latent and positively affect the chances of Team Rivers emerging as Nulli Secundus amongst the committee of States at the upcoming NSF.

CAF announces additional qualifiers as CHAN 2024 field expands to 18 teams



EDWARD OSEGHE

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) has announced plans for an additional qualifying championship to address the shortage of teams in the final field for the 2024 African Nations Championship (CHAN).

Currently, 16 teams have secured spots, including the three co-host nations and 13 others who progressed through the qualifying series. However, the wild card previously granted to Rwan-

da appears to have been rescinded, as the country is no longer listed among the participants.

Algeria, a late entrant, may also have been excluded from the competition. Despite these developments, CAF confirmed that “two nations must still be confirmed through a series of qualifier matches ahead of the August 2025 tournament.”

With these adjustments, the final field for CHAN 2024 will expand to 18 teams, and the tournament's official draw will proceed as scheduled.



I've no plans to return to NPFL, says Omeruo

FOLUSEWA AKINOLA

The former Chelsea player and Super Eagles defender, Kenneth Omeruo has ruled out a possible return to play in the Nigeria Premier Football League (NPFL).

Omeruo revealed his decision during a live X (formerly Twitter) Space session, co-hosted with fellow Nigerian internationals Wilfred Ndidi and Asisat Oshoala, along with several Nigerian journalists.

Explaining his reasons for not returning to the NPFL, Omeruo mentioned the absence of a top-flight club in his hometown of Abuja but also expressed a strong interest in scouting and developing new talent within the league.

He said, “I don't think I will come back to play in the NPFL. I grew up in Abuja and they don't have a club playing in the top-

flight. And right now, I can't go back to Akure. I don't see myself going back to the Nigerian league to play but I'm someone who likes scouting good players.”

Speaking of the quality within the league, he recalled a time when an NPFL streaming app allowed him to share game footage with his agent and others.

“There was a time when the league had an app where we could stream games from everywhere and back then I shared it (the link) with my agent and other people because I knew the quality we had in that league,” he explained.

Although the former Chelsea player ruled out playing in Nigeria's League, the presence of prominent veterans internationals like Ahmed Musa, Shehu Abdullahi and Brown Ideye in the NPFL could still inspire other stars to follow suit.

Serbian int'l breaks Federer record in Melbourne win

FOLUSEWA AKINOLA

Novak Djokovic has surpassed Roger Federer's record for the most major singles matches played after beating Jaime Faria to progress to the third round of the Australian Open.

The 37-year-old was made to work in his 430th Grand Slam singles match but he emerged triumphant, beating qualifier Faria 6-1 6-7 (4-7) 6-3 6-2.

The win gives Djokovic sole ownership of the all-time record for most Grand Slam singles matches played among men and women more than rivals, Federer, who played his last major match at Wimbledon in 2021.

When asked about this major feat he said “I love this sport. I love competition,” Djokovic said when asked about the milestone.

“I try to give my best every single time. It's been over 20 years that I've been competing in Grand Slams at the highest level.

“Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record.”

Djokovic is on course to make further history still in Melbourne if he wins the title.

This would earn him a 25th major, moving him clear of Australia's Margaret Court as the sole leader of all-time Grand Slam singles titles.



Nasarawa United unveil star-studded signings ahead of NPFL 25 second stanza

Today, we officially unveiled eight high-profile players at a Press Conference at our home ground, the Lafia City Stadium, in a major squad overhaul ahead of the commencement of the second stanza of the 2024/25 Nigeria Premier Football League Season.

In this bold move to bolster our team's chances of success, securing the services of some of the most talented and sought-after players in the top-flight league was imminent looking at our position on the league table.

The new signings bring a wealth of experience, skill, and determination to the squad, and will be available for selection for our team's first match of the second stanza against Katsina United on Saturday, 25th January, 2025, at the Lafia City Stadium by 4pm.

The new acquisitions include;

1. Central defender, Benson Abbey who joined us from Shooting Stars Sports Club of Ibadan.
2. Left back, Peace Dewan formerly of Sunshine Stars of Akure.
3. Attacking Midfielder, Abubakar Aliyu previously with Shooting Stars Sports Club of Ibadan.
4. Central Midfielder, Solomon Chigozie from Kwara United FC of Ilorin.
5. Winger, Peter Eneji, who rejoined from Busaiteen FC of Bahrain.
6. Centre forward, Ugochukwu Leonard who relinked up from Heartland FC of Owerri.
7. Winger, Benjamin Jack, from Golden Boot FC of Benin



Republic, and

8. Winger, Onyema Emmanuel, who arrived from Ikoro-du City FC of Lagos.

Addressing the Press earlier, Club Chairman, Solomon Babanjah, said,

"We are absolutely delighted to welcome these exceptional players to Nasarawa United FC.

"This is a major statement of intent from the Club, and we are confident that these signings will help us achieve our

goals in the second stanza of the 2024/25 Nigeria Premier Football League Campaign.

"These players are household names, and have written their names in gold as far as the top-flight league is concerned in Nigeria.

"Our situation in the league is somehow precarious, but with the acquisition of these top-class players, we are in the right position to turn things around and return the team to where we rightly belong to, which is the

summit of the league.

"We plead for the support and prayers of all key stakeholders involved to enable us get out of this terrain.

"We thank His Excellency, Governor Abdullahi Sule; the Deputy Governor, Dr. Emmanuel Agbada Akabe, the State Ministry of Youth and Sports Development; the State Football Association, our ever-present supporters and fans, both home and scattered all over, for always standing by us.

IOC To replace damaged Paris Olympics medals

Damaged and defective medals won by athletes at the 2024 Paris Olympics will be replaced in the coming weeks, organisers said, after French media said that more than 100 medals had already been returned.

The thousands of medals handed out during the Games were produced by France's state mint.

"The Paris 2024 Olympic Games Organising Committee is working closely with the Monnaie de Paris (the French state mint), the institution responsible for the manufacture and quality control of the medals, to assess any complaints about the medals and to understand the circumstances and cause of any damage," the IOC said.

Defective medals will be

systematically replaced by the Monnaie de Paris and engraved identically.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) told newsmen that the "defective medals" from the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris will be replaced with identical models.

"The replacement process should begin in the coming weeks."

CHAN 2024 logo and trophy unveiled as activation continues despite postponement

CHIDINMA KALU

Hours before the final draw for the 8th edition of the African Nations Championship (CHAN) 2024, the competition's logo has been unveiled, even as the tournament has been postponed to August.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF), the championship's organisers, announced that the new design "brings a fresh identity and emphasises its deep-rooted connections to African football and culture."

A key highlight of the unveiling was the introduction of

the new CHAN 2024 trophy. It boasts a sleek, modern design featuring a combination of gold and silver elements, symbolizing the prestige and growing stature of the tournament.

A notable feature of the trophy is the 54 distinct lines

encircling it, which, according to CAF, "symbolize the 54 African nations united with a map of the continent at its core." This design underscores the championship's celebration of diversity and unity across Africa.

CAF explained that, "Each line represents the foundation of African football, a pathway carved by our passion and skill, a tribute to our players and our dreams."

The new trophy serves as a powerful representation of the progress in African football and the shared passion that continues to unite the continent.



Man United hopeful of completing January move for Osimhen

Manchester United, one of the Premier League giants, remain optimistic about completing a major transfer for Nigerian striker Victor Osimhen, according to football transfer expert Ben Jacobs.

Osimhen, a 26-year-old Napoli striker currently on loan to Turkish side Galatasaray, was

the subject of widespread transfer speculation last summer, with Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), and Saudi Arabian clubs vying for his signature.

However, the Nigerian forward turned down a move to Saudi Arabia, while negotiations with Chelsea and PSG failed to materialize. Napoli subsequently loaned him to

Galatasaray, where he has impressed with 13 goals in 17 matches this season.

The Red Devils are in desperate need of a reliable striker. Although the club signed Joshua Zirkzee from Bologna last summer, the forward has struggled to make an impact. Osimhen has emerged as a "dream" target for Manchester United, but the

financial complexities surrounding the deal are substantial.

Jacobs, speaking to The United Stand said: "Victor Osimhen is a Man Utd dream target. But financially, it's very difficult, even with that release clause dropping to €75 million. Nothing is possible in January, and Osimhen still insists on a permanent move."

Jacobs also noted that Unit-

EPL: Iwobi urges Fulham to move on from derby loss to West Ham

Alex Iwobi has said it is important for Fulham to move on from the London derby defeat to West Ham United.

Marco Silva's side lost 3-2 to the Hammers at the London Stadium on Tuesday.

Iwobi scored both goals for Fulham in the thrilling encounter.

The versatile midfielder said they were disappointed not to get a positive result from the game.

"We're all disappointed the way we lost the game, just mistakes," he told Fulham TV.

"Had we not made the mis-

takes, we would have won it.

"But then there's a game around the corner and so we cannot dwell on, so we must ourselves and go again.

"We created so many chances and hit the post twice, but if you don't defend as a team, you get punished in the Premier League."

Iwobi has scored seven goals and registered three assists this season.

Fulham occupy ninth position on the table with 30 points.

The Cottagers will be away to Leicester City on Saturday.



Super Eagles: Ndidi urges mates to brace for World Cup 26 campaign

Super Eagles midfielder Wilfred Ndidi has tasked his teammates to utilise the facelift the 2025 African Cup of Nations qualification ticket has provided and ensure they channel all their energies to the remaining 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

Ndidi who admitted the players put themselves in precarious situation, warned that failure to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup would be a massive setback for Nigerian football and the players whom largely may not have that chance to do so again.

Ndidi said as much in a conversation with his Super Eagles' teammate Kenneth Omeruo on X (formerly Twitter) as he dwelled on the team's difficult position in the qualifiers.

"We know we're in a difficult and critical situation, and we cannot let

this slip because if some players miss out on playing at this World Cup, there might be no other guaranteed opportunity to go for the next World Cup," Ndidi stated.

The Super Eagles currently sit fifth in Group C with three points from four matches, four points behind joint leaders Rwanda, South Africa, and Benin Republic. Nigeria's next matches are away to Rwanda in Kigali on March 17 and at home to Zimbabwe in Uyo seven days later.

"We put ourselves into this situation because we didn't do well in the previous games, but I feel like the qualifying games for the AFCON and qualifying for the AFCON have created a new confidence in the team already to actually push towards qualifying for the World Cup," Ndidi further lamented.



SOCIETY

BLACK MAN'S WOES:

Why we weep for africa on social media

CHARLES AWUZIE

Post something about Polygamy and polyamory, you will get 1000 comments in few minutes. But talk about Technology and your engagement will crash like the Naira. Africans would rather argue Theology than to debate Technology.

Africans know everything about God, but know nothing about being gods.

Africans know everyone going to hell, but don't know that we are already in hell.

Africans would rather pray for the healing of one, but will never play a role in the Science that can heal All.

Africans would rather follow celebrity pastors who ask them to type amen to receive cars, than to follow intellectuals who challenge them to make cars.

Africans would rather give their entire January earnings as a First fruit

Offering to their god than invest 50% of their January earnings on an online course or genuine investment that can make their lives better.

Africans would rather get burnt

into ashes on earth to defend a God in heaven, than to bring the figurative beauty of heaven to earth.

Oh Africa, who has bewitched us...

Who told us that INTELLECTU-

ALISM is anti-Christ but 'Iberiberism' (ignorance) is Godly.

How were you so Boxed that you can never think outside the box even for a moment?

What is this box?

Who created this box?

Who put you into this box?

Why can't you stretch your mind beyond this box - for example, to consider death or ageing as mere diseases solvable through science and technology... I mean, even if this doesn't work (fortunately, it is working), at least you would have stretched your mind outside the box for once in a lifetime. Just stop arguing and start imagining solutions.

Do you not understand that the secret of creativity is Wild Imagination?

What is your wildest imagination? Going to heaven? Or your haters burning in hell fire? Can't you see that the imagination of heaven and hell has filled your subconscious mind

and now, you can't imagine anything further. You can't imagine solutions to diseases and death.. You can't imagine solutions to poverty and lack. You can only imagine one thing - heaven or hell - or both. This is your problem oh Africa.

I wake up every morning with a renewed passion to lead my beloved continent out of the darkness of ignorance created by superstitions, illusions and hallucinations.

I wake up every morning desiring to tear the box enslaving our smart brains.

What the brain of the African can create when released from the box of superstition is unimaginable...

If you are reading to this point, I want you to decide that going forward, you will imagine the impossible and attempt to bring your wildest imagination into reality. If you think like this, you will have a reason to live every day.

What is your wildest imagination? Going to heaven? Or your haters burning in hell fire? Can't you see that the imagination of heaven and hell has filled your subconscious mind and now, you can't imagine anything further.

You can't imagine solutions to diseases and death.. You can't imagine solutions to poverty and lack. You can only imagine one thing - heaven or hell - or both. This is your problem oh Africa

The Asoebi has come to stay

TAYO TADE

Being seen at a funeral party, wedding or anniversary events wearing the chosen ceremonial attire for the event is a common phenomena in Nigeria. Nigeria's tradition of matching outfits at events has a well recognized tradition. Infact, you are not a real guest if you are even dressed in the most expensive attire that does not identify with the ceremonial outfit, either in colour or design, or the other fashion assemblages like colour of shoes, gele(headgear) and bag.

Matching outfits made from identical fabric. They're a regular feature at parties, weddings and funerals in Nigeria, spotted across social media and fashion pages. They're called aso ebi, a Yoruba phrase meaning 'family cloth'.

This communal cultural tradition serves to publicly display one's social relations. Sociability among the Yoruba can be said to be centred around family ties.

But in time, aso ebi has come to include distant relatives and friends, birthing new and unintended forms of social anxiety. Although my study on aso ebi was published in 2014, the findings remain relevant. If anything, the practice is growing among Nigerians.

While the intended functions of aso ebi remain a show of love, identification, solidarity and social bonding, its commodification is also leading to conflict and the unequal treatment of party attendees.

This is because those lacking the financial power to buy the clothes are left out in the distribution of souve-

nirs and even food. They experience social exclusion, embarrassment and withdrawal from group participation. The commodification of aso ebi frustrates its intended social bonding.

A Nigerian bride is usually seen in photoshoots surrounded by her bridesmaids and friends, who are dressed in aso ebi.

The origin of the aso ebi tradition is unknown, but our participants over the age of 60 believed it came about mainly to identify immediate family at funerals. A culture expert participating in our study said:

The purpose of aso ebi is to easily identify the children of the deceased during funerals, and not relatives nor friends and not for other occasions.

However, younger participants believed that aso ebi was any cloth chosen for any occasion.

The inherent purpose of buying uniform dress is closely tied to the idea of solidarity. When many people are communally clad, it suggests that the party host is popular and well networked. Party conveners are sometimes evaluated on the turnout of people at their event. A large crowd of attendees confers honour on the organiser among their family and friends.

FROM FUNERALS TO FASHION

But for certain traditional practices to remain suitable, they must reflect modification in terms of content and purpose. In contemporary times, aso ebi has undergone transformations. Its use has been extended from family members (ebi) to co-workers (alabasi-sepo), friends (ore), alajogbe (co-res-

idents), neighbours (aladugbo) and other well-wishers.

People unrelated by blood but connected socially form a new order of social relations. Party-goers support the celebrant in cash, gifts and in kind by becoming involved in planning the event. Although people welcome cash support, attendance boosts the morale and social value of the event. It also adds aesthetics in the form of fashion. A female civil servant in our study said:

The main reason that we buy and sell aso ebi is to make the event colourful, unique and beautiful.

The unique colours and styles of the aso ebi wearers adds value to an event.

Attending the social event is as important as agreeing to buy the cloth for it. People are invited through invitation cards and reminded through text messages on their phones. A

poorly attended event can be a shameful affair and so a broader group of social connections is now invited to the event. A participant in our study asserted:

I have attended weddings that I did not know the couple at all or the families of the couple but I wore the same aso ebi that everybody wore at the occasion. This is not the way it is supposed to be.

THE DOWNSIDE

Solidarity is reciprocated consciously or unconsciously in the culture of aso ebi. This is in line with the Yoruba maxim, "Gbami nigba ojo, kingba e nigba erun", "One good turn deserves another."

A person who does not rally round a celebrant may not be given support from the organiser of the event. Embedded in this is the purchase and wearing of aso ebi, which may be the

We were not allowed to enter the venue because they said they wanted people of a high class to have a seat. Seats had name tags but my colleagues defiantly occupied a table, at least four of whom had bought the aso ebi. But trays of food were passing over our heads without any being placed on our table. It took about one hour before there was anything to eat. At that point I stood up and left because I felt so bad

basis of social differentiation at the event. The seating arrangement, serving of food and distribution of gifts are at stake.

A participant in our study told us that she attended the wedding ceremony of a junior colleague and could not spare the money to buy the aso ebi, which was sequins and satin lace. The price was put at N11,500 (US\$76). She decided to use what she had to buy a gift for her colleague, but paid the social price for that decision when she arrived at the wedding:

We were not allowed to enter the venue because they said they wanted people of a high class to have a seat. Seats had name tags but my colleagues defiantly occupied a table, at least four of whom had bought the aso ebi. But trays of food were passing over our heads without any being placed on our table. It took about one hour before there was anything to eat. At that point I stood up and left because I felt so bad.

Party-goers dressed in aso ebi heading to the venue. Jeremy Weate/Flickr

ENTRENCHING INEQUALITY

Those who cannot buy aso ebi and stay away from events may be avoiding being hurt or embarrassed, but they stand to lose the opportunities that lie in group convergence and networking.

This form of exclusion reduces social cohesion and pits people against one another. Ultimately, wealth affects relationships, participation, social integration and power. Inequality becomes entrenched by beautiful clothing.