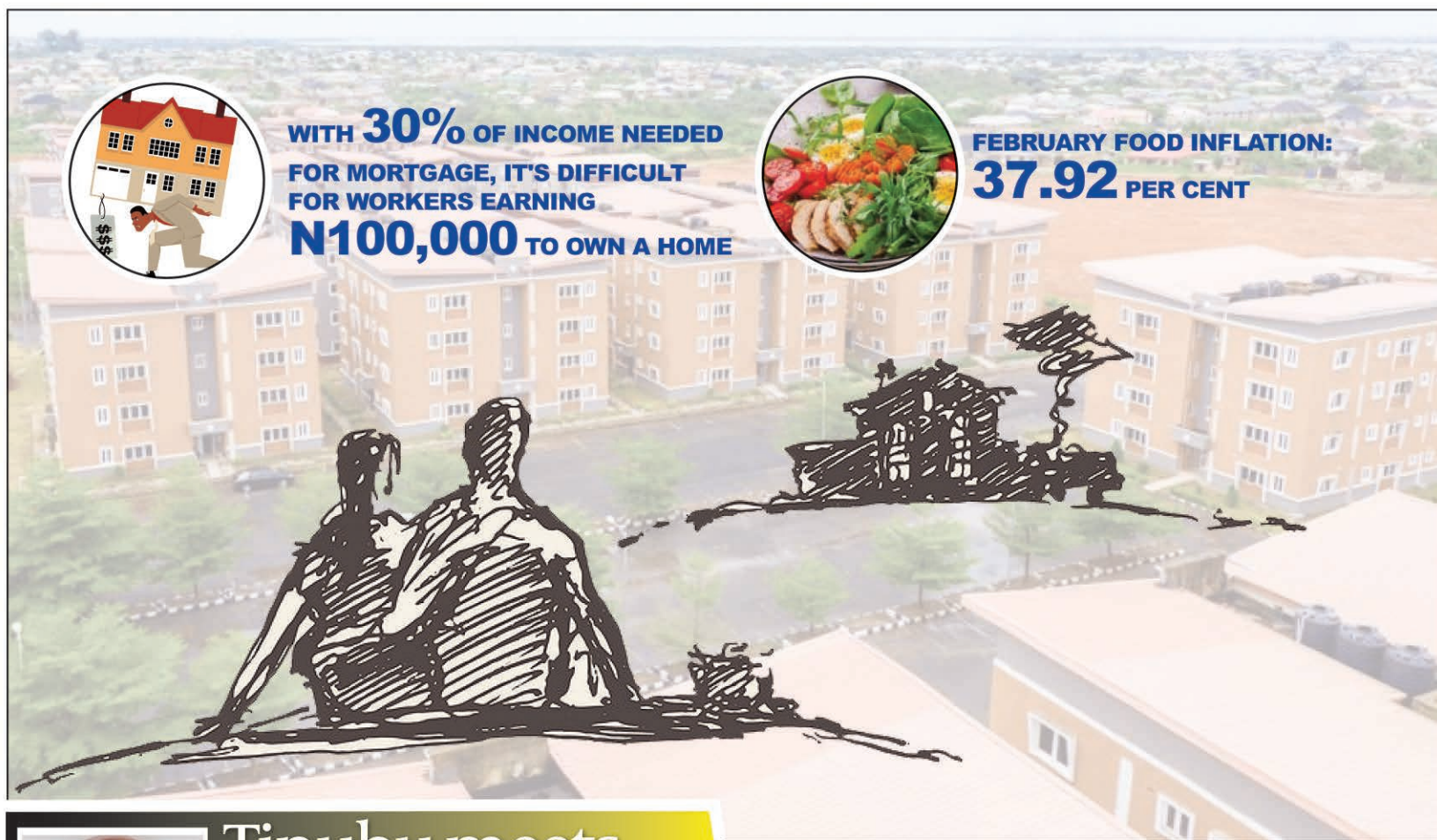




## Inflation and rising construction costs:

PAGE 6

# Low, middle class defer homeownership plans for food



WITH **30%** OF INCOME NEEDED FOR MORTGAGE, IT'S DIFFICULT FOR WORKERS EARNING **N100,000** TO OWN A HOME



FEBRUARY FOOD INFLATION: **37.92** PER CENT

**Court convicts five for murder, kidnapping in Rivers** METRO PAGE 8

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**Terrorism: Ohanaeze cautions Tinubu as gunmen abduct dozens in fresh Kaduna attack** NEWS PAGE 6

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**The Guardian** Conscience, Nurtured by Truth

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# Panorama

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## SPOTLIGHT

### Metering gaps remain despite N273.3b loan to DisCos for meters, others

From Kingsley Jeremiah, Abuja  
Nigeria's electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos) may have spent an average of N670,000 to purchase each prepaid meter and other accessories through a N273.3 billion facility obtained from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).  
If the report of CBN covering a detailed assessment of a N10.3 trillion developmental finance budget between 2015 to 2022 is anything to take seriously, DisCos spent N273.3 billion to provide 414,000 prepaid meters.  
While the cost of prepaid meters in Nigeria between 2015 and 2022 stood at about N50,000 and N100,000 for single and three phase me-

ters, the CBN report pegging 414,000 meters against N273.3 billion, meant that each meter went for N670,000.  
Coming under the Nigerian Electricity Market Stabilisation Facility intervention project, which targets increasing electricity capacity from 3,400MW to approximately 4,900MW, the CBN report showed that the DisCos spent the money on maximum Demand meters, Smart meters, and Single-Phase meters.  
While the Federal Government at some point took over the mass metering programme with financing from the CBN from phase

zero, the CBN, after the first phase backpedaled and sued some meter companies.  
The apex bank had approached a Federal High Court in Lokoja, Kogi State, for an order to freeze 157 accounts of Meter Asset Providers for allegedly diverting intervention funds under the NMMP between January 1, 2020, to March 15, 2022.  
The court documents showed that the apex bank requested 15 commercial banks and the Bank of Industry (BOI) to freeze the accounts of 157 companies for 180 days pending the outcome of its investigations.  
The Guardian had learnt that

while most heads of DisCos, especially those who have been ousted from the system were afterwards trailed by the EFCC due to the metering saga, and other allegations, the team of former President Muhammadu Buhari on infrastructure pulled the string that forced the CBN to abandon the allegations.  
CBN report showed that Ikeja Disco received the highest of the facility, standing at N40.74 billion, Eko Disco received N34.85 billion in credit facility and Abuja DisCo got N34.69 billion. Ibadan DisCo got N27.73 billion, Enugu Disco was loaned N27.84 billion, and Kaduna Disco borrowed N24.36 billion, among others.



Kaduna State Deputy Governor, Dr Hadiza Balarabe (left); Head of Service, Habiba Shekarau; Commissioner of Health, Ummah Ahmed; Commissioner of Human Services and Social Development, Rabi Salisu and others, during a Ramadan Tafsir at the Almanar Mosque, in Kaduna...yesterday. PHOTO:NAN

### 'Trump unable to make \$454m bond in civil fraud case'

DONALD Trump has been unable to post a bond covering the full amount of his \$454m New York civil fraud judgment against him, his lawyers said in a court filing.  
The filing on Monday states that obtaining a bond has proven to be "a practical impossibility", adding that "diligent" efforts made to secure a bond have included "approaching about 30 surety companies through 4 separate brokers" and "countless hours negotiating with one of the largest insurance companies in the world."

These efforts have proven that "obtaining an appeal bond in the full amount" of the judgment "is not possible under the circumstances presented," the filing states.  
Trump owes \$456.8m.  
In all, he and co-defendants including his company and top executives owe \$467.3m, according to AP.



... DAY 3613

OUR GIRLS STILL MISSING

Tope Templer Olaiya, News Editor @TopeTempler

### How we saved \$53m from \$128m contract awarded, by Wike

From John Akubo, Abuja  
The Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Nyesom Wike, yesterday disclosed how his administration was able to save \$53 million for Nigeria from a contract of \$128 million approved by the immediate past administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.  
He said the administration of President Bola Tinubu met the contract for the operation of the Abuja Metro Light Rail at \$128 million.  
Speaking before the Senate Committees on FCT and FCT Areas Councils, he said the administration was forced to

demand details and urgent reviews of the sum because there was no way the Federal Government could afford to pay such an amount.  
Wike, who appeared before the committees to defend the N1.1trillion statutory budget of the FCT for this year, told lawmakers that the contract was signed by the government of his predecessor, former President Muhammadu Buhari.  
Narrating the encounter between him and the contractor, CCECC, the minister said he learned that the cost

of operations also covered personnel training for 29 months.  
He stated, "This was projected by the last administration. We did a review and brought it down to \$75 million, in the process, saving about \$53 million for the government."  
"It had to do with the Metroline. The cost for the construction is different, the cost for the operation where CCECC is insisting, we train our people for 29 months and \$128 million was approved by FEC before this administration."

## RANDOM FACTS

- South Africa is the first African country to have access to Google's AI chatbox, Gemini.
- Soteriophobia is a condition which causes a person to refuse depending on others out of fear of being disappointed
- Anhedonia is the word for that feeling when you cannot find joy in the things that usually bring you joy.
- Sleep makes you more creative and makes your memories stronger.
- The space between your eyebrows is called the Glabella.

## TODAY'S QUOTE

It is good to love many things, for therein lies true strength, and whosoever loves much performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love is well done.

I confess I do not know why, but looking at the stars always makes me dream.  
VINCENT van GOGH

In everybody's life there's a point of no return. And in a very few cases, a point where you can't go forward anymore. And when we reach that point, all we can do is quietly accept the fact.  
That's how we survive.  
HARUKI MURAKAMI

## CROSS WORD PUZZLE

1	2	3	4	5
			6	
7			8	
		9	10	
11				12
		14	15	
	16	17		
18			19	
20		21		

- ### ACROSS
1. Town in Edo State, (6).
  4. Deplorably bad, (3).
  7. Buddhist in State of enlightenment, (5).
  8. Town in Cross River State, (4).
  9. Town in Osun State, (3).
  11. Make somebody be quiet, (4).
  15. 'One' in Hausa language, (4).
  16. Woman's underwear, (3).
  18. Town in Oyo State, (4).
  19. Tropical American fruit, (5).
  20. Decompose, (3).
  21. --- Adedibu, late Ibadan politician, (6).
- © Olulana Olukayode

- ### DOWN
1. Late Nigeria Head of State, (6).
  2. Reuse something, (6).
  3. Large hawk, (4).
  5. Plunge briefly into liquid, (3).
  6. Start legal proceeding against, (3).
  10. Be adequate, (2).
  12. Town in Bauchi State, (6).
  13. Kwara State Ex Governor, (6).
  14. Indicating alternative, (2).
  16. Command, (3).
  17. Of agriculture, (4).
  18. Knight's title, (3).

Check page 31 for solution to the puzzle

## TODAY IN HISTORY

- **2023 - Switzerland**  
The Swiss Government brokered a deal for UBS to buy out rival Credit Suisse in an attempt to calm the 2023 banking crisis.
- **2019 - Nigeria**  
Delta State government suspended headmistress of Okotie-Eboh Primary School 1, Sapele LGA, Mrs. Vero Igbigwe following a viral video in the 'Dem go flog me tire' fame where little Success Adegor was sent home over her parents' failure to pay her examination levies.
- **2019 - Kazakhstan**  
The first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, resigned from office after nearly three decades, leaving Senate Chairman Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as the acting President and successor.
- **2017 - Nigeria**  
A medical doctor, Allwell Oji, jumped into the Lagos lagoon on Third Mainland Bridge. Oji, 35, was going to Victoria Island for a Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria meeting.
- **2017 - Ghana**  
20 people were killed when a big tree fell into the pool they were swimming in at a waterfall in Kintampo, crushing and drowning people enjoying a day out.
- **2015 - Nigeria**  
Dozens of women forced to marry Boko Haram fighters were slaughtered by their "husbands" before a battle with troops in Bama, Borno State. Witnesses said the killing of women began 10 days before Bama was liberated.
- **2011 - Libya**  
Libyan Civil War: After failure of Muammar Gaddafi forces to take Benghazi, French Air Force launched Opération Harmattan, beginning foreign military intervention in Libya.
- **2008 - Pakistan**  
Legislators elected Pakistan's first female speaker of parliament, Fehmida Mirza, a follower and lookalike of assassinated former PM Benazir Bhutto
- **2008 - Italy**  
Osama bin Laden accused Pope Benedict XVI of helping in a "new Crusade" against Islam and warned of a "severe" reaction to European publications of cartoons of Prophet Muhammad that insulted Muslims
- **2002 - Zimbabwe**  
Zimbabwe was suspended for one year from the 54-nation Commonwealth on charges of human rights abuses, electoral fraud as punishment for Pres. Mugabe's conduct following a turbulent election.
- **1996 - S/Africa**  
Nelson Mandela divorced Winnie Mandela after 38 years of marriage.

## 'Equitable energy transition critical to realisation of SDGs'

By **Oludare Richards**

**A**N equitable energy transition is critical to realisation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), OPEC Governor for Nigeria, Ambassador Gabriel Aduda, has stressed. He advised that entities must be encouraged to responsibly develop available energy sources.

He made the submission at the Global Reputation Forum (GRF) for world leaders and entrepreneurs at the House of Lords in Westminster, United Kingdom.

In his keynote presentation of Social Impact of Energy Transition in Africa, guided by theme: "Global Collaboration for Sustainable Development: The Role of Nations in Social Impact," Aduda stressed that the continent must develop from the known before it could transition to the unknown and harness its natural endowments for the good of the people.

"Big brother nations must recognise that achieving set goals in energy transition calls for deliberate and sustainable global partnerships where all nations are given a fair field of play and encouraged to develop responsibly energy sources available to them," he said.

With the world six years away from the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs, only 12 per cent of the targets for which data exist, are on track, but almost one half are off track and more than one thirds are either failing to advance or worse still, regressing below the baseline set in 2015. Progress so far is said to be nowhere near where it is needed.

He noted that the fossil fuel industry can and must be part of the solution. Also, he maintained that climate change enthusiasts must acknowledge fossil fuels as the fuel that aided the industrialisation of advanced nations, and come up with modern technologies that would further reduce emissions and not reduce production.

Politician and biodiversity scientist, Dr Bibi Ameenah Firdaus Gurib-Fakim, who served as the sixth President of Mauritius, observed that the two interwoven sustainable development fields of environmental and social needs seem to have drifted apart from the way they measure progress and should work together.

She stated that it is only through cross-sector, cross-industry and cross-society partnerships that "we can scale the societal commitments to which we hold ourselves accountable and protect the global commons."

## Settle NASU, SSANU members urgently, NLC tells govt

By **Gloria Nwafor**

**T**HE Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has urged the Federal Government to speedily pay up outstanding salaries of members of the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational (NASU) and Associated Institutions and Senior Staff

Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU). A statement by NLC President, Joe Ajaero, yesterday, advised the government not to take for granted the maturity of the unions, stating that there has been no credible reason or explanation for withholding

the pay in the first place. Recalling how the singular act has plunged the workers into "indescribable hardship," he said much worse, was when it defies logic to try to subject members of the unions to discriminatory treatment.

According to him, the action portrayed the government as courting avoidable industrial disputes.

Ajaero lamented that this was coming at a time when confidence was being restored to the public universities.



President Bola Tinubu (right) presenting All Progressives Congress (APC) flag to Edo State governorship candidate, Monday Okpebholo and his running mate, Denins Idahosa, at the Presidential Villa, Abuja ... yesterday.

## NCC claims voice, data services up by 90% after disruption

By **Adeyemi Adepetun**

**F**OLLOWING the disruption on March 14, which affected data and voice services due to cuts in undersea fibre optics along the coasts of Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) has confirmed services being restored to approximately 90 per cent at optimal level.

Its Director of Public Affairs, Reuben Mouka, in a statement, yesterday, hinted that Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) have assured the regulator that data and voice services would operate optimally pending full repairs of the undersea cables, as they have managed to activate alternative connectivities to restore normalcy.

AS part of efforts to address the Internet outage, WIOCC, Africa's digital backbone, has said it is leading the continent's response to the cable cuts currently affecting the WACS, ACE, Main One and SAT3 subsea systems on the western seaboard.

WIOCC, which claimed that its hyper-scale capacity on every major system is the largest in Africa and ideally placed to swiftly deliver restoration solutions to hyperscalers, fixed and mobile carriers, Internet service providers and other clients, enabling them to quickly re-establish key traffic routes

### • Operators deploy strategies to restore subsea cables

into, within and out of Africa, said the move would minimise performance degradation for end-customers.

The Group CEO, Chris Wood noted: "Immediately the four subsea cables were severed off the coast of Cote d'Ivoire, our engineering, operations and field teams swung into action. They have been working tirelessly for the last 48 hours with our strategic network partners and equipment suppliers and will, within the next 24 hours, have activated an unprecedented additional 2 Terabits per second (Tbps) of capacity across the unaffected cables in our network to support the capacity needs of other network operators and hyperscalers. Our clients connected directly at Open Access Data Centres (OADC) data centres in South Africa and Nigeria are already protected from the impact of the subsea outages due to the unique levels of redundancy and scale of the WIOCC core backbone.

"In Lagos, the Equiano cable, in which WIOCC owns a fibre pair, has not been affected by the incident off Cote d'Ivoire. WIOCC lands the cable directly into the OADC data centre, establishing the most resilient digital ecosystem hub in Lagos and offering the most direct connectivity to

Europe and South Africa. As a result, OADC's data centres and WIOCC's hyperscale network are playing a key role in restoring services to other facilities and operators currently suffering outages in Lagos and elsewhere on the continent."

In a statement, yesterday, the Group Chief Operating Officer, Ryan Sher, added that the priority "is to ensure minimal disruption and maximum resilience for our clients"

Already, Minister of Communications and Digital

Economy, Dr Bosun Tijani, has announced plans to spearhead a global collaboration for enhanced protection of undersea cables.

He made the disclosure on X (formerly Twitter) handle at the weekend.

Recognising the critical role these cables play in the digital economy, Tijani emphasised the need to review international laws and foster partnerships with regional and global bodies to accelerate efforts to safeguard them.

## Don't distract Tinubu with budget padding claim, YCE warns

From **Rotimi Agboluaje, Ibadan**

**Y**ORUBA Council of Elders (YCE), yesterday, warned against any attempt to pull down the President Bola Tinubu-led government over the media buzz generated on the heels of alleged budget padding.

The Secretary-General, Oladipo Oyewole, in a statement in Ibadan, Oyo State, said the group takes a serious exception to the brick-back in the media.

He said: "The YCE, as a totally non-political body, continues to defend the interest of the Yoruba race, to watch with keen interest and speak openly to issues that concern developments in the polity. "On the issue of padding of the national budget, we take serious objection to the brick-back in the media. Accordingly, we suggest, with all seriousness, that the matter be officially investigated and the truth be told to the people."

"The President and his administration must not be pulled down by any ill-intentioned cause that may not advocate the same for the great Nigeria we are working for. That will be unacceptable."

On the prevailing food scarcity, the scribe said the situation was due to a re-organisation to prepare the nation and citizens for a better tomorrow.

He continued: "We see the ongoing hunger and hardship experienced by the masses as a result of various forms of re-organisation to prepare Nigeria and Nigerians for a better tomorrow. Food must be made available."

"We, therefore, commend the President for linking resources together for the betterment of humanity, by mid-wifing Niger and Lagos states in the area of food production and exchange for money through marketing and sales.

## Group lauds President's reforms, flays past administrations

By **Waliat Musa**

**M**USLIM Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) has exonerated the current administration from the pervasive hardship in the country, noting that the development is a cumulative effect of poor policies over the years.

In a statement by its president, Rasaki Oladejo, the group submitted that the lack of political will did not allow past administrations to end the fuel subsidy regime, thus inflicting untold damage to the country's economic health.

The organisation added that Nigeria was dancing precari-

ously on the edge of a cliff, pointing out that it only required a purposeful leader to take bold economic and political decisions to pull it back.

Oladejo submitted: "For instance, everybody knows

that the country can no longer sustain the regime of fuel subsidy and all past administrations recognised this truism. So, what is to be done in this situation? Discontinue with the damn albatross of subsidy of course!

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# Implementation hurdles for copious provisions in new Electricity Act

*The new Nigerian Electricity Act 2023 is a landmark legislation that aims to reform the power sector nationwide and address its longstanding challenges. But as noble as the provisions are, effective implementation will be one of the greatest constraints of legislating Nigeria out of blackouts, JOSEPH ONYEKWERE, reports.*

**T**HE Electricity Act (Amendment) Bill, 2023, which was signed by the president in 2024, repealed the Electric Power Sector Reform Act, No. 6, 2005 and consolidated the laws relating to the Nigerian electricity supply industry. It also provides a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for the power sector in the areas of electricity generation, transmission, system operation, distribution, supply, trading, enforcement of consumer rights and obligations.

It provides for a holistic integrated resource plan and policy that recognises all sources for the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity, including the integration of renewable energy into Nigeria's energy mix and attracting investments as well as other related matters.

The primary objective of the Act is to provide a comprehensive legal and institutional framework to guide the operation of a privatised, contract and rule-based competitive electricity market in Nigeria and attract through transformative policy and regulatory measures, private sector investments in the entire power value chain of the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI).

Specifically, the Act seeks to provide an ideal legal and institutional framework to leverage the modest gains of the privatisation phase of the electric power sector to accelerate growth in power generation capacity and improve utilisation of generated power through increased investments in new and efficient power generation technology and revamping existing power plants.

To promote policy and regulatory measures to ensure the expansion of power transmission networks in Nigeria to address any imbalance in the existing transmission infrastructure; stimulate policy and regulatory measures to generally scale up efficient power generation, transmission, and distribution capabilities of the power sector to achieve a national electricity access targets and attaining the highest per capita power consumption in Africa within a reasonable time frame; and stipulate consequential, transitional and saving provisions regarding reforms made under the provisions of the repealed Act.

Also, part of its objective is to promote the development of a competitive electricity market; stimulate policy measures that will attract investments across the Nigerian electricity value chain to re-energise economic growth, drive job creation, and improve the living conditions of Nigerians; and provide a clear legal and institutional framework for the formulation and

adoption of a National Integrated Electricity Policy and Implementation Plan.

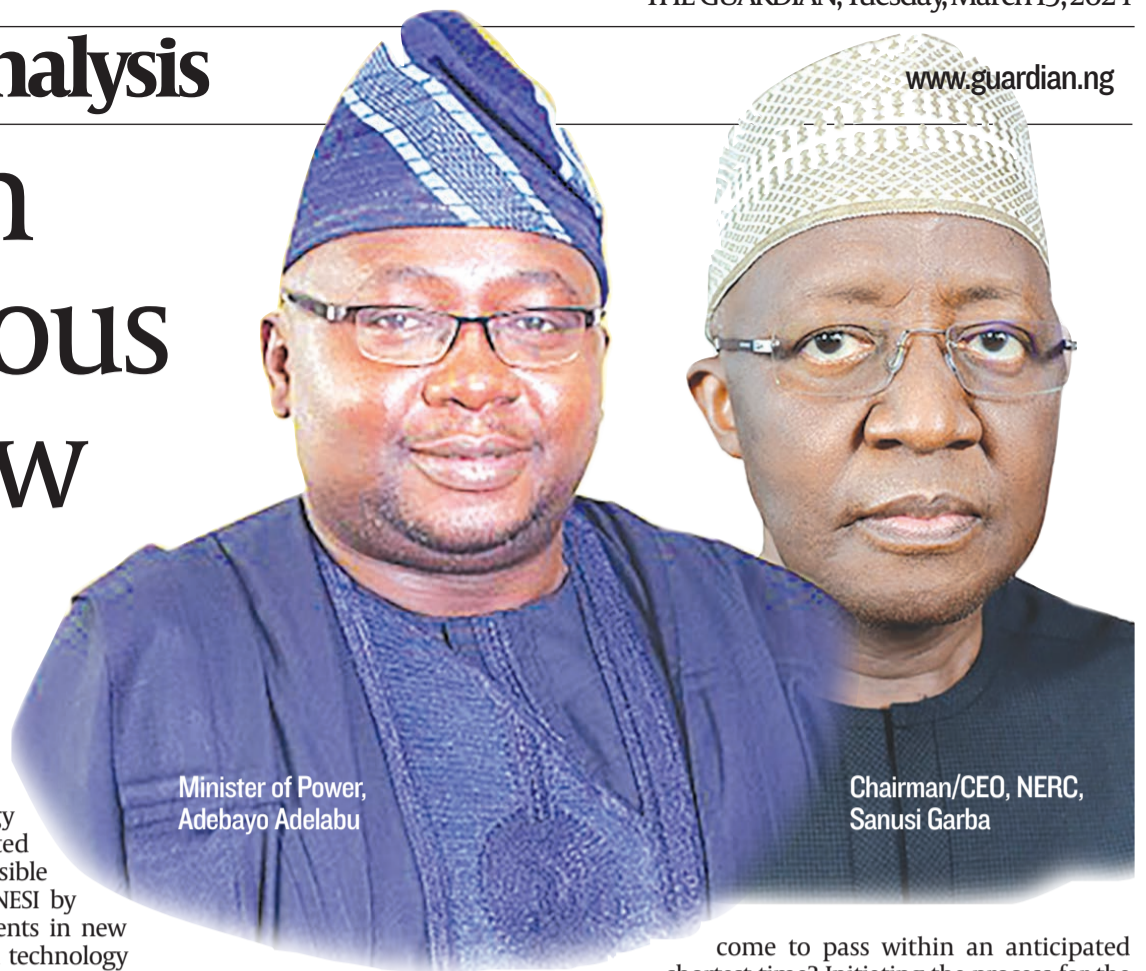
It is also intended to stimulate policies to address technology limitations and outdated infrastructure that are responsible for value chain losses in the NESI by attracting sustainable investments in new and efficient power generation technology and revamping existing power plants; eliminating through policy and regulatory measures, barriers to investments in generation, transmission, distribution, and related sub-sectors in the electricity industry; and promote policies and regulatory measures to increase geographic coverage in power generation, transmission, distribution and supply.

Apart from providing a framework to stimulate the development and utilisation of renewable energy sources and create an enabling environment to attract investment in renewable energy, it provides a framework for the improvement of access to electricity in rural, unserved, underserved, peri-urban and urban areas through the use of conventional sources and renewable energy off-grid and mini-grid solutions as well as the promotion of indigenous capacity in technology for renewable energy sources through a framework for local content in the electricity supply industry.

The Act also recognises third-party investments in NESI infrastructure by private and public sectors; provides a clear framework for cross-border electricity trade in the interest of national security and energy self-sufficiency; promotes frameworks for the security of electricity infrastructure, prescribes effective punitive measures against electricity theft and other offences peculiar to NESI; and strengthens the relationship between federal electricity market and state electricity market among other copious provisions.

The law seeks to address the development and environmental concerns of host communities and sets aside five per cent of the actual yearly operating expenditures of power-generating companies (GENCOs) from the preceding year for the development of their respective host communities.

It further provides that the funds set aside for the development of host communities will be received, managed, and administered for infrastructure development in the host



Minister of Power,  
Adebayo Adelabu

Chairman/CEO, NERC,  
Sanusi Garba

communities by a reputable Trustee/Manager to be jointly appointed by the respective GENCO and their host community.

The Act has several implications for NESI and its stakeholders, such that it empowers the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) to regulate the electricity sector within Nigeria and transition regulatory responsibilities to state regulators when they are established.

It enables states, companies, and individuals to generate, transmit and distribute electricity within their respective jurisdictions, subject to NERC's oversight and approval; mandates electricity generation licensees to meet renewable generation obligations as prescribed by NERC and promotes the integration of renewable energy into Nigeria's energy mix and grants the National Assembly the power to carry out oversight functions over the NESI through its respective Committees on Power in the Senate and House of Representatives.

Furthermore, the Act protects the rights and obligations of electricity consumers and provides for dispute resolution mechanisms.

However, the Act also faces some challenges, such as the need for effective implementation and enforcement of the provisions of the Act by the relevant authorities and stakeholders; the need for coordination and harmonisation of the roles and responsibilities of the federal, state and local governments in the electricity sector and the need for adequate infrastructure and capacity development to support the increased generation, transmission and distribution of electricity.

Others include the need for public awareness and education on the benefits and opportunities of the Act for electricity consumers and investors.

Human rights lawyer, Toluani Yemi Adebisi, argued that lawmaking is not a problem in Nigeria, but the implementation/compliance has consistently remained a big challenge. According to him, part II of the new Act, on National Integrated Electricity Policy and Strategic Implementation Plan is of great interest.

"The entire Section 3 (part II of the Act) talks of the Federal Government initiating the process for the preparation of an integrated Electricity Policy and Strategic implementation plan within one year from the commencement of this Act, even to develop the power Sector with optimal utilisation of other resources such as coal, natural gas, nuclear substances, etc., to the extent of rural electrification and provision of electricity to all rural areas, the Villages, Hamlets, etc.

"All these as contained in Sections 3(1),(2)(a-g) are good and of great interest, but can they

come to pass within an anticipated shortest time? Initiating the process for the preparation of these laudable ideas may for a long time never see the light of the day not to talk of doing it within one year, because of our failed systematic adherence to time frame," he pointed out.

Same, he said, was said of providing Meters to all electricity consumers within certain months of implementing the repealed 2005 Act, till today thousands of consumers remain unmetered and are still exploited under the notorious estimated billings.

Adebisi noted that despite NESI's burning desire to implement, improve and navigate into other sources of power for abundant supply to even rural areas, they cannot be effectively achieved without adequate capital.

His words: "How can such be attained when the Federal Government (MDAs) alone is having about N100 billion unpaid electricity bill? This was buttressed by the Executive Director of the Association of Nigeria Electricity Distributors, Sunday Oduntan, recently. Even the President had to pay the N342.3 million unpaid electricity bill by Aso Villa."

The lawyer stated that N280.98 billion has remained unpaid out of N1.063 trillion billed to customers in the first nine months of 2023. This figure, he argued, included the Federal Government's N100 billion, which represents about 30 per cent of its indebtedness.

"With this huge indebtedness, making remarkable progress to improve and implement financially required provisions would remain a mirage and indeed a protracted illusion.

"To make the dreams in the new Act a reality, the Government must show its readiness to put in place stronger and sustainable policies that specifically target the distribution companies, else the over 13,000 Megawatts of installed power generation capacity and 7,100 Megawatts transmission capacity will all be a waste," he declared.

Similarly, lead Partner, Infusion Lawyers, Senator Ihenyen, believes the new Act is a step in the right direction. According to him, while concerns over the implementation of the copious provisions of the new Act are understandable, Nigerians must also appreciate that the electricity sector is huge with multiple players and value chains that need to be comprehensively catered to.

He noted that the new Act repealed up to five Acts, consolidating the laws in the sector, including the Electric Power Sector Reform Act, 2005; Nigerian Electricity Management Services Agency (Establishment) Act, 2015; and various laws on hydroelectric power producing areas development.

Read the remaining part of  
this story on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng)

“

To make the dreams in the new Act a reality, the government must show its readiness to put in place stronger and sustainable policies that specifically target the distribution companies, else the over 13,000 Megawatts of installed power generation capacity and 7,100 Megawatts transmission capacity will all be a waste.

”

## Court adjourns suit seeking to sack 25 Rivers lawmakers

From **Obinna Nwaoku**, Port Harcourt

A Federal High Court sitting in Port Harcourt, Rivers State has adjourned a suit filed by civil society organisations in the state against the embattled 25 members of the state House of Assembly to April 26 for hearing.

The presiding Judge, Justice Stephen Dalyopam, adjourned the matter after listening to counsels in the matter. He said the adjournment would give all the parties to the suit the opportunity to file their processes.

Dalyopam, however, directed all the counsels to ensure they completed their processes of services and serve each other before the new date.

Speaking to journalists outside the courtroom, counsel representing the plaintiff in the matter, Eugene Ode, told journalists some parties had filed preliminary objections challenging the jurisdiction of the court to hear the matter before it, while some counsel had not filed any responses to the court.

Ode said it was in the spirit of fair hearing and justice that the court adjourned the matter to give fair hearing and equal justice to all.

## Youths urge Aiyedatiwa to quit Ondo polls

From **Adewale Momoh**, Akure

ONDO South Youths Forum (OSYF) has appealed to Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa to shelve his ambition to contest for the governorship seat in the interest of the Southern Senatorial District.

The group, which urged Aiyedatiwa to back any of the aspirants from the district, stated that his quest to emerge as governor in the forthcoming November governorship election would shortchange the district.

The youths emphasised that Ondo South's interest was to produce a candidate, who is legally eligible to serve eight years in office instead of settling for just a four-year term.

The group noted that with the ruling of the Supreme Court, Aiyedatiwa was only permitted to be sworn in once more since he already took the oath of office on December 27, 2023, after the demise of his erstwhile boss, late governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu.

In a statement, its coordinator, Kingsley Omogbehin, urged the All Progressives Congress (APC) and President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to do the needful when considering who would fly the flag of the party at the polls.

# Tinubu meets Edo APC chiefs over state crisis

From **Terhemba Daka** (Abuja) and **Michael Egbejule** (Benin City)

PRESIDENT Bola Tinubu, yesterday, met with the leadership of the Edo State chapter of the All Progressives Congress (APC) at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

The meeting, which had the party's candidate for the coming governorship election, Senator Monday Okpebholo, and his running mate, Dennis Idahosa, in attendance, was at the behest of the Presidency, which aimed at resolving disagreements in the chapter.

Although details of the discussions were still scanty at press time, an informed source at the meeting said one of the resolutions was for the running mate,

## As party guber candidate loses supporters to PDP

Idahosa, to withdraw his litigation against the candidature of Okpebholo.

Recall that the primary election that produced Okpebholo as the candidate became controversial, as Idahosa was first declared by the Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodinma-led committee.

The first round of primary was, however, declared inconclusive by the National Working Committee (NWC) of the party, owing to what it identified as irregularities.

Among those at the meeting held in the President's office were the National Chairman of the APC, Dr Abdullahi Ganduje; Senator representing Edo North

Senatorial District, Adams Oshiomhole; Senator Matthew Urhoghide, former representative of Edo South in the Senate, among others.

MEANWHILE, the political support base for Edo Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governorship candidate, Asue Ighodalo, yesterday, received a boost as some members of the Okpebholo family of Uromi, Esan North East, Edo State, defied expectations by rallying behind Asue Ighodalo's candidacy.

The move to support Asue Ighodalo was intensified during a visit to Bishop Matthew Okpebholo, a senior family member, just as another family member,

Patrick Okpebholo, who communicated the family's choice to newsmen, noted that Asue Ighodalo was a preferred candidate.

Patrick said the visit of the PDP candidate to the home of the bishop was a strategic move by the candidate in consolidating the chances of the party to victory ahead of the 21st September Edo governorship election.

Patrick maintained that their support underscored the family's belief in Asue Ighodalo's ability to steer Edo State towards prosperity and fulfilment of its potential.

He stressed that in a show of solidarity and determination, other prominent members of the family had all pledged their commitment to Asue Ighodalo's candidacy.



Senator Aminu Tamabuwal (left); former Commonwealth Secretary General, Emeke Anyaoku, and Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, during the National Dialogue on the Constitutional Future of Nigeria, in honour of Prof Ben Nwabueze, themed: Lawful Procedures for Actualising a People's Constitution for Nigeria, at the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs (NIIA), Victoria Island, Lagos.

## IYC condemns killing of soldiers, reprisal in Delta

From **Julius Osahon**, Yenagoa

IJAW Youth Council (IYC) has criticised and condemned, in strong terms, the killing of soldiers on a peace mission to Okuoma, an Urhobo community in Ughelli South Council of Delta State.

The body called on the military to conduct thorough investigation into the matter with a view to bringing the perpetrators to justice.

A statement, signed by its spokesman, Binebia Princewill, while describing the incident as unacceptable, said the act was an evil that must not be swept under the carpet as bringing the culprits to book would serve as a deterrent to others.

It read: "It is very unfortunate that people will dare to have the impetus and temerity to invade and attack soldiers on a peace mission to

resolve the lingering communal battle between the people of Okuama in Ughelli South and their brothers from Okoloba community in Bomadi Council of Delta State. To us, this is not only barbaric but also unacceptable.

The council, however, frowned on the method being used in the search by soldiers for the perpetrators as sources from the communities reported that many

innocent people had been killed.

The statement tasked the military not to go out of the rules of engagement and be professional in their operations.

The statement called on the Delta State Governor, Sheriff Oborevwori, to quickly resolve whatever differences the people of Okuama and Okoloba had before it would degenerate to something else.

## NASU, SSANU strike: Students resist attempt to stop exams

From **Tina Agosi Todo**, Calabar

STUDENTS of University of Calabar (UNICAL), yesterday, resisted an attempt by striking Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institution (NASU) and Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) to stop examinations from taking place.

This took place on the first day of a seven-day warning strike declared by NASU and SSANU over non-payment of

their four months' salary. The union had barricaded the main gate of the university, preventing staff and students from gaining entrance into the institution.

This resulted in a fight when the Students Union president and other students tried to stop the union from entering into the examination halls.

The students, led by the SUG President, God's Gift Kachi, also protested to the Vice

Chancellor's office, threatening to attack the NASU building if prevented from writing their examinations.

Responding, the Vice Chancellor, Prof Florence Obi, appealed to the students to remain calm, assuring them that their examinations would continue.

She also called on the students to be peaceful in their protest and not to destroy any school property, which might have dire consequences.

In her address, NASU Chairperson, Victoria Orok-Asuquo, said: "We are suffering and we have passed through all necessary procedures before embarking on the strike.

"We are not against the Federal Government paying the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) because it is their right, which they worked for; all we are saying is that we should also be paid what we are being owed."

## Environmentalists want Afi sanctuary, Drill ranch protected

From **Tina Agosi Todo**, Calabar

ENVIRONMENTALISTS in Cross River State have called for the protection of Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary and Drill Ranch in Buanchor community of Boki Council of the state.

In a town hall meeting in Buanchor, organised by Panacea for Developmental and Infrastructural Challenges for Africa Initiative (PADIC-Africa) in collaboration with Pandrillus Foundation, they maintained that to address the challenges threatening the Afi Mountain and Drill Ranch, there must be a significant policy change by government.

The Programme Officer, Pandrillus Foundation, Zack Schwenneker, said the Afi Mountain and the Drill Ranch, eco-tourism sites in Buanchor, had been facing encroachment by farmers, hunters, wood loggers and other illegal activities.

He charged representatives of communities around Afi Mountain Sanctuary to draw the government's attention to the challenges that could hinder eco-tourism from flourishing in the community and other conservative areas across the state.

## We're determined to produce healthcare professionals, says Odili

As alumnus charges Uniben students to aspire for the best

From **Obinna Nwaoku** (Port Harcourt) and **Michael Egbejule**, (Benin City)

FORMER Governor of Rivers State and Pro-Chancellor of PAMO University of Medical Sciences, Peter Odili, has said the institution is determined to produce professionals in healthcare.

Odili spoke at the 7th Matriculation of 2023/2024 Session of the University, yesterday.

He admonished the new undergraduates to focus on their studies, saying the school had zero tolerance for social vices.

He said: "Take pains to study your handbook, obey the rules. You have heard the Vice Chancellor tell you about zero tolerance. It means zero. So, parents, do not come begging when there is an infringement because the consequences are clearly spelt out."

He urged the students to take the bold step of reporting any act of harassment, saying: "Students take note, any staff that harasses you in any way report that staff. Do not be afraid to report."

# Low, middle class defer homeownership plans for food

By Chinedum Uwaegbulam

As inflation shaves off savings of many low and middle-income class Nigerians amid rising construction costs, homeownership plans are being deferred as untamed food prices continue to bite deeply into household incomes.

With currency devaluation and stubborn inflation that sees many homes spending over half of their incomes on food, many households are falling off the eligibility ladder for mortgage.

Nigeria's food inflation rate in February 2024 quickened to 37.92 per cent on a year-on-year basis, which was 13.57 per cent points higher than the rate recorded in February 2023 (24.35 per cent). In recent years, food prices have been on the rise across Nigeria but got worse in the last few months following subsidy removal and naira devaluation.

The upward trend in the prices of these staples and other products has weakened the purchasing power of many citizens, making it difficult for many households in the country to afford daily meals. The naira has tumbled across both the official and unofficial markets on several occasions in recent times amidst an increased forex demand and a significant spike in the prices of goods and services across the country.

Though the National Housing Fund (NHF) Act 2004, states that all Nigerian employees and income earners, whether in paid employment or self-employment, are entitled to the NHF scheme and can register as long as they're 21 years of age

- More worries as civil servants earning N100, 000 can't own homes
- Experts urge govt to adopt social housing, review NHF scheme

and whose salaries are more than N3,000 per annum, there are worries that the housing gap between the high- and low-income earners may widen as contributions become inadequate for mortgage requirements.

The long-standing housing crisis has reduced new constructions that prompted inflated property prices and soaring rents. The combination of a growing urban population, poverty, increasing construction costs, high inflation and declining household income, have also made access to decent and affordable housing difficult for many Nigerians.

The Guardian gathered many NHF contributors; especially civil servants earning N100, 000, who could not afford to build individual houses as result of the rising cost of building materials and inability to get allocation, have also been disenfranchised in different government housing schemes and mortgage products. Even the Federal Government's housing programme is beyond their reach.

According to UN-Habitat, housing is not affordable if it costs more than three yearly household incomes to buy or more than 30 per cent of monthly income to rent. With current statistics, there is a global housing affordability crisis that the formal private housing market alone is failing to confront.

The affordability crisis cannot be addressed unless it considers all segments of the

housing stock including public housing and informal housing that are now the only housing affordable to large segments of the urban population - while creating conditions for the private housing sector to reach further down market.

Currently, the units range from one, two to three-bedroom bungalows and blocks of flats across 34 states and the Federal Capital Territory. For instance, the one-bedroom house type costs between N7, 222,404 and N9, 268,751; two-bedroom bungalow sells for N9, 148,378 and N12, 398,460, while that of a three-bedroom range between N13, 241,074 and 16,491,155.

There are fears that the government may raise current home prices in its scheme due to the high exchange rate and inflation in the country. If that happens, it will further worsen the woes and affordability of the low-income earners, who before now could not secure a mortgage, as their monthly salaries have been affected by the devaluation of the naira.

The Federal government established the NHF scheme in 1992 for Nigerians above 18-years of age, especially those working in public, private and informal sectors are eligible to register and participate by contributing 2.5 per cent of their monthly incomes towards owning a home. The loan amount is determined by the applicant's affordability and income level that will enable repayment of the loan.

A prospective applicant who

wishes to obtain a loan to build a house is expected to have his/her land, as well as an acceptable title to the land prior to the application for an NHF loan. In many states, land prices have skyrocketed beyond the means of low-income earners, while land owners find it difficult to obtain titles due to the exorbitant rate.

Also, a contributor is eligible to access a maximum loan amount of between N5 million to N15 million repayable over a maximum period of 30 years at an affordable interest rate of 6 per cent. The applicant can also apply as an individual for an NHF loan to develop a land or buy directly from government sponsored estate or private estate developers.

The contributors' base of the scheme as of July 2023 according to figures obtained by The Guardian from the FMBN revealed that in about 31 years of the scheme covering 1992 to July 2023, N656.12 billion was received as contributions from the NHF scheme.

Data further shows that 24,322 mortgage loans were created, N92.41 billion was disbursed as Home Renovation Loan to 113,948 beneficiaries, N225.96 million was disbursed as NHF Individual Construction Loan, which was introduced recently by the bank. Also, N67.41 billion was refunded to NHF retirees. The refund figure is for 440,222 retirees.

The Guardian gathered that factors affecting civil servants from owning homes are that not many civil servants earn 100,000 per month, except Grade level 12

and above are those earning such monthly salary. Secondly, the tenure of mortgage is limited to the length of service remaining before retirement and civil servants are required to retire at the age of 60 years or expiration of 35 years in service whichever is earlier.

Therefore, tenure of mortgage is based on length of service remaining for a civil servant as mortgage facilities are not extended beyond date of retirement. Also, another issue is mortgage finance interest rate as mortgage repayment includes the principal and interest - Federal mortgage charges six per cent yearly, while the Federal Government Staff Housing Loans Board charges three per cent yearly.

Read the remaining part of this story on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng)



European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Samuela Isopi (left); Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Benjamin Okezie Kalu; former Deputy Speaker, Idris Wase and ex-Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Emeke Ihedioha during the Deputy Speaker's Aides Retreat and the Rule of Law and Anti-corruption (RoLAC) Phase II Programme in Abuja...yesterday. PHOTO: LUCY LADIDI ATEKO

## Terrorism: Ohanaeze cautions Tinubu as gunmen abduct dozens in fresh Kaduna attack

From Saxone Akhaine (Kaduna), Nnamdi Akpa (Abakaliki), Danjuma Michael (Katsina) and Monday Osayande (Asaba)

A FACTION of Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, yesterday, cautioned President Bola Tinubu on the handling of security challenges in the country.

The warning came as news emerged that terrorists, on Sunday night, abducted dozens of community members in Kajuru Local Council of Kaduna State.

Monday's incident came less than two weeks after gunmen kidnapped over 280 school pupils and teachers in Kuriga, also in Kaduna State.

Reacting to the previous attack, President Tinubu, through Minister of Information and National Orientation, Mohammed Idris, had affirmed that no ransom would be paid for the release of the victims.

In response to the abduction of 280 Kaduna schoolchildren on March 7, 2024,

- Army deny killing innocent community members in Delta
- How Katsina neutralised over 200 bandits, kingpin in two weeks'

Ohanaeze Ndigbo, the apex Igbo organisation, condemns the flagrant recklessness exhibited by Northern political elites.

"The unscrupulous demands for a ransom of Nibillion to liberate the abducted Kaduna schoolchildren are but a ploy to ensnare you, to coerce you into subservience to Northern bandits and terrorists until the year 2027," the group said in a statement by its Secretary General, Chidi Ibeh.

Ohanaeze said: "Do not succumb to the pressure from the Northern Elders Forum or the persuasive overtures of Sheikh Ahmad Gumi advocating for ill-advised negotiations with terrorists. Stand firm, for the fate of the nation hangs in the balance. Remember the dire consequences of yielding to such insidious tactics: a nation compromised; a people in peril.

"This is your moment to wield both gentle diplomacy and resolute force in vanquishing the scourge of insecurity. Any semblance of capitulation will embolden the perpetrators, embroiling the nation in a cycle of payouts and concessions, entwined in the web of Northern potentates who seek to perpetuate their grip on power."

The group added: "The Southern masses stand steadfastly with you, President Tinubu, urging you to navigate this treacherous terrain with steadfast courage and resolute determination. We entreat you to be the beacon of unwavering resolve, the embodiment of strength and leadership."

Not less than 87 people were reportedly kidnapped in Kajuru.

Security operatives were said to have begun searching bushes in the area to rescue

the victims.

A member of a group called the Kajuru-Station Youths, Harisu Dari, confirmed the incident to journalists in Kaduna, yesterday.

Dari said the attackers also broke into some shops and stole food items and other valuables.

He said the community was invaded at about 10.00 p.m. Barely two days earlier, gunmen had attacked the Dogon-Noma community, also in the local council, and abducted 15 women and a man.

Dari said no contact had yet been established with the 87 persons.

"As of the time I visited the community, security operatives had not been drafted to help restore the confidence of the villagers. The villagers were traumatised by the sad development. The government needs to re-strategise in tackling these terrorists," he said.

The Kaduna State Police Command, however, disputed the figures.

Spokesperson, ASP Mansir Hassan, who also confirmed the development to The Guardian on the telephone, said: "The figure of those kidnapped in the community is not up to what people are speculating."

He explained: "The unfortunate incident happened in the early hours of today (Monday), and our men are on the ground in the area on a search and rescue mission. They are hunting the kidnappers. The terrain in the area is difficult. There is no mobile network in the village. Our men are on the ground, and they are trying to establish order in the area."

Meanwhile, the Nigerian military, yesterday, reacted to allegations that soldiers killed over 50 persons in Okuama community, Ughelli South Local Council, Delta State, describing the claims as "propaganda".

A community member had told reporters: "The army left,

but within a while, they came back with more reinforcement, gunboats, and other things. And instantly, about 20 persons were killed. And when they came back again, they began to shoot. They killed nothing less than 50 persons on that day. Then, the following day, they mobilised again, some from Bomadi, Okwagbe. They came together and burned the entire community down. That was on March 15."

But the Director of Army Public Relations, Major Gen Onyema Nwachukwu, in a statement, said: "The unfortunate killing of troops of 181 Amphibious Battalion of the Nigerian Army, while on a peaceful and mediatory mission, after a reported case of communal clash between Okuama and Okoloba communities in Ughelli South and Bomadi Councils of Delta State respectively is not only despicable but should be unreservedly condemned by all.

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## UI SSANU, NASU join nationwide seven-day warning strike

Urge Tinubu to fund public varsities, accede to their demands

From Rotimi Agboluaje, Ibadan

THE University of Ibadan (UI) chapter of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), yesterday, called on President Bola Tinubu to rescue public universities from their near comatose situation by funding them appropriately and prioritising university workers' welfare.

The SSANU Chairman, UI branch, Abiodun Rasaki Omisore and his NASU counterpart, Michael Ogunlade, made the call while speaking with journalists on the seven-day warning strike embarked upon to press home their demand for the payment of their salaries withheld by the Federal Government.

The unions began a nationwide strike, yesterday, over what they described as unfair treatment and disparity in the payment of withheld salaries by the Federal Government.

They said the strike was in fulfillment of the earlier threat and ultimatum issued to the Federal Government by the unions over the unpaid withheld salaries of their members.

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## Lagos council reiterates commitment to improving residents' standard of living

By Silver Nwokoro

THE Ojodu Local Council Development Area (LCDA) of Lagos State has assured residents of the area of its commitment to improve their standard of living.

Chairman of the LCDA, Olusegun Odunmbaku, who spoke with newsmen, yesterday, said that in the last few years, the LCDA under his leadership had carried out development projects in all sectors, such as health, education, environment, youth empowerment and social infrastructure.

Besides, he disclosed that medical personnel had been employed at Apata and Gbadamosi primary health-care centres, while many youths and women had been empowered with skills to reduce unemployment.

According to him, some primary healthcare centres in the LCDA had been rehabilitated, while two of them were upgraded to 24-hour service delivery, with an alternative power supply.

Odunmbaku, who said that 14 mini-buses were released to some residents of the LCDA to ease transportation, while the administration donated N1,000,000 for the procurement of buses for Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Ikeja branch, said his administration had partnered with WaterAid and PEPSICO to provide WASH facilities in schools, markets and health centres.

# Sanwo-Olu, ex-govs, others call for new constitution

By Kehinde Olatunji

LAGOS State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu; former governors, erudite scholars and nationalists, yesterday, called for a new constitution, saying that the current one is faulty, flawed and does not reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the people.

They noted that an amendment of the current constitution would not cure the fundamental flaws, but that there is urgent need for a people-oriented constitution, which will be subjected to a national referendum.

The charge was given during a national constitutional dia-

logue tagged: "Lawful procedures for actualising a people's constitution for Nigeria," organised by *The Patriots*, under the chairmanship of Emeka Anyaoku, in honour of the late Prof. Ben Nwabueze, held at the National Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) in Lagos.

Among the attendees were Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State, former governors of Osun (Rauf Aregbesola), Ogun (Ibikunle Amosun), Cross River (Donald Duke), Ekiti (Kayode Fayemi), Delta (James Ibori), Rivers (Rotimi Amaechi) and Akwa Ibom (Obong Attah) states.

Others were Senators Gbenga Daniel and Aminu Tambuwal,

Olabode George, Ayo Adebajo, former Minister of Finance, Idika Kanu; Gen. Ike Nwachukwu (rtd), constitutional lawyer, Tunji Abayomi and Mike Ozekhome (keynote speaker).

Sanwo-Olu berated those elected in federal offices for saying one thing before they get to power and doing another at their emergence in office.

On his part, Attah noted that the underpinning principle that guided the drafting of the current constitution had turned out to have been misguided.

According to him, instead of unity, the country is battling disunity and in place of true

federalism, the country has a dictatorial unitary system.

Attah, who pleaded with the National Assembly to reject the call for referendum for the review of the 1999 Constitution, urged the lawmakers to make a new constitution for the country.

In his keynote address, Ozekhome stressed the need for Nigerians to own their constitution through a referendum, saying that without that, the country would be on a journey to no destination.

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Deputy Controller of Agodi Correctional Centre, Ibadan, Jelili Odunlami (left); Oyo State High Court Judges, Justices Mojisola Sule and Olusegun Olagunju, and the state's Chief Judge (CJ), Justice Iyabo Yerima, during the CJ's visit to the correctional centre in Ibadan...yesterday.

PHOTO: NAN

## ICAN tasks government on monetary, fiscal policies to tackle inflation

By Victor Gbonegun

THE Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) has urged the Federal Government to deploy both monetary and fiscal policies in addressing inflation rate in the country.

President of ICAN, Dr Innocent Okwuosa, who gave the charge, yesterday, during a chat with journalists in Lagos, said that the Federal Government should establish a 'Monetary and Fiscal Committee,' whose members should meet regularly, brainstorm and determine a prompt combination of measures to deploy in reduc-

### Seeks members' inclusion in governance

ing inflation.

Okwuosa said food is a major cause of inflation as farmers could no longer go to the farm due to heightened insecurity.

He, therefore, stressed the need to motivate farmers to go back to farm by improving security and supporting them with mechanised tools.

He said: "The simplest thing the government should do is to improve support to farmers and increase food production. The increase by 400 basis points of the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) shows that

the government made the right decision, but we cannot rely on monetary policy alone. There should be a combination of monetary policy and fiscal policy to reduce inflation.

"The government should consider the capital market as an alternative rather than borrowing from an international finance institution."

The ICAN president also blamed lack of accountability and transparency in governance as the root causes of all issues affecting the country, saying that if the nation can

institute the right accountability and transparency index, the citizens' trust in governance will increase.

"Lack of accountability and transparency and others are responsible for infrastructure deficits," he said.

Okwuosa, who lamented non-recognition of professional accountants in governance, said: "The Federal Government should utilise professional accountants on the issue of governance. They have a lot to offer in budget monitoring, capacity development, budget execution and for the government to have improved results."

## 'Ogun's N5b intervention palliative impacting lives of residents'

THE Ogun State Government has said that the N5 billion intervention palliative meant to cushion the impact of the current economic challenges in the country is having direct impacts on the people of the state.

Special Adviser to the Governor on Media and Information, Kayode Akinmade, stated this, yesterday, on an OGTV Current Affairs Programme, The RoundTable.

He said that through targeted interventions, the government aims to address the current economic challenges by implementing a series of phased initiatives aimed at alleviating these burdens.

The state governor, Dapo Abiodun, had recently announced the N5 billion intervention funds to cushion the effect of the rising cost of living and inflation in the state.

The grant, according to him, is planned to be shared as palliatives to cushion the effect of the fuel subsidy removal.

Abiodun, during a media briefing in Abeokuta, said his administration acknowledges the current hardship in the country, occasioned by the fuel subsidy removal and the concerns raised from different quarters regarding the rising food prices and shortages, coupled with the depreciation of the naira.

He said that proactive measures to alleviate the impact of the challenges to guarantee the welfare, well-being and wellness of the residents of the state would be implemented.

Akinmade said: "Ogun is the first state to implement the Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) Bus initiative to take care of transportation challenges."

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## Olubadan's demise, a colossal loss, says Yoruba Obas' Forum

THE Yoruba Obas Forum has described the death of Oba Lekan Balogun, the Olubadan of Ibadan, as a colossal loss to Yorubaland.

According to the *News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)*, National President of the forum and Molokun of Atijere, Oba Samuel Adeboye, stated this in a condolence message on behalf of other members, yesterday, in Osogbo.

The forum, comprising traditional rulers from Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti states, described the late Olubadan as a progressive traditional ruler, whose reign within a period of two years brought about the sustenance of peace and stability in Ibadanland.

"The late monarch's contributions to the socio-economic and cultural development of the region are immeasurable.

"His legacy will continue to inspire generations to come," the forum stated.

## Ex-govs failed to implement Ekiti blueprints, Afe Babalola laments

From Ayodele Afolabi, Ado-Ekiti

FOUNDER of Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD), Afe Babalola, yesterday, said that those who had governed Ekiti State before Governor Abiodun Oyebanji didn't do well because they abandoned the vision and blueprints laid down by those who laboured for the creation of the state.

Babalola, who regretted that Oyebanji didn't govern the state much earlier because of his Midas touch, said the vision behind the creation of the state was to make it the best in Nigeria just like

### Says Oyebanji should have governed the state earlier

ABUAD.

The legal icon spoke during the commissioning of ABUAD multisystem hospital Annex at Odo-Ado Igrigiri Road in Ado-Ekiti.

He said: "It pains me that you didn't become governor of Ekiti State much earlier than now. We know what we did to bring the state into existence. Our vision was for it to be the best state in Nigeria, as well as setting the pace as my university is doing now.

"Unfortunately, those who became governors before

you didn't have the love of Ekiti State. Go and tell them that I said so. That is why we are facing so much hardship in the state. When I was a councilor in the 60s, I didn't receive a salary.

"That was when there was development in Ekiti Local Council. We thought that those who are coming to govern the state will follow our footsteps and blueprints but they refused to follow them. However, this governor is doing a yeoman job.

"The road to the hospital has become impassable. When I

was coming here this morning, I knew what I went through on the road. It took us almost two hours to get here. That is how deplorable the road has become.

"The reason for this is that we don't have honest people in government. I have written letters, made telephone calls, sent text messages to the Minister for Works to no avail. They will say they have put it in the budget but nothing happens at the end of the day. God will deliver us from them."

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## Court convicts five for murder, kidnapping in Rivers

From **Obinna Nwaoku, Port Harcourt**

To die by hanging, lethal injection

JUSTICE Sika Aprioku of Rivers State High Court sitting in Port Harcourt, yesterday, convicted and sentenced five people to death by hanging or injecting them with lethal substances until they are confirmed dead for murder and kidnapping. The convicts are Okechukwu Orji of Atali community in Obio/Airport, Igwe Promise, Iheanyi Igwe and Morrison Igwe all from Omudioga in Emohua Local Council of Rivers State as well as Goodness Monday from Akwa Ibom State. They were found guilty of 10-

count charge of conspiracy, cultism, murder of a local vigilante commander of Omudioga community in Emohua Local Council of the state, identified as Umezurike Alex and illegal possession of firearms. In his judgment, Justice Aprioku, however, discharged and acquitted the sixth defendant, Alex Deiwe.

The judge held that the prosecuting counsel, Essien Edet proved his case against the convicts on charges of conspiracy, cultism, illegal possession of firearms and murder.

He, therefore, convicted and

sentenced them by hanging or administration of lethal injection until they die.

The court also held that the convicts did not only murder the vigilante commander, but were also involved in kidnapping and other criminal activities in parts of the state before their arrest and commencement of prosecution.

Speaking to newsmen outside the courtroom, Edet, who is the Officer in charge of legal annex, Directorate of Finance and Administration (DFA), Rivers State Police command, expressed happiness over the judgment.



CP Tunji Disu

He described it as justice well served, which will also serve as a deterrent to others who are involved in such crimes.

The Guardian learnt that the late vigilante commander was killed and beheaded in 2021, while other parts of his body were dismembered by cultists, for fighting against criminal activities in the area.

## Anambra doctors issue 72 hours ultimatum for prosecution of officer who 'assaulted' their colleague

From **Uzoma Nzeagwu, Awka**

ANAMBRA chapter of the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), yesterday, gave a 72-hour ultimatum for the immediate arrest, investigation and prosecution of Cpl. Ifeanyi Okona and his collaborators, who allegedly assaulted their colleague, Dr Ofofode Ekweogwu.

It further demanded an undertaking of full responsibility for the safety of Dr Ekweogwu to be signed by Cpl. Okona as NMA would hold the police responsible for any harm on the doctor or any member of his family.

NMA said: "We condemn in the strongest term, the kidnap, torture, attempted extortion, mental assault and threat to life of our member, whose only crime was treating a police officer successfully and demanding payment for his services.

"A 72-hour ultimatum is hereby given for a satisfactory response to these demands, failing which we shall seek legal redress.

"We may not guarantee industrial harmony at the expiration of the ultimatum and shall employ means to protect our members from any similar assaults from

men of the Nigeria Police."

The association issued the ultimatum in a statement issued in Awka by the Chairman and Secretary of the chapter respectively, Dr Jane Ezeonu and Dr Frank Ifeanaeme.

In the statement, the doctors condemned what they called the "abduction" of one Dr Ekweogwu, a Consultant Neurosurgeon from his clinic by men suspected to be from the State Criminal Investigation Department (SCID) on Saturday, March 16.

They explained that Dr Ekweogwu successfully treated a patient, Cpl. Okona of the Nigeria Police Area Command, Nnewi, who sustained head injuries from a road traffic accident in January and discharged him.

"Rather than pay his bills, even after he was given discounts as requested, Okona absconded from the hospital by scaling the perimeter fence.

"He later returned to pay part of the bill and was allowed home on self-cognisance to complete the payment afterwards.

"Rather than pay the outstanding bill, Cpl. Okona resorted to using intimidation to escape payment," the NMA alleged.

## Commercial motorcyclists protest killing of colleagues in Delta

From **Monday Osayande, Asaba**

COMMERCIAL tricycles and Okada riders under the aegis of Arewa union in Asaba, Delta State, yesterday, protested against the alleged killing of two Okada riders on Sunday.

The protesters accused officials of the task force on Commercial Motorcycle and Tricycle Operators Association (COMTOA) of committing the killings.

They stormed various parts of Asaba destroying property and other valuables at various offices, including the office of COMTOA, at Summit road, where they attacked members of COMTOA. They were said to have destroyed vehicles, office

furniture and made away with computers and other valuables.

Speaking on the issue, the Director General of COMPOA, Chief Uchenna Okafor (aka Kosoko), alleged that "the Arewa Community are trying to form their own union so that they can avoid paying money to the state government."

He explained that they got information last week Saturday that they (Arewa Community) were about to set up a union that is different from the one Delta State government inaugurated.

"We called the Special Adviser on Arewa Community and the Sarki of Asaba and they denied. At

about 3:00p.m. that day, it was discovered that they had already inaugurated their own Arewa task force and that was how it started.

"They started attacking people paying for tickets through COMTOA, chasing the task force and ticket sellers away, but we were not deterred because the revenue is for the Government.

"On Sunday, we were around the Government Reserved Area (GRA) with the Police to enforce the law against the movement of Keke riders from 10:00 p.m. when we were attacked again and we eventually left the area.

"This morning, about 300 Arewa tricycle riders came to our office to attack us with cutlass, guns, and other arms.

They broke doors, windows, stole laptops, generators and phones. They also ran away with motorcycles," the COMTOA DG said.

Responding, Coordinator of Arewa Community on sales of tickets, Hashima Abubakar said he was not against the sales of tickets, but his people have to negotiate instead of towing the path of chaos.

When contacted, spokesperson for Delta State Police Command, Bright Efade confirmed the killing, saying the incident happened on Sunday night. "It was between the task force and the Okada riders. We are investigating the killing as well as controlling the protest," he stated.

## Lagos court sentences man to 35 years imprisonment for armed robbery

By **Yetunde Ayobami Ojo**

JUSTICE Oyindamola Ogala of a Lagos High Court, Ikeja, yesterday convicted and sentenced a man, Adamu Francis to 35 years imprisonment for armed robbery.

The judge convicted Francis after he was found guilty on a three-count charge brought against him by the Lagos State Government. The state had arraigned him on charges bordering on armed robbery, conspiracy and assault.

He was alleged to have robbed one Illiasu Ajoke Abiodun of her necklace, wristwatch, UBA and GTB Automated Teller Machine (ATM) cards, and a cash of N50,000.

The judge held that the

prosecution has been able to discharge the burden of proof placed on it beyond every reasonable doubt.

According to the judge, offensive weapons were used by the convict to carry out the robbery, adding that there is no principle of law establishing that the

prosecution should tender weapons used to execute an attack.

The judge said: "The defendant was arrested in the same vehicle in which the victim was robbed of her belongings. The circumstantial evidence against the defendant is

strong, and he is accordingly found guilty of the offence as charged."

The judge, therefore, sentenced him to 35 years imprisonment.

The prosecution had in the charge marked ID/13695c/2020 and dated December 16, 2020, alleged that the convict committed armed robbery, contrary to Section 297 (2)(a) 299 and 174(a) of the Criminal Law Ch C17, Volume 3, Laws of Lagos State 2015.

It alleged that Francis and others now at large on or about May 12, 2020, at about 6:15a.m, at Ogudu Bus Stop, Ojota, Lagos State, conspired among themselves to commit robbery.

He was also alleged to have assaulted Abiodun by heating her and stripping her naked.



Lagos High Court

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# Residents protest demolition of property in Circular Road, Ibadan

From Seye Olumide, Ibadan

HUNDREDS of residents whose property falls within 500 metre-radius of the Ibadan Circular Road (ICR) and marked for demolition, have staged a peaceful protest to call the attention of Governor Seyi Makinde, and by extension, that of President Bola Tinubu, to their plight, following the commencement of demolition in the area.

The aggrieved residents lamented that the demolition was coming amidst economic woes in the country, wondering where they are expected to start from, if their structures are pulled down.

The placards wielded by protesters, including the aged and children took to the highway, crying and urging the state government to stay action on the proposed exercise.

Part of the messages on the placards read: 'Governor Seyi Makinde, please come to our aid,' 'No more Circular corridor', 'Mr Governor don't kill

us', 'Circular Road Corridor is massacre', 'No more 500 metres set back,' 'Let's have peace of mind' and others.

The victims alleged that government officials are stylishly driving them away with a plan to acquire the area for themselves in future.

Addressing newsmen, the Community leader of Onigbinde Village, Alhaji Olalude

## •Seek Makinde's intervention

Onigbinde, said the development has rendered many residents of the area homeless and placed them in dire need of government's help.

According to him, although the matter was reported to the governor and the late Olubadan, Lekan Balogun, their assurances and calls for calm

by the residents have not yielded the needed result.

He said: "We woke up last week and saw bulldozers pulling down our houses and when we asked them, they said they wanted to do a setback for the Circular Road. "We have seen in different places where highways exist

with structures along the routes, but in our case, they said they don't want to see any structure within 500 metres-radius from the road."

Onigbinde added: "We have been living in the location for years. The government should please consider us. With the situation in the country now, the economic condition and hardship generally, we are begging them to help us as poor people. But they said no, that they want to go ahead with the demolition.

"We went to the Governor's Office, met him and he even visited this place to see things for himself, assuring us that there won't be any problem, but with what is on ground, there is a problem. Many people are sleeping outside already.

"We reported the matter to the late Olubadan. He also assured us that we should stay calm. Now that they have started demolishing some houses, that means ours will soon come down. Even though we don't know when, we don't have a rest of mind."

Another victim alleged that government officials and or politicians would later take over the land in the near future, if they succeed in displacing them.

Also, a media consultant who lives within the affected areas, Soji Gbelekale, said they were initially asked to maintain a 75 metres setback for the road, which was respected by most property owners.

He lamented the government's extension of the setback to 150 metres and later to 500 metres, which has sent many people homeless

and others to their early graves.

He said: "We heard about the Circular Road and where the demarcation was made even before we bought the land. The pillar for marking the metres was conspicuous and everyone buying land around the axis was aware of that. It was pegged with a big iron rod and people were given several metres away so that it wouldn't affect them.

"But later, we heard that the 75 metres extension to both left and right was going to be extended again to 150 metres on both sides. Everyone was agitated. Initially we thought it was a rumour because it was too sudden and unimaginable.

"Later, we heard it would again extend to 500 metres on both sides of the road. That was actually too much. We know that it will end up rendering many people homeless.

"We have been praying for this Circular Road project to come alive because we are aware it will bring rapid development and civilisation. This is because we have suffered severe underdevelopment such that we had to do many things on our own to make sure the place is developed, in terms of roads and electricity, which are things the government ordinarily should do.

"But now the coming of the road has become a real problem for us. Many people are already homeless as others are hospitalised.

"We are now begging the government. This government is known to be humane and people friendly, that was why we thought it was ini-



Protesters

## Court remands man for alleged defilement, assault

By Yetunde Ayobami Ojo

FOR allegedly defiling and sexually assaulting a 13-year-old minor, Justice Abiola Soladoye of a Lagos Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court has remanded a man, Oluwafemi Olumoro at the Kirikiri Correctional Centre.

The court ordered his remand yesterday, after he pleaded not guilty to a three-

count charge brought against him by Lagos State Government.

The state's Deputy Director of Public Prosecution (DPP), Mr Olusola Soneye informed the court that the defendant allegedly committed the offences sometime in June 2018 at No.7 Church Street, Idera, Owode-Ajegunle in Ikorodu, Lagos.

The defendant allegedly defiled a minor by having unlawful sexual intercourse with her.

He was, therefore, arraigned on a three-count charge bordering on defilement, sexual assault by penetration and assault occasioning harm.

Following his plea of not guilty to the charge, the judge ordered that the defendant be

remanded in the Correctional Centre.

She also adjourned the case to May 6, 2024 for commencement of trial.

The prosecution alleged that the defendant sexually assaulted the girl by penetrating her anus with his penis, adding that he beat the girl with a belt, which caused injuries to her right eyes.

## No evidence found in 'ghost workers' allegation, says EKEDP

THE Eko Electricity Distribution Plc (EKEDP) yesterday, said contrary to recent negative media reports regarding the company and some members of its staff relating to 'ghost workers', it has been vindicated by investigation.

In a statement, the company said: "As EKEDP is committed to maintaining the highest ethical business practices, the

Board of Directors took immediate action by mandating the HR Committee to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the matter. "This investigation was initiated in response to allegations that the board was notified of. We can now report that the investigation has now been concluded. "The findings indicate that the allegations of fraud, neg-

ligence, or conspiracy against our staff members were unfounded.

"We want to emphasise that no evidence was found to substantiate any of the claims made against any member of our staff, including our Chief Legal Officer, Wola Joseph-Condotti, Chief Audit and Compliance Officer, Sheri Adegbenro and Chief Human Resources Offi-

cer, Aik Alenkhe," the company said.

It added that moving forward, EKEDP's core mission is to provide reliable and sustainable electricity distribution services.

"We remain focused on this goal and will continue investing in our network infrastructure, processes and people to deliver improved services that address our cus-

## Group condemns killing, mutilation of security agencies bodies in Delta

By Bertram Nwannekanma

MEMBERS of #Prayer & Support 4 the Nigerian Armed Forces & other security agencies, yesterday, condemned the gruesome killing and mutilation of the bodies of some officers and men of the Nigerian Army on a peace mission at Okuama community in Bomadi Local Council of Delta State.

Convener of the group, Ambassador Mary Fatile, in a statement condemned the act, and called on the Federal Government and all necessary stakeholders to look into the gruesome killing of military personnel.

She also called on the government to fish out the killers and ensure that they face the wrath of the law.

According to her, it is condemnable that the troops of 181 Amphibious Battalion on a peace mission to the Okuama community were surrounded and killed.

The group listed those affected as the Commanding Officer of the 181 Amphibious Battalion, a Lt Colonel, two majors, one captain and 12 soldiers.

Ambassador Fatile emphasised the universal desire for peace and freedom among nations and their citizens.

She emphasised that to achieve peace and tranquility globally, effective leadership is essential, particularly in nations where democracy prevails.

The convener noted that despite over two decades of democratic rule, peace and freedom have remained elu-

sive for its citizens.

"Since the advent of democracy in 1999, the nation has been plagued by ongoing challenges to these fundamental democratic principles.

"Even during periods of military rule, dialogue was often employed to resolve issues, yet now, under democratic gover-

nance, members of the military are being brutally murdered in settlements within the country. This occurrence is particularly alarming given that Nigeria is not at war. "Adding to the concern is the lack of response from leadership quarters, including the hierarchy of government."

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## Ex-NMA staff needs N30 million for kidney transplant

By Hope Ibiba Tam-talbot

FORMER administrative officer of Nigeria Medical Association (NMA), Akpa Emeka is in need of N30 million to undergo some kidney transplant to save his life.



Emeka

The Guardian learnt that Emeka was abducted during one of his trips to the southeast.

He, however, began to nurse kidney disease and other health issues after his release from kidnappers' den.

In June 2023, he experienced a crisis that led to the amputation of his right limb and his kidney failed.

Emeka, who is married with four children, is currently undergoing dialysis twice a week at Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abuja.

He is also seeking a kidney donor and financial support totaling at least N30 million to save his life.

When contacted, the managing consultant and a nephrologist at the FMC, Abuja, Dr Ernest Aniedu confirmed Emeka's condition.

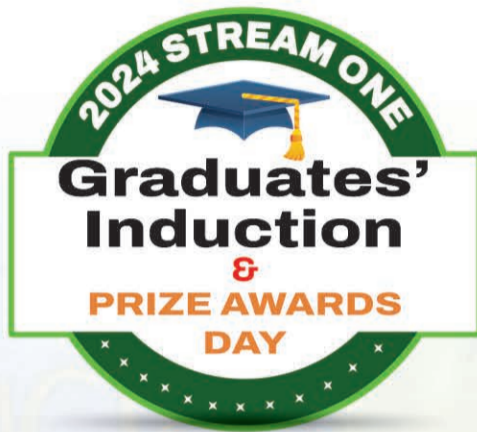
Assistance could reach the family through telephone number: +2348035986601, Zenith Bank account number: 2082542366, and account name: Akpa Chukwuemeka Emmanuel



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**Mr. Abubakar Suleiman, FCIB**  
Managing Director/CEO,  
Sterling Bank Plc



Saturday, March 23, 2024



11:00 am



Hybrid (Ijewere Hall Bankers House/  
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# Editorial

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## Looting depicts misrule, misery and decadence in society

THE recent invasion and looting of food items of warehouses belonging to the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) is a worrisome incident that cannot be pardoned for its illegality and greed; and yet cannot be overlooked for its underlying depiction of hunger and anger in the land. Food items looted included those in transit for distribution in the wake of the harsh economic situation in the country. While looting is tantamount to criminal trespass, the situation, however, portrays the gory reality of pervasive poverty and the abysmal level of decadence in the society. Mass looting of warehouses including foodstuff in transit reflects the dehumanising condition to which the people have been subjected because of poorly initiated and implemented economic policies.

Prior to the worsening economic situation in the country, looting of foodstuffs was hitherto considered strange in the society. Looting should not find justification or rationalisation under whatever pretext considering the hazardous and dehumanising circumstances under which such notorious activities are carried. The consequences of mass looting portend grave danger to the society and foretell the imminence of anarchy. Regrettably, the situation that has made mass looting an option in the country could be likened to the season of anomie where aggrieved citizens appear to be reacting angrily but disorderly to the hardship resulting from the failure of governance.

While it should be asserted that the spate of looting in the country is borne out of frustration, it is, however, lamentable that the aberrant situation is becoming fashionable.

While looting could as well be the expression of mass anger over government's poor handling of the economy, it would, however, be preposterous to ignore the fact most of the looted items in transit belong to private citizens carrying out legitimate business. Even the looting of warehouses belonging to the government should be deemed inimical to the society considering that not all warehoused items are hoarded as often perceived. In most cases, looters end up denying the larger society of justice by either pushing legitimate business owners into crisis or depriving citizens who are in jeopardy during an emergency the opportunity to be reached out to when the need arises. When warehouses are looted under the guise that food items were hoarded, the unfortunate reality is that possibility for equitable distribution of the looted items has been denied as those who ought to be the target beneficiaries are shut out of prospects of fair treatment by those who deploy crude force and violence. Majority of citizens already overstressed by the harsh economic situation are ultimately the victims as most of the looted food items are hawked at exorbitant prices or hoarded in private cupboards. It must be emphasised therefore that looting of government warehouses denies target beneficiaries of social welfare programmes and thereby worsens the hardship amongst the downtrodden.

More important, however, is the need for governments at national and sub-

national levels to be mindful of unwittingly encouraging criminality by subjecting people to unnecessary hardship through wrong-headed policies. Governments at all levels have failed to live up to expectations by ensuring fair distribution of the commonwealth and, by so doing, they instigate frustration and decadence in the society. The level of impoverishment in the society has become deep-seated with consequences of a ripple effect of chaos and instability by individuals who are ready to latch on to any situation to loot.

Looting becomes an option in a situation where people are hungry and frustrated amid outlandish displays of wealth by politicians. There is the need to ensure timely and proper distribution of food items to alleviate the sufferings of the people. The fact that people believe food items are hoarded by government officials attests to the depth of trust deficit in the society. The government has lost the trust of the people because the social contract which places responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the elected has been broken. Governments at all levels should therefore prioritise confidence building to earn the trust of the people. The only antidote to looting is for the government to ensure justice and fair play when food items are warehoused for distribution. Government should put in place measures that will ensure transparency and accountability in the distribution of items designed as palliatives.

nated as palliatives.

Government must face the fact that the situation in the country has degenerated to the level that hope is fast disappearing. The poor have lost hope and therefore see nothing wrong in looting warehouses in reaction to the widespread corruption and callous exhibition of commonwealth by politicians. Government has the responsibility to put an end to the excruciating economic situation that instigates looting which poses a serious threat to peace in the society. If the situation is allowed to degenerate further, citizens carrying out legitimate retail of food items would be exposed to risks and uncertainties as stock of food items will be the target of angry citizens eager to vent out their frustration by looting.

Ultimately, the government must appreciate that provision of palliatives should only be for the purposes of intervention during emergency. What the citizens deserve is productive engagements that will translate into living wage for household survival. Distribution of food items as palliatives, except in emergency cases, should not be a permanent priority of the government in the bid to tackle poverty headlong. There must be a more robust strategy of getting citizens meaningfully engaged with the view to harness the productive energy to ensure decent living and to discourage looting and other forms of decadence in the society.

### LETTER

## The prophetic paradigm of Benjamin Nwabueze

SIR: When nature conspires with nurture to work a miracle for a people, there is ceaseless celebration because it does not happen every day. The late Professor Benjamin Obi Nwabueze who died on October 31, 2023 was one such gem whose gift as an Igbo man, Nigerian, bar man and human being transcended both time and tenure.

A cerebral lawyer and law teacher, seasoned Senior Advocate of Nigeria, Nwabueze was many things rolled into one, a force of nature finessed into a file for men and matters by his sheer humility and ceaseless candor. Indeed, like a refiner's fire, he burnt bright, purifying the thought processes of those who passed under his firm but compassionate hands.

In a country where hypocrisy is the honey of the high and mighty, Nwabueze knew intrinsic truth about the transience of power and never missed an opportunity to speak truth to power. A citadel of constitutional law and Nigeria's constitutional democracy, he knew the place and power of Nigeria's supreme law having con-

tributed to the drafting of the 1979 Constitution. But beyond his awe at the potency of the law, he knew the potential of the law to prevent chaos and chicanery in a country where the makers of the law often conspire with its interpreters and enforcers to place themselves above the law and defraud Nigerians.

Instances abound of the many times the doyen of Nigeria's constitutional law stepped forward to make one of his immortal offerings of truth to power, drawing from his well-spring of experience, insight and wisdom as some factors and fiends pushed the country towards the precipice.

Born on December 22, 1931 in the sleepy town of Atani in Anambra State, there was nothing in the life of the young Benjamin that suggested he was seeded with the makings of a global icon. His humble beginnings at CMS Central School in Atani soon led him to some of the world's most prestigious institutions. His academic pursuit started at the CMS Central School Atani, from 1938 - 1945; C.M.S Central School, Onitsha (formerly, African College), 1947 - 1950. Prof. Nwabueze earned his

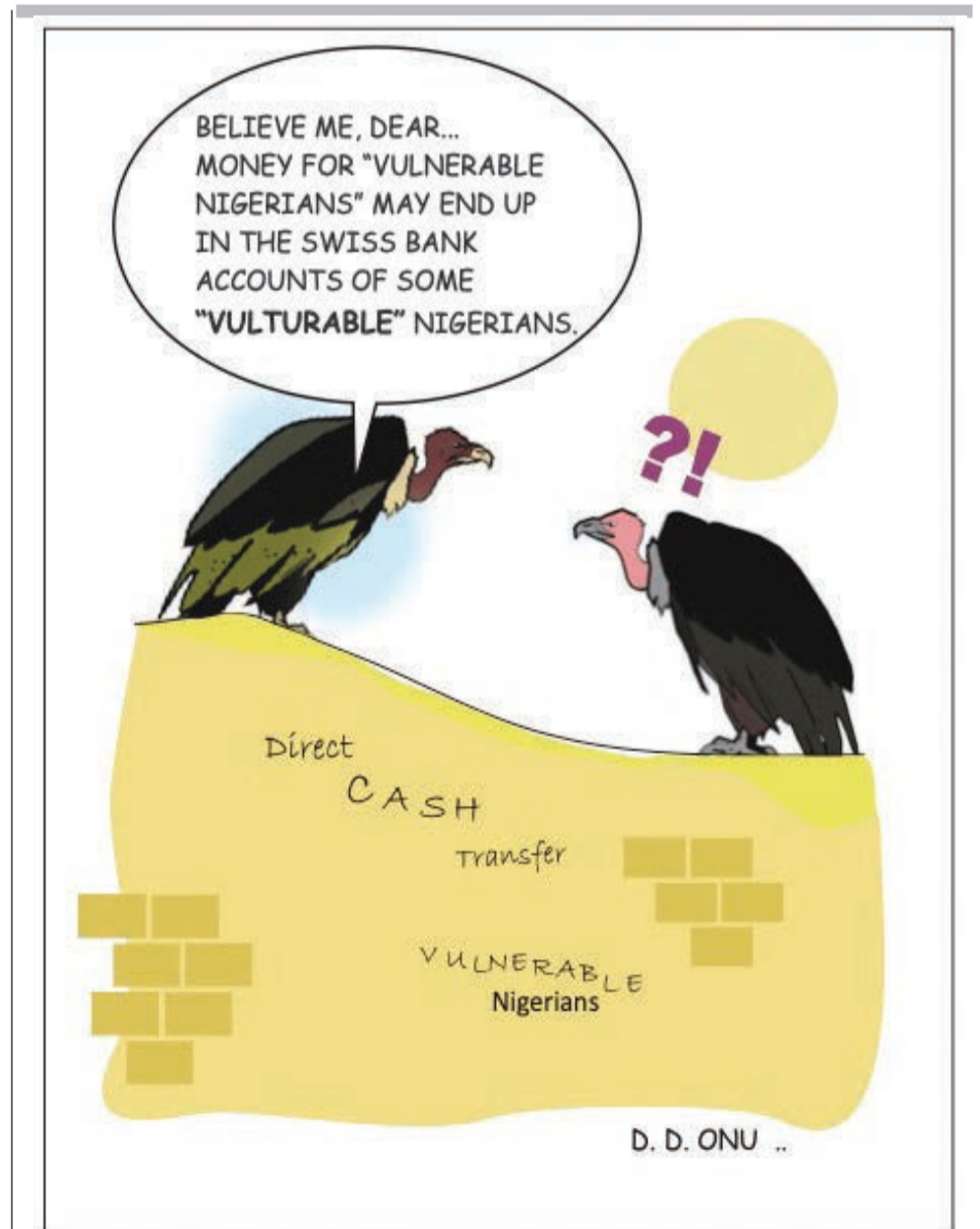
Doctor of Laws (LL.D) at the University of London in 1978, based on his three outstanding books - Constitutionalism, Presidentialism, and Judicialism, thus entering the record books as the second (since the death of Dr. T.O. Elias), the only Nigerian and African holder of a higher doctorate degree in Law by published works.

He was also the first academic lawyer to be made a Senior Advocate of Nigeria in 1978 strictly on the basis of his published works.

But with the erudite professor of law, there was just enough grit to match the abundant glamour. Together with Akanu Ibiam, M.I. Okpara, K.O. Mbadiwe, Chief Ugochukwu, P.N. Okigbo and Udoji, he was a founding member of the pan-Igbo group, Ohaneze Ndigbo, serving as its pioneer secretary-general between 1978 to 2006, during which time they transformed the fortunes of the group in Nigeria's socio-economic and political space.

Read the remaining part of this article on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng)

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# Opinion

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## Jacques Delors: Father of the European Union

By Adekeye Adebajo

GIVEN how crucial regional cooperation is to Africa where intra-regional trade is a paltry 14 per cent, there was a surprisingly muted response to the recent death, at 98, of one of last century's greatest architects of regional integration: Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Commission (1985-1994).

French journalist, Françoise Fressoz, described him as "one of the great Christian democrats who made Europe." Delors was the heir of his compatriot, Jean Monnet, who had headed the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) - forerunner of the European Economic Community (EEC), founded in 1957.

With strong working class roots as the grandson of French farmers, Delors's father, Louis, worked as a messenger at the Banque de France, an institution which he pushed his son to join. Jacques married Marie Lephaille whom he had met at the bank, and they had a daughter Martine Aubry, the long-serving Mayor of Lille, and a journalist son, Jean-Paul, who tragically died of leukaemia at 29. Delors took night classes to earn an economics degree from the University of Paris.

Religious and civic-minded, the French dubbed him grenouille de bénitier a 'church hen'. He became involved in supporting trade unions to fight social injustice, joined the French economic planning commission, and demonstrated his pragmatism by serving Gaullist prime minister, Jacques Chaban-Delmas (1969-1972) at the Matignon, earning himself the enduring distrust of both right and left.

Delors sat in the European Parliament for two years before serving as France's economics and finance minister under Socialist president, François Mitterrand, between 1981 and 1984. He met with journalists every week, and learned the importance of communicating his ideas: a trait he took with him to Brussels. He again demonstrated his determination to forego ideological straitjackets in order to find practical solutions by stabilising the falling franc, fighting inflation, and implementing an austerity budget while seeking to protect

workers and promote social welfare.

He threw tantrums and threatened to resign several times. Intensely shy and sometimes self-deprecating, he was a melancholy and brooding presence in cabinet, suffering bouts of depressive mood swings and sciatica. Delors had two big regrets in French politics: not accepting the premiership of France from Mitterrand while finance minister, and not running for president of his country in 1995 when he was its most popular politician. Despite his tremendous self-confidence, the fear of failure persistently haunted him.

Delors was the first three-time president of the European Commission, overseeing a period of unparalleled success not witnessed since the halcyon integrationist days of the 1960s. A meticulous workaholic, he had an astonishing grasp of technical detail which earned him the trust of the heads of state on the European Council.

On assuming office, he immediately pushed the 1985 Schengen agreement which abolished border controls between five core EEC states, and now has 27 states as part of a "borderless Europe". The dynamism of the new Commission was evidenced by the fact that in the first six months of 1988 alone, Delors's hyperactive Commission took more decisions than the body had done in the decade between 1974 and 1984.

During his tenure, the Commission also achieved a single market for people, goods, capital and services by 1992 through the 1986 Single European Act which Delors regarded as his finest achievement. The Act also gave the Community new "competences" in employment, development, the environment, and technological research.

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty mandated a single currency - the euro - created in 1999 and now used by 20 European Union countries. Delors further promoted a common defence and foreign policy, and oversaw the birth of the European Union in 1993. This golden age of integration significantly coincided with the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War: historic events which facilitated Delors's push for European integration. He ar-

gued that "the only choice Europe has is between survival and decline", insisting that a supranational Union was the only way to compete with the US and Japan at a time when China was still two decades away from becoming an economic superpower. The EU increased its membership from 10 to 15 under Delors's energetic leadership.

Before the Frenchman entered the Commission in 1985, Commissioners ran their divisions as Lords of the Manor in charge of semi-independent fiefdoms, and the president was primus inter pares among the 17 commissioners in the 'college'. Delors's British biographer, Charles Grant, described how his subject instituted a bureaucratic revolution that led to power and ideas being centralised and flowing top-down rather than bottom-up.

His methods were ruthless and unorthodox - Delors himself admitted that his leadership was at first "authoritarian" - relying on a clandestine network of largely French officials planted in strategic positions within the 17,000-strong Commission. His use of this informal réseaux sapped the morale of some of his most senior Eurocrats.

Delors had always understood, from his time as French finance minister, the importance of cultivating powerful friends to get things done. As commission president, he was close to Spain's Felipe Gonzalez, Italy's Giulio Andreotti, Holland's Ruud Lubbers, and Belgium's Wilfried Martens. Despite a widespread assumption that his success was linked to support from a former political patron, François Mitterrand, Delors's closest relationship was actually with Helmut Kohl: the German Chancellor and paymaster of the European project.

It was Kohl who had proposed Delors for election as Commission president in 1984, and not the Elysée Palace which preferred French foreign minister, Claude Cheysson. Delors supported German reunification early, even as Mitterrand and Britain's Margaret Thatcher dithered. The Commission president and German Chancellor met privately about once a month including in Kohl's hometown in the

Rhineland-Palatinate. Both men were down-to-earth and had a wry sense of humour.

For all his strengths, Delors could sometimes be petty and petulant. As in France, he threatened to resign at least a dozen times a year if he did not get his way, throwing tantrums in front of leaders, ministers, and commissioners. He was also sometimes accused of being a French nationalist who defended the parochial interests of French state-owned enterprises and the Gallic farming lobby, at a time when 70 per cent of the EU budget was spent on agriculture.

Delors's compatriot, Pascal Lamy, who later became Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, was Delors's chef de cabinet at the Commission and the eminence grise behind his success. Critics invariably compared Lamy to manipulative figures of monarchical European courts like Machiavelli and Rasputin.

He was intelligent, industrious, efficient and ruthless, and more powerful than any of the 16 commissioners, often acting as an enforcer while taking responsibility for unpopular decisions in a way that shielded Delors, who loathed direct confrontation with opponents.

Lamy was an énarque (a graduate of France's elite Ecole Nationale d'Administration), while the working-class Delors admitted to an inferiority complex at not having attended any of France's grandes écoles. Though he hated the grubby games that politicians often feel forced to play, Delors would ironically become the consummate dealmaker, stitching together visionary political compromises in his quest to build Europe.

As he prepared to leave the EU, the Commission's most effective president eloquently summed up his own legacy: "Some of the houses I build stand up, some crumble: I think of myself as an engineer, and less a philosopher or political leader... My job is to provide momentum, ideas, initiatives."

Professor Adebajo is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Pretoria's Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship in South Africa.

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## Mediation as ADR mechanism under NSCDC Amendment Act 2007

By Debo Oladinni

THERE is no gainsaying the fact that dispute resolution is a crucial component in every facet of human life and one constant variable in our society, like change, is dispute. This is due to the diverse and complex nature of human society and social interactions. Furthermore, with the constantly changing nature of the rules guiding human relationships and behavioural patterns, dispute is unavoidable.

Disputes when not properly handled and resolved have the capacity to destroy family, commercial and business relationships, including impacting negatively on the growth and development of the micro economic development of a nation. Having made the point on the inevitability of disputes and its likely effect on our society, it therefore becomes imperative for a society to devise and adopt efficient means of dispute resolution.

It is pertinent to state that 'mediation' is one of the Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms (ADR), which also includes: 'negotiation, conciliation, and arbitration. However, before proceeding to the meat of my paper, I must state that running through the labyrinth of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) Act, it is expedient to state that the Act did not make mention of ADR, under which mediation falls as a means of resolving disputes.

In fact, the word 'mediate' appears only once and was not defined in the interpretation section. The NSCDC Act did not provide clear definitions or guidelines for the scope of mediation services that the Peace and Conflict Resolution Unit of the NSCDC has the 'jurisdiction' to render. In essence, it is important for the National Assembly to, as a matter of urgency, amend the NSCDC Act, which will include the clarification of NSCDC's role in mediation, including the types of disputes the NSCDC can mediate upon and the procedures which must be adhered

to.

### Conceptual clarifications

Alternative Dispute Resolution: The Black's Law Dictionary defines Alternative Dispute Resolution as "any procedure for settling a dispute by means other than litigation." In essence, it is a non-adversarial way of resolving disputes and it is voluntary, confidential, timely, cost effective and based on the mutual agreement of parties.

Mediation: As I stated earlier in my paper, the term 'mediation' is not defined in the NSCDC Act. However, I would adopt the definition contained in Section 91 of the Arbitration & Mediation Act 2023, which defines mediation as "a process, whether referred to by the expression mediation, conciliation or an expression of similar import, where parties request a third person "the mediator" to assist them in their attempt to reach an amicable settlement of their dispute arising out of or relating to a contractual or other legal relationship but the mediator does not have the authority to impose upon parties a solution to the dispute."

### Theories underpinning the practice of mediation

It is pertinent to state that several theories underpin mediation practice, acting as a compass to mediators in their approach and techniques in resolving disputes. However, it is important to clarify that mediators often utilise a combination of components from different theories to guide their approach to the specific circumstances of each case. Some of the theories include, but are not limited to:

Communication Theory: This theory harps on the importance of effective communication as an essential ingredient for successful mediation in resolving disputes, with the mediator employing various communication skills, such as active listening, non-verbal cues, paraphrasing, and reframing, to facilitate clear and constructive dialogue between the parties. By encouraging open and honest communication, the mediator can assist parties clarify their needs, identify commonalities, and work towards a mutually agreeable solution.

Interest-Based Bargaining Theory: Interest-based negotiation is a way of negotiating that takes the parties' best interests into consideration rather than focusing solely on positions. It can also be called integrative bargaining. This is a technique that seeks to identify the particular interests that the other party has, as well as one's own interests.

Transformative Mediation Theory: This theory regards mediation as an opportunity for parties to transform their relationship positively and develop their conflict resolution skills. The aim is not just to resolve the immediate dispute, but to empower the parties to handle future conflicts constructively. At the other end of the continuum is transformative mediation. According to its main proponents, this approach is strongly values-based, concerned as it is with the 'growth' and even the 'moral' development of the disputants.

Transformative mediators are only secondarily interested in attaining formal resolution to the conflict. Here the third party is primarily concerned with disputants experiencing recognition and achieving empowerment. In essence, this theory encourages mediators to create a safe cocoon where parties can engage in self-introspection, acknowledge their emotions, and develop empathy for each other's perspectives.

Narrative Theory: This theory is a pattern of mediation that focuses on the story of the relationship between the people who are in dispute and looks to heal this relationship as well as resolve the dispute. It centers on how each party narrates their story and the unique moment where the stories intersected in a way that caused a rift in the relationship. In this way, the mediator acts as a facilitator, assisting each party understand the other's narrative, fostering empathy and potentially revealing areas of common ground. Hence, by exploring these narratives, the mediator can help parties in constructing a shared narrative that forms the foundation for a mutually agreeable resolution.

To be continued tomorrow.

# Opinion

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## Nigeria: Powering beyond the immediate

By **Abiodun Komolafe**

NIGERIA is at a crossroads and Nigerians are trying to find the responses to an economic crisis and currency turmoil. Of course, all manner of symptoms keep appearing!

Towards the end of February, Governor Biodun Oyebanji unveiled a N12 billion economic relief programme for Ekiti residents. That's in addition to other proactive steps already taken by the governor to mitigate the effects of the fuel subsidy removal and naira floatation by the national government.

In Borno State, Governor Babagana Zulum has been putting in a stellar shift even as Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State has also been doing well across the board.

Although not a paradise on earth, the 'Centre of Excellence' has a robust revenue base and a very solid social safety net thereby making it violence-free and practically the safest state in Nigeria. And in Abia State, the recent inauguration of the \$800m Geometric Power Plant and the proposed state-wide light rail project have revealed what to expect from the Alex Otti-led government.

With these and other interventions in place, one can safely say that the governors are in the right mode. However, the historical imperative of this time is that men of high intellect and exposure like Oyebanji, Sanwo-Olu, Zulum and Otti should now be at the forefront of redefining the way out of the cultural dysfunction in which Nigeria is currently immersed.

That the governors have the human empathy and the intellect to do so is not in doubt. So, why can't they dig deeper into a critical response to the illusion called 'palliative' like the former Governor Lateef Jakande whose direct labour approach to public works projects in Lagos State helped a lot of people to break out of poverty in addition to transfer of skills by participation?

Since social capital is deeper than economic capital, another way of building an aspirational society is by embarking on housing schemes that are directed at civil servants and the urban-middle-class. After all, the In-

dians and the Vietnamese have shown that the higher the skills of an economy, the higher the productivity. Otherwise, how did Vietnam arrive at having the lowest unit cost of electricity in the world? Well, it is not just that she developed a first-class electricity industry, she also developed world-class institutes! That's why world-class industries like Samsung have found a safe haven in the once war-troubled country. Indeed, that's why Samsung does more than \$65 billion worth of manufacturing exports annually, not from South Korea, its home country, but Vietnam.

Taking advantage of technology from Denmark, let our governors also maximise the opportunities provided by the removal of the power sector from the Exclusive List. Let them explore all the available human and social capital resources within the country and in the Diaspora to look into the alternative renewable sources of energy.

When one takes a critical look at the terrifying statistics, Ekiti State and the Netherlands have exactly the same land mass. However, the Netherlands is the world's 2nd largest exporter of food and agricultural products. For the Netherlands, the agro-industrial exports fetch her about \$140 billion a year. Impliedly, with the advantage of land mass, there are lots of potentials for a state like Ekiti to transform into an agro-industrial power house.

There was a time when Indians were scattered across the globe, scavenging for survival. But her situation changed immediately she decided to reach out to the Diaspora Indians. Now, India is the world's 5th largest economy. Today, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) can match any Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Remember also the Wageningen University and Research as the engine room of the Dutch economy, the power of research that has transformed that small country into its current status. But where are Nigeria's Research Institutes situated? When was the last time the Nigerian government poured money into, say, the University of Ibadan for research

works?

Unlike India, the political establishment in Nigeria has defied the thrust of development, as we have accepted it, or as it has been the conventional wisdom since the 1950s. Instead of following the paths of brilliant economists like Karl Gunnar Myrdal and Andre Gunder Frank, the political class in Nigeria has built its economy based on low skills and low wages, thinking that that's the way to have political control. As fate would have it, the chickens have now come home to roost and it is as if the gods are angry!

Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first Prime Minister, was right! Balewa didn't see the point of a Federal Ministry of Agriculture. But he reluctantly established it. As a matter of fact, it was the last Ministry to be created in the First Republic; and he didn't call it 'Federal Ministry of Agriculture'. Instead, it debuted as the 'Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Research', with Alade Lamuye as its first minister.

The idea at the time was to use the Federal Government money and international aid to establish a fantastic research institute and the products of the research would be given to the regional governments for implementation. Sadly, everything has long been distorted.

The last time we heard of the National Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) was when Professor Dotun Philips held court as its Director-General. The more reason posterity will remember Oyebanji for turning Ekiti State University not just into a degree factory but also a well-funded and research-focused institution of higher education.

Since nothing happens by chance or faith, the question is: what's to be done? Since one's actions determine one's faith, it behooves educated and enlightened minds like Oyebanji, Sanwo-Olu, Zulum and Otti to favour efforts that tend towards moving away from the low-skill, low-wage labour into a high-skilled economy, which is the only way to get productivity at the optimal and internationally competitive exports.

Conventionally, 'palliative' is just an expedient start, not a cure. It is a temporary approach, not a permanent solution.

Nigeria as a country must strive to become an agro-industrial powerhouse, most probably taking after the Dutch model. As I have argued elsewhere, our governors now have an opportunity to link agriculture with technology as most of today's achievements in the sector are technology-propelled. For instance, the Netherlands uses the model of buying grains from the surrounding areas and processing the same into value-added agro-industrial products for export to other countries. So, what stops states like Ekiti, Lagos, Borno and Enugu from understudying and... implementing this model?

Our governors must also encourage the creation of Technology Parks. At a time some Nigerians have become crudely selfish and unrepentantly self-centered, only seeking the easy options, the almost-completed Cargo Airport project in Ekiti is an attestation to the fact that the government's policy thrust is in the right direction. However, it is important to quicken the pace because time is of the essence.

A state like Ekiti has one fundamental competitive advantage, and that's its human capital resources, both at home and in the Diaspora. Therefore, Oyebanji should explore that intellectual property and turn it into gold; and ditto for the other governors. They should set up government-private sector coordinating bodies to link up their people's capital in the Diaspora and attract Foreign Direct Investments to their states.

They need to prove to their brother governors that it is the height of indolence for a governor to practically relocate abroad, walking the streets of London like a teenager on an excursion, pretending to be searching for investors. Whatever is on the ground here will speak to the shape and the size of investments that can be attracted.

*Komolafe wrote from Ijebu-Jesa, Osun State. He can be reached via: [ijebujesa@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ijebujesa@yahoo.co.uk)*

## The labyrinth of a looted country

By **Kene Obiezu**

THE government's reaction has been customarily caustic and short fused. Those involved in the looting of a warehouse belonging to the Agric Department Strategic food store, located at Tasha area of Abuja, on March 3. Federal Capital Development Authority (FCTA) in Tasha, Abuja have been arrested. To the government, there is no justification for criminal behaviour, only the convenience of choice, and choice compulsion.

The looting following similar looting across the country as hunger and anger have mounted in the country. It also brought memories of the COVID-19 pandemic, when warehouses around the country were ripped open as enraged Nigerians went on rampaging. During the EndSARS protests, Nigerians did not express their hunger for food. Rather, it was their hunger for justice that saw multiple public buildings attacked.

The 15 persons arrested for looting the warehouse may be an infinitesimal number of Nigeria's surging population, arrested for their attack on the warehouse, but numbers don't lie like Nigerian politicians. Pictures hold nothing back, like the legislators who hoard their constituency allowances.

In more ways than the authorities would care to admit, Nigeria is a looted country, a plundered country, one long subject to the depredations of men. There were the slave dealers who fronted the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Then came the colonialists, who held sway until independence

in 1960. If independence was supposed to be Nigeria's salvation from the plunderer's poleaxe, the shackles have held rather firm.

Democratic governance in Nigeria lasted all of six years before the military intervened. Because the military was desperately ill-suited for the cut-throat nature of civilian politics, Nigeria soon found itself at the mercy of the depredations of an internecine civil war. It is alright to say that the country has never been able to recover from the depredations of that war, despite the best efforts of Yakubu Gowon.

In many ways, Nigeria is a looted country. From the artefacts stolen from the Benin Empire, many of which are yet to be returned, to the Abacha loot which continues to trickle down to the country to the warehouses looted at intervals in the country.

With this identification of a surfeit of loot, it may be an irresistible temptation to ascribe ease to the identification of the looters. The country of those who colonised Nigeria is not hidden. So is Abacha's grave, as is the identity of the warehouse thieves.

The problem is that beyond those that Nigerians know, there are others. Many of them, indeed, who have either conspired or are complicit in the looting of Nigeria, still walk free. Shoulders stiff, heads high and eyes straight, they tower above the law in Nigeria, which rather reserves its bite for Nigeria's great unwashed.

The warehouse may have been looted, much to the embarrassment of those who have been desperate to project

Abuja as exempt from the chaos eating up Nigeria, but the looting blueprint was set a long time ago. It is not even about the current administration. It is more about those who have now been forced out of office by the brutal transience of power.

Hunger scythes through Nigeria and though contributors include the war in Ukraine and the disturbances in the global market, corruption is responsible for the wounds Nigerians feel most deeply.

It would be easy for those responsible for stealing the country dry to cry themselves hoarse over Nigeria's worsening insecurity. But who will blame the hungry for grabbing bread hidden in plain sight? Who will blame those whose residual theft was easily nudged awake by the hunger rippling through Nigeria?

The overwhelming temptation is to feel a twinge of sympathy for the Tinubu administration. It is unusual for a new administration to be beset by a multiplicity of such ferocious challenges. The law in Nigeria criminalises looting of any kind. Of course, when it has to do with the poorest of the poor, such legislations and their enforcers sharpen their teeth. Expectedly, they slacken and struggle when it has to do with holding to account the powerful, whose power comes from looting public funds.

Self-preservation goes to the core of every human being. Hunger seeks to upend that core, and so it is instinctive to seek to sate one's hunger. No one can legislate hunger. *Obiezu can be reached via: [keneobiezu@gmail.com](mailto:keneobiezu@gmail.com)*

CRUDE OIL PRICE UPDATE

Brent crude: \$86.98 | WTI crude: \$82.86

FOREX MARKET UPDATE

I&E window: ₦1572.86

## Stakeholders raise concern over NBS unemployment computation

From Kingsley Jeremiah, Abuja  
STAKEHOLDERS, yesterday, in Abuja raised concerns over Nigeria's single-digit unemployment claim and the loopholes in unemployment data.

The stakeholders, who gathered at an event organised by the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) on the need to understanding the new Nigerian labour force statistics, said with a mere five per cent of Nigerians in formal employment and over 90 per cent in the informal sector, Nigeria has more to worry about.

Also raising the red flag on the low rate of women in formal employment and the high rate of young Nigerians in unemploy-

### Insist youth unemployment spells doom for economy

ment, the new labour statistics, they said could affect adequate planning.

Nigeria's unemployment rate was put at five per cent in the third quarter of 2023 with the informal accounting for 92.7 per cent.

The stakeholders noted that the quality of work remained questionable as most people engage in anything only to feed as the country has no social interventions.

The stakeholders noted that there are also concerns that the country's most vibrant people who are graduates are the most affected by unemployment conditions.

They were also worried about government inter-

ventions or palliative and the population that are beneficiaries while stressing the need for policymakers to critically put statistics side by side along with their decisions.

President of the Nigerian Economic Society, Prof Adeola Adenikinju, said the current template could be deceptive in an environment where people pay attention to figures instead of deeper understanding.

He asked for a proper breakdown of the labour data, adding that politicians would only think they are performing and conclude that the level of unemployment is less.

Executive Director of CSEA, Dr Chukwuka Onyekwena, said the value of accurate

and reliable labour force statistics cannot be overstated, especially in a country as large and diverse as Nigeria.

Onyekwena noted that producing high-quality labour force statistics is a large feat, adding that it requires strong methodologies, stringent data collection approaches, and advanced analytical tools.

He stated the data necessitate a thorough understanding of the social, economic, and political forces that shape the Nigerian context.

"With a population of over 200 million people and a fast-expanding labour force, Nigeria faces unique challenges and opportunities in realising the full potential of its human cap-

ital. "Understanding the labour market dynamics allows policymakers to devise strategies to stimulate job creation, boost workforce skills, and increase productivity, resulting in inclusive growth and reduced poverty and inequality," he stated.

According to him, Nigeria can chart a course toward better policy formulation with economic implications by deepening the understanding of the most recent developments in Nigerian labour force statistics, encouraging collaboration and dialogue among diverse stakeholders.

Senior economist at the

World Bank, Dr Godstime Eighiremolen, said the bank relies strongly on data like that of NBS to get people out of poverty with statistics-based evidence. According to him, in a country like Nigeria without social interventions, people go into the streets and find something to do, even if they are getting ₦1,500 in a day.

He noted that the quality of jobs people are doing is sacrosanct especially if people must move from poverty.

Eighiremolen, while noting the need to be gainfully employed, said there is a need for interventions to be evidence-based.

### Economist faults arrest of Binance executives, blames CBN for failed policies

By Adeyemi Adepotun

A professor of applied economics at Johns Hopkins University, Steve Hanke, has joined scores of tech professionals calling for the release of two Binance executives detained by Nigeria after it restricted access to several crypto platforms including Binance.

The scholar said Nigeria's economic instability came from policies implemented by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), including significant increases in the country's money supply.

Contrary to some perspectives, Hanke insisted that cryptocurrency trading is not responsible for Nigeria's economic challenges and advised the federal government to release the Binance detainees.

Recall that the federal government, recently, restricted access to several crypto platforms including Binance, recognized as the world's largest crypto exchange.

Following this action, two Binance executives and American citizens, Tigran Gambaryan and Nadeem Anjarwalla, who hold UK and Kenyan nationalities, who were negotiating with the government, were

detained and have remained in detention without any formal charges against them.

Hanke said these executives are unfairly detained because they may not directly have a hand in the economic situation of the country.

He said: "With the Naira plunging and inflation surging, Nigeria has hit the panic button, recently forcing Binance to halt its operations. Crypto speculation is not the source of Nigeria's problems."

Hanke is the founder and co-director of the university's Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise.

His advice followed that of another Nigerian crypto enthusiast, Bright Johnson, who argued that Nigerian authorities seem to be seeking to make them the scapegoats for the naira's recent devaluation against the US dollar and the country's soaring inflation rate.

He said that detaining these Binance employees is misguided and could backfire on the government, derailing its efforts to protect Nigeria's economic interests.



Chief Rep Officer, Bank of Beirut, Camille Chidiak (left); Executive Director, Chief Operations and Information, Stanley Amuchie; Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, Fidelity Bank, Dr Nneka Onyeali-Ikpe; Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer, Bank of Beirut, Sopholis Argyrou; Executive Director/Chief Risk Officer, Kevin Ugwuoke; at recent courtesy visit led by MD/CEO, Bank of Beirut to MD/CEO, Fidelity Bank.

### Inflation may hit 32.77 per cent this month

By Helen Oji

INFLATION rate has been projected to reach 32.77 per cent this month.

The projection is hinged on the prediction that harvest depletion would sustain price pressure in the food basket, leading to a month-on-month increase of 3.29 per cent for food inflation.

According to Cordros Capital Research, headline inflation remained elevated, rising by 180bps to 31.7 per cent year-on-year (YoY) in February

(January 29.9 per cent YoY), occasioned by increased consumer prices on the back of low food supply relative to demand, lingering currency pressures, and higher energy prices, amid the unfavourable base effects from the prior year.

"We highlight broad-based pressures across the food and core baskets. Precisely, food inflation (+251bps to 37.92 per cent y/y) remained at a 19-year high, while the core inflation (+154bps to 25.13 per cent y/y) settled at the highest level since March 2004

(32.6 per cent). On a month-on-month basis, consumer prices surged by 48bps to 3.12 per cent (January: +2.64 per cent m/m), the highest point in six months. "On our outlook, we identify the CBN's efforts to stabilize the naira, recognizing the high pass-through effect on domestic prices. These efforts include improved dollar supply from the CBN to the forex market, monetary tightening, and higher domestic interest rates," they noted

Based on the aforementioned,

the experts predicted a less volatile naira this month, compared to previous months, thus moderating the impact of currency volatility on price increases in March.

Consequently, the analysts forecasted core inflation to print lower by 10bps to 1.98 per cent MoM in March.

However, they expected harvest depletion to sustain price pressures within the food basket, leading to a MoM increase of 3.29 per cent for food inflation.

"Broadly, we forecast headline

### 5G driving deployment of AI, but regulation difficult, says NCC

By Adeyemi Adepotun

THE Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) said developing regulations and policies to govern artificial intelligence (AI) deployment is complex as well as playing catch up due to

technological advancements in this part of the world.

NCC said although most legislative and governing bodies are looking to regulate this technology, there has been a continuous struggle to strike the right balance

between risk mitigation and stifling innovation while promoting innovation and ensuring security and trust.

The NCC Executive Vice Chairman, Dr Aminu Maida, who disclosed this, said indeed the regulation of AI is very difficult for countries

all over the world.

Maida, while marking the 2024 World Consumer Rights Day, said despite the usefulness of the technology, its usage also comes with legal and regulatory challenges, which need to be addressed.

The NCC EVC said getting it right with AI regulation would require the collaboration of all stakeholders, including academia and technology developers.

He described AI as a phenomenon that has captured the imagination of scien-

tists, engineers, and thinkers for decades, saying it represents the culmination of human innovation and the quest to create machines that can mimic human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities.



# ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF AUDIT EXECUTIVES OF BANKS IN NIGERIA [ACAEBIN]

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*...Objectivity & Integrity*

## COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND RETREAT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF AUDIT EXECUTIVES OF BANKS IN NIGERIA (ACAEBIN).

The Association of Chief Audit Executives of Banks in Nigeria (ACAEBIN) held her 2023 Annual General Meeting/Retreat at Abuja between 4th and 7th March 2024 with the theme "The Role of the Internal Auditor in Promoting Stability in the Financial Services Sector and National Economic Growth."

Various topical issues were discussed including Foreign Exchange Liquidity Crisis, Leveraging Technology Tools to Enhance Audit Efficiency and Effective Banking Supervision Collaboration, amongst others.

At the end of the Conference, far-reaching recommendations were proposed, which included the following.

1. Internal Auditors should continue to provide assurance to the Board and Executive Management that recent regulatory policy directives are being complied with while Management and the Board should be held accountable and prioritize regulatory compliance by conducting thorough risk assessments, credit analysis, and monitoring of FX sources and utilization.
2. Maintaining proper KYC, EDD and AML/CFT/CPF compliance in relation to all customers, particularly FX customers, is crucial. Distinguishing between cash and transfer transactions can prevent money laundering. Effective communication and guidance on circulars by Banks can help customers comply with regulations and avoid legal, reputational or financial consequences.
3. Central Bank of Nigeria should enhance the independence of Chief Audit Executives by strengthening the governance process around their appointment, appraisal, discipline, redeployment, and career progression.
4. The Association commends the efforts of Law Enforcement Agencies in the fight against fraud and requests that more resources should be channeled towards speedy conclusion of investigation and purposeful prosecution of fraud cases.
5. Interdepartmental training between the Information System Team in Internal Audit and the Information Technology Governance Team is crucial for continuous knowledge exchange and improvement. The Information System Audit Team should be involved in planning the various compliance assessments of the standards recommended by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).
6. Banks should establish an assurance community of Information Security, Internal Audit, Internal Control/Systems Control, Compliance, and Risk Management departments. This community should collaborate regularly to share insights and monitor cybersecurity-related initiatives and projects.
7. To stay relevant, Internal Auditors must be agile, develop new skills, embrace technology, and collaborate with stakeholders leveraging people-driven insights to address emerging technology and cybersecurity threats.
8. Internal Auditors should be proficient in data analytics and to achieve this, Internal Auditors should upskill themselves to enhance their competence in business data analytics, interpret insights properly leading to better decision-making.
9. Internal Audit Function should establish a strong data governance framework to guide sourcing and use of data. The data development journey should focus on people, analytics strategy, process outline, technology adoption, and data quality to enhance data capabilities and drive better outcomes.
10. Internal Auditors are encouraged to improve on their soft skills in addition to technical expertise because communication and relationship management with auditees are crucial areas for improvement. Developing cultural intelligence by recognizing, understanding, and respecting diverse cultural differences is essential. This skill must be reflected in interactions with the auditees, even when delivering unfavorable messages.
11. Internal Audit Function should have a clear and comprehensive strategy that exceeds regulatory requirements including being prepared for any new requirements and take swift action to initiate remediations.

**Signed: Association of Chief Audit Executives of Banks in Nigeria (ACAEBIN)**





## PRESS RELEASE

### EKO DISCO MANAGEMENT CLEARED IN 'GHOST WORKER' INVESTIGATION

The Eko Electricity Distribution PLC (EKEDP) is aware of recent negative media reports regarding the company and some members of staff relating to 'ghost workers'. As EKEDP is committed to maintaining the highest ethical business practices, the Board of Directors took immediate action by mandating the HR Committee to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the matter. This investigation was initiated in response to allegations that the board was made aware of.

We can now report that the investigation has now been concluded. The findings indicate that the allegations of fraud, negligence, or conspiracy against our members of staff were unfounded. We want to emphasize that no evidence was found to substantiate any of the claims made against any member of our staff, including our Chief Legal Officer, Wola Joseph-Condotti, Chief Audit and Compliance Officer, Sheri Adegbenro and Chief Human Resources Officer, Aik Alenkhe.

#### Moving Forward

EKEDP's core mission is to provide reliable, and sustainable electricity distribution services. We remain focused on this goal and will continue investing in our network infrastructure, processes and people to deliver improved services that address our customers' needs.

Serving over 700,000 residential, commercial and industrial customers across Lagos, EKEDP plays a vital role in powering economic growth and development. We will strive to maintain the utmost integrity as we execute our mandate.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'B.S. M.', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Chairman, Board of Directors

Lagos, Nigeria  
March 18, 2024

[www.ekedp.com](http://www.ekedp.com)

More information can be found at [www.ekedp.com](http://www.ekedp.com)  
Follow EKEDC, on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube

## Heirs restates commitment to drive sustainable development across Africa

HEIRS Holdings has restated its commitment to improving lives, driving positive change and transforming sustainable development across Africa.

The company made a commitment in its newly-released television commercial that showcases the company's diverse portfolios, spanning power, energy, financial services, hospitality, real estate, healthcare and technology sectors.

Speaking on the new television commercial, the Group Head of Marketing and Corporate Communications, Heirs Holdings, Clari Green, said the company, in its 13th year, has established a reputation for being consistent in creating value, while driving Africa's social and economic agenda.

She said the company has an investment portfolio that has spread across 24 countries worldwide since it launched in 2010 with a bold strategy to focus on the African continent and unlock its socio-economic potential.

Green listed some of the key milestones of the company, acquiring a controlling stake in Transcorp, leading the organisation into an era of year-on-year growth and expansion into the power sector.

She said Transcorp Power surpassed the five-year performance target of 670MW set for it in 2013 by the Federal Government through the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), by increasing the available capacity of Ughelli Power

Plant from 160MW to 701MW within four years of taking over the plant.

Green said Transcorp Group orchestrated the successful listing of Transcorp Power on the main board of the Nigerian Exchange (NGX).

According to her, the move not only further bolstered the company's portfolio, but also injected an additional N1.8 trillion into the market capitalisation of NGX.

She said in less than two weeks, Transcorp Power's market capitalisation grew to over N2.8 trillion, adding that with a combined generating capacity of approximately 2,000 MW between itself and its sister company, Transfam Power, Transcorp Group's power subsidiaries account for 15.5 per cent of the total installed capacity in Nigeria.

Additionally, Heirs Energies, a subsidiary of Heirs Holdings, recently announced a further expansion of its gas supply business, supplying the recently-commissioned 188 MW power plant operated by Geometric Power Limited, located in Aba, Abia State.

Green further stated that Afriland Properties Plc, a real estate investing company of Heirs Holdings, grew its portfolio size to over N12 billion and has become one of the largest land banks in Nigeria. She said Heirs Holdings' Avon Healthcare Limited (Avon HMO), impacted over 230,000 lives through 2,500 hospitals across the world, paying over N24 billion (\$32 million) in claims in 10 years.

## NBC reaffirms commitment to empowering women

By Tobi Awodipe

IN commemoration of this year's women's month, Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) Limited has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting women in all areas of life with the unveiling of a documentary that spotlights the empowered voices of women within its value chain.

Aligning with the theme for the year, 'Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress', the video captures the success stories of some female distributors who have been integral to the brand's success in the last seven decades in Nigeria. It tells the story of growth and empowerment of not just the women, but the impact on their families and communities.

Featuring five female depot owners who share their perspectives on how they have been empowered, it also highlights the power of opportunity, challenges and resilience.

Corporate Affairs and Sustainability Director, Oluwasoromidayo George, said empowering women is fundamental for any society's advancement. She added that by doing this, they have

opened the door to greater economic diversification, productivity, and income equality. "Equipping women and girls with life skills is critical for their well-being as it fosters resilience, creates access to social protection and shapes a better future for them," she said.

Reiterating the brand's commitment to the prosperity of women, she said the significance of women for Nigeria's future growth is apparent and central to their strategic direction as an organisation.

Sharing details of the initiatives for women, she said they include the 5by20 initiative aimed at providing women with opportunities to kick-start and manage their businesses through the linkage to its distribution system; partnership with the Lady Mechanic Initiative to empower vulnerable young women with vocational, entrepreneurial and life skills, to become certified professional automobile mechanics, partnership with the Lagos State Government Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) to train thousands of women on financial literacy and communications skills among others.

## Customs agents kick against double taxation on vehicles

By Adaku Onyenucheya

THE National Council of Managing Directors of Licensed Customs Agents (NCMDLCA) has kicked against the imposition of payment of electronic call-up charges on importers after paying for vehicle entry permit (VEP) and tenure packing fees (TPF) to terminal operators, describing charges as double taxation.

In a letter to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the licensed customs agents lamented that VEP and TPF, which are

contained in the rate paid to the terminals, legally authorised vehicles to enter ports for loading without any further payment.

The letter signed by the President, NCMDLCA, Lucky Amiwero, said it was illegal to double charge the same service of vehicle entry into the ports, which has been paid for by the importers through the customs agents.

According to the customs agents, N21,500 and N75,075 electronic call-up charges for 20ft and 40ft containers

respectively have no direct bearing on cargo and are also not part of the service rendered on cargoes.

The agents said the lease agreement contracted by the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) with the terminal operators incorporates vehicle entry permits and tenure parking rate per truck entering the port premise as contained in the maximum tariffs for cargo dues of vehicles.

According to them, the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and terminal operators should be responsible for the

payment of the electronic call-up system in line with the agreement.

They stated that it is strictly NPA's responsibility to regulate traffic within the limit of a port or the approach to a port under section 32 (a) of the agreement and not the customs agents or importers.

The customs agents also noted that it is the legal responsibility of the authority to provide ease of access to the port, which is part of the Nigerian port infrastructure, to facilitate trucks into the ports.



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*This week, we continue with our 3rd discussion on a 4-part series titled **Implementing Personalized Coaching & Mentoring**. We already looked at **8 Reasons Leaders Must Adopt A Coaching Leadership Style in 2024** and **9 Ways To Develop Coaching Leaders On Your Team**.*

### Implementing Personalized Leadership Coaching & Mentoring III

#### 7 Coaching errors leaders make and how to avoid them

BASED on experience serving clients at over the past 12 years, Implementing Personalized Coaching & Mentoring is our #2 strategy for driving a culture of peak performance.

What we have found is that as leaders attempt to coach and mentor, there are certain behaviors some leaders exhibit that limits the potency of their attempt.

Nobody is perfect and we are all vulnerable to making mistakes at some point in our lives. Even professional coaches aren't immune to making mistakes. The difference is whether we are open to discovering our ignorance and making conscious effort to unlearn these behaviors.

In the time past, before coaching became a common lexicon in the corporate world, a lot of leaders bullied their way coercion and manipulation. Some later realized they could have done better but it was too late for most.

As we have noted in the past years, coaching has evolved to be a game changer for teams and organizations of all sizes, successfully converting team members into partners through motivation, inspiration, and a variety of other elements.

However, because coach leadership is entrusting your team members to do their best while you encourage and inspire them to think, plan, and set goals objectively, while also navigating the best route to reach them, you cannot afford to make costly mistakes.

Let's look at 5 of the most common errors limiting the effectiveness of coaching:

#### 1. When Leaders Don't Really Listen

When you don't develop the capacity to understand what others are feeling and experiencing to truly connect with your team's perspectives and

challenges, you miss out on a very crucial strategy that would have helped to build trust with your team. Active listening isn't just about hearing, but listening to comprehend to gain hindsight or foresight.

Next time you are in a conversation with your team members, leave everything else in the moment and ensure you truly listen more than you speak.

#### 2. When Leaders Don't Provide Constructive Feedback

In our work with leaders, we find that one of the rare traits most team members find admirable is when a leader has the capacity to give constructive feedback. This is one of the criteria for nominating leaders for The Peak Performing Executive of The Year.

When you don't provide concise, helpful, and practical feedback from periodic assessment, you deny your team members the opportunity to grow. Some attempts at giving feedback focuses on discussing the error and consequently magnifies the error.

It is therefore imperative that you implement a performance management system where you can give constructive feedback by focusing on what can be done better to enable your team members make informed adjustments to areas in need of improvement in their career journey.

#### 3. When Leaders Don't Admit Their Errors

You can't afford to give your team members the impression that you are perfect or that you know it all. Leaders must always acknowledge and disclose their faults. This is because team members are continuously observing how their leaders lead—especially when they make mistakes.

When leaders fail to accept responsibility for their failures, they contribute to a culture in which honesty is expendable.

Next time you make a mistake, admit it, learn from it and share with team members. This is not weakness, it takes guts to admit your error even to your subordinates.

#### 4. When Leaders Assume Knowledge of Team Members

Assumption is the lowest form of intelligence. When your perception of your team members is based on their background or previous experiences you must have had with similar character profiles that share the same identity as your team members, it weakens the effectiveness of your attempt.

While there may always be overlaps and similarities among those whom you lead, making judgments or assumptions that they will be the same doesn't help anyone. Nor is it fair to your team members who are their own unique individual selves with a unique set of attributes, goals, desires, and obstacles.

While it is good to draw on experiences, as a leader, you must approach each member of your team with a blank slate, being as curious as possible to learn the most about them in the most neutral manner possible.

Still, on making assumptions, it is an error for leaders to talk to their team about the performance of other members. Why? Because if a leader speaks poorly about one member of the team, the tendency or the possibility for the rest of the team to think that they could be next will be high.

We all thrive in a high-trust environment. Therefore, It is always easier to establish trust when relationships are reliable and authentic, and when communication is direct and open. So, as much as it might be tempting, leaders should abstain from this practice and rather choose to talk directly to each team member about their performance and not their peers.

#### 5. When A Leader Is Totalitarian

Totalitarian is a system of government that is centralized and dictatorial and requires complete subservience to the state. There are many different coaching styles and methodologies available. And, with expertise and time, leaders frequently establish a specific style and procedure based on the commonalities of the profiles of members of their teams and what would yield the highest guaranteed success. However, for a coaching engagement to be successful, it must focus on the team first and foremost; and then the process comes second. Many leaders attempt to use coaching in totalitarian system by forcing their team to take a specific route rather than being flexible.

After coaching hundreds of executives in the past 12 years, I've learnt that coaching conversations rarely follow a set pattern. Many times, I rush forward, circle back, go deep, and shift direction—wherever the ground is most productive. Certainly, the coaching goals can serve as the North Star to shoot for, but the path to those goals can never be precisely defined - and this is something leaders must embrace and understand, to allow them to be flexible.

#### Conclusion

Peak performing leaders are those who help their team members overcome obstacles and reach their potential. Therefore, be present to offer resources and support when needed. Acknowledge and commemorate accomplishments, regardless of the size. It is your responsibility as a leader to specify the attitudes and actions you expect from your team. As you continue to develop and improve as a coaching leader, go to workshops, study books, and look for mentorship from more seasoned coaching leaders.

# Labour & Appointments

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## Casualisation of workers continues despite calls for decent work

*Despite the Federal Government's promise to end casualisation of workers, there is a surge in its adoption even as other forms of indecent employment practices gain traction, GLORIA NWAFOR reports.*

**T**HE unending casualisation of workers is becoming a major concern to stakeholders.

Although, where there is an acute shortage of jobs for those seeking them, the temptation to exploit the system is high.

Coupled with the lack of adequate laws to protect the vulnerable casualised workers by the government, the lot of protecting those entangled in the mix naturally falls on the labour unions.

While the labour unions lack political powers and authority to stamp out casualisation, they often rely on various conventions and regulations of international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to carry out picketing of premises of firms that engage in the practice.

For instance, members of the Chemical and Non-Metallic Products Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (CANMPSSAN) last week, protested at the premises of the Shongai Packaging Industry Limited situated at KM 38, Lagos-Abeokuta Road, Sango Ota, Ogun State, over inhuman treatment and casualisation of its members.

The protest, spearheaded by CANMPSSAN and allied unions was led by the President of CANMPSSAN, Segun David, and they temporarily paralysed activities at the company's office.

The union accused the company of dehumanising the workers and casualisation by the management.

Among others, the union raised concerns of equipment safety concerns, poor medical provision and compensation for injured staff.

The protesting workers, who gathered at the entrance of the company as early as 7:00 am, brandished placards and sang solidarity songs, accusing the management of various anti-labour practices.

While addressing the protesting workers, CANMPSSAN President, David, frowned at the company's lackadaisical approach to addressing the workers' concerns, which he noted have lingered for long.

He said the picketing of the company would continue if the organisation refused to take necessary action.

He said that the union responded to complaints by their members working in the company over precarious working conditions on-site.

According to David, the management engaged the workers on an ad-hoc basis with no conditions of service attached nor any welfare or medical services in place.



President of Chemical and Non-Metallic Products Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (CANMPSSAN), Segun David (middle), with members of the union during the picketing of Shongai Packaging Industry Limited over inhuman treatment and casualisation of its members in Ota, Ogun State.

He said: "In October 2022, the services of some workers were terminated for no just reason of which they were not informed before the termination.

"The union reached out to Shongai's management, urging them to fulfill their obligation by compensating the terminated workers with their rightful benefits. Despite their initial agreement, the company failed to follow through, instead proposing that the workers return as contract employees. This shift suggests a deliberate attempt by the company to casualise its workforce."

He said that despite numerous meetings, arbitration sessions and intervention by the Ministry of Labour, Shongai continually failed to honour its commitments. According to him, even after setting deadlines, such as January 2023, they repeatedly reneged on their promises.

David further explained that efforts to resolve the matter persisted through mid-2023, with the company consistently failing to meet its obligations.

"When pressed further, they suddenly introduced a new gratuity calculation method without consulting the union, a move deemed unacceptable. Now we are in mid-March and the gratuity of these workers is yet to be paid and the welfare of other workers in the company, which is also part of our agitation today, has not improved," he said.

He pointed out the cases of two of their members whose appointments were terminated in October 2022 without any compensation.

According to him, "Our members were terminated in October 2022 with our paying them their benefits, instead, their appointments were converted to contract staff. This has been going on for so long and nothing was done."

While the management of Shogai, through the head of the HR Department, Funmilola Oladipupo, called for a meeting to address the situation, it agreed that the two retired staff would be paid gratuity in terms of expiry time based on

their current salary.

It agreed that the welfare facilities would be improved; the yearly performance appraisal exercise would be concluded and implemented; there would be regularisation of casual workers, and accident victims in the organisation would be adequately compensated, among others.

David, had before now appealed to the federal government to gear its policies towards stopping casualisation and contract staffing employment in the country, or at least curtail it.

He described casual work as often temporary, with uncertain wages, long hours, and no job security, noting that the matter should be pursued vigorously by the government.

He added that it could be actualised through collaboration with organised labour and civil society organisations.

He said: "The rise of casual employment is now a global trend in the larger global picture where decent work as a path to broad-based development is rejected and more jobs are created through outsourcing or labour agencies. "Casual work is often temporary, with uncertain wages, long hours, and no job security"

"The growth in irregular work has changed the nature of employment from a labour relationship to a commercial relationship, with the worker taking all the risks. The truth is that the owner of the business wants to cut costs by all means possible so that human capital can be treated as mere robots.

"Our position as a trade union

“  
The growth in irregular work has changed the nature of employment from a labour relationship to a commercial relationship, with the worker taking all the risks.  
”

organisation is that government policies must be geared towards stopping casualties or at least curtailing them. This should be pursued vigorously and actualised through collaboration with organised labour and civil society organisations."

Before now also, President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Joe Ajaero, had lamented unfair employment practices, among others at workplaces, indicting the Ministry of Labour and Employment for the upsurge in casualisation and outsourcing of workers, among other forms of indecent employment practices.

He said: "The issue of job protection is sad because there are even no jobs. So, what are we protecting? Countries like ours have to capture the number of people that are within the unemployment brackets and underemployment brackets. A lot of people in Nigeria are underemployed.

"In the absence of social security or social safety, you have a lot of people who are unemployed and you are talking about job protection. It is a big problem that we are in.

"It is the same with the issue of casualisation and outsourcing. The ministry does not seem to have an answer to this. Rather, they are trying to get unions to sign an agreement with employers, legalising casualisation. Those that are casualised or outsourced should and must belong to a union. How long will they remain as casual or outsourced workers?"

"To worsen the matter, within a period, probably after every two years or even one year, they disengage these casuals and bring in another set of casuals. It is something that we will have to look at as a national policy and ensure that somebody cannot be outsourced forever. So, we need a new direction towards it."

Indeed, casualisation cuts across virtually all sectors of the economy.

A report published by the Campaign for Democratic Workers' Rights, showed that over 45 per cent of the workforce in

Nigeria operates as casual workers, while 50 per cent of the burden of casualisation exists in the downstream oil and gas sub-sectors of the economy, telecommunication, banking, construction, mining and some other workplaces.

According to experts, development is assuming a worrisome dimension because of the saturated labour market and a quest to maximise profits by multinationals and other corporate entities.

The NLC boss, who noted that the challenge has become a general problem across the country, pledged to confront it headlong.

He noted that the challenges are based on policies of the government, which tend to deprive workers of their income.

In his submission, the Director-General of the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA), Adewale-Smatt Oyerinde, said while outsourcing is accepted globally, casualisation should be disallowed entirely.

He said the employers' body was in support of a decent work environment and standardisation of employment across sectors.

"Outsourcing is globally accepted, while casualisation is frowned at. That the private sector is facing enormous challenges, which sometimes necessitate some companies going the route of outsourcing and casualisation might be correct, because of the socioeconomic situation that businesses are forced to endure.

The harsh regulatory environment and dwindling income, all contribute to making doing business in Nigeria very uninteresting," he said.

He said NECA has reached out to unions to deepen collaboration and advocate a favourable environment that will enable businesses to thrive, as well as enable employers and employees to contribute to national development.

He said the Ministry of Labour in partnership with the social partners has done much to regulate employment in most sectors.

Recently, he said NECA and the ministry reviewed employment guidelines in the oil and gas industry. "It will progressively eradicate the issue of casualisation and contract staffing to ensure standardisation of employment in all industries. The ongoing effort is also to ensure standardisation of employment and decent work across the board," he said.

President of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC), Festus Osifo, also pledged to curb casualisation in the oil and gas industry.

Osifo, who is also the president of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), described casualisation as modern slavery.

Stating that casualisation has become a menace in the sector, he said: "This is a message of hope for workers that have not been enjoying the joy of working. The first step to address casualisation in the industry is unionising the workers to give them a sense of belonging, which is by the International Labour Organisation (ILO)."

# Labour & Appointments

## Ex-perm secs seek merit-based recruitment in public service

From Collins Olayinka, Abuja

**A**DHERENCE strictly to Arules-based and merit-based recruitment, deployment and promotion and effective human resource management will restore the credibility of civil service and reposition it as the engine of economic growth, the Council of Retired Federal Permanent Secretaries (CORFEPS) has said. In a communique issued at the end of its 2024 colloquium which had 'Reflections on Nigeria's public service: Way forward for good governance', as its theme, the group insisted that there is an urgent need to prioritize merit and competency in the service and remove mediocrity. The body also expressed its support for the planned

restructuring of the civil service regarding the cost of governance caused by overlaps and duplications in the functions of ministries, extra-ministerial departments and agencies. It added: "To this end, CORFEPS calls government attention to the observed abuse of the monetization policy of 2003. The true essence of that policy should be revisited where necessary, paying attention to the welfare needs of civil servants in such areas as transportation, and accommodation." It also restated the need to reinstate the coordination and supervisory role of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation by reinstituting the

Establishment and Records Office to complement the full roles of the National Council on Establishment. The communique which was signed by the Chairman of the group, Yayale Ahmed and Ambassador Bulus Zom Lolo, who is the General Secretary,

also seeks the establishment of a desk or Unit for matters relating to retired permanent secretaries and former Heads of the Civil Service of the Federation in the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to facilitate communication and

collaboration, whenever and the OHCSF necessary, between CORFEPS

### Tinubu reappoints Idris as NNRA DG

**P**RESIDENT Bola Tinubu has approved the reappointment of Dr Yau Idris as the Director General/Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NNRA) for another five years. In a statement signed by the Assistant General Manager (AGM), Information, Ekaette Bassey, Tinubu confirmed the reappointment in a letter by

the Minister of State Petroleum Resources, Heineken Lokpobiri. The letter stated that the five-year tenure takes effect from February 18, 2024. The statement reads: "The reappointment is contained in a letter from the Minister of State Petroleum Resources, Sen. Heineken Lokpobiri dated March 11, 2024, and states that the five-year tenure takes effect from February 18, 2024."

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### VACANCY

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- Supervise Sales to create, manage and implement sales strategy, plan and budget
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- Ensure all operations are carried out in a cost-effective manner.
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## PUBLIC NOTICE

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT

### PUBLIC DISPLAY EXERCISE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (ESIA) FOR THE PROPOSED LEKKI DATA CENTRE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN MOPO VILLAGE IBEJU-LEKKI, ETI-OSA LGA, LAGOS STATE.

In accordance with the provisions of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act CAPE12 LFN 2004, which makes it mandatory for proponents of all new major development activities to carry out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of their proposed projects, the Federal Ministry of Environment hereby announces twenty-one (21) working days Public Display for the draft EIA report submitted by Medallion Data Centres Limited. This Display is to enable the public to make inputs that shall facilitate informed decisions on the project's EIA by the Ministry.

#### Project Description:

The proposed project involves the construction of a Data Center facility within Mopo Onibeju Community, Eti-Osa LGA, Lagos State. The proposed facility will be involved in over 100% of all internet traffic exchanged in Nigerian Internet Exchange. The estimated energy consumption for the proposed Data Center is about 1.7 Megawatts which will be sourced from EKEDC, Generators and IPP Plants. The total land take for the proposed project is approximately 18,900 square meters.

#### The Display Centres are:

- Headquarters, Eti-Osa Local Government Area, Lekki, Lagos State.
- Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, Alausa, Ikeja, Lagos State.
- Federal Ministry of Environment, Surulere, Lagos State
- Federal Ministry of Environment, Environment House (Brown Building), Independence Way, Central Business District, Abuja-FCT.
- www.ead.gov.ng

#### Duration of Display:

Date: 18<sup>th</sup> March – 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

Time: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm Daily.

ALL COMMENTS RECEIVED SHOULD BE FORWARDED TO THE HON. MINISTER, FEDERAL MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT HEADQUARTERS, MABUSHI, ABUJA-FCT OR [info@ead.gov.ng](mailto:info@ead.gov.ng) ON OR BEFORE 22<sup>nd</sup> APRIL, 2024.

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- Complete bookkeeping tasks, track office expenses.
- Raise monthly payment for clients
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- Maintain office equipment
- Ensure diesel supply and maintenance of the generators
- Oversee facilities services, maintenance activities.
- Ensuring the building meets health and safety requirements.
- Checking that agreed work by staff or contractors has been completed satisfactorily and follow up accordingly.
- Coordinating and leading one or more teams to cover various areas of responsibility;

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##### Degree in Business Administration (B.Sc)

- 2+ years of experience in office management, real estate and/or a related field is strongly preferred
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Application closes last day in March



THE WORLD BANK

**OSUN STATE GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA**  
**MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**  
**OSUN RURAL ACCESS AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETING**  
**PROJECT (RAAMP) OLD GOVERNMENT PRESS BUILDING, ADERIN, TESTING**  
**GROUND AREA, OSOGBO**  
Email: [osunraamp3@gmail.com](mailto:osunraamp3@gmail.com)

#### SPECIFIC PROCUREMENT NOTICE

RFB No: NG-OSUN RAAMP-335637-CW-RFB

RFB Description: Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of 48km Rural Roads in Osun State (Lots 1-4)

Project: Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP)

Employer: Osun State Project Implementation Unit

Country: Nigeria

Issued on: Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has received financing from the World Bank and on-lent the financing to nineteen participating states (namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo, Plateau, Sokoto, Niger, Gombe, Ekiti, Kaduna, Ebonyi and Osun) toward the cost of the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) and Osun PIU intends to apply part of the proceeds toward eligible payments under the contract for **Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of 48km Rural Roads in Osun State**. This contract will be financed by the International Development Association (IDA) and Osun State Government. Procurement process will be governed by the World Bank's Procurement Regulations.

2. The Osun State Project Implementation Unit, Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for the Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of 48km Rural Roads in Osun State grouped into 4 lots as follows;

LOT	NO OF ROADS / LOT	DESCRIPTION OF LOT	LGA / LOCATION	BID SECURITY	FINANCIAL CAPABILITY (NGN NAIRA)	AVERAGE ANNUAL CONSTRUCTION TURNOVER (NGN NAIRA)	SPECIFIC CONTRACT & CONTRACT MANAGEMENT
1	1 Road	Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of OGBERIN EDE – ADELEKE UNI – LOOGUN EGBEDA – ODE OMU Road in Osun State (21.74km) – Lot 1	Ede South and Ayedade LGAs	N52 Million	N366 Million	N3.4 Billion	2 Contracts each of N1.8 Billion within the last five years
2	3 Roads	Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of TRADE FAIR – ADURAMIGBA – OKINNI Road in Osun State (4.76km) – Lot 2	Egbedere LGA	N27 Million	N192 Million	N1.7 Billion	2 Contracts each of N916 Million within the last five years
		Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of IWOYE – NAZARETH FARM WITH SPUR TO ABIYE Road (2.85km) – Lot 2	Egbedere LGA				
		Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of TESTING GROUND – IMORU COMMUNITY SCHOOL – LAAROYE – KUTA / ILE OGBO ROAD (2.58km) – Lot 2	Iwo and Ayedire LGA				
3	2 Roads	Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of KOSONGBOGBOE Road – OLLAWO AYORA – KULIYAT – ATMAN JUNCTION (5.29km) – Lot 3	Osogbo LGA	N20 Million	N140 Million	N1.3 Billion	2 Contracts each of N700 Million within the last five years
		Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of IGBAVI GRAMMAR SCHOOL JUNCTION – IGS – OPETE JARA ROAD (CEMENTRY) in Osun State (1.94km) - Lot 3	Odo-Otin LGA				
4	2 Roads	Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of AGODO – OLODE TANGBORI – OGBAAGBA in Osun State (2.9km) – Lot 4	Ede North	N23 Million	N160 Million	N1.5 Billion	2 Contracts each of N775 Million within the last five years
		Backlog Maintenance / Rehabilitation of OLUO LOOGUN – ARAROMI – AKINBOBE – LOOGUN Road in Osun State (5.9km) – Lot 4	Ede South				

*Note: The project involves backlog maintenance / rehabilitation of an existing rural feeder road having a total length of 48km. The works include but not limited to; Site clearance and Earthwork, Culverts and Drains, Pavement and Surfacing as well as strict undertaking of Social and Environmental Safeguard. The work is expected to be completed within 18 months and defect Liability Period of 12months.*

3. Bidding will be conducted through National Competitive procurement method using Request for Bids (RFB) document as specified in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers- Procurement in Investment Projects Financing" November, 2020- Fourth Edition ("Procurement Regulations"), and is open to all eligible Bidders as defined in the Procurement Regulations.

4. Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from the State Project Coordinator **Osun State Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP), State Project Implementation Unit (SPIU)** and inspect the bidding document during office hours 0900 to 1600 at the address given below.

5. The bidding document in English Language may be purchased by interested eligible Bidders upon the submission of a written application to the address below and upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of **Two Hundred Thousand Naira (NGN200,000.00) only per LOT while additional lots will attract a cost of One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Naira (NGN150,000.00) per other lot**. The method of payment will be direct deposit to the specified account below. The document will be made available at the address given below;

**Bank Name:** Zenith Bank Plc

**Account Name:** Osun State Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project

**Account Number:** 1015417898

6. Bids must be delivered to the address below on or before **12:00noon on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2024**. Electronic Bidding will **NOT** be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend at the address below on **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2024 by 12:00noon**.

7. All Bids must be accompanied by a "Bid Security" in the amounts indicated in the above table.

8. Attention is drawn to the Procurement Regulations requiring the Borrower to disclose information on the successful bidder's beneficial ownership, as part of the Contract Award Notice, using the Beneficial Ownership Disclosure Form as included in the bidding document."

9. The address(es) referred to above is (are):

**Osun State Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP),**

**State Project Implementation Unit (SPIU),**

Old Government Press Building, Aderin, Testing Ground Area,

Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria.

Tel: 08064859658, 08034390379

E-mail: [osunraamp3@gmail.com](mailto:osunraamp3@gmail.com)

**Signed: State Project Coordinator**



*Saving resources and time spent on election litigations begins with conducting elections that are free, fair and credible. Jibrin S. Okutepe says except the executive is prepared to deal with serial violators of Electoral Act, the situation may be worse in 2027. In this interview with **BRIDGET CHIEDU ONOCHIE**, he also talks about the role of some senior lawyers in sustaining the alleged corruption in the judiciary.*

What in your view should be done to reduce pre- and post-election litigations?

I AM not too sure politicians would want to line up to the courts in 2027, particularly when you already feel cheated by the kind of judgments we were getting. If you cannot beat them, you must join them. It also means that we are likely to get voter apathy; people will no longer waste their time queuing to vote because votes may not count, and the political class has no respect for the sovereignty of the people anymore. That is why when judgment is delivered, politicians go to thank the executive for what they on-interference."

My understanding of such visits is that they know what they do, otherwise, what business has the President got to do with being congratulated for not interfering with the judgment of the court? Are we being told that they usually interfere? And no word has come from the judiciary that delivered the judgments, while the congratulations go to the executive.

Does that not indicate that there is something the media might discover if they probe?

Have you as a journalist asked politicians what their experiences are? I keep wondering what kind of people we are. We have beautiful laws, but badly operated by bad people. That is why I love what the Attorney General of the Federation said - that if you have bad people operating good law, you will have bad results, but if you have good people operating bad laws, you have good results.

Are the people operating our laws good Nigerians? Or are they Nigerians that have chosen to profit from the iniquities of misconduct in public office? Are we really getting purity of judgment and pure administrative work that are not rooted in selfishness? In other climes, where parties turn in their dispute to courts, there are well-guiding precedents that give you an assurance that when you get to court, it is likely to be consistent in following the past precedents. As a lawyer, and every other lawyer that is prepared to say the truth will tell you that it would be difficult for us to say with a degree of certainty what the state of the law is. There are contradictory judgments here and there and I don't know what is responsible for this. The suffering of the masses doesn't seem to matter to us. We pretend to operate under the rule of law, but I do not see Nigeria actually operating under the rule of law. We operate the rule of convenience to those in power. Except the executive is prepared to deal with those that have serially violated the Electoral Act, my fear for 2027 is that it will not be anything different from what we are witnessing today.

Can you relay your experiences as a counsel to one of the litigants in the last elections?



*The judiciary was not set up in our constitution to rubber stamp every decision of the government. That is why the adjudicatory power has been donated to an impartial arbiter called judiciary which has its domain in Section 6 of the constitution. The same constitution has said that the country shall only be governed by the manner prescribed by the constitution. Therefore, if there is evidence that somebody has come to power, not in accordance with a manner prescribed by the constitution, then, the court must be patient to listen to the matter because the manner prescribed for governance in Nigeria through the constitution is that the country shall be a democratic government by which the sovereignty belongs to the people.*



## Judiciary not set up to stamp every decision of government, says Okutepe

If you have followed my tweets or public utterances, I have maintained that the kind of judgments given in the electoral matters, particularly by the highest court of the land need to be reviewed, if we are not to say goodbye to democracy in Nigeria. My understanding of democracy is that it is a product of the people by the people and for the people. It is not a product of courts even though courts are necessary ingredients in stabilising democracy. So, when decisions of courts appear to be aiding and abetting the destabilisation of democracy in the form that whoever wins election at all cost remains the winner without the judiciary, who has the onerous responsibility of scrutinising the products of election and the work of INEC, then, there is no need for those who have lost election to approach the court.

Except in a few cases, the judgments that came out gave pass marks and a pat on the back to INEC for obvious dereliction of duty and infractions of its own rules and regulations, and even the humongous amount of money spent to acquire BVAS machine and installation of Irev portal. The Irev, which was intended to checkmate unlawful writing of results by politicians. So, the intention was, if there is a dispute as to the accuracy of results that were being collated and announced, you have recourse to results freshly uploaded at the conclusion of elections at the polling units. But when judgments of courts rendered use of Irev redundant, until certain layers that are impossible are followed, one begins to wonder the wisdom in spending money to procure BVAS machines and installing Irev.

Secondly, there is this concept of *sui generis* (class of its own) that has been so employed generously in a negative form in my estimation. When you say that an election petition is *sui generis*, it is not a concept that should be used to put roadblocks on the way of justice because it is peculiar on its own. It is neither a civil or criminal case. It is a concept invented to show that an election petition is very peculiar, not only to unlawfully install people who didn't win elections, it is peculiar because the sovereignty of the people resides in the election petition. That is why, in the good old days, their Lordships were of the view in several cases, both Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court, that when dealing with election petitions, you are not dealing with parties before the court alone, you are dealing with the rights of the people who voted for their representatives. Therefore, you must have patience to listen and examine cases that are being brought by those who feel aggrieved that the rights to lead the people bestowed on them have been taken away by some form of malpractices.

But today, we have so much elevated the concept of *sui generis* to the level that even rules of courts have become the masters of the courts and the constitutions. Therefore, the rights to fair hearing, the rights donated by the law called Evidence Act for one to call witnesses by Subpoena have been thrown overboard by our courts on the ground that if you don't file all the witnesses' statements on oath within 21 days allowed to file the election petition, you cannot file witness statement on oath for subpoenaed witnesses. It got to such a ridiculous level now that they are saying that you should file a witness statement on oath of a subpoenaed witness. Mark you, a subpoena is a right created by the Evidence Act and it is on an exclusive legislative list. Only the National Assembly can make laws to guide the evidence in court. The National Assembly in making first schedule to the Electoral Act, subjected the schedule to any other written law, and in my understanding when the word "subject to" is used, it is a word of limitations. It, therefore, means that that law is subject to written laws. That means other than those prescribed by the schedule to the Electoral Act. There are various decisions of the Supreme Court which interpreted that schedule to the Electoral Act as rule of court and that where there is a conflict between rule of court and substantive law, the rules of court will have to give way for substantive law so that you can do justice thereby. But suddenly, we have elevated the rules of court as more of a master and subordinating the substantive law as a mere servant to rules of court. And this is the reason the public is worried and rightly so in my view. If we begin to do what we are doing, then in 2027 as some people have pointed out, the best instrument to win election would be AK47, and once you can fix yourself in power and get INEC to declare you, even if by unlawful means, those who

complain will have an onerous task of proving it. And I don't think that such is the essence of the judiciary.

The judiciary was not set up in our constitution to rubber stamp every decision of the government. That is why the adjudicatory power has been donated to an impartial arbiter called judiciary, which has its domain in Section 6 of the constitution. The same constitution has said that the country shall only be governed by the manner prescribed by the constitution. Therefore, if there is evidence that somebody has come to power, not in accordance with a manner prescribed by the constitution, then, the court must be patient to listen to the matter because the manner prescribed for governance in Nigeria through the constitution is that the country shall be a democratic government by which the sovereignty belongs to the people, not few cabals who have the power to procure thugs to install themselves in power, or few people who have the wherewithal to change the results from the polling units and inflate the votes for themselves. Nigerian politicians know what they do. Forget about all that you hear about the court affirming or not affirming, we all know what they do; they know they didn't win election but have found partnership in impossible principles of law that have created an opportunity to inflict wickedness on Nigerian people.

So, I am at home with the public and Nigerian courts cannot pretend not to know the feeling of the Nigerian public. They go to Nigerian markets and they listen to Nigerian news. That is why they take judicial notice of who addresses what in their judgments. And once people perceive that there is an injustice, you will begin to see insecurity here and there. Most of the insecurity situations you see, in my understanding, are products of injustice in our society.

**Allegations of corruption in the judiciary have persisted, why is it that nobody has been apprehended or punished?**

Ask yourself who has the capacity to arrest those who are perceived to have committed this wrong? The power of arrest is vested in the executive, the judiciary does not arrest. No member of the public can go and start arresting any person perceived to have committed misconduct.

Read the remaining part of this article on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng)



Okutepe

# 'Why SGBV victims need accelerated justice'

By Ngozi Egenuka

**STAKEHOLDERS** have stressed the need for the judiciary to accelerate justice for victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), while soliciting women inclusion in policy making of the country.

This was said at a two-day Legal Workshop for Community Women Leaders of Alimosho Local Government Area, organised by Women's Rights and Health Project (WRAHP) in

collaboration with Canada Funds for Local Initiatives (CFLI).

The legal workshop aimed at engaging women in the fight against the prevalence of SGBV in the communities by building community resilience and implementing strategies to curtail its effect on victims and the community.

Programme Manager, WRAHP, Francis Umoh noted the importance of empowering women mentally and financially to address GBV issues and their prevalence.

Umoh stated that women need to be strengthened to overcome the bane of marginalisation, which necessitates gender inequality. "At the end of this training, we should have come up with practical and active plans to solve this problem eating deep into our society," he said.

Executive Director, Women for Peace and Gender Equality Initiative, Dr. Mojisola Akinsanya identified gender inequality, systemic discrimination and unequal power relations as root causes

of SGBV.

Highlighting mediation as an approach to building community resilience, Akinsanya urged participants to lead engagements and processes to prevent SGBV, encourage survivor-centred measures to create succour for victims and to implement the 'do no harm' approach.

She noted that state governments have been functionally involved in prosecuting violators and sought the establishment of a specialised SGBV court to fast-

track reported cases.

She canvassed policy reforms to encourage women inclusion in decision making processes.

Participant and community member, Dumiminu Marquel

said: "I find this really important because it has enlightened us on how to deal and curb the spate of SGBV and in turn empower others with the skill garnered from this workshop."

## NBAWF pledges to redefine success for female lawyers

By Joseph Onyekwere

**THE** Nigerian Bar Association Women Forum (NBAWF) said it is poised to redefine the meaning of success for female lawyers in Nigeria.

This, it intends to do during its yearly conference in Lagos this week.

Chairperson, NBAWF, Chinyere Okorocha at a pre-conference briefing in Lagos said the forum was created to cater to the needs of Nigerian female lawyers through empowerment programmes, seminars, workshops, mentorship initiatives, collaboration with sister bodies, locally and internationally, and to empower the Nigerian female lawyer for success.

"Sometimes female lawyers' careers are truncated in some way owing to stereotypical biases and cultural nuances.

"So, we empower ourselves through the yearly

### Court vacates order stopping MTN, ATC from constructing base stations

By Joseph Onyekwere

**JUSTICE** Yellim Bogoro of the Federal High Court, Lagos has vacated its interim order which restrained MTN Nigeria Communications Plc and ATC Nigeria Wireless Infrastructure Limited from constructing new Base Transceiver Stations across Nigeria.

The judge set aside the order which the court granted in favour of the Incorporated Trustees of HEDA Resource Centre on November 21, 2023.

HEDA commenced the suit marked FHC/L/CS/2359/2023 listing the Federal Ministry of Environment and Ecological Management, MTN Nigeria Communications Plc, ATC Nigeria Wireless Infrastructure Limited and others as defendants.

The plaintiff filed an ex parte application averring that ATC proposed to build 2,500 Base Transceiver Stations for MTN's operations but that the stations were within proximity to Base Transceiver Stations belonging to IHS Towers Nigeria Limited.



Member, Content and Programme Committee, NBAWF, Blessing Udo; Head, Finance and Fundraising Committee, Ifeoma Ben; Chairperson NBAWF, Chinyere Okorocha; Chairperson, Conference Planning Committee, Folashade Alli (SAN); Head, Hospitality, Logistics and Protocol Committee, Kemi Afesojoye and Deputy Head, Media and Publicity Committee, Gloria Ireka during the briefing in Lagos.

conference that speaks to issues that are important to us," she said.

The theme of the conference, she said, is: "Beyond the Balance Sheet: Redefining Success for Women in Law" and would be held on March 21 and 22 in Lagos.

"The theme was carefully chosen to redefine the meaning of success for the female lawyer, because success means different things. It could be in leadership, mentorship or finances. We want to explore those different areas in great detail.

"We have so many distinguished members of

the society, both lawyers and non-lawyers who will grace the occasion as speakers and panelists. Our keynote speaker will be founder of BAP Productions and Terra Kulture, Mrs Bolanle Austen-Peters.

"We'll have a dinner and a gala night, which will be chaired by Mrs Funke Adekoya (SAN). The guest speaker at the dinner will be CEO of the Bank of Industry, Dr Olasupo Olusi.

"We urge those who have not registered for this special event billed to hold at the Oriental Hotel to do so. The NBAWF has a governing council and is structured

around 11 committees through which we carry out our activities. These include mentorship, advocacy, external relations, membership, young lawyers, in-house counsel, public sector, among others," she stated.

Okorocha explained that the forum has 125 branch facilitators across the country domiciled in each NBA branch.

"We also have a state lead in each of the 36 states of the federation and Abuja. This way, we're able to reach the grassroots to empower Nigerian female lawyers," she explained.

### Management of Pearl Gardens Estate not in dispute, court says

By Yetunde Ayobami Ojo

**JUSTICE** Olubukola Aigbokhaevbo of the Lagos High Court has ruled that the management and administration of Pearl Gardens Estate, Sangotedo, Lagos by CMB Building Maintenance and Investments Limited is not in dispute.

The judge, while ruling on the case filed by CMB Building Maintenance & Investments Company against Felix Obiakor and Residents Association of Pearl Gardens, held that the management was not in dispute.

The CMB had filed an originating summons for consequential order to take over as the sole management of Pearl Gardens, but the

judge held that what was in dispute was the manner of management.

The court also dismissed the counter-claims filed by the Residents Association.

It held that the residents' association's counter-affidavit was not properly brought before the court as it was filed out of time and there was no application to regularise it.

The court also dismissed the counter-argument by Oyetubo Jokotade Estate Resources Limited to the effect that the matter cannot be resolved by originating summons.

Justice Aigbokhaevbo, however, agreed with the argument of counsel to CMB that the matter could be

resolved by originating summons because the claimant was seeking a consequential order based on the judgment delivered by Justice Mufutau Olokooba on December 1, 2021.

CMB had in its originating summons, prayed the court to give a consequential order to the judgment entered in favour of CMB on 1st December, 2021 by Justice Olokoba in the suit that was filed by the Residents Association in 2015 marked LD/064GCMW/2015.

The Residents Association as well as Oyetubo Jokotade Estates Resource Limited filed a counter-affidavit to the originating summons through their respective lawyers.

## Appeal Court declares Okolie *Ihonor* of Ogwashi-Uku

From Bridget Chiedu Onochie, Abuja

**THE** Court of Appeal sitting in Benin, Edo State, has declared Chief Hyacinth Afamefune Okolie, the authentic *Ihonor* of Ogwashi-Uku, Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State.

The Chieftaincy title is the third in the hierarchy of traditional titles in the Kingdom after the *Obi* and the *Iyase*.

Chief Okolie had won the contest for the coveted title after a fierce contest in 2008 but unsatisfied with his emergence, two of the contestants, Borniface Anyibuofu and Augustine Nwaeke Okeibunor, headed to the high court, seeking to quash his nomination.

The two contestants at

various times, in different suits, sought the courts' nod to quash the nomination.

The matter was later brought before the Appeal Court in a case marked CA/AS/174/2018, where judgment was delivered in favour of Chief Okolie.

Indigenes of Ogwashi-Uku, who were at the court premises hoped that the judgment would engender peace in the Kingdom.

The court judgment was coming on the heels of a similar judgment over the *Iyase* title, the second most powerful title in the kingdom.

High Chief Mike Nwaukoni was installed as the *Iyase* in 2004, but his installation challenged in 2008 following the enthronement of Prof Aninshi Okonjo as the *Obi* of the town.

## Investors sue firm, others over disputed property

From Ameh Ochojila, Abuja

**SIX** property investors have dragged Sterling Oil Exploration and Energy Production Co. (SEEPCO) Limited and representatives of the Umu-Azaka Anie family before the High Court of Delta State, sitting in Asaba, over disputed property.

The plaintiffs are Chief Iduh Famous Amechi, Chinedu Omenogor Kingsley, Mr Onowu Ogechukwu, Mr Oshagbor Uchenna, Lt Cdr Wilson Egbo Ikwuni (Rtd) and Mrs Lilian Osogochukwu Ekeigwe.

Besides SEEPCO, other defendants in the suit are subsidiaries of Sterling Oil Group, Ashtavinayak Hydrocarbons Ltd, Chief John Onah, Ossai Monday Okiseuwe, Okolie Sunday, Lucky Ojumah and the Community Liaison Officer of SEEPCO Ltd.

The plaintiffs are asking the court to declare that the ownership of the disputed land/property lying at Utageba-Ogbe, Kwale, Ndokwa-West LGA of Delta State is vested on them who have good title to it.

This, they said, followed the passage or divesting of all of the 3rd and 4th defendant's (vendor) interest to the plaintiffs through a properly executed deed of conveyance dated February, 7, 2015 between the 3rd defendant (vendors) and the 4th plaintiff (purchaser).

The plaintiffs also wants the court to declare that the

encroachment of the plaintiffs' respective properties at Utageba-Ogbe, Kwale, Ndokwa-West LGA of Delta State by the 1st and 2nd defendants either through their servants, privies, assigns and/or agents is unlawful and amounts to sheer acts of trespass.

As a result, the plaintiffs are praying the court for a perpetual injunction restraining the 1st and 2nd defendants, either through their servants, privies, assigns and/or agents from further acts of trespass into their respective properties.

"An order of this court directing the 1st and 2nd defendants to pay to the 1st plaintiff, the sum of N100 million being special damages for destruction of the 1st plaintiff's cash crops/economic trees planted on his property.

"An order of this court directing the 1st and 2nd defendants to pay to the plaintiffs, the sum of N300million, being general damages for the psychological trauma and deprivation from the use and enjoyment of their respective properties lying at Utageba-Ogbe, Kwale, Ndokwa-West LGA of Delta State, meted on the plaintiffs by the defendants, owing to their sheer and repeated acts of trespass thereon," the plaintiffs prayed in their writ of summons, adding that they want to be paid N20 million as cost of action.

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## 'How journalists can combat information disorder in democracy'

By Sunday Aikulola

As part of efforts aimed at countering fake news, mis-information and dis-information, International Press Centre (IPC) recently held a two-day capacity building workshop in Kaduna State on combating information disorder in democratic governance reporting using fact-checking and Freedom of Information (FOI) tools.

Programme Manager, IPC, Stella Nwofia, disclosed the training addresses a critical aspect highlighted in the EU-EOM final report on the 2023 general elections, which underlines online platforms role in the electoral process.

Despite repeated warnings from government officials about the dangers of misinformation, Nwofia observed various entities, including individuals associated with major political parties, disseminated false information online.

Speaking further, she added, "central to democracy is the conduct of free and fair elections, empowering individuals to exercise their rights, hold leaders accountable, and shape their collective destiny. However, the rise of misinformation poses a significant threat to democratic governance, fostering scepticism, discord and distrust. By promoting a culture of critical thinking, fact verification, and media literacy, our goal is to empower journalists to uphold truth, advocate for integrity, and safeguard democracy."

Executive Director, Media Rights Agenda, Edetaen Ojo, spoke on: "Post Election Reporting: Using FOI and other investigative methodologies to report democratic governance and electoral accountability issues."

He revealed FOI requests could be used to target expense claims of public officers for a variety of activities, including travels, meetings, entertainment; monitoring the processes of contract awards, the value of contracts awarded, the standards of performance; check revenue and expenditure profiles of public institutions.

Ojo disclosed the FOI Act could also be used to obtain raw data from public institutions, which are analysed to establish patterns or detect any breaches of the law, rules, regulations, codes of conduct and extracting the results or findings of unpublished investigations or enquiries.



Journalists at a press briefing in the Civil Society Situation Room

To him, regular use of the Act give journalists real chance to live up to the obligations of the media under Section 22 of the Constitution, which provides that: "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in chapter two and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people."

On her part, a senior lecturer at the Kaduna Polytechnic, Fatimah Shaibu, spoke on, "Deepening Reportage of Gender Issues Post-Elections".

She stressed the need for media reports to depict "women's role as essential and important and not as superior or inferior; recognise both genders and accord appropriate limelight to their roles and achievements; desist from systemic reinforcement of patriarchal framing of politics concerning gender issues; give women issues more visibility as against the logic of media commercialisation, which prioritises profit and access to those with the means of purchase, who are mostly men."

Others include, gender mainstreaming should be adopted to depict the concerns and experiences of women as an integral

part of mainstream media so that women can benefit as men do; in deepening reportage of gender issues, it must be seen as a way of examining how social norms and power structure impact the lives and opportunities available to different groups of men and women.

In his presentation, Executive Director IPC Lanre Arogundade, who spoke on, "Fact checking of pictures in the head, good journalism and imperative of investigation and verification" noted that the picture in the head may not be the picture out there.

Arogundade stated the picture in the head may make people to engage in hate speech and it can also make you to do so even as a journalist; the picture in the head may make people to engage in disinformation and spread disinformation by way of misinformation including you as a journalist.

He noted 51.1 per cent of online misinformation also comes from manipulated images, adding deep fakes are specific subset of synthetic media that focus on manipulating or altering visual or auditory information to create convincing fake content, ranging from images, audio and video.

### Media firms urged to adopt fair, balanced editorial policies on disability inclusion

THE media has significant influence in shaping societal perceptions, yet persons with disabilities, who make up 16 per cent of the world's population, are often overlooked, misrepresented, or ignored, perpetuating stereotypes, a recent United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

They noted that accessible media formats for audiences with disabilities are scarce, while existing self-regulatory mechanisms in the media are often lack specificity in addressing their needs. Many media workplaces are not equipped to accommodate professionals with disabilities.

These issues were discussed at the recent UNESCO International Conference Zero Project on Persons with



Beyond Borders Media

Disabilities. Those issues also dominated the webinar and exclusive preview of "Disability Equality in Media", which was organised by UNESCO in December 2023.

This webinar was a part of organisation's contribution to the commemoration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and

falls within the organisation's mission to promote diversity in media.

"When we look at employment rates of person with disabilities globally, the aggregate data shows us that four out of 10 are outside of the labour market," said Jürgen Menze, Technical Specialist, Disability Inclusion and

Coordinator and Global Business and Disability Network, International Labor Organisation

Despite this, the media's impact can be used positively to raise awareness, combat discrimination, and change societal attitudes. It can also empower individuals with disabilities to express themselves and access to information.

UNESCO is leading the way with initiatives such as the Practical Manual on Disability Equality in the Media and a masterclass consisting of 10 instructional videos. These efforts are geared towards equipping media professionals with the skills and knowledge needed to foster inclusivity and accessibility in their content production and organisational practices.

### I-CSPJ demands release of journalist, Segun Olatunji

By Sunday Aikulola

INTERNATIONAL Press Centre's (IPC) Centre for Safety and Protection of Journalists (I-CSPJ) has demanded immediate release of the Editor of *First News* and former Kaduna Bureau Chief of *Punch Newspapers*, Segun Olatunji.

Olatunji was said to have been whisked away from his residence in Iyana Odo, Abule Egba area of Lagos State by armed men suspected to be soldiers on Friday, March 15, 2024.

According to a report, the management of the online newspaper linked his abduction to a recent story published by *First News*, titled, 'Revealed: Defence Chief running office like family business - Public Interest Lawyers,' published by many other online platforms.



Olatunji

Press Freedom Officer of IPC, Melody Akinjiyan, a former colleague of Olatunji, stated, "10 armed men, some dressed in military uniform stormed the residence few minutes past 6:00pm on Friday and took him away, without any information as to where they were taking him to or his offence." grievances.

### Noah's Ark boss, Adisa, appointed mental health ambassador

By Sunday Aikulola

THE Board of Directors of Asido Foundation, a leading non-profit mental health organisation in Nigeria, has announced appointment of Chief Executive Officer/Chief Creative Officer of Noah's Ark Communications, Lanre Adisa, as a mental health ambassador.

The appointment was conveyed in a letter issued on February 15, 2024, by the foundation and signed by its

founder, Dr. Jibril Abdulmalik.

The investiture was held on Monday, February 26, in Ibadan during the 4th edition of Jemilah Abubakar Memorial Essay and Award Ceremony at Gamaliel Onasode Hall, International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan.

Speaking during the investiture, Abdulmalik explained that the choice of Adisa as mental health ambassador

is in recognition of his impactful work in the communications sector, commitment to excellence, innovation and his passion for social impact.

He stressed that the foundation recognises Adisa as a significant influence that would contribute to the collective efforts in addressing mental health challenges in Nigeria.

"Your role as an Ambassador would involve advocating

for mental health awareness and destigmatisation, especially among the youth," he said.

In his acceptance remarks, Adisa expressed his profound appreciation to the board of Asido Foundation for finding him worthy as an ambassador for mental health.

"I want to assure you that I would do everything within my capacity to protect the interest of persons or indi-

viduals battling with mental health issues," he said.

Adisa, a distinguished alumnus of the University of Ilorin, has been instrumental in the growth of major brands in Nigeria, directing the creation of exciting advertising campaigns, including popular Airtel ads that would pass as short films. Adisa was the former Chairman of the Lagos Advertising and Ideas Festival Management Board.



Adisa



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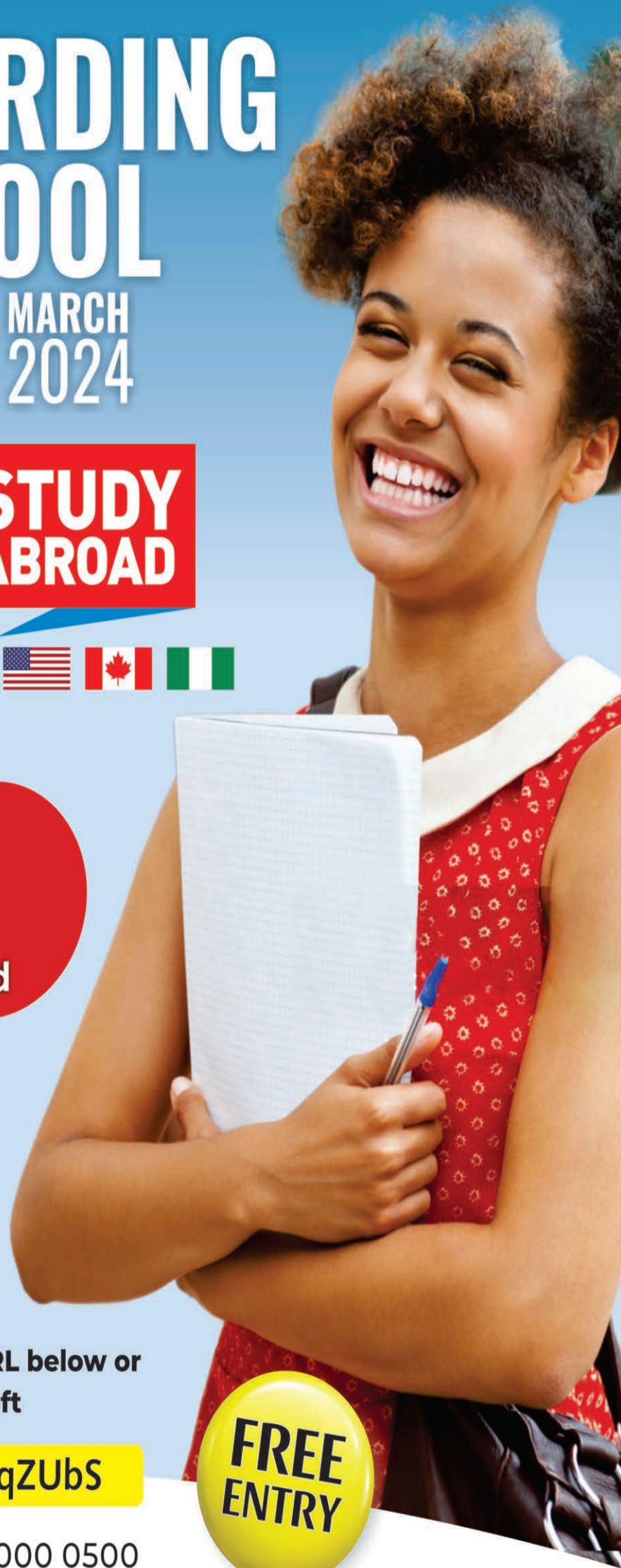
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## COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL ROOT CROPS RESEARCH INSTITUTE (NRCRI), UMUDIKE AT THE CLOSE OF HER 2024 ANNUAL REVIEW AND PLANNING WORKSHOP HELD BETWEEN 13TH – 14TH MARCH 2024 AT THE NRCRI LIBRARY COMPLEX, UMUDIKE, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

### Preamble

The National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), Umudike 2024 Annual Review and Planning Workshop took place from the 13th to 14th March 2024, at the Institutes' Library Conference Hall. The Theme of this Workshop was "Advancing Sustainable Root and Tuber Crops-based Farming Systems in Nigeria: A Pathway to Resilient Agrifood Systems".

The Workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders including Policy makers, Scientists, Academia, Past Executive Directors and Directors of NRCRI, Professors, Deans of Faculties/Colleges of Universities, Farmers, NGOs, His Royal Highnesses of Host Communities, and representatives from the Private Sector. The workshop was officially opened by the Governor of Abia State, represented by the Hon. Commissioner for Agriculture, Prof. Monica Ironkwe and Senior Special Assistant on Food Security, Dr. Cliff Agbaeze. The welcome address was delivered by the Executive Director of NRCRI, Umudike, Prof. Chiedozie Egesi. Goodwill messages were conveyed by The Vice Chancellor, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Prof. Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe; and Provost, Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu (FCAI), represented by the Deputy Provost, Dr. Jonah Nwawuisi. Additional goodwill messages were shared by the Programme Director for Commercialization at the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), Nairobi, Kenya, Dr. Emmanuel Okogbenin; and Director General, National Biosafety and Management Agency (NBMA), Dr. Yemisi Agnes Asagbra; and HRM Eze Ben Oriaku of Umudike Community. A Special address was delivered by the Executive Secretary of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN), Prof. Garba Hamidu Sharubutu. The workshop was declared open by the Abia State Governor who was represented by his Special Adviser on Food Security, Dr. Cliff Agbaeze.

### Keynote and Lead Paper Presentations

The Keynote Address was delivered by Dr. Kent Nnadozie, Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Rome, while the Lead Paper on "Quality Early Generation Seeds: Key to Delivering Roots of Prosperity" was presented by Prof. Happiness Oselebe, Professor of Plant Breeding & Genetics at the Centre for Crop Improvement, Nutrition & Climate Change (CCINCC), Ebonyi State University (EBSU), Abakaliki. The keynote address highlighted the high rate of genetic erosion that is ravaging the world presently, the danger it poses to the shrinking diversity of plants in the world, the consequences it poses to the world's ability to respond to future global food resilience and diversity needs, and the need for policies and collaborations at national and transnational levels to halt the drift. The lead paper emphasized the crucial role of quality early-generation seeds in agriculture and their impact on crop production, resilience, and overall success.

### Key Highlights

The workshop highlighted the:

1. Threats to agriculture including population growth, climate change, genetic erosion, and governance complexities.
2. Importance of addressing loss of genetic diversity for agricultural and food resilience.
3. Significance of global and local policies and collaboration in managing plant genetic resources.
4. Challenges faced by root and tuber crops in Nigeria:

7. Urgency to enhance agricultural productivity due to global population growth projections.
8. Need for quality early-generation seeds for successful crop production and food security.
9. Importance of shifting the seed system of root and tuber crops from the largely informal systems to the formal system that enhances productivity and food security.
10. Importance of root and tuber crops in stabilizing food production and stemming loss of foreign exchange since most of the crops are homegrown and commands huge export potential.



Panel session with (L-R) Prof Chinedum Nwajiuba (former Vice Chancellor, Alex Ekwueme University, Ebonyi State, University), Prof Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe (Vice Chancellor, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike), Dr Kent Nnadozie (Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations, Rome); Prof Chiedozie Egesi (ED/CEO NRCRI); Prof Garba H. Sharubutu (Executive Secretary, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN)); Prof Jude Njoku (former Vice Chancellor Federal University of Technology, Owerri); Prof Happiness Ogha Oselebe (former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Ebonyi State University), Dr. Emmanuel Okogbenin (AATF, Nairobi); and moderated by Mr. Richard-Mark Mbaram (African Development Bank) during the 2024 NRCRI Annual Review and Planning workshop which took place from the 13th to 14th March 2024, at Umudike.



On the green carpet from L-R Dr. Charles Amadi (Director, Tuber Crops Department, NRCRI), Mrs. Hauwa Tahir Jibo (NBMA), Dr. Joseph Onyeka (Director, Biotechnology & Product Development, NRCRI); Dr. Kent Nnadozie (Keynote Speaker, FAO, Rome), Dr. Agnes Yemisi Asagbra (Director General/CEO, NBMA), Prof Chiedozie Egesi (Executive Director/CEO NRCRI) Dr Tessa Madu (Director Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, NRCRI), Dr. Ihuoma Okwuonu (Assistant Director/Coordinator, Biotechnology, NRCRI).

5. funding, climate change, and market access.
5. Need for a concerted focus on the four pillars of stable food systems which include: crop diversity, research and breeding, value chains and seed systems, and policy support.
6. Opportunities for transforming root and tuber farming in Nigeria through collaboration, technology, and policy tools.

### Recommendations

The Workshop arrived at the following recommendations:

1. Expansion of conservation efforts for all crop genetic resources.
2. Enhancing crop breeding programs to improve food diversity and for better response to emerging issues that impact food security.
3. Support seed system development and the use of high-quality seeds of improved varieties for higher productivity.
4. Foster national policies for diverse and resilient agrifood systems for enhanced food security and job creation opportunities.
5. Enhance collaboration, technology adoption, and market linkages.
6. Collaborate with value chain actors for market-preferred varieties, certified seeds and commercialization of research outputs and products.

### Conclusion

The NRCRI 2024 Annual Review and Planning Workshop concluded with a call to action for all stakeholders to collaborate, share expertise, and work towards transforming root and tuber crop production in Nigeria. There is an urgent need to address threats to agriculture such as insecurity, climate change, genetic erosion, and governance complexities to mitigate the current food crises. To ensure agricultural resilience and food security while also creating job opportunities, support for crop breeding programs and seed system development, policy alignment for diverse food systems, and enhanced collaboration and technology adoption are essential. By focusing on these key points, we can work towards a sustainable agricultural sector that not only meets the nutritional needs of the population but also contributes to economic growth and job creation. We opine that these are essential for the success of the efforts by the Federal Government of Nigeria to enhance food security, stabilize food prices and enhance economic empowerment.

Signed:

**Prof. Chiedozie Egesi (FBSN, FASN)**  
Executive Director/CEO, NRCRI Umudike  
Date: 14th March 2024

# Politics & Policy

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*Rancorous street fighting between Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State and his estranged godfather, Nyesom Wike, has got in the way of peace and order in the Local Government Councils of the state. Now contested is the simple democratic principle of holding council elections when the current tenure expires in June 2024, ANN GODWIN reports.*

NO time has been fixed for the conduct of local council elections in Rivers State, less than three months to the expiration of the tenure of the current elected officials.

Although the River State Independent Electoral Commission (RSIEC) had earlier indicated readiness for the process, there may be no election as and when due after all.

Last week, the Rivers State House of Assembly passed an amended version of the Rivers State Local Government Law No. 5 of 2018 and other related matters. The amendment is to empower the House of Assembly to freely extend the tenure of elected chairmen and councillors via a resolution, "where it is not feasible to hold local government elections before the expiration of their three-year term".

The Executive has rejected the tenure elongation bid, describing it as unconstitutional and self-serving.

The uncurrent, yet again, is the uncouth rivalry between the state legislature and executive on one hand, as well as that between Governor Siminalayi Fubara, and Minister of Federal Capital Territory, Nyesom Wike, on the other hand.

While members of the state Assembly have not enjoyed the best of relationship with Fubara, his predecessor, Wike, has engaged him in a battle of wits over the political soul of the state. Even the controversial peace accord brokered by President Bola Tinubu has proven futile in appeasing the recalcitrant gladiators.

As it is, Fubara, who is the leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state, has continued to boost his support base through his people-oriented programmes and projects. Wike, who has a leg in the PDP and another in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), has become more intentional in reviving the Grassroots Development Initiatives (GDI), a community-based group that mobilised the electorate during his two-term tenure. Put together, the two-governance structure is tailor-made for chaos.

The minister recently stated that the alliance between PDP and APC in Rivers State is a force nobody can challenge in 2027, explaining that the election would be an easy one for his camp because of the alliance it has forged with other parties.

While the governor strategises on how to contain Wike's forays, the salvo being served on him from the state House of Assembly is no less worrisome. Most of the lawmakers are loyal to Wike.

## When two elephants fight in Rivers, local councils languish

To hoodwink the governor, the Martin Amaehule-led House of Assembly had on January 23, passed the Rivers State Local Government Amendment Bill 2023, which it said was aimed at protecting council chairmen from dissolutions and appointment of a caretaker committee by the state government when the tenure of elected officials expires.

Knowing the danger in assenting to such a bill, Fubara declined his assent. Three days later, like a people on a mission, the House overrode the assent of the governor and passed the bill into law.

They did not stop there; four bills they had earlier presented to him were also passed into law.

The Guardian learnt that the House decided to override the governor's assent at its 99th legislative sitting at the assembly quarters in Port Harcourt, not the Assembly Complex, which had burnt on October 30, 2023, and has since been demolished by Fubara.

They hinged their reason for the passage of the bills on the governor's failure to assent to them when they were presented to him. They listed the bills to include the Rivers State Local Government Law (Amendment) Bill; the Rivers State Traditional Rulers' Law (Amendment) Bill and the Rivers State Advertisement and Use of State-Owned Property Prohibition (Repeal) Bill.

Amaehule stated after the passage of the bills that they knew the governor would decline, adding however, that the amendment abridged the powers of the governor in suspending local government chairmen and appointment of caretaker committee.

There is suspense among politicians in the state about whether the council election will hold in June or the governor will dissolve the incumbent officials and appoint a caretaker committee.

The State Commissioner for Information and Communication, Joe Johnson said there was no cause for alarm. He said: "The tenure of local government chairmen will expire by June; any bridge we get to, we will cross it. We do not have anything to express fear about whether something will be done or not. It's a democratic system and once the time is due, the government will take appropriate steps."

This is not the first time the state govern-

**“If PDP is confident to emerge victorious in the polls, then, they should allow the elections to be held. PDP in Rivers State is moribund and in the Intensive Care Unit. What you see there are strange bird fellows, where the 27 Assembly members have left the party, and decamped to another political party.”**

ment has encountered a bottleneck in its local government administration. During the tenure of Governor Chibuike Amaechi, the same local government law was amended by APC-led lawmakers, who were loyal to Amaechi with which he was able to conduct a local council election on May 23, 2015, a few days before the expiration of his tenure in office. He left office on May 29, 2015. PDP, then controlled by Wike boycotted the election.

A Federal High Court in Rivers State in July 2015, however, nullified the outcome of the election, following an appeal raised by the Wike-led government. Delivering the judgment, Justice Lambo Akanbi, described the election as illegal.

As the intrigues unfold, the state PDP and APC have disagreed on the turn of events.

While the state PDP through its spokesperson, Sydney Garbra, admitted that his party will have a landslide victory at the election; APC caretaker committee chairman, Tony Okocha, accused the PDP of already gripped with fear because its house is in shreds.

Garbra said: "Right now, Governor Fubara is the leader of the party and he is the one in charge, just like his predecessors, Wike, former governors Chibuike Amaechi, and Dr Peter Odili did when local government elections were conducted in their tenure. Fubara will meet with his party stakeholders

and ensure the council polls are conducted. His own will not be different."

"As the leader of the party, he will call party stakeholders and they will discuss the interest of the party."

He expressed delight that the governor is winning the war because according to him, "even those at the other camp are returning to embrace the governor because he is running an 'all-inclusive government' and has the interest of people at heart. He is also delivering programmes and projects that have a direct impact on the people."

He said PDP stakeholders are drumming support for the governor, adding that those attacking Fubara supporters are acting in ignorance. "They cannot stop a moving train", he added.

Okocha however, predicted that the PDP would fail woefully if the local council polls were conducted.

He said: "If PDP is confident to emerge victorious in the polls, then, they should allow the elections to be held. PDP in Rivers State is moribund and in the Intensive Care Unit. What you see there are strange bird fellows, where the 27 Assembly members have left the party, and decamped to another political party."

"The law says that three months to the expiration of the tenure of the incumbent local government council chairmen, RSIEC should put out a timetable notifying the parties of fresh elections, so that they will start to prepare. Then, one month within the three months will enable the parties to prepare themselves. "If PDP claims it holds the structure, why are they foot-dragging in conducting the election? There are certain things human beings cannot skew. Why are they afraid? If PDP is not afraid, let them conduct the elections," he added.

Meanwhile, at the Rivers State Independent Electoral Commission (RSIEC), nothing is on the ground to assure preparations for the council election. During a visit by the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC) in the state in January, this year to his office to ascertain the level of preparedness for the exercise, its chairman, Justice Adolphus Enebi, assured that the commission was ready and willing to carry out their task.

Read the remaining part of this story on [www.guardian.ng](http://www.guardian.ng)



Fubara

Wike

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Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

## Organ harvesting: NAPTIP drags hospital, four others to court

From Tina Abeku, Abuja

NATIONAL Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) has taken an Abuja-based private hospital, Alliance Hospital and Service Ltd, and four others to court on an 11-count charge bordering on alleged involvement in organ harvesting, an offence contrary to and punishable under Section 20 (3) of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition), Enforcement and Administration Act, 2015.

Reading their charge at the arraignment of the accused, (three males and one female), Justice Keziah Ogbonnaya of the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, said that between February and May 2023, the accused allegedly played a part in the harvesting of the kidneys of three young males, including two minors.

In their plea, the defendants, Emmanuel Muiyiwa Olorunlaye, Chikaodili Ugochukwu, Dr Christopher Otabor, Dr Aremu Abayomi and Alliance Hospital pleaded not guilty to the charges preferred against them.

Upon taking their plea, the trial judge granted the defendants bail ahead of commencement of trial on May 6.

Among the bail conditions is that all four defendants report at the Abuja office of NAPTIP daily from Tuesday, March 19, except on days of hearing of the matter. They are also ordered to deposit their travel documents.

## FRSC has powers to operate on FCT roads, Appeal Court rules

THE Court of Appeal, yesterday, upheld the judgment of a Federal High Court that the Federal Road Safety Commission's (FRSC) officials can operate on all roads in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Justice Okon Abang of the appellate court, while reading the judgment in appeal no: CA/ABJ/CV/243/2022, filed by a lawyer, Igwe Onyesom Ugochukwu, against the FRSC, Dr. Lawal Akeem O. and Dr. Isaac Nwokeukwu (1st to 3rd respondents), held that the law covers corps.

Following his altercation with FRSC officials, which led to the seizing of his car for violating traffic rules, the appellant sued FRSC at the Federal High Court sitting in Abuja on March 9, 2021, before Justice A. I. Chikere, but lost out.

Dissatisfied, the appellant's lawyer, Austine Ogezi, urged the appellate court to set aside the lower court's judgment and hold that it was wrong to hold that the FRSC can operate on all public roads, including Shehu Shagari way inside the FCT, Abuja.



Representative of World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. Andrew Abiodun (left); Director, Primary Health Care Development Agency, Plateau State, Martha Kummiap; Plateau State Commissioner for Health, Dr. Cletus Shurkuk, and other government officials during the handing over of the COVID-19 Sample Collection Centre to the Plateau State Government by WHO in Jos...yesterday.

## Court to hear Kanu's N1 billion suit against FG, DSS April 18

From Ameh Ochojila, Abuja

A FEDERAL High Court, Abuja, yesterday, fixed April 18 for the hearing of a N1 billion suit filed by the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, against the Federal Government and Department of State Services (DSS).

Justice James Omotosho adjourned the matter after Kanu's counsel, Alloy Ejimakor, indicated his interest in responding to a counter affidavit jointly filed by the DSS and its Director-General (DG).

Upon resumption of the hearing, Gbenga Oladimeji, who appeared for the federal government, informed the court that they were yet to file

### Dismisses appeal over unlawful arrest, detention

their response on behalf of 1st and 2nd defendants, because he was only been notified about the process this morning though they had been served since March 6.

Oladimeji prayed for an adjournment to enable him to respond appropriately. But the DSS lawyer, Abdul Danlami, said they had filed their counter affidavit in opposition to Kanu's plea.

Ejimakor then sought an adjournment to enable him to file a further affidavit in response to fresh issues raised by the DSS in their counter affidavit, and Justice Omotosho adjourned the matter until April 18 for adoption of processes.

The News Agency of Nigeria

reports that Kanu, through his lawyer, Ejimakor, had filed the latest suit marked: FHC/ABJ/CS/1633/2023 for enforcement of his fundamental rights, while in detention.

In the originating motion dated and filed December 4, the applicant sued the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF), DSS and its DG as 1st to 4th respondents respectively.

The suit was filed pursuant to Order II, Rules 1 & 2 of the Fundamental Rights Enforcement Procedure Rules 2009, among others.

MEANWHILE, the Court of Appeal sitting in Abuja, yesterday, dismissed

the appeal brought before it by Felix Okonkwo, one of Kanu's lawyers, over his unlawful arrest and detention by the Police and DSS.

Justice Okon Abang dismissed the appeal for lacking in merit. Delivering judgement, yesterday, on the appeal, Abang held that the appellant failed to establish miscarriage of justice in the judgment of a High Court of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, in the matter.

Felix Okonkwo, Ikenna Chibuike and Okafor Ugochukwu, who were appellants in the appeal, then plaintiffs, had dragged the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and the DSS before the High Court for the enforcement of their fundamental human rights.

## CSOs warn EFCC against political witch-hunting

From Sodiq Omolayo, Abuja

CIVIL Society Organisations (CSOs) have called on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to save the image of Nigeria by avoiding being used as a weapon of political battles.

The organisations warned the anti-graft agency that prioritising political battles that are counterproductive to a robust anti-corruption policy of the President Bola Tinubu administration will backfire.

Speaking under the auspices of the Committee for

the Defence of Democracy and Rule of Law, the CSOs noted that the seeming fixation of the anti-graft agency on particular targets, fierce media trial and the network of opposition figures publicly displaying their affinity with the Commission on particular matters, easily reflected political hatchet jobs that must be discouraged.

Addressing journalists in Abuja, Co-Convener of the forum, Kayode Mogbojuri, who spoke on behalf of the over 100 CSOs, said the EFCC could not afford to become a tool of political witch-hunt in the hands of every "disgrun-

tled politician, seeking political retribution against opponents or perceived enemies".

Mogbojuri alleged that how the EFCC is handling the current corruption allegations against the immediate past Governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello, is becoming a case of political witch-hunt by his political opponents.

He accused the anti-graft agency of being a ready tool to be manipulated into fighting proxy wars for politicians.

Mogbojuri said: "In every country where the fight against corruption has been politicised, corruption has

not only thrived but also imploded. Politics and law enforcement should be water and oil that cannot mix."

The activists said that the fact that the amended charge read that the former governor committed the said offence sometime in September 2015, when he had not even become governor, also showed that it was a hurried attempt to nail him without due diligence, saying that it was an error, which would only compound the embarrassment this had earned for the nation's anti-corruption struggle.

## 'Southeasterners, others benefit from Northeast commission's projects'

From Gordi Udeajah, Umuahia

FORMER two-term member of the House of Representatives for Ikwuano/Umuahia Constituency, Sam Onuigbo, has said that non-Northeasterners also benefit from the North East Development Commission's (NEDC) activities and projects.

Onuigbo, who is a member of the NEDC Board representing the Southeast Zone, spoke, yesterday, in

Umuahia, noting that many Nigerians resident in the Northeast, including Southeasterners, also benefit from the facilities made available by the Commission for the direct benefit of Northeast indigenes.

He recalled that NEDC was created by federal law to address challenges arising from insurgency and restiveness in the region, resettle and rehabilitate displaced persons, reconstruct damaged and dilapidated struc-

tures and empower them.

The former lawmaker lamented that Abia State still lacked a federal secretariat about 33 years after its creation, unlike other states created at the same time. He commended the renewed move to change the scenario by the President Bola Tinubu-led government.

He also acknowledged and appreciated the role Governor Alex Otti of the Labour Party (LP) has played in actualising the state's

Federal Secretariat, saying that Otti already paid compensation to the landowners for their economic crops.

On the state of projects, in his constituency, while he was a lawmaker, Onuigbo, a member of the All Progressives Congress (APC), told journalists that reports he got from the team that undertook the projects' inspections, at the weekend, to know their status, were that the projects were progressing.

## 'MoU on Port Harcourt-Calabar-Enugu-Abuja standard gauge not binding'

From Daniel Okejeme, Abuja

FEDERAL Ministry of Transportation has stated that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) it signed with MPH Rail Development (UK) Limited for the proposed Port Harcourt-Calabar-Enugu-Abuja standard gauge rail project is not binding.

The Minister of Transportation, Said Ahmed Alkali, stated this while reacting to comments and commentaries by certain persons, especially on social media, concerning the status and implications of the MoU signed on February 12, 2024.

Alkali informed that a MoU is a non-binding agreement that states each party's intentions to take action, conduct a business transaction or form a new partnership. He noted that it is not a legally binding agreement, stressing that it only provides a platform for further engagement, discussion, scrutiny and the provision of required guarantees by the parties to reach an agreement if they are satisfied.

He stated that the MoU in question arose from an unsolicited proposal presented by the British African Business Alliance (BABA), an association based in the UK with an interest in business in Africa.

## Activities paralysed in UNN as SSANU, NASU join warning strike

From Sodiq Omolayo, Abuja

ADMINISTRATIVE activities were, yesterday, paralysed at University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN), as Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational Associated Institutions (NASU) joined their counterparts in a seven-day nationwide warning strike.

They said that the warning strike, called by their national Joint Action Committee (JAC), was to protest the Federal Government's failure to pay members four months withheld salaries during their strike in 2022.

Addressing members during an emergency congress at UNN, branch Chairmen of SSANU and NASU, Dr Linus Akata and Ekene Amu, respectively, said that the emergency congress was to inform their members about the seven-day nationwide warning strike.

Akata said that the strike would be total and comprehensive in UNN in compliance with the directive of the national leadership. He said that all the administrative offices and essential service sections of the university were already under lock and key.

He warned that the unions would deal decisively with any member found defaulting or sabotaging the warning strike.

## CSO urges FG to address anxiety over oil exploration in Bauchi, Gombe

By Innocent Anoruo

**R**ENEVLYN Development Initiative (RDI) has berated the Federal Government for failing to prepare oil-bearing communities in Bauchi and Gombe states for potential environmental and health impacts of oil exploration. The position of the civil society organisation (CSO) followed an interactive meeting it had with communities in Alkaleri Local Council of Bauchi on February 28, 2024, where the locals had the opportunity of learning about oil impact in the Niger Delta and environmental issues that are likely to arise in the North due to discovery of oil in commercial quantity. While lamenting the grow-

ing friction between two communities in the two states over ownership of the oil wells, the residents also decried growing insecurity in the region. The Federal Government, in October 2019, announced that it had found one billion barrels of oil reserves and 500 billion cubic feet of gas within the Kolmani river area of Gombe and Bauchi states. The oil fields (OPL 809 and 810) that are to be developed by Sterling Global Oil, Northern Nigeria Development Commission (NNDC) and Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), have attracted an investment of \$3 billion, marking a journey of oil exploration in northern Nigeria.

## Adamawa, World Bank to spend N97b on girls' education

**A**DAMAWA State Government will spend more than N97 billion on the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) Project. AGILE is a World Bank-assisted project of the Federal Ministry of Education. The Commissioner for Education and Human Capital Development, Dr Garba Pella, disclosed this in Yola, yesterday, at the end of the state's maiden meeting on implementation of the project. Pella said no fewer than 24,000 adolescent girls in 100 schools across the state were expected to benefit

from the five-year project aimed at ensuring that adolescent girls complete their secondary education. The projects to be carried out includes rehabilitation of schools, building new schools, empowerment of girls with skills and empowerment of some vulnerable parents, who use their daughters for hawking, he added. The Project Coordinator, Dr Umar Idriss, explained that the project "is for learning and empowerment to improve access to secondary education for adolescent girls."

## Zulum inaugurates 565,000-litre water project in Azare

From Njadvara Musa, Maiduguri

**G**OVERNOR Babagana Zulum of Borno State has commissioned the 565,000-litre mega water supply project in Azare, Hawul Local Council. According to him, the Borno South Senatorial District water project is serving over a dozen communities along the Biu-Gombi road. Inaugurating the solar-powered water project, on Sunday, Zulum disclosed: "Today's event will address the lingering water scarcity for domestic and industrial uses at the

council headquarters, as well as adjourning 15 communities. "It is my singular honour and privilege to commission this mega water works today, to the glory of God," adding that it would serve humanity, including the farming herding communities. While briefing the governor on the completed project, the Commissioner for Water Resources, Tijjani Alkali, said "the water project discharges 10 litres of water per second" to homes and business premises.

## Benue empowers 27,600 women with loans, grants

From Samson Kukwa-Yanor, Makurdi

**B**ENUE State government is set to empower 27,600 women across the state with loans and grants. This was disclosed, yesterday, by the Commissioner for Cooperatives and Rural Development, Mrs Joy Luga, in Makurdi. According to her, the initiative, which is in collaboration with the state government and Bank of Agriculture (BOA), is targeted at empowering

women in the state to be self-reliant. Appreciating Governor Hyacinth Alia for making funds available for the initiative, she said the inclusion of women, especially those in the rural areas, was in line with the governor's strategic development plan. The commissioner further disclosed that the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development had commenced training of women in skill acquisition in different areas like fashion designing.

# Tinubu needs your support to succeed, Sule tells Obi

From Abel Abogonye (Lafia) and Ibrahim Obansa (Lokoja)

**G**OVERNOR Abdullahi Sule of Nasarawa State has appealed to the 2023 presidential candidate of Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi, to support President Bola Tinubu, as the President needs him to succeed. This was as Kogi Peoples Movement for Equity and Justice (KPMEJ) condemned negative social media commentaries against former Governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello. Sule made the appeal yesterday, when Obi visited him at Government House, Lafia. "You are going round the

## Group flays negative comments on Bello

country to contribute towards cushioning the effect of the economic hardship. I know you have the experience and capacity to support President Tinubu to succeed. I like the statement you made that there is time for politics and time for governance. "I am sure you have contributions to make, just like the one you are making in Nasarawa and across the country by drilling boreholes in communities and identifying with Muslims during the Ramadan," he said. Obi remarked that he was in the state to support Muslims in the period of Ramadan in

his little way. "I decided to tour the states during the Ramadan period to support the less privileged people in my own small way," he said. The former Anambra State governor noted that as part of his support to Nigerians, he embarked on nationwide borehole drilling in rural communities across states. Lack of potable water, according to Obi, is the major demand across all communities in the country. Obi reiterated that he was not desperate to be President of Nigeria, but to make sure Nigeria is working like other

developed countries of the world. He, however, commended Sule for embarking on road projects and urged him to focus on improving the livelihoods of his people. KPMEJ, in a statement, yesterday, by its Coordinator, Sani Usman, noted that the comments were part of an attempt to create disaffection between Bello and his political leader, Tinubu. Bello, the group asserted, holds the Nigerian leader in high esteem as his father and benefactor, adding that the relationship will continue, no matter the evil machinations of disgruntled elements bent on destroying it.



Nasarawa State Governor, Abdullahi Sule (left) and 2023 Presidential Candidate of Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi during the latter's courtesy visit to the Government House in Lafia...yesterday. PHOTO: ABEL ABOGONYE

## Students stranded as SSANU, NASU begin warning strike in UNIJOS

From Isa Abdulsalami Ahovi, Jos

**S**ENIOR Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) and the Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), University of Jos (UNIJOS), began their warning strike yesterday. This was as University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) branch of NASU appealed for public understanding over its decision to embark on the industrial action. As early as 9.00am, when *The Guardian* visited, all the lecture rooms were under lock and key. Stranded students

## UNIMAID NASU seeks public understanding

were seen hanging around, saying they were supposed to have lectures and, some of them, examinations. None of the members of SSANU and NASU could be seen on the campus. But one of the staff, who possibly forgot something in the school and came to pick it, gave his phone number, but did not pick his phone when called. **T**HE UNIMAID appeal was made by the NASU Chairman, Musa Liman, who spoke to the News Agency of

Nigeria (NAN) on the impact of the strike in UNIMAID. Liman said the nationwide strike followed its national body's directives to protest the alleged unfair treatment of union members by the Federal Government. The chairman, who said the action was also to save public universities from collapse, noted that the level of compliance in UNIMAID was impressive. "I thank our members for the almost 100 per cent com-

pliance and to urge them to remain calm, peaceful and wait for further directives. "If you observe, places like senate building, bursary, works department, exams and records, fire service and many other places in the university are closed for the seven-day strike," Liman said. He explained that it was only the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT) of the university that refused to join the strike on Wednesday.

## Wike orders immediate reshuffle of FCTA directorate

From Azimazi Momoh Jimoh, Abuja

**F**EDERAL Capital Territory (FCT) Minister, Nyesom Wike, has ordered immediate reshuffle of personnel across the secretariat, departments and agencies of the administration. The order, which took effect after the swearing-in of the pioneer Head of Service (HoS), permanent secretaries of FCTA, Chairman and members of the FCT Civil Service Commission, is expected to bring efficiency

into the system. Wike, who broke the news during the swearing-in, advised the directors to accept their new postings in good faith, stating that there's going to be a reshuffle across all sectors of the FCTA. "Immediately after now, the HoS will send out the posting of directors. I have said there will be total reshuffling in all areas, and I'm going to implement it this afternoon," he said. Meanwhile, the minister

warned the newly appointed permanent secretaries to perform or be shown the way out. The minister, who warned that the administration would not tolerate any act of indolence, also advised the permanent secretaries against unnecessary bureaucratic bottlenecks that slow down work. He said: "If you perform below expectation, there is nothing like a query, we have no time for that; we will just send you packing as

permanent secretary. So, I don't want to hear any complaints. Now that you will be handling secretariats, you have your secretaries as your political heads. I do not want to hear that files are unduly delayed." The minister charged the newly appointed coordinators to do their best, as Tinubu's administration was set to take development to the satellite towns and poised to improve infrastructure in the city centre.

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## Joshua, Fury in line for two-fight deal, Wembley showdown

**B**OXING icons, Tyson Fury and Anthony Joshua, are being lined up for a two-fight deal. The two British rivals have not yet met in the ring despite being two of the most dominant boxers in the heavyweight division over the past



decade. Both in recent times have taken to Saudi Arabia for their lucrative fights, with Fury scraping past Francis Ngannou last October in Riyadh while Joshua dismantled the same opponent inside two rounds. Fury, who holds the WBC belt, will fight Oleksandr Usyk on May 18 for the title of undisputed heavyweight champion. And despite there being a rematch clause in the contract, promoter Eddie Hearn is hopeful of Joshua taking on the Gypsy King in the aftermath, reports *dailystar.co.uk*. AJ and Fury have gone back and forth numerous times over the years, coming closest to a 'Battle of Britain' showdown in August 2021 before Deontay Wilder won an arbitration case. That meant Fury had to fight the American a third time, ending hopes of a meeting between the pair.

Now Hearn has revealed that Saudi Arabian powerbroker, Turki Al-Sheikh, is planning two AJ vs Fury fights, with one of them potentially taking place in the UK amid fears of all future blockbuster fights holding in the Middle-East. Hearn told *The Sports Agents* podcast: "This is a gentleman called Turki Al-Sheikh, who is obviously a very influential figure in sports and entertainment in Saudi Arabia. "He's also the biggest fight fan I've ever met. And quite amazingly, he's now talking about staging two Fury versus AJ fights - one in Saudi Arabia and one at Wembley Stadium." He added: "He's one of those guys that listens and reads everything. So he's definitely read about, 'I wish this fight was at Wembley,' or 'It's a



shame the fight is in Saudi Arabia.' "I mean, we really must have more of a global vision in sport, boxing doesn't just sit here but two Brits, fighting for the undisputed world championship, I think he would probably bring one of them to the UK, I really do. And that financially, they've got the ability to do that."

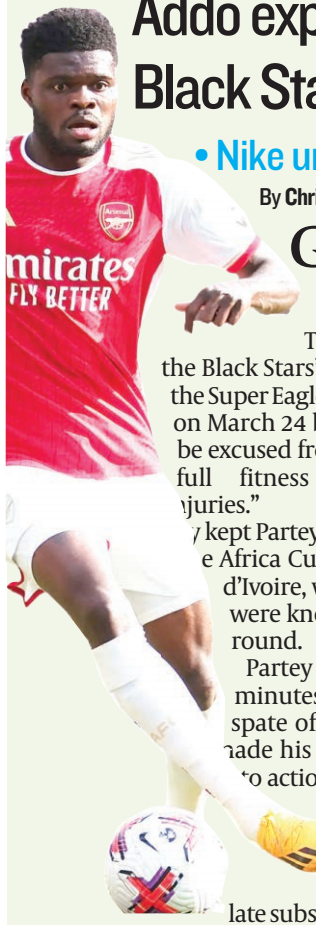
### Premier league deducts four points from N'Forest over financial breaches

**T**HE English Premier League has deducted four points from Nottingham Forest for breaching the league's financial regulations. The Premier League charged Forest and Everton with breaches of the league's profitability and sustainability rules in January. If confirmed, Forest's points deduction would plunge them into the relegation zone, as Nuno Espirito Santo's side, currently in 17th place on 25 points, would have just 21 points. That would leave them in 18th place, one point behind Luton, who would climb out of the bottom three as a result of Forest's deduction. Everton were deducted 10 points in November, which was reduced to six on appeal. The Goodison Park club are still waiting to discover if they will be hit with another points penalty relating to their second charge.

## Addo explains Partey's absence from Black Stars' lineup for Super Eagles

• Nike unveils Eagles new jersey

By Christian Okpara



**G**HANA'S new coach, Otto Addo, has said that he omitted Arsenal midfielder, Thomas Partey, from the Black Stars' team that will meet the Super Eagles in a friendly match on March 24 because "he asked to be excused from the game to gain full fitness following recent injuries." Addo kept Partey out of Ghana's team for the Africa Cup of Nations in Cote d'Ivoire, where the Black Stars were knocked out in the first round. Partey has played just 41 minutes since August after a spate of muscle injuries. He made his long-awaited return to action for Arsenal against Sheffield United earlier this month, before being used as a late substitute in the Gunners'

2-1 win against Brentford. He was also part of Arsenal's matchday squad in the Champions League victory over Porto on penalties. After missing nearly four months of football, Arsenal have understandably been keen to manage his return to action carefully. This is particularly the case given that Partey suffered a setback on his road to recovery after initially returning to training in January. In Addo's 27-man team for the game billed to hold in Morocco are debutants, Bolivia-based David Akologo, Nordsjaellands' Ibrahim Osman, France-based Nathaniel Adjei, and Diomande Mohammed of Rangers of Scotland. The other debutant in the squad is Asante Kotoko's Frederick Asare. Brighton and Hove Albion right-back Tariq Lamptey is back in the squad after recovering from an injury that ruled him out of the Africa Cup of Nations in Cote d'Ivoire, just as left back, Patrick Kpozo, winger Abdul Fatawu Issahaku, and midfielder Edmund Addo, who have also made a return to the team.

## Team Nigeria's MMA squad relishes African Games experience

By Faith Akpan

**T**EAM Nigeria's Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) athletes, comprising nine fighters, are relishing their experience at the ongoing 13th African Games in Ghana, where they featured in nine weight categories. The fighters, against all odds, won five gold, three silver and one bronze medals in the MMA category. Muzan Richard won the gold medal in the men's 120.5kg by beating Cote d'Ivoire's Dago Fanny. Eze Daniel (83.9kg), Busayo Idowu (52.2kg), Olanike Sodiq (61.2kg) and Joy

Obanla (65.8kg) also won gold medals in their respective categories. The silver medallists are Blessing Karo (61.2kg), Bernard Eweh (65.8kg) and Winifred Peter (47.6kg), while the solo bronze medallist is Albert Idowu (70.3kg). To qualify for the African Games, the athletes went through the MMA Championship held in February by the Boxing and MMA Hall of Fame, which represents the sport's global ruling body, the Global Association of Mixed Martial Arts (GAMMA).

Speaking during a reception for the contingent by the management of Continental Hotel, Lagos, recently, the athletes regretted that the country paid scant attention to their preparation for the Games, saying that the nine MMA fighters made a tortuous road trip, lasting over 10 hours, to be in Ghana. They added, however, that their determination to excel against strong competition from Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Sudan, Togo, Uganda, Libya and hosts, Ghana, pushed them to success.

## Top golfers set for PGD Tour's N20m Custodian Classic

By Christian Okpara

**W**EST Africa's best golfers have been lined up to battle for the Custodian Classic's N20 million purse on March 28 at Lakowe Lakes Golf Club, Lagos. The Custodian Classic is part of the PGD Tour sponsored by Custodian Investment Plc., which inaugural edition was held at the Ikoyi 1938 Golf Section, where Ghanaian Vincent Torgah clinched victory. This year's event, according to the organisers, promises to be exciting as it will feature a

lineup of approximately 80 players from Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Cameroon. A PGD Tour Director, Femi Olagbenro, said the Custodian Classic plays a prominent role in enhancing the tour's stability and player development. He said the transition to Lakowe Lakes Golf Club, as host of the event, signifies the tour's evolution. "What we are building is a dynamic platform, where players will have to fight hard

for every win and eventually task their productivity and abilities. We have tried a new venue for every returning event so far on this second season of the Tour, and this is what we hope we can continue," Olagbenro said. Also speaking at the event, Group Managing Director, Custodian Investment Plc, Wole Oshin, said, "The Custodian Classic has become a part of our social investment towards capacity development of the Nigerian youth, a demographic pivotal to our nation's future."

## FIFA names Egypt as latest host of new friendly series

**W**ORLD governing body, FIFA, yesterday named Egypt as the fifth country to host the new series of friendly games introduced to allow teams from different confederations to play each other. The pilot phase was expanded to feature 24 national teams from three continents, FIFA said in a statement. The Egypt edition—which will hold from March 22-26 — will also include Croatia, Tunisia and New Zealand. Egypt will host New Zealand in the opening game on Friday, which will also mark the inauguration of a new 92,000-capacity stadium that the country has built in a new

administrative capital, 45 kilometres east of Cairo. Named Egypt Stadium, the venue is the second biggest in Africa, behind South Africa's 94,000-seater Soccer City. Tunisia will face Croatia in the other game, with the winners playing each other in the second match. Although there are no

trophies or prize money, the series is designed to benefit national teams that do not have the opportunity to play teams from other confederations, with FIFA set to cover travel costs. Algeria, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka will simultaneously host other editions this month, although formats will differ.

### SOLUTION

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Joshua, Fury in line for two-fight deal, Wembley /31 showdown



## Super Eagles coach: Go for quality not nationality

AT the conclusion of AFCON 2023, I wrote in this column that the Super Eagles was now in a good place. I said so because the team never lost any match throughout the tournament, except the final in which the host, Ivory Coast, defeated the Super Eagles by two goals to one.

Three of our players were named in the tournament's first eleven. The Super Eagles Captain at the tournament, William Troost Ekong, was named the most valuable player of the tournament. Before AFCON 2023 the Super Eagles occupied the 43rd position in the world FIFA ranking. After the tournament the team jumped several steps to the 28th position in the world.

This is good but not as good as we were in 1995 after our performance in the 1994 AFCON that we won with Clemens Westerhof as the coach. We were solidly stationed at the number five position in the world. Since then, we have not got anywhere near there. But our relative success at the 2023 AFCON ought to inspire us to seek to do better in both AFCON and the World Cup.

We have the players but we need a good support base, a great technical back-up and an accomplished and talented coach. That is the point at which we are now.

The coach who guided the team during the last AFCON, Jose Peseiro, had left because his 22 months tenure had ended and it was not renewed. The reason for non-renewal, I learn, is that his salary of \$50,000 per month was a huge burden for the football authorities to carry. Football is the world's premier sport. It is a cash cow. But it is also a money guzzler so good coaches don't come cheap.

Nigeria should have found the money with which to keep the coach because we have a few qualifying matches for the 2026 World Cup to be played soon. However, there is no need crying over spilt milk. The NFF has now advertised the position and a number of applicants, foreign and local, have shown interest.

These applicants include Emmanuel Amunke, a former Barcelona winger, who was a gold winning member of the 1994 AFCON and the 1996 Olympic Games. He also led the Golden Eaglets to glory at the 2015 FIFA Under-17 World Cup. He also helped Tanzania to qualify for the 2019 AFCON for the first time since 1980. He is highly rated.

Others include Michael Nsien, the current United States Under-19 coach, a former Super Eagles Assistant Coach, Sylvanus Okpala, a former Super Eagles player and Assistant Coach, Daniel Amokachi known in his playing days as the Bull. There is also Finidi George, a former Super Eagles player who guided Enyimba Football Club to the league title last year. He was also Peseiro's Assistant at the AFCON 2023.

In that group you will also find Sunday Oliseh, a former Super Eagles player and coach. He wants a second chance. There is also, a Spain-based former Super Eagles forward Henry Makinwa. He played football for 17 clubs in 11 countries and three continents.

Someone else who has thrown his hat into



the pitch is Ndubuisi Egbo, a former Tirana Fc handler, who is the first Nigerian coach to win a league title in Europe. This was in Albania in the 2019/2020 season. An experienced Portuguese coach, Antonio Conceicao, who guided the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon to a third-place finish at the 2021 AFCON is also an interested party. He has also coached national teams in Cyprus, Portugal and Saudi Arabia.

There is a debate going on now as to whether we should choose a foreigner or a Nigerian as our coach. For me, that debate is sterile. What we need is a good coach, period. One that can deliver the goods, the goals and the goal of football success.

In 1980, we had a Brazilian coach, Otto Gloria, who won AFCON for Nigeria. In 1994, we had a Dutchman, Clemens Westerhof, who won AFCON for us. We have had other foreigners such as Gernot Rohr and Peseiro who won nothing for us. We have also had a Nigerian, Stephen Keshi, who brought the AFCON crown to us in 2013, the only Nigerian to do so. There have been other Nigerian coaches who never achieved the feat.

In other parts of Africa, some local coaches have performed the magic. For example, Hassan Sheheta of Egypt won AFCON on three consecutive occasions for Egypt from 2006 to 2010. Also, Aliou Cisse of Senegal won AFCON two years ago.

During the 2023 AFCON, the Ivorian football authorities dismissed its foreign coach and got an Ivorian to step in. It is the Ivorian indigenous coach that won AFCON 2023 for Ivory Coast.

From the above analysis, it is clear that some

foreigners have succeeded and some Nigerians have also succeeded. Some Nigerians have failed and some foreigners have failed in the coaching of our footballers. So, what is needed is not nationality but quality of the coach.

There are charges against both foreign and local coaches. You can call them demerits. For example, foreign coaches are said to ask for very high salaries in dollars; they are not willing to live in Nigeria; they prefer to live abroad because they claim that they have to monitor the performance of Nigerian players there; they are not interested in using players from the domestic league, they prefer ready-made Nigerian players plying their trade abroad; they do not accept dictation on player

selection from the NFF or its organs; they exhibit superiority complex.

There are also charges against indigenous coaches. They are said to be easily manipulable by the football managers and they easily cave in and do the wrong thing for fear of losing their job. They are also accused of favouring some players because of ethnicity, religion, money or connection. Critics claim that they lack confidence in disciplining the players, especially the big boys among them.

This is evidence of inferiority complex. The critics of these two sets of coaches believe that these are factors that ought to be taken into serious consideration during the hiring process. All of the allegations may not be true and all of them may not necessarily apply to all coaches in each of the two groups.

Most of the charges may actually sound like generalisation, unfounded generalisation that can be used to derail some of them who belong to any of the two groups. That is why it is more important to go for merit, for meritocracy than to search for hidden demerits, hidden booby traps.

In the advertisement for the job, the NFF states that the prospective coach "must have proven experience at the elite level of football." That is vague. That is opaque. That is woolly. What they should be looking for is achievements, not experience. How many gold medals or trophies has he got as a coach at the elite level of football? How many teams has he taken from the ground floor to the victory podium? Those are the evidence of achievements.

No one needs experience that produces no significant achievements. The Super Eagles is a big team full of stars who play in big clubs in Europe and they are likely to respect a coach with significant achievements. They are also likely to look down on a coach that has no such significant achievements, a coach that can be classified as a "mumu." That is what can breed tension, disunity and failure in a team.

The Super Eagles is in a good place now as I have said. The team must be built to be bigger, stronger, more fluent than it is now. Only a coach with significant achievements can take the team to the sky. That depends on the choices that the NFF makes. It should look for money, go and break a bank and get the money to run football, the game that most Nigerians are crazy about if they themselves are also crazy about football.

We have some World Cup qualifiers that we have to play against South Africa and Benin Republic in the next few months. We are also supposed to play two international friendlies during the FIFA window this month. So, the NFF officials have their hands full.

They must speed up the search for a coach of significance, one that suits a team like the Super Eagles. They must employ one early so that he can handle the World Cup qualifiers in which we haven't done very well so far.

We have to seek to recover our losses so that we can brighten our chances for appearing at the 2026 World Cup.

**“The team must be built to be bigger, stronger, more fluent than it is now. Only a coach with significant achievements can take the team to the sky. That depends on the choices that the NFF makes. It should look for money, go and break a bank and get the money to run football, the game that most Nigerians are crazy about if they themselves are also crazy about football.”**

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