

Tinubu Markets High Grade Lithium Deposits In Nigeria To European Govts

INNOCENT OWEH
ABUJA

President Bola Tinubu, on Thursday, seized a meeting he had with Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands at his official residence, known as The Catshuis, in The Hague, to market the lithium deposits in Nigeria.

According to Tinubu, Nigeria is well-positioned to power the clean energy future of Europe and the world with its high-grade lithium deposits.

The president said Nigeria offers immense opportunities across a pool of sectors, insisting that his administration is deepening reforms to enhance the investment climate.

He captivated the audience,

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Fubara To CNS: Fulfill Your Mandate, End Oil Theft, Waterways Crimes

ITODE AKARI
PORT HARCOURT

Rivers State governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, has charged the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ikechukwu

Ogalla, to end oil theft and other waterways crimes in the state in fulfillment of his mandate.

Fubara reminded the CNS that his appointment came at a critical time when the country direly need waterways security, encouraging the Nigerian Navy

to be firm in the fight against all forms of economic sabotage, particularly crude oil theft.

The governor noted with delight the positive results already recorded by the Navy in the state following the tremendous

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Telcos Fear Revenue Loss As Starlink Targets Data Market Share

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH

As Nigeria's telecoms industry continues to be confronted with the threat of low revenue projections in recent times, operators are worried that their bottom line may soon experience a major hit due to the entry of Starlink, a satellite

- Push For Upward Tariff Review
- Say Economic Challenges Affecting Investors' Confidence

broadband internet service provider into the Nigerian telecom market.

There is already uneasiness among the telecom operators and some indus-

try observers who see the business model of Starlink, SpaceX's satellite internet service, as a threat to local internet service providers and telecom

operators who have in the past years focused more on data service than voice service in Nigeria.

Last year, Elon Musk's internet

company, Starlink, planned to roll out services that will allow mobile phones to connect directly to its satellites in 2024.

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Any Govt That Takes Us Away From Where Buhari Kept Us Is Supported
— Kukah

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Fire Razes Part Of Lagos Airport Old Terminal As FAAN Diverts Flights

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Dana Air Suspension: Directive Similar To Interference In NCAA Autonomy
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Security Operatives Launch Manhunt For 109 Fleeing Inmates Of Suleja Prison

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Leaders Of 18 Nations Urge Hamas To Release Hostages

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Don Okere, Editor, Daily Independent (right), presenting a letter of notification for Independent Pharmaceutical Distribution Company of the Year 2023 Award bagged by World Wide Commercial Ventures Limited (WWCVL) to its Managing Director, Naveen Pala, in Lagos on Thursday.

NNPC Explains Fuel Scarcity As It Bites Harder In Abuja, Kaduna

CHIDI UGWU
ABUJA

The Nigerian National Petroleum Com-

pany Limited (NNPCL) on Thursday explained the cause of the growing scarcity of premium motor spirit (PMS), otherwise known as petrol, blaming the development

on logistics issues.

This is as the situation is said to bite harder in Abuja and Kaduna.

The company, in a statement signed by

Olufemi Soneye, Chief Corporate Communications Officer, NNPCL, however, assured that issues have been resolved.

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Ondo Guber: Ex-Dep Gov Agboola Ajayi Wins PDP Ticket P6

News

Gov Mbah Warns Against Politicisation Of Palliatives Distribution

PATIENCE OGBODO-IWUAGWU
ENUGU

Governor of Enugu State, Dr Peter Mbah, on Thursday, flagged off another round of the distribution of palliatives in the state, warning against the politicisation of the exercise to ensure it gets to the independent and vulnerable people across the state.

Mbah, however, said that the palliatives were a quick-fix and efforts of the federal government and the state to cushion the effects of the economic hardship in the land while the positive results of the state's economic policies and programmes crystallise.

Performing the official flag-off after the inspection of the food-stuffs, which were largely grains, the governor assured that the distribution of the palliatives would be carried out from time.

He said: "We have done this

before. So, it is an ongoing thing, as we will continue to intervene because we understand the economic challenges and hardship that our people face currently.

"However, what we are witnessing here today is our short-term measure, what we refer to as a quick-fix towards our promise to eradicate poverty and ensure zero hunger in our state. We have robust programmes in place, which will ultimately ensure that we eradicate poverty and kiss it goodbye in Enugu State.

"We have instituted several programmes in place to eradicate poverty. Our community and social development programmes, our state's small and medium enterprise programme, and our women programmes, among others, were designed to ensure that we empower our people economically. As the Chinese people would say, it is better to teach a man how to fish than to give him fish everyday.

"So, our plan is ultimately for

our people to be able to generate wealth, generate employment, and create wealth for themselves. The ultimate thing is for our people to be able to create wealth, whether in the agricultural sector, the business sector or those that are providing services. We are poised to upskill them. And very soon, you will see and also feel the impact of these programmes.

"For those that are in the agricultural sector, we are going to upskill them so they can increase their production. For those in business and the SMEs, we have intervened in those areas by providing funds.

"But while we do those, we are not unmindful that our people must eat the next day, and that is why programmes like this are important and will continue.

"So, what we are witnessing today is a collective effort by the federal government and state government to ensure that we get to the last man."

Abiodun Tasks Ogun Corps Members On Volunteerism

APATA OYENIRAN
LAGOS

As the 2024 Batch A Stream II orientation course of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) commences in Ogun State, Governor Dapo Abiodun has charged the 3,500 corps members undergoing training at the permanent orientation camp at the Gateway International Stadium, Sagamu, to embrace volunteerism and dedication in the course of service to their fatherland.

Governor Abiodun stated this as he declared open the opening/swearing in ceremonies for the 2024 Batch A Stream II orientation course at the Sagamu Permanent Orientation Camp Ground.

Abiodun, who was represented by the Commissioner for Sports Development, Wasiu Isaka, charged the corps members to take advantage of their coming together with young Nigerians from diverse backgrounds to learn, interface and work together for a common goal of nation-building.

He expressed optimism that the experiences and challenges shared within the period of the orientation and during the service year would shape their understanding of the country in profound ways like personal growth, resilience and empathy.

"I urge each and everyone of you to uphold the core values of the NYSC programmes - Unity,

Service and Humility. Remember that you are not just representatives of your various states and schools but ambassadors of a United Nigeria. Let your actions speak louder than words and let your service be a testament to the spirit of volunteerism and dedication."

Earlier in her welcome address, the Ogun State Coordinator of the scheme, Olayinka Nasamu, welcomed the corps members from various parts of the country to the state.

She intimated the corps members with the mandate of the Scheme, saying that the Service has been carefully planned and segmented into four cardinal programmes namely: Orientation, Primary Assignment, Community Development Service (CDS), and the winding-up and passing out.

APC Guber Primary: Aiyedatiwa's Victory Testament To Leadership Qualities — Group

BOLU-OLU ESHO
AKURE

The recent victory of Governor Lucky Aiyedatiwa at the All Progressives Congress (APC) governorship primary in Ondo State has been described as a testament to his exceptional leadership qualities displayed within the period he took over the mantle of leadership in the state.

This was the submission of a socio-cultural group in the Southern Senatorial District of the state, Ilaje Development Summit Group (IDSG).

In a congratulatory statement signed by the Executive Administrator of the group, Rev. Adesola Omogbeminiyi Adebawo and made available to newsmen in

Akure the Ondo State capital on Thursday, the group also said the emergence of the governor as the standard-bearer of the party indicated his widespread acceptance across all the 18 local government areas of the state.

According to the statement: "Governor Aiyedatiwa's nomination as the APC standard-bearer is not only a testament to his exceptional leadership qualities, but also indicative of his widespread acceptance among his party faithful in Ondo State, as well as a historic moment for the Ilaje community.

"His Excellency's achievement highlights the APC's commitment to inclusivity and recognition of the diverse talents and capabilities within our great state.

"As a non-partisan organisation dedicated to the advancement and development of the Ilaje people, IDSG commends the APC for its decision to nominate an Ilaje candidate. This bold step reaffirms our belief in the power of unity and diversity to drive progress and prosperity for all.

"We applaud Governor Aiyedatiwa for his exemplary service and unwavering dedication to the betterment of Ondo State. Under his visionary leadership, we have no doubt that our beloved state will continue to thrive and flourish.

"We call upon all other contestants, as well as all residents of Ondo State, to join us in rallying behind His Excellency, united in our shared vision for a brighter future for our state."

Lagos Targets N5bn Sales At June Tourism, NBC Trade Fair

VICTORIA OJUGBANA
LAGOS

Special Adviser to the Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, on Tourism, Arts and Culture, Idris Aregbe, has unveiled the ministry's value-driven partnership with Naija Brand Chick (NBC).

Speaking during a press briefing on "Lagos Tourism, Naija Brand Chick Trade Fair," which held at Alausa, Ikeja, on Thursday, Aregbe noted that the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture targets N5 billion in sales at the trade fair, adding that it speaks volumes about the state's commitment to driving economic growth and prosperity.

He said that the trade fair, which is billed to hold between June 14th and 16th, 2024, "will witness the historic event that marks the beginning of a new era in hospitality and trade fair."

While announcing the synergy as "a landmark collaboration that marks a significant departure from traditional governance approaches," Aregbe said: "As the Special Adviser to the Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, on Tourism, Arts, and Culture, it is my honor to unveil our value-driven partnership with Naija Brand

Chick (NBC)."

According to him: "This alliance is not just about cooperation; it's about amplification. It's about taking the Lagos Tourism NBC Trade Fair to unprecedented heights, where it serves as a pivotal catalyst for our entrepreneurial community."

He noted that under the visionary leadership of Governor Sanwo-Olu's administration, and with the steadfast support of the Lagos State Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, the state "aims for nothing short of excellence."

Group Sensitises Women On Child-Birth Spacing In Yobe

MOHAMMED ABUBAKAR
DAMATURU

Awareness creation, sensitisation and health talks during ante-natal care in health facilities across communities in Yobe State were identified as strategies used in encouraging women to accept the use of childbirth spacing services to improve their health and those of their children.

These were the findings by the Yobe Media Team for Family Planning during their field trip to Dikumari and Ngelzarma Primary Health Care Centers in Damaturu and Fune local government areas of the state.

Interacting with 22-year-old Hafsat Yakubu, mother of six, and resident of Dikumari, a settlement in the suburb of Damaturu metropolis, Yakubu said she embraced childbirth spacing

three years ago adding that initially, she was entertaining fear about it because of the various misconceptions surrounding it which is more pronounced in the rural areas.

This narrative is similar to that of Habiba Usman, a 25-year-old mother of three, who embraced the practice of giving room for the proper care and upbringing of her children.

The Facility Manager in charge of Dikumari Primary Health Care Center, Falmata Muhammad, said that childbirth spacing has been accepted among the urban and semi-urban women, including many from the rural areas, as they recorded 70 and above number of women from the 13 rural

catchment areas every month accessing child birth spacing services.

She attributed the success story to the continuous sensitisation and health talks to the women during ante-natal care, adding that more women are coming to seek counseling on the various family planning methods available to access.

At Ngelzarma Primary Healthcare Center in Fune Local Government Area, which is a distance of 35 kilometers away from Damaturu the Yobe State capital, the Yobe FP Media Team had a lively session with the health personnel and women, who came for their ANC, including those coming for childbirth spacing services.

NSCDC, Army Strategise On Enhanced Security In Anambra

CHUKWUJEKWU ILOZUE
AWKA

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, (NSCDC), Anambra State Command, has met with the Nigerian Army to strategise on how to improve security in the state.

This is coming on the heels of reports of cult killings in Awka, Anambra State capital, and kidnappings by herdsmen in Ukwu-Nawgu, Nawgu-Isuaniocha and Nawgu-Enugu-Agidi toads in Duhokofia Local Government Area, which is also within the state capital territory.

The Public Relations Officer of NSCDC, Anambra State Command, Okadigbo Edwin, revealed the partnership in a press statement made available to the media in Awka.

Okadigbo said the resolve was

made during a courtesy call by the state Commandant of the corps, Olatunde Maku, to the Commander, 302 Artillery Regiment of Nigerian Army, Onitsha, Anambra State, Col. M. B. Abubakar.

Maku, who sought the collaboration of the Army to tackle the insecurity in Anambra, said: "Most of the confidence we have as NSCDC personnel is as a result of the Nigerian Army. You remember when I resumed my tour of duty, I saw the existing relationship between all security agencies and I keyed into it.

"I am proud to say that you have not disappointed me in executing our core mandate in the protection of critical national, state and local government assets and infrastructure. We have sought for your

synergy and I am happy to say, you have without hesitation, availed us. Thank you for always partnering with us.

"We commend the Nigerian Army for being a supportive partner to NSCDC in the area of training and retraining of the corps personnel, joint operations, fight against illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, illegal oil refining and petroleum black market racketeering.

"We hope that our partnership will help us tackle sundry crimes in Anambra State."

In his response, Col. Abubakar appreciated Maku for the visit and assured him of enhanced support, collaboration and synergy in the overall interests of the nation.

INSIDE

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Feminism Or Not, Women Must Be Worthy Of Inclusion
— Ifedayo Agoro

Age 18 Varsity Admission: Policy, Implementation Rascally, Counterproductive — VCs, Educationists, Others
● Say There Should Be Time Frame For Execution To Avoid Confusion ● Institutions Are Going To Create Pool Of Unproductive, Idle Young People — Prof Of Journalism ● With The Policy In Place, Special, Gifted Children Will Suffer — School Administrator

Multiple Deaths: AGN Seeks Face Of God

D'banj To Mark 20th Anniversary With New Track

Nigerian Woman Breaks Record With 55-hour Interview Marathon

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EPI 50th Anniversary: WHO Gives Self Pass Mark

MOHAMMED ABUBAKAR

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti has given the international organisation passmark as it marks African Vaccination Week and the 50th anniversary of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI).

According to WHO, "Progress towards eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus in our region has also been commendable. As of March 2024, 43 out of 47 high-burden African countries had been validated for elimination, representing 91% of our Member States in the African Region."

According to him, "Every last week of April, we commemorate Africa Vaccination Week and World Vaccination Week to increase awareness of the importance of every person's need and right to be protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. We keep vaccinations high on national and regional agendas for healthy communities."

State Police Would Curb Security Challenges, Says Former Police Boss

GLORIA ANAEZE

The former Chairman of Police Service Commission, Chief Simon Okeke, yesterday, said despite the economic downturn with cost of living rising to absurdity, that President Bola Tinubu was still a courageous leader.

Chief Okeke noted that President Tinubu had been trying his best possible to fix the economic problems under his watch, saying that though the problems were enormous.

He noted that the team working with the President needed to be reshuffled but gave his nod to the office of the Central Bank of Nigeria Governor and the Economic Adviser who he said were doing well.

According to him, the cabinet reshuffle had become necessary to create an opportunity for a zone like the South East to be equally accommodated in ministerial appointments like other geo-political zones and proposed an eight ministerial positions from the South East.

He disclosed that the Ohaneze Ndigbo had earlier called for the cabinet reshuffle, adding that he endorsed the position of Ohaneze to have more Easterners in the ministerial job in the interest of justice and equity.

On the recent controversy of having state police, Chief Okeke who disclosed that he had been a major proponent of state police ideology before it became an issue of the moment, declared that state police remained the ideal thing, if anybody wanted to be serious about security challenges in the country.



Oba Lawrence Jayeoba Adebajo, Orimolusi of Ijebu-Igbo (left); Tunde Onakoya, world record holder in the longest chess marathon (second left); Dapo Abiodun, Governor, Ogun State (third left); Noimot Salako-Oyedele, Deputy Governor (middle); Oba Abdulrazaq Adenugba, Ebumawe of Ago-Iwoye (third right); Rafiu Onakoya, father of the marathon chess champion (second right), and Taiwo Onakoya, champion's mother, during the governor's presentation of Model of the Gateway City Gate to the Marathon champion when he visited the governor in Abeokuta, Ogun State, on Thursday.

Palliatives: FG, States Owing Workers Wage Award for March, April – TUC

INNOCENT OWEH
ABUJA

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) has decried the delays by the Federal and State governments in paying the workers wage award for the month of March and April, 2024.

President of the TUC, Comrade Festus Osifo called out both arms of government while briefing the media on the fallout of its National Executive Council meeting held in Abuja on Thursday.

Osifo said while a few states were up and doing regarding the payment of the wage award which is a fallout of

palliative measures to cushion the effect of subsidy removal, states like Imo, Delta, Benue, Katsina, Kebbi, Anambra among others were lagging behind, despite huge allocations from the federation account.

The TUC leadership also carpeted the Federal Government over its unilateral decision to increase electricity tariff without consultation with stakeholders.

According to Osifo, such decisions are not implemented in advanced climes. He said it is even more worrisome that most Nigerians are not metered, calling on the government to rescind implementation in the interest of the suffering masses.

TUC also decried the level of insecurity in the country, lamenting that farmers cannot go to farms for cultivation for fear of being killed.

He warned that unless government tackled the situation head on, the prices of food and other commodities would keep rising beyond the reach of ordinary Nigerians.

Osifo said, "We held our NEC where we reflected on the recent increment in electricity tariffs, we consider this decision as being too hasty."

"There are provisions that ought to have been followed before you increase electricity tariff, there ought to be stakeholders engagement, but in this case it was not done."

"Today electricity tariffs are being increased when some people are still using estimated billing. We have expected that by now every single house in Nigeria should have pre-paid metre, we insist that there must be stakeholders engagement to arrive at a critical decision like this."

On the inability of the Port-Harcourt refinery to kick off operations by April as promised by the Federal Government, TUC said it was part of the reasons for the resurgence of fuel queues in parts of the country.

He urged government to hasten up and actualize it, so as to lessen the economic hardship in the country.

Nigeria Positioned As Africa's Premier Mining Investment Destination, Alake Affirms

TOYIN ADEBAYO
ABUJA

In a virtual address to the Nigeria-Australia Investment Roundtable, the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dr. Dele Alake, highlighted Nigeria's status as Africa's prime mining investment hub, underlining policies and incentives fostering an environment conducive to business operations in the mining sector.

Dr. Alake emphasized the

government's commitment to combatting illegal mining and enhancing security around mining areas, citing the establishment of the elite para-military force known as "Mining Marshals."

These Marshals, comprising a robust 2,220 personnel including a rapid response squad in each state, have significantly curtailed illegal mining activities, safeguarded licensed miners, and enforced regulatory compliance across the country.

Moreover, Dr. Alake as-

sured Australian investors of Nigeria's readiness for joint ventures through the impending establishment of the private sector-led Nigerian Solid Minerals Corporation. Advanced stages in legislative and corporate processes underscore Nigeria's proactive stance towards engaging investors in critical mineral ventures such as Lithium, Gold, Baryte Lead, and Iron ore.

Speaking on regulatory frameworks, the Minister disclosed intensified scrutiny on

defaulters of annual service fees, aiming to curb indiscriminate speculation and license racketeering.

Approval processes for mineral permits and licenses have been streamlined, alongside the publication of monthly mining statistics to foster sector transparency and development.

Dr. Alake urged investors to prioritize Nigeria, highlighting favourable policies including tax waivers and capital repatriation.

Yahaya Bello: Ex-ECOWAS Court Of Justice VP Berates EFCC Chairman

as a form of media trial.

He stressed the importance of discretion in such matters, pointing out that institutions of justice, like the EFCC, should conduct investigations discreetly without involving the media.

Nwoke said, "The EFCC chairman's press conference of yesterday was really uncalled for. That is

unfair trial. All these challenges are because of what I would call a media trial."

"An institution of justice should be in a position, especially when you are the investigator, carry out a discrete investigation. You do not need to involve the media."

"For example, the EFCC's chairman interview yesterday was really, really uncalled for. It was uncalled

for in the sense that you do not need to accord any privilege to Yahaya Bello."

"The law doesn't require according or the giving of privileges to persons who are suspected of having committed an offense. That is one."

"Secondly, the law necessarily doesn't need, especially in situations of this nature. In corruption cases, you don't necessarily need

Ijede Council Of Obas, Traditional Chiefs Appreciate IGP

OLORUNDARE ENIMOLA

The Council of Obas and Traditional Chiefs of Ijede Community in Ikorodu, Lagos State has commended the Inspector General of Police, IGP Kayode Egbetokun on the improved security situation in communities in the state.

This was contained in the message sent through the AIG of Zone-2, AIG Olatoye Durosimi for his positive response to a letter addressed to him in February, 2024, requesting Police back up to stem down the burgeoning activities of hardened criminals in the entire Ijede Community.

The letter earlier sent by the Community reads in part; "We write to inform your good self that for sometime now, Ijede Community and its environs within Ikorodu, Lagos State has been inundated with kidnappings, abductions, murder, cultism activities and all manner of atrocities, making us to go about our legal businesses with fears and apprehension of being attacked or hacked down by the marauding criminals."

The letter states further; "We must state that these criminals seems to have overwhelmed the Police personnel operating in Ijede Community, environs and we cannot no longer sleep with our eyes closed."

"Our fear is that if these vices are perpetuated by the faceless elements, our community will degenerate into a lawless Community." The letter reads.

The community leaders while commending the IGP said that since the letter was submitted and prompt action was taken with the deployment of a strong tactical Police team by the Inspector General of Police through the AIG, Zone 2, criminal activities by the misguided elements have drastically reduced and the Community is now relatively safer as people now go about their businesses without any fear or agitations.

to make an arrest. You don't need to bring into custody. Because more often than not, in corruption cases, they're determined by documentary evidence.

"If you make out a prima facie case and you have evidence to make out a prima facie case, why don't you file a case in court and serve the accused person? Why would you, in the first instance, perhaps advertise or publicize? Because that is, in the first instance, unfair hearing," he added.

Civil Groups Advocate Professional Handling Of Pipeline Protection

SEYI TAIWO-OGUNTUASE

Leaders of civil society groups under the Civil Society Coalition for Mandate Protection (CSC-MAP) have advised that pipeline protection should be given to professionals and that pipelines in Itsekiri and Yoruba territories should not be given to former bandits who once led armed insurrection against the state.

CSC-MAP, a coalition of 55 civil society, community-based organisations and faith based groups spread across Nigeria, made the call on at a rally in Ojota, Lagos.

It cautioned that the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) may be unconsciously empowering armed groups through pipeline contracts in the Niger Delta.

The groups expressed support for the reforms of President Bola Tinubu, calling on Nigerians to be patient to reap the dividends, also called for a stop to the pattern of giving pipeline contracts to people associated with violence.

Dreamworks Integrated Systems Marks 20 Years Of Innovation

SEYI TAIWO-OGUNTUASE

Dreamworks Integrated Systems, a provider of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions in Nigeria as part of activities to celebrate its 20 years anniversary has unveiled a new logo.

Chuks Aylor, Group Managing Director at Dreamworks Integrated Systems, while speaking at the celebration, said that for two decades, Dreamworks has been a trusted partner for businesses and individuals, delivering innovative solutions across computing, power, consumer, electronics, accessories, enterprise, and mobile technologies. He said that the company's dedication to exceptional service has positioned it as a powerhouse in the Nigerian ICT industry.

Aylor also noted that the ICT solution firm is marking its anniversary highlighting its commitment to the future, stating that the celebration includes; refreshed brand identity which is the unveiling of a new logo that reflects the company's continued growth and evolution.

He also explained that exciting giveaways will be offered across all Dreamworks' social media platforms throughout the month.

Speaking further he said that there will be a city wide tech walk on Friday April 26 that will celebrate the evolution of technology in the country and Dreamworks' role in that growth.



Chizoba Perpetua Ehiogu, Rector, College of Insurance and Financial Management (left); Tunde Mimiko, Managing Director, Sanlam Nigeria (second left); Benedict Ujoatuonu, Managing Director/CEO, Universal Insurance Plc (third left); Fatai K. Lawal, Chairman of occasion (third right); Adeolu Adewumi-Zer, founder/Managing Director, ZER Consulting Africa and keynote speaker (second right), and Val Ojumah, former Managing Director, Sanlam Nigeria, during the 2024 Inspenonline retirement summit and unveiling of insurfeel initiative, in Lagos on Thursday.

PHOTO: KINGSTON DANIEL

WHO Commemorates World Malaria Day, Urges Continued Efforts Toward Elimination

TOYIN ADEBAYO

ABUJA

Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO Regional Director for Africa, has underscored significant strides made in malaria control and elimination efforts globally, disclosing that over US\$50 billion has been mobilized since 2000.

This investment has averted 2.1 billion malaria cases and 11.7 million deaths, leading to a 50% reduction in the malaria mortality rate despite

the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking on the occasion of the 17th World Malaria Day under the theme "Advancing health equity, gender equality and human rights," Dr. Moeti emphasized the need for continuous and equitable delivery of malaria services, especially to vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and rural communities.

Dr. Moeti highlighted recent milestones in malaria elimination, including the certification of Cabo Verde in January 2024 and the ap-

proval of the R21/MatrixM malaria vaccine, which will be rolled out in 19 African countries this year alongside the RTS,S vaccine.

While celebrating progress, Dr. Moeti acknowledged persistent challenges facing the African region, including extreme weather events, conflict, resource constraints, and biological threats.

She called for concerted efforts to address these challenges and ensure equitable access to malaria interventions.

Dr. Moeti reiterated WHO's commitment to supporting strategic initiatives such as

the "High Burden High Impact" (HBHI) approach, which targets countries hardest hit by malaria with customized interventions based on local data.

She also emphasized the importance of innovation and research to develop new strategies and tools targeting vulnerable groups.

Acknowledging the critical role of partnerships, Dr. Moeti thanked organizations such as the Global Fund, the US President's Malaria Initiative, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for their support in delivering malaria services.

Why We Resigned From Fubara's Cabinet –Pro-Wike Commissioners

ITODE AKARI

PORT HARCOURT

Former Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in Rivers State, Prof. Zacchaeus Adangor and his counterpart, Isaac Kamalu, Commissioner for Finance, have explained why they resigned their appointments after rejecting their redeployment to other ministries at the behest of Governor Siminalayi Fubara.

Governor Fubara had on Monday ordered a minor cabinet reshuffle, transferring Adangor to the Ministry of Special Duties (Governor's Office) while Kamalu was moved to the Ministry of Employment Generation and Economic Empowerment.

The die-hard loyalists of

Wike service in the administration of Fubara, who did not take the Governor's directive in good fate, expressed their displeasure by tendering their resignations.

Prof. Adangor whose resignation was contained in a letter titled, 'Cabinet Reshuffle: Notice of rejection of redeployment and resignation from the Rivers State Executive Council', added that his resignation took effect from April 24, 2024.

The letter, dated April 24, 2024 was addressed to the Secretary to the State Government, accusing Governor Fubara of willfully interfering in his duties as the Attorney-General for the State.

Adangor explained, "My at-

tention has been drawn to your letter dated 23rd April, 2024 and widely circulated on social media, whereby I was deployed to the Ministry of Special Duties (Governor's Office).

"Further to your referenced letter, I hereby give you notice of my rejection of the said redeployment and resignation from Rivers State Executive Council with effect from 24th April, 2024.

"I wish to state for the record, that I am no longer willing to continue to serve in the administration of His Excellency, Sir Siminalayi Fubara, Governor of Rivers State, in any capacity whatsoever.

Explaining further, he said, "It is important to mention that the governor of Rivers

State, in the past couple of weeks willfully interfered with the performance of my duties as Honourable Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Rivers State, by directing me not to defend, oppose or appear in suits instituted against the Honourable Attorney-General and Government of Rivers State by persons admittedly hired and sponsored by the Government of Rivers State.

"That having served the government and people of Rivers State dutifully as member of the Rivers State Executive Council for the past five years, it has become imperative for me to quit the administration in order to preserve my reputation."

Bakare Elected Chairman Forum Of Arts, Culture & Tourism Commissioners

OLUSEGUN KOIKI

Prof. Rasaki Ojo, the Ekiti State Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, has been elected as Chairman, Forum of Commissioners for Culture, Tourism, Arts, Heritage and Creative Economy in Nigeria.

A statement by the media consultant to the organization on Thursday, said that the Bakare was elected at the forum's meeting held in Abuja earlier in the week.

The statement hinted that the new chairman would lead his colleagues from all the states of the federation for an initial term of two years.

Bakare as an experienced player in the sector, had been a practicing creative artiste for 43 years.

He has also been a researcher, lecturer, and scholar of performing arts and tourism for 34 years, a former Assistant Director, National Troupe of Nigeria, a former Choreographer, National Troupe of Gambia, a former Artistic Director of Abuja National Carnival and one of the most internationally sought-after consultants in the creative sector.

In his home state, Ekiti, the 1997 Ekiti merit award winner (culture sector) and 2013 recipient of Ekiti Cultural Ambassador, has tremendously uplifted the sector since he became the commissioner in December 2019.

Players in the sector said that with his wealth of experience, Bakare is expected to lead his colleagues to influence policies and actions that would impact the sector all over the country.

Other elected executive officers of the forum that are Prince Stan Ifeanyi Ogbuwu (Ebonyi State Commissioner); Vice Chairman, Hon. Nagombe Joseph (Taraba State Commissioner); General Secretary and Hon. Bolanle Olukojun (Kwara State Commissioner) as Treasurer.

Others are Hon. Robert Abubakar Ewa (Cross River state Commissioner); and Public Relations Officer, Hon. Hajiya Rabi Salisu (Kaduna State Commissioner), Financial Secretary.

'Presidential CNG Initiative Aims To Convert 1 Million Cars By 2027'

CHRIS EBONG

The Federal Government has launched an initiative to convert 1 million vehicles to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by 2027.

The announcement came from Program Director of the Presidential CNG Initiative, Engr. Michael Oluwagbemi during his address at the Avalon Policy Dialogue.

Oluwagbemi outlined that while the government will not foot the bill for the conversion of all the vehicles, it has devised a mass conversion incentive program that will be predominantly driven by the private sector. Speaking about the initiative, he revealed that down payments have been made for 20,000 conversion kits, set to be available within the next

month. Furthermore, he stated that plans are underway to establish conversion sites nationwide through affiliated partners.

According to him, the program has already seen significant interest, with 85 conversion sites registered under the affiliate program. "Since December 2023, the initiative has attracted \$50 million in investments, primarily

focused on refuelling and conversion infrastructure," Oluwagbemi stated. "Over 120 applications for refuelling stations are currently underway pending approval at NMPDRA and we are ensuring it goes through every regulatory hurdle. Most of it will deliver additional CNG dispensing capacity at current refuelling price."

On his part, the CEO of

Mezovest, Mr Tosin Thompson, commended the Federal Government on the CNG initiative describing it as timely and strategic for revitalizing the economy. He acknowledged the role that the Presidential CNG Initiative has been playing and added that collaboration with the private sector will be key to the success of the initiative.

Sanwo-Olu Calls For Value Reorientation, Efforts Against Corruption

SEYI TAIWO-OGUNTUASE

Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu, Lagos State Governor, has called for value reorientation and concerted effort against the menace which corruption has become if Nigerians truly desire to make a meaningful progress in the journey towards achieving significant improvement in all spheres of national endeavours.

The Governor, who was represented by Dr. Kadri Obafemi Hamzat, his Deputy, stated this on Thursday while speaking at the opening of a National Anti-Corruption colloquium with the theme; "Strong will in implementing anti-corruption measures in the public sectors" hosted by the House Committee Chairman On Anti-Corruption at Eko Hotel And Suites, Victoria Island, Lagos.

He said that the issue of corruption and its wide spread impact on national development has for long been a subject of national discourse at different fora.

"There is a need for value reorientation and a concerted effort against the menace which corruption has become if we, as a people, truly desire to make a meaningful progress in our journey towards achieving significant improvement in all spheres of our national endeavours particularly the economic and social well-being of our people".

He said in a bid to address the challenge posed by corruption and its resultant negative and devastating impact, a number of measures have been put in place to promote accountability and transparency in the way and manner public resources are managed.

These measures according to him are designed to achieve two broad objectives which are to prevent the occurrence of the act of corruption and also to ensure that whoever commits the offence is made to face the consequence under the law, to serve as deterrence to others.

"The question however is, why has the issue of corruption particularly in the public sector remained worrisome despite the measures that have been put in place including the establishment of anti-corruption institutions. I believe this is the salient question which this colloquium organized by Hon. Kayode Akiolu will seek to unravel and come up with new ideas and strategies for the consideration of relevant organs of government and policy makers."



Abayomi Anifowose, Head of ICT, Nigerian Institute of Management (left); Taiwo Ganiyat Olusesi, Director-General, Nigerian Institute of Management (second left); Lynda Saint-Nwafor, Chief Enterprise Business Officer, MTN Nigeria (middle); Haitham El-Hanafi, Head of Sales, Speechlogix (second right), and Esther Akinnukawe, Chief Human Resources Officer, MTN Nigeria, during the launch of MTN Meetings+ held at MTN Rooftop, Falomo, Lagos, on Thursday. PHOTO: KUNLE AJAYI

Coastal Road: Lagos Residents Call For Govt's Intervention Over Right Of Way

TITILOPE JOSEPH

Property owners and residents of Okun Ajah community have called on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Lagos State Government to urgently look into the Right of Way impasse on the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Road.

The affected property owners and residents are appealing to the President, Gov. Babajide Sanwo Olu and the Lagos State Assembly to investigate the recent marking of buildings and other places for demolition by officials of the Lagos State Government.

Hundreds of the residents

during a peaceful protest at the Lagos State House of Assembly and other places accused officials of the Lagos State Physical and Urban Planning Agency of extending the Right of Way of the proposed road beyond the established delineation.

The demonstrators stressed that the Coastal Road project, initiated in 2006, had its Right-of-Way distinctly defined and gazetted and that the community had respected the coastal road alignment, ensuring no development encroached upon the coastal road boundary.

According to the protesters, it was emphasized that those

who flouted the right-of-way and built on it, creating obstructions, should face consequences to act as a deterrent to others.

Many of the affected property owners secured Certificate of Occupancy and a survey plan, which were reportedly signed by the then Governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the then Surveyor General of Lagos State.

The protesters claimed that the survey delineated the sanctioned and gazetted coastal road alignment along the coastline and that they adhered to plan, who simply identified himself as Fasisi

said, "To our surprise, we discovered that the officials from the Lagos State Physical Planning and Urban Development Agency were marking properties for demolition, even those outside the gazetted coastal road alignment."

The resident pointed out that, "The markings followed the original alignment from Ahmadu Bello Way but began to deviate upon reaching the Okun-Ajah community."

He stressed that, "The purpose of the protest is to bring to the government's attention the unexpected and illegitimate deviation from the original gazetted right-of-way for the coastal road.

VICTORIA OJUGBANA

The Lagos State government has shut down about 12 private schools over illegal operations this year, while five of them were closed down for infraction and breach of the state safety rules.

Lagos State Commissioner, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Jamiu Tolani Alli-Balogun, disclosed this during the 2024 ministerial press briefing he delivered at Alausa, Ikeja, on Thursday, adding that plans are under-way to close more schools that breach the state's education law.

While presenting the

Lagos Shut Down 12 Illegal Private Schools In 2024 – Commissioner

ministry's scorecard in the last one year, Alli-Balogun disclosed that from the onset, the Education Transformation Plan of the Babajide Sanwo-Olu administration and its expected deliverables focused on policy shift and addressed short, medium and long-term challenges to the provision of qualitative education in Lagos State.

He noted that since "2019, the administration of Babajide Sanwo-Olu has rigorously pursued a strategic policy of not leaving any child behind.

"In addition to the existing 1,723 public schools in Lagos State, the ministry executed a plan to expand our capacity to absorb more students and provide access to education across the state."

Among other achievements, Alli-Balogun disclosed that the "state government established nine (9) new schools across the state, especially in highly populated areas, with children of school age and identified remote communities in order to bring education closer to Lagos State

children.

The newly established schools, Alli-Balogun said, presently have a combined pupils/student's population of 4,588 comprising 2,310 females and 2,278 males.

The new schools and their locations are: Methodist Junior Government High School I, Agege; Ibelefun Junior Grammar School II, Ikorodu; Mushade Odugate Government Junior High

II, Ikorodu; Egbin Kingdom Junior Secondary School II, Ikorodu.

But one of the beneficiaries of the judgement, Chief Sunday Ijalana, through his counsel, Mr. Biodun Fasakin, filed a fresh suit at the High Court praying that the judgements of the lower court and that of the Appeal Court be vacated because they were obtained by fraud.

Justice William Akintoroye of a High Court had on June 16, 2021 dismissed the suit over dispute on the ownership of land at Agbeja community in Akure South Local Government Area of Ondo State.

Stir In Court As Judge Attempts Hearing Suit Dismissed By Appeal Court

BOLU-OLU ESHO
AKURE

There was a stir at an Ondo State High Court sitting in Akure when a lawyer, Jimoh Famoritiye, holding the brief of Chief Dapo Agbede, argued that a presiding judge, Justice David Kolawole, could not adjudicate on a suit earlier decid-

ed by the Court of Appeal.

The presiding judge had insisted on proceeding on grounds that the judgment was obtained by fraud as claimed by the claimants.

Meanwhile, Justice William Akintoroye of a High Court had on June 16, 2021 dismissed the suit over dispute on the ownership of a land at Agbeja community in Akure South Local Government

Area of Ondo State.

But the applicants were not satisfied with the judgement and head to the appellate court for redress.

At the Court of Appeal, the applicants filed a notice of withdrawal of appeal.

Consequently, the Appeal Court presided over by Justices Oyeibisi Omoleye, Oziakpono Oho and Y. A Bashir upheld the decision of the lower court.

234 Project: Schools Get Applause As Regional Winners Emerge

BOLU-OLU ESHO

The Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party 2024 Ondo Governorship Primary Committee, Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo has assured the people of Ondo State that he and his team have come to conduct a free, fair and transparent primary for the party.

Addressing newsmen at the venue of the election, the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State said the party will win the gubernatorial election in November in the state.

He said he was the one who conducted the primary of Osun State and PDP eventually won the election, noting that the party will win the November 16, 2024 gubernatorial election in Ondo State because he's the one conducting the primaries.

Ewhrudjakpo philosophicaly said that the sun that shone last year is the same shining this year. So, PDP will achieve the same feat it achieved last year in Osun State.

He said: "We are in Ondo state for the conduct of the PDP gubernatorial primaries, where we have seven aspirants and you know electoral rules require that for a candidate to emerge in any party, primaries should be conducted.

Edo Poll: Ex-APC Mobiliser In Akoko-Edo Dumps APC For PDP

FRANCIS ONOIRIBHOLO
BENIN

Former Chairman of the Committee for Works and Housing in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, Hon Ogini Kingsley Topa, has pitched a tent with the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP to ensure victory for the party in the September 21st 2024 governorship election.

Prior to his defection, Topa, a grassroots mobilizer popularly referred to as 'ward 1 governor' said he left the opposition All Progressives Congress, APC to join forces with the developmental stride of the Governor Godwin Obaseki to ensure he finished well.

Topa who spoke Thursday also noted that Obaseki's recent appointment of Marvellous Omobayo from Akoko-Edo as the deputy governor was a demonstration of his love for the people of Akoko-Edo whom he claimed have been politically marginalized especially in top political offices despite being the largest council in the state.

New

Dana Air Suspension: Directive Similar To Interference In NCAA Autonomy — Aviation Group

OLUSEGUN KOIKI
LAGOS

Aviation Safety Round Table Initiative (ASRTI), a body of professionals in the sector, has described the Wednesday's suspension of Dana Air operations by Mr. Festus Keyamo, the Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, as external interference with the autonomy of the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA).

A statement by Olumide Ohunayo, General Secretary, ASRTI, on behalf of the professionals, said that the pronouncement by Keyamo served to erode the institutional autonomy and jeopardises safety in the aviation sector.

ASRTI reiterated its commitment to the non-negotiable autonomy of the NCAA as stated in Section 4(3) of the Nigeria Civil Aviation Act.

The body expressed its disappointment with Keyamo, maintaining that the directive was contrary to law and process the

minister promised to respect.

The group maintained that the suspension of the entire operations of Dana Airlines directed by the minister ran against these principles and indicated a return to the ugly past that destroyed confidence in the industry.

It insisted that the conduct of financial audits of airlines reside exclusively with the NCAA, adding that the decisions on what were appropriate sanctions for violations also reside exclusively with the apex regulatory body in the sector.

ASRTI called on the ministry to with immediate effect lift the suspension of the entire operation of the airline and also offer an apology to the entire aviation community for the actions from Keyamo.

It also emphasised that the NCAA and the Nigerian Safety Investigation Bureau (NSIB) should continue with their investigations on the affected MD 82 aircraft or fleet and the airline.



Lucky Aiyedatiwa, Governor, Ondo State (left); Vice President Kashim Shettima (second left); Wale Edun, Minister of Finance and Coordinating Minister of the Economy (middle); Climent Buari, representative of Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria (second right), and Abubakar Suleiman, Managing Director/CEO, Sterling Bank Ltd, during the national stakeholders' workshop on economic and financial inclusion in Abuja, on Thursday.

The statement added: "ASRTI also advises the minister to concentrate his efforts on policy issues that positively impact the airline industry."

"ASRTI also demands that other agencies be allowed to carry out their statutory obligations without interference, including the observed interference at the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN). ASRTI also requests that the minister move promptly to

appoint the required boards to enable the smooth and properly guided operations of agencies.

"The ASRTI commends the NCAA for the recent suspension of three non-schedule operators for operational infractions and urges the NCAA to make public, the list of the airlines concerned in the reported infractions for transparency as well as to highlight actions others must avoid to prevent the same outcomes."

A letter from the Ministry of

Aviation and Aerospace Development, signed by Dr. Emmanuel Meribole, dated April 24, 2024, with the reference number: PS/FMA/MA/S.121/Vol.I/99, directed to the Director-General NCAA had on Wednesday, ordered for the immediate suspension of Dana Air pending safety and financial health audit of the airline by the regulatory body.

The letter to the NCAA stated that the recent incidents involving Dana Air had raised se-

rious concerns regarding both the safety and financial viability of their operations.

The letter directed Director-General NCAA to immediately initiate the suspension of the airline's fleet until a comprehensive audit could be conducted, directing that the audit should encompass all aspects of safety protocols, maintenance procedures, and financial health to ensure full compliance with aviation regulations.

Security Operatives Launch Manhunt For 109 Fleeing Inmates Of Suleja Prison

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) said it has begun a manhunt for 109 out of 119 inmates who took advantage of the collapse of the perimeter fence of Medium Security Custodial Centre, Suleja, Niger State, to escape from custody during a downpour on Wednesday night.

The service, in a statement

by its spokesperson, AS Duza, said the perimeter fence of the prison collapsed during heavy rainfall that lasted for several hours on Wednesday night.

The downpour, according to the NCS, wreaked havoc on the Medium Security Custodial Centre, Suleja, as well as surrounding buildings, destroying part of the custodial facility,

including its perimeter fence, giving way to the escape of the 119 inmates of the facility.

However, Duza said while 10 of the inmates have been captured, it has set the machinery in motion to capture the other fleeing inmates.

"The service has immediately activated its recapturing mechanisms, and in conjunc-

tion with sister security agencies have so far recaptured 10 fleeing inmates and taken them into custody, while we are in hot chase to recapture the rest.

"The service is not unmindful of the fact that many of its facilities were built during the colonial era, and that they are old and weak.

"The service is making frantic efforts to see that all ageing facilities give way for modern ones. This is evidenced in the ongoing construction of six number of 3000-capacity ultra-modern custodial centres in all the geo-political zones in Nigeria as well as the ongoing reconstruction and renovation of existing ones.

"The service wishes to assure the public that it is on top of the situation and that they should go about their businesses without fear or hindrance. The public is further enjoined to look out for the fleeing inmates and report any suspicious movement to the nearest security agency," the NCoS said.

BOLU-OLU ESHO
AKURE

Former Deputy Governor of Ondo State, Agboola Ajayi, has been declared the winner of the Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) governorship ticket.

He emerged winner with 264 votes out of the 621 accredited voters at the primary which held at International Culture and Event Centre (The Dome), Alagbaka, Akure on Thursday.

The Chairman of the PDP 2024 Governorship Primary Committee, Lawrence Ewhrudjakpo, who conducted the primary with

Ondo Guber: Ex-Dep Gov Agboola Ajayi Wins PDP Ticket

the seven-man committee explained that two votes were voided.

The venue of the event was thrown into hysterical laughter when the chairman of the seven-man governorship primary committee disclosed that one of the delegates thumb printed columns of all the aspirants.

Another delegate left the ballot paper blank voting for none of the aspirants.

Declaring Agboola Ajayi as the winner of the primary election, Ewhrudjakpo said: "Seven aspirants participated in the exercise,

nobody stood down for each other and by the virtues of the results, Agboola Ajayi having scored the highest number of votes cast in the indirect primary election, is hereby declared the winner of this primary and hereby declared the candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for the November 16, 2024 governorship election in Ondo State and he is hereby returned as the candidate."

In his acceptance speech, Agboola Ajayi said: "Let me give glory to Almighty God for a day like this. The victory goes to all PDP members, and it is a victory for democracy."

"I want to first commend my brother, our leader, the chairman of the committee, for a transparent and very credible process. I'm sure everybody in Ondo State is happy with the result. You can't compare it with the direct or fraudulent primary."

"Let me also commend the national leadership of our party for putting in place a transparent process. That is the difference between the PDP and other political parties in Nigeria."

"To all our party members: no victor, no vanquish. We are all winners, and it is a victory for democracy."

Agboola Ajayi would contest in the November 16, 2024 gubernatorial election in Ondo State as the standard bearer of PDP.

Ajayi was the deputy of the late Governor Oluwarotimi Akeredolu in his first term but fell out with Akeredolu before the end of the tenure.

He therefore defected to PDP but was denied of the party's ticket by Eyitayo Jegede who won the gover-

norship ticket.

Agboola Ajayi subsequently defected to Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) where he was offered the governorship ticket of the party.

He, however, lost the governorship election before he later returned to PDP.

Meanwhile, Kolade Akinjo, a former member of the House of Representatives, came second with 157 votes.

Other aspirants scores are as follows: Akingboye Bamikole, 24; Akinwumi Harrison, 64; Arebuwa Tubosun, 02; Ebiseni Olusola, 99, and John Ola-Mafo, 09.



Former Senate Spokesman, Ayogu Eze, has passed on.

He was aged 65.

The senator, who represented Enugu North Senatorial Zone, died on Thursday at an Abuja hospital after suffering from an

Former Senate Spokesman, Ayogu Eze, Passes On

undisclosed illness.

For the eight years he spent in the Senate, Eze was a member of the Constitution Drafting and Amendment Committee that made

some novel changes to Nigeria's 1999 constitution.

After his re-election to the Senate in 2011, he was appointed chairman, Senate Committee on Works.

Eze also served as a member of committees on Police Affairs, National Planning, Marine Transport and Federal Character & Inter-Government Affairs.

Senator Ayogu Eze, born November 23, 1958, was elected senator for the Enugu North Senatorial District of Enugu State, taking office on June 5, 2007.

OLUSEGUN KOIKI
LAGOS

For the second time in 2024, fire incident disrupted flight services at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport (MMIA), Lagos.

The latest one occurred on Thursday at 05:29a.m and gutted the E-Wing of the airport.

The incident led to the diversion of flights from

Fire Razes Part Of Lagos Airport Old Terminal As FAAN Diverts Flights

the wing of the airport to another wing.

It was gathered that a smoke was detected at E54 bridge of the terminal.

The old terminal has consistently experienced a series of fire disasters, which necessitated Mr. Festus Keyamo, the Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, to shut it

down last year September before it was reopened about a month later.

A statement by Mrs. Obiageli Orah, the Director, Public Affairs and Consumer Protection, FAAN, confirmed the fire incident.

Orah stated that officials of the Airport Rescue and Firefighting Services (ARFFS), a department in

the agency, were swiftly mobilised to contain the fire, which had cut off power supply at the section of the old international terminal.

Orah said: "At 05:29hrs, smoke was detected billowing from the E54 Bridge, leading electrical engineers to immediately cut off power to the entire E

Wing.

"The Airport Rescue and Firefighting Services (ARFFS) team was quick to respond, arriving at the scene by 05:30hrs.

"Initial suspicions point to sparks from an electrical unit as the cause, but a thorough investigation is ongoing to ascertain the cause of the fire."

Orah explained that the incident, which had escalated into a fire, was brought under control by 06:41hrs, adding that the smoke was eventually ventilated.

She also stated that in the meantime, all flight operations in the terminal were diverted to the D-Wing.

Any Govt That Takes Us Away From Where Buhari Kept Us Is Supported — Kukah

JOY ANIGBOGU
LAGOS

Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese and founder, Kukah Centre, Matthew Hassan Kukah, has said that he'll support any government that can take Nigeria far away from where former President Muhammad Buhari has taken it to.

Kukah spoke on Arise TV on Thursday while speaking on the state of the nation with special reference to the conference taking place in Abuja on Thursday, organised by Kukah Centre and titled, 'Promoting National Integration and Unity'.

He said, "If you ask me if I believe that this government can achieve what it wants to achieve, my answer is yes. But people should take up the responsibility to be vigilant, keep the government on its feet. I think you can also see that some of the things that we have agitated for, the government has shown a bit of responsibility.

"For me, any government that is prepared to take us a little bit away from where former President Buhari left us, I'll be more than happy to support that process. However, I won't issue any government a blank cheque."

Speaking about the signifi-

cance of the conference, he said, "We're not going to have a one off event. We've established a broad based programme of interaction. A lot of people are on our mailing list, institutions, individuals, etcetera. What we're going to do on the issue of security, we've tried our best to engage the government and to provide alternatives in terms of how we see things. Every meeting that we have, it is important to feed the media and the civil society organisations, the faith based communities etcetera. It's the advantage that we have over and above other events."

On the fact that most of the things that Buhari didn't do right are still on ground and things haven't improved, he said, "No wound heals in a day. The map reading in business is not what the president does. My main concern is that contrary to the whole conversation, Nigerians think that one day they'll find one messiah who will come out. I'll say that we can't have a messiah in Nigeria because if you have a messiah, the Christians will recognise him, the Muslims won't recognise him. If some sections of Muslims are expecting a messiah, when he appears, the Christians won't recognise him. We're not looking for a messiah



Diran Fawibe, Chairman, International Energy Services (left); Audery Joe-Ezigbo, Deputy Managing Director, Falcon Corporation Ltd (middle), and Kayode Ekundayo, Publisher, Energy Times Newspaper, during the presentation of the Amazon of Nigeria Gas Industry to Joe-Ezigbo at the Energy Times Awards held in Lagos, recently.

and there are no messiahs anywhere. The media in Nigeria is doing a very good job and the question is, how do we continue to hold the feet of those who are in power to the fire? I'm not an opposition politician but I'm also opposed to things that I see the government is not doing right. So, if you talk about healing, quite a

lot is taking place. I'm not talking about relations with the government. I think that despite all the challenges and the difficulties, we have a lot of bright spots here and there. There's evidence that we're in the right direction. Where the government is not doing well, it's important that we know how to make noise but I don't think we

can assume that nothing is happening, and that nothing is changing. A lot of things are changing."

He gave an example of how about four passengers who were on business class vacated their seats for him, when he actually had an economy class ticket on an Abuja bound flight from Sokoto.

He noted that the efforts some people are making are being appreciated.

"Unlike you, one of the things that I market best as a priest is hope and that is where we differ. So, no matter how difficult things may be, I have a reason to make people know that tomorrow will be better," Kukah added.

The leaders of 18 nations whose nationals remain captive in the besieged Gaza Strip demanded their immediate release Thursday and said it would lead to what they called a "credible end of hostilities."

A statement from the leaders of Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Thailand, the UK and the U.S. said the fate of the hostages and Gaza's civilians, "who are protected under international law, is of international concern.

"We emphasize that the deal on the table to release the hostages would bring an immediate and prolonged ceasefire in Gaza, that would facilitate a

Leaders Of 18 Nations Urge Hamas To Release Hostages

surge of additional necessary humanitarian assistance to be delivered throughout Gaza, and lead to the credible end of hostilities," they said.

"Gazans would be able to return to their homes and their lands with preparations beforehand to ensure shelter and humanitarian provisions. We strongly support the ongoing mediation efforts in order to bring our people home," they added.

About 130 hostages held by Hamas remain in captivity in Gaza following an Oct. 7 cross-border attack on Israel that killed over 1,200 people. Roughly 250 hostages were taken to the coastal enclave that

day. Negotiations to secure their release led to more than 100 being freed in November during a short-lived temporary truce.

Hamas is demanding a permanent end to Israel's ongoing offensive against Gaza in return for any hostage-prisoner deal with Tel Aviv.

Qatar and Egypt-mediated negotiations to secure a ceasefire in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages are ongoing. The latest proposal put forward to Hamas would include a six-week ceasefire in return for the release of 40 hostages.

The US State Department accused Hamas on Monday of having "changed their de-

mands" during talks, alleging that it "certainly does seem like Hamas is more interested in full-scale regional war."

But a senior Biden administration official who discussed Thursday's joint statement with reporters on condition of anonymity said that while Hamas' initial response to the proposal was "totally non-constructive," the Palestinian group later signaled readiness to resume talks based on the plan.

The deal "meets nearly all of the demands that Hamas has had, including key elements," said the official.

"There's a very forward-leaning deal on the table. I think it's

the road map to the end of the crisis, and all Hamas needs to do is release this vulnerable category of hostages and we'd be moving forward," he said, referring to women, wounded, elderly and sick hostages.

"If there are adjustments here and there that need to be made, of course, we're very much open to that, and we would support that because we want to bring these people home. And ultimately, this is a negotiation," the official added.

The six-week ceasefire is being framed as a path to a longer second phase that would establish a permanent truce. The US, Qatar and Egypt would serve as

guarantors.

More than six months into the Israeli onslaught, over 34,000 people have been killed in Gaza, including over 14,000 children, according to Gaza health officials. Vast swathes of Gaza now lay in ruins, pushing 85% of the enclave's population into internal displacement amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine, according to the UN.

Israel is accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling from the UN's top court in January said it is "plausible" that Israel is committing genocide. It ordered Tel Aviv to halt such acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

CONTINUED FROM P1

support it has received from his administration.

Governor Fubara spoke when he hosted on a courtesy visit, the Chief of Naval Staff and his delegation of top officers of Navy High Command at Government House in Port Harcourt on Thursday.

The Rivers State governor in a statement signed by his Chief Press Secretary, Nelson Chukwudi, reiterated that Nigeria is facing myriad of crises, including economic challenges, rising insecurity and criminal activities that threaten the national economy, which should not be overlooked.

He said, "We are working together, we will give you all the support to make sure that you deliver on your mandate.

"And what is the mandate? You were appointed at a time when our country is facing a lot of crises, and your duty, among others, include to reduce, if it cannot be eliminated completely, the criminalities perpetrated on the waterways; oil theft and others.

"And I am happy that they

Fubara To CNS: Fulfill Your Mandate, End Oil Theft, Waterways Crimes

are positive and commendable records of achievement so far, in the course of your tenure."

Governor Fubara said the good news of reduced level of oil theft in Rivers State is evidence of the many positive things that are happening in the state beyond the much hyped negativity, and assured that such positive achievements will be sustained.

"The success of the Nigerian Navy in our state, in the areas of curbing oil theft, is because the state government has given you all the necessary support.

"We have collaborated with the command here. We supported them morally, and with all the necessary logistics.

"We have also maintained good relationships with the communities to make sure that whatever it is that is required for these operations to be successful were granted. I am happy to be associated with these very laudable achievements.

"So, I have to say that I am hap-

py that the Chief of Naval Staff, today, is commending the success of the exercise. He is commending the doggedness of the men in fighting oil theft, not just in the Niger Delta, but particularly in our state.

"I want to assure you that we will continue to give them the support, and discourage any act that would be a sabotage to the economy of our state."

Governor Fubara further stated that Rivers State was not named in error; but because there are several water channels that can boost the operations of the Navy. This is why we are requesting that the Nigerian Navy move all its bases to the state.

"It was not a mistake they called it Rivers State. It is surrounded with all forms of rivers. You want the Atlantic region, you can get it here. You want those small creeks, you can also get it here. Maybe, if you want an Island, you can also find it here.

"So, it is proper if we work

with you and you have all that is required within this geographic region, to have all your bases relocated to Rivers State," he said.

Speaking further, Fubara said, "We must continue to give you the necessary support to make sure that you succeed. I am happy to also say that, as the governor of the state by the special grace of God, we are still here, not minding the dramas here and there. We will not let our people down in ensuring that we protect their interest.

"We will support the genuine course of governance; the protection of lives and provision of basic amenities. And these can only be achieved when there is a peaceful environment.

"And the peaceful environment can only come when there is a collaboration with security agencies to prevent crimes, and protect lives and property of residents."

In his address, the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Em-

manuel Ikechukwu Ogalla, noted that the Nigerian Navy and Rivers State are like conjoined twins who cannot do without each other.

Ogalla stated that the Navy still requires collaboration on various aspects of their activities ranging from training, operations, logistics, adding that Rivers State is key to their performance.

"My purpose of coming here today are three fold. The first is to inform His Excellency that on Saturday we are graduating a set of former civilians who have been trained at our Basic Training School, Onne, and are graduating to join the ranks of the Nigerian Navy as ratings in order to beef up our strength.

"The second reason is to first appreciate the governor and the entire Rivers State government for the schools they donated to us: the Ambassador Nne Krukru Model Secondary School at Eleme in Eleme Local Government Area, and the Model Secondary

School, Egbelu in Oyigbo Local Government Area."

Vice Admiral Ogalla stated further: "We also want to use this opportunity to inform His Excellency that following that donation, and based on our strategic plan of moving our facilities to areas where we have enough space to be able to carry out our duties, we have renovated the school at Eleme.

"We are happy to report, today, that the erstwhile location of headquarters of Naval Training Command, Lagos, is moving to that particular school location in Eleme, tomorrow."

Speaking on the operational successes recorded thus far, he said that propelled by the charge given to them by President Bola Tinubu, the Nigerian Navy, under his watch, has impounded 14 vessels caught to be conveying stolen crude oil and several other individuals arrested, adding that investigations into their culpability were ongoing.

Metro

FEDPOLY Ilaro: Late Abimbola's Father Dismisses Report, Says Daughter Had No Reason For An Abortion

• NANS, Students Demand Probe, Allege Negligence By Clinic Staff

Mr. Ajayi Oluseye Simon, father of the 29-year-old late Ajayi Abimbola Adejoke, a year one Higher National Diploma (HND) student of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro who slumped and died, on Thursday, dismissed the medical report issued by the Polytechnic as untrue.

The deceased student, Ajayi Abimbola Adejoke, a 100-level Higher National Diploma (HND) student of Leisure and Tourism, allegedly died at the clinic of the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro due to negligence on the part of clinic staff.

However, a medical report signed by Dr. Babatunde Jesusina, the Director of Medical Services at the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro stated that the deceased female student had committed an abortion and was pale at the time her colleagues assisted by security men rushed her to the Polytechnic medical facilities for help.

My Daughter Had No Abortion - Father

In his reaction to the abortion theory by the Polytechnic management, the father of the deceased 29-year-old student, Mr. Ajayi Oluseye Simon, who sobs all through a telephone chat with Daily Independent from his Abeokuta home said there was no justification for Abimbola to have committed or resorted to an abortion because her fiancée had his approval for marriage.

"Are you saying a 29-year-old lady is not ripe for marriage? I gave approval to their relationship and



Abimbola

the husband to be is a young man. I know him very well and most times he visits my home in Abeokuta.

"The Medical Director's report of abortion was fake and nonsense. My daughter was hail and hearty on the day of the practical as attested to by her colleagues.

"She suddenly developed abdominal pains in the kitchen during the practical class and was promptly attended to and rushed to the Polytechnic clinic.

They neglected her for a long time after which they rushed her to Ore-Ofa Hospital, also in Ilaro, where she later died.

Mr Ajayi disclosed that when the news of Abimbola's

ill-health got to him, he called her and she acknowledged that she was getting a little relief at the health facility she was moved to, saying further communication became impossible until her fiancée announced her untimely death.

"The abortion report was a cock and bull story by the Polytechnic authority to cover up for their inefficiency and unprofessional conducts that led to the death of my daughter.

"Abimbola was not a wayward child. She was diligent and ripe enough to get married at age 29. They have inflicted lifetime pains on my family. This is painful. The school clinic should explain.

"Abimbola had no reason to resort to an abortion. What for at 29 with a committed fiancée," Mr Ajayi added sobbing.

NANS, SUG FEDPOLY Ilaro, Others Kick

However, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) joined by the entire student body of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Ogun State have expressed concerns over the alleged negligence and questionable circumstances that led to the death of a female student of the institution.

The students alleged Abimbola died due to negligence on the part of the clinic staff.

NSCDC, Army Strategise On Enhanced Security In Anambra

CHUKWUJEKWU ILOZUE
AWKA

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, (NSCDC) Anambra State Command has met with the Nigerian Army to strategise on how to improve security in Anambra State.

This is coming on the heels of reports of cult killings in Awka, Anambra State capital, and kidnappings by herdsmen in Ukwulu-Nawgu, Nawgu-Isuaniocha and Nawgu-Enugu-Agidi Roads in Dunukofia Local Government Area, which is also within the state capital territory.

The Public Relations Officer of NSCDC, Anambra State Command, Mr. Okadigbo Edwin revealed the partnership in a press statement made available to the media in Awka.

Okadigbo said the resolve was made during a courtesy call by the state commandant of the corps, Mr Olatunde Maku to the Commander, 302 Artillery Regiment of Nigerian Army, Onitsha, Anambra State, Col. M. B. Abubakar.

Maku who sought the collaboration of the army to tackle the insecurity in Anambra said: "Most of the confidence we have as NSCDC personnel is as a result of the Nigerian Army. "You remember when I resumed my tour of duty, I saw the existing relationship between all security agencies and I keyed into it.

"I am proud to say that you have not disappointed me in executing our core mandate in the protection of Critical National, State and Local Government Assets and infrastructure. We have sought for your synergy and I am happy to say, you have without hesitation availed us. Thank you for always partnering with us.

NPAN Commiserates With Ray Ekpu Over Wife's Death

The Newspapers Proprietors's Association Of Nigeria (NPAN) has condoled with renowned journalist and columnist, Mr Ray Ekpu over the death of his wife, Uyai Ray Ekpu.

NPAN in a statement dated April 25, 2024, signed by its President, Mr Kabiru Yusuf stated that the passage has created a deep void in the nation's socio-development landscape.

The former Editor in Chief/Chief Executive Officer of Newswatch, Mr Ekpu, had announced the passing of his wife, Uyai Ray Ekpu, on Wednesday, stating that she passed after a brief illness at age 73.

While condoling with the Ekpu's family, NPAN noted that the late Mrs

• Says She Left Enviale Legacies

Ekpu left an enviable legacies as a thorough professional.

The statement reads in parts: "It is with great shock that we received the news yesterday, of the death of our sister, friend and your better half, Mrs Uyai Ray Ekpu. She was aged 73.

"A quintessential management and training specialist and seasoned administrator, her passage has created a deep void in the nation's socio-development landscape.

"Though she is no more, we are consoled by the enviable legacies she left as a thorough profession-

al, the value she held as a bridge builder and her exemplary disposition for community service. Mrs Uyai Ray Ekpu, was a senior staff of the Centre for Management Development (CMD) and retired in 201 sa na Acting Director, Management Education and Training Department. On behalf of the Executive Council of our esteemed Association, we commiserate with you and your entire family.

"We pray that the Almighty God, will console and uphold each and everyone of you Once again, our condolences."

KAZEEM AWOJODU
IBADAN

The Rector of The Oke-Ogun Polytechnic, Saki (TOPS), Dr. Sikiru Adetona Ajibola has urged students of the institution to steer clear of cultism, hooliganism and other anti social vices saying that the institution has zero tolerance for any form of anti-social behavior

The Rector stated this on Wednesday in his welcome address during the matriculation ceremony of 5, 849 new students of the Polytechnic for the 2023/2024 academic session held at new 500 capacity building of the Institution.

In a statement made available to newsmen by the Institution's Public Relations Officer (PRO) Adebayo Samson Abiodun the Rector, Dr. Ajibola admonished the newly admitted students to desist from any anti-social behaviours capable of disrupting the smooth running of the Polytechnic.

He warned that the management will

Shun Cultism, Hooliganism, Other Vices, Rector Urges Students

• As The Oke-Ogun Poly matriculates 5,849

not hesitate to sanction anyone found culpable of any act of misconduct as well as other forms of social menace.

The Rector who assured parents and guardians that their children/wards are in safe hands hinted that the TOPS is on the path of becoming a world-class institution as various mechanisms have been put in place to attain the feat.

Dr. Ajibola, while welcoming the students to the institution, noted that the matriculation marks a special milestone as new faces and new blood are injected into the Polytechnics, Universities and Colleges of Education.

Hesaid, "I am excited to welcome you to our great Polytechnic, where we enforce academic excellence with godliness and where we enforce our core values."

"TOPS is on the path of becoming a world-class institution and various mechanisms have been put in place to attain this feat. We assure you all the Parents and Guardians that your children/wards are in safe hands."

"Presently, TOPS have all its programmes fully accredited by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). At this Matriculation Ceremony today, we will be matriculating Students into the accredited 6 Schools of TOPS and the schools are: School of Science; School of Financial Management Studies; School of Environmental Studies; School of Engineering; School of Agricultural and Natural Resources and School of Business and Communication."

Ogbomoso Shooting: Police Detain Officers Involved, Commence Investigations

RAJI ADEBAYO

The Oyo State Police Command has disclosed that all the operatives including Insp. Rasheed Saheed involved in the incident of shooting in Ogbomoso that resulted in the death of one person, named Iyanda Damilola are currently under detention at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Iyaganku.

This disclosure was made by the Commissioner of Police, Oyo State Command, CP Adebola Hamzat in statement made available to journalists by State Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Osifeso Adewale on Thursday.

According to the statement, "The Oyo State Police Command wishes to clear the air about the unfortunate shooting incident that occurred on Monday 22/4/2024 at about 0130hrs around a popular Night Club along, "Under G" Area, Owode-Ogbomoso resulting to demise of Iyanda Damilola, 'm'.

"Investigation report reveals that during the early hours of the same date and time, a distress call was received by Operatives of the Command's Monitoring Unit stationed within Ogbomoso through the Director of a popular Night Club within the axis, requesting for immediate intervention and protection from rampaging suspected student cultists who were at the time harassing guests and destroying club property.

One Feared Dead, Many Reportedly Wounded As Hoodlums Clash With Security Operatives In Anambra Market

PERCY ONYEJEKWE
NNEWI

It was reportedly bloodbath in Nnobi market, Anambra State on Wednesday evening when hoodlums believed to be cultist cum drug peddlers attacked security operatives said to be on routine duty in the town.

It was gathered that about 5.30 pm Wednesday evening, some security operatives said to be on duty stopped at the Meat Section (Ogbo anu) Nnobi Market situated along Awka-Etiti Road, where they allegedly arrested one of the hoodlums

Irrked by the arrest which was said to have been done without causing fear and panic, some of the hoodlums began shooting into the air while another walked boldly with a broken bottle to one of the vehicles in which were sitted some of the security operatives and jabbed the face of one of them with the broken bottle.

The security operatives were said to have neutralized the bold, fearless hoodlum while the others allegedly engaged them in gun battle, shooting sporadically everywhere.

Sources said some persons including a butcher, a woman fish dealer, a garri seller among other unidentified persons were allegedly caught by stray bullet while the incident, which caused stampede in the market, lasted.

Our View

Russian-Ukraine War: Time For A Truce

After months of tensions and arms build-up along its borders, Russia finally invaded Ukraine on 24th February, 2022. Airstrikes and missiles bombarded Ukrainian cities, followed by ground invasion from the Russian and Belarusian territories.

PDP's Focus At NEC Meeting Was Reconciliation – Ologunagba

Debo Ologunagba is the National Publicity Secretary of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). In this interview, he talks about the 98th National Executive Committee (NEC) of the party, why the party's major focus is reconciliation, among other issues. JOY ANIGBOGU brings the excerpts:

People hoped that during that NEC meeting the focus would be on the party addressing its own affairs, disciplinary issues within the party, and those people who left the party were the ones talking about reconciliation. Again the communique that you read dealt more on the All Progressives Congress (APC), and the APC has come out to say that your party is shambolic, how do you explain the outcome of that NEC meeting?

People have their rights and opinions about what they feel about it. But what we need to establish is for us to have a political party or institution in any environment, in any country there must be peace. So, PDP cannot operate in isolation of the environment in which we are as a country. So, how would it be if the PDP didn't talk about the general insecurity in the nation, an economy that is in shambles? If APC can nose around and say that PDP should talk about itself and not about the economy, it means what we're describing APC to be is now being confirmed. A party that doesn't have the interest of the people at heart. What happened at the NEC of the PDP is a confirmation of the capacity of this party in a very trying moment to take itself up and begin the process of reconciliation. In any human endeavour and particularly in a political party, where you have competing interests, competing ideas, competing confederations, and concentration of interests and ideas, it means that if there is any issue there is need to reconcile. Don't forget there was the first NEC meeting after the elections. What is expected of any party, like the PDP that is a truly democratic party in this country, if you look at its affairs and consider these issues, regarding what happened at the last elections even though we have our reservation about the outcome of the election. We're now here and what we did at that meeting was to focus more on those issues that we had, particularly the ones about the party and the challenges of the party. People can decide not to look at the communique and rather pretend the party didn't discuss its own affairs. Recall in my briefing yesterday we mentioned that the reconciliation and the disciplinary committee is being reconstituted because we have outstanding committees in these two committees. Some members of the party have left, some are dead and so it needs to be reconstituted. NEC in its wisdom, decided to wade in the PDP tradition. In addition to that, we looked at our constitution and we said, yes because we're dynamic and a party that is constantly revolving and improving its processes, we extended the mandate of the constitution review and amendment committee, headed by former Governor Emmanuel Udom of Akwa Ibom



Ologunagba

State to receive new amendment proposals and reviews. We said go back to the drawing board, call in for more memoranda, let people come in and bring in their own suggestions so that we can reform our party. That was what we did. If the APC in an attempt to cover up and find the issue to divert attention, is its business. Whether or not they want to admit it or talk about PDP talking about the economy, I don't know what they expect us to talk about. If we don't talk about the economy, if we don't talk about the insecurity, if we don't talk about ill advised policies causing excruciating pains to Nigerians. This was what the NEC of PDP focused on and of course all the organs of the party are in union recognizing that once we have unity we would begin to

perform the role of opposition, and of course it will be good for the country.

You talked about the last election and what worked against the PDP, some of those factors were within the room in that NEC election, did you have the opportunity to address that because one of the outcomes that a lot of people were expecting was some of measure in terms of disciplinary action against those who worked against your party, those who went against the constitution of the party, was that discussed and what was the outcome of that?

We did. Again you need to follow up the process. The NEC of the party somehow discussed the details of what happened a night before we had a caucus of the party. There was a detailed discussion on that. Those conversations that brought about the recommendations and the agenda proposal to the NEC. Those issues were discussed. Of course we didn't discuss the issue of who did what and who didn't do what at the NEC meeting. What we did was to set the apparatus for that. You won't do it in such a way that you have about 500 people coming into the NEC to discuss that, which is why we set up the reconciliation committee. PDP is a party of process. PDP is a party of programme, of constitution. We tried to meticulously follow those processes because

we need to look at divergent views in the issue. The party is composed of many interest groups, individuals with different backgrounds, must have contests of ideas and interest at some points. We cannot go into NEC to start talking about that because we have not even received the reports of the committees. The moment we have those reports there will be further discussions and necessary steps will be taken in the right direction. It's not because we just want to punish people but because we must hold people accountable. Secondly, we must begin to build the party and ensure that we have processes that are clear, and members of the party can understand it and know that it is in the interest of the party and the individuals to ensure that they abide by the principles in line with the constitutional provisions and policies of the party. We did discuss and when the reports are received they will be sent to the appropriate committees. Anti-party was done at the national level, there were different issues at the state level. We need the state chapters to bring up the matters to the committees. Again the attendance at the meeting on Thursday suggests that this party is organic, it is truly a representation of Nigeria. You saw the challenge of the party being put forward and the fact. There were speculations of confusion to the disappointment of those who thought it would be so. They couldn't see the issues that we raised in respect of the economy, about the country. They were looking at our own processes of reform of integration of unity and ensuring that the resilience and the ability of the PDP to come together in this trying time to continue to play its role in the interest of the Nigerian people.

Wike has held all of you at the jugular. You cannot move forward if you don't address the past. Is your party afraid of Wike?

I don't agree with your characterization of the party being afraid of an individual. PDP is bigger than individuals. It is an institution and it is 25 years old.

Can you prove that the PDP is bigger than Wike?

I just told you that I disagree with your characterization. I need to tell you what happened during the process. Number one, it is on record that in this party we have presidents, vice presidents and they have led this party before now, but to come and say that an individual is bigger than the party wouldn't be completely correct and I'm sure you will agree with me on that. This party tries to work on processes and tries to ensure that the principle of democracy is in all the processes. Reconciliation is not a one day affair.

PDP is bigger than individuals. It is an institution and it is 25 years old

11

Quote Of The Day

"The whole land of Rivers State stands in affirmation that we won the election fairly and deserve to serve out our full tenure. There is not going to be anything that will cut short the popular mandate that you all gave to this administration."

– Governor Siminalayi Fubara of Rivers State.

Politics

Governor Soludo: Jolly Good Friend Of The Press

CHRISTIAN ABURIME

The recent claims by the Anambra State Chairman of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Dr. Odogwu Emeka Odogwu, that Anambra State Governor, Prof. Chukwuma Charles Soludo, CFR, is an “enemy of journalists” could best be described as an unfortunate accusation, completely far from the truth.

Indeed, it is an unfair accusation that casts a shadow over Governor Soludo’s respectful relationship with the press, and it also fails to recognise the governor’s little but notable gestures in the past. While Dr. Odogwu’s concerns deserve a hearing, a closer look reveals a governor dedicated to general progress, not alienating journalists.

It would be recalled that Governor Soludo inherited a complex situation when he assumed office two years ago. Aside from confronting multifarious challenges of insecurity, economic straits, infrastructure deficit and so on, state resources have also been relatively lean and needed stringent, prudent management. Of course, this led to the rationalisation of the National Light newspaper, which unavoidably impacted its staff, but reflected a broader effort to streamline government operations. Thus, a focus on streamlining should not be misconstrued as an emasculation of the press.

By the way, it is unfair to judge Governor Soludo’s commitment to the fourth estate of the realm based solely on his nascent two-year tenure. Transforming a state is an arduous undertaking that demands a stepwise approach and prioritization, as indicated



Soludo

above.

The governor has initiated groundbreaking policies like free education, free antenatal care, construction of over 450 kilometers of roads, enhanced security, urban renewal, employment of 5,000 teachers with more 3,000 to be employed soon, 5,000 youth empowerment grants, employment of 1,000 doctors/nurses and other medical personnel among several other developmental efforts.

These are no small feats for a young administration under the weight of competing demands.

Meanwhile, Dr. Odogwu highlights the positive treatment journalists receive in other states. While such initiatives are commendable, the comparison game is unnecessary. Governor Soludo’s priorities are clear: rapid development across the state. Of course, even as the focus towards long-term, state-wide development goals is more compelling, the Soludo administration would never ignore journalists in the state. That is why, last Christmas, his administration distributed rice palliatives to journalists as

a gesture of support during challenging times when food inflation shot through the roof.

This action, no matter how small, clearly demonstrated the governor’s goodwill and concern for journalists’ welfare. How can a leader who extended such a gesture be branded an adversary? Responsible governance is a delicate balance of addressing myriad needs with finite resources.

A responsible leader systematically tackles problems, not ruling by impulse or sentiment. So, the accusation that Gover-

nor Soludo prefers his TV station over mainstream media is also misplaced. A leader’s use of communication channels to disseminate his vision and development strides does not preclude collaboration with traditional outlets. If anything, journalists should embrace such initiatives as expanded avenues to share the government’s good works with the public.

While Dr. Odogwu’s call for training, appointments and infrastructure for journalists are understandable and valid, it is pointless to turn entreaties into impatient vilifications. As the Soludo administration is still evolving, his track record demonstrates a willingness to prioritize critical needs as circumstances permit.

Addressing the NUJ’s needs can certainly be part of the plan moving forward. Vilifying the governor as an “enemy” is counterproductive and will only strain the bridges he has built. Patience is most advised.

In all, Governor Soludo understands that a vibrant, well-equipped press serves democracy better. Rather than trade accusations, the state NUJ should explore constructive dialogue to convey their grievances and needs respectfully.

A mature leader like Governor Soludo will undoubtedly lend an ear to reasonable requests that uplift the state’s civic institutions as partners in progress. A forward-thinking governor committed to holistic progress can hardly be called an “enemy.” The fourth estate would be wise to embrace him as an ally.

By working together, the Governor and the NUJ can ensure a thriving media landscape alongside a flourishing Anambra State.

Elevating Nigeria's Image: Empowering PR Professionals For Better Future

EZENWA OPARA

As public relations professionals converge at Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria for the 2024 Nigeria Public Relations Week and the 61st Annual General Meeting of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, it's imperative to reflect on the pivotal role of Public Relations (PR) professionals in shaping Nigeria's image and narrative both domestically and internationally.

The journey of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) since its conception in 1963 by the likes of Dr. Sam Epelle, Alex Nwokedi, Aduke Alakija, Theo Awobogu, Kunle Ojora, Wilton High and Dan Agbakova. Underscores the recognition of the need for a structured approach to information management. The attainment of chartered status in 1990 further solidified the importance of PR in the Nigerian context. However, despite these strides, there remains a pressing need to empower PR professionals to take the lead in information gathering and dissemination.

In a globalized world where perception often shapes reality, effective PR becomes not just a luxury but a strategic necessity for nations seeking to build positive reputations and foster understanding. Nigeria, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse population, and burgeoning economy, stands to gain significantly from a well-managed PR strategy.

At the heart of this strategy lies the expertise of PR professionals. These individuals possess the skills, knowledge, and ethical framework necessary to pull through the complexities of modern communication landscapes. By entrusting them with the responsibility of information management, Nigeria can guarantee that its narrative is crafted with accuracy, integrity, and relevance.

Moreover, allowing PR professionals to spearhead information management is not just about promoting a favorable image; it's also about fostering transparency, accountability, and trust. In a society where misinformation

and disinformation abound, the role of credible communicators becomes all the more critical. By adhering to professional standards and best practices, PR professionals can help combat falsehoods and build credibility both at home and abroad.

As Nigeria strives to position itself as a global player on the economic, political, and cultural fronts, the need for effective PR becomes increasingly evident. The 2024 Nigeria Public Relations Week and the 61st Annual General Meeting serve as timely platforms to reaffirm this commitment and chart a course towards a future where PR professionals play a central role in shaping Nigeria's narrative and enhancing its image on the world stage.

Ezenwa Opara is Deputy Chair, Public Image, Rotary International, District 9110, a member Of Nigeria Institute of Public Relations and an accredited Practitioner/Member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom. He writes from Lagos.



Ezenwa

Our View

VISION

To be Nigeria's First Truly Independent National Quality Newspaper

OUR MISSION

To produce a quality, vibrant and viable newspaper that will inform and form the nation's present and aspiring political, business, economic and cultural leadership; challenge and inspire the nation's journalists to advance and defend the public good; and deliver superior value to all stakeholders.

EDITORIAL POLICY

We shall be independent on all matters, but shall never be neutral on any matter, especially those concerning the well-being of Nigerians.

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Russian-Ukraine War: Time For A Truce

After months of tensions and arms build-up along its borders, Russia finally invaded Ukraine on 24th February, 2022. Airstrikes and missiles bombarded Ukrainian cities, followed by ground invasion from the Russian and Belarusian territories.

The invasion, the first of such in the 21st century, provoked anger and condemnation across the globe, especially in Europe and North America. At the emergency session of the United Nations on 2nd March, 2022, 141 out of the 193 member nations voted in favour of the resolution condemning Russia, 35 abstained while five voted against it. The United Nations "deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine". It demanded Russia "immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine" and "completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces".

At the beginning of the tensions in 2014, Russia had annexed Crimea while the separatists it backed seized part of the Donbas region, sparking a war between Ukrainian armed forces and the Russian-backed separatists.

The on-going war has led to

catastrophic deaths and destruction in Ukraine and resulted in the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The conflict has led to food and energy crises with attendant rise in cost of living all over the world.

There is the strong view, especially among the Western states, that an authoritarian state like Russia harbours mortal fear for the democracy wind blowing across its borders with the potential of rocking the political boat within its territory. The plausible cause of the invasion would seem to prevent Ukraine from joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Russia had for years railed against the expansion of the Western military alliance to Eastern Europe and station of its weapons close to its borders. In the months before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia specifically demanded that NATO revert to its 1997 borders in Europe, remove its military infrastructure from the Central Europe and the Baltic as well as guarantee that Ukraine would never be admitted into the organisation. The US-led NATO largely rejected the demands, restating its open-door policy. It noted that Ukraine would not in

the immediate future be admitted into the alliance.

However, two years after the invasion, the war has raged on ferociously, with western nations supplying Ukraine with high-grade weapons. While we recognise the rights of every sovereign nation to belong to any association of its choosing, the security concerns of Moscow should not be completely ignored. The recent admission of Finland and Sweden into NATO, especially the former, which shares a massive border with Russia, may further escalate military tensions with potential for debilitating consequences across Europe and the world.

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and dissolution of the rival Warsaw Pact, the continued existence of NATO and its assimilation of former members of the Soviet Union would naturally alarm Russia and raise eyebrows about the real motives of the US-led NATO. For instance, why is NATO expanding only to the borders of Russia? Why is the military alliance only interested in membership of countries bordering Russia? Why does NATO still exist as a military alliance after the end of the Cold War? Can NATO ex-

plain away the charge that it is using the Russia-Ukraine war to test the efficacy of its high-tech weapons, just like Russia would also stand accused? Why does the alliance insist Ukraine must win the war rather than negotiate an immediate ceasefire and ultimate settlement of the avoidable conflict?

Nevertheless, we reject the invasion of an independent entity by another sovereign country, especially without the sanction of the United Nations. Countries must respect the territorial integrity of one another. Russia must stop the war and pull its forces out of Ukraine immediately. It must jettison the sham referenda and the consequent absorption of the four regions of eastern Ukraine – Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia - into Russian territory. NATO must end with deliberate speed its supply of weapons to Ukraine and kick-start the process of dismantling the military association.

We call on Ukraine to implement the Minsk agreements, as a way out of the political log-jam in the Donbas region. All parties to the conflict - Russia, Ukraine and US-led NATO - must seek diplomatic solution to all the contentious issues without further ado.

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Addressing Epidemics In Nigeria Through Improved Water, Hygiene

on a number of levels by improved access to WASH. The health indicators include, diarrhea, nutrition, complementary food hygiene, female psychosocial stress, and violence, maternal and newborn health. Others are menstrual hygiene management, school attendance, and oral vaccine performance, waterborne and neglected tropical diseases.

World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises access to Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services as an essential precautionary measure for protecting human health from the onslaught of emerging diseases, epidemics, and pandemics like COVID-19.

In addition, studies show that improved WASH has the capacity to address the water crisis, a critical age-long problem in many African countries such as Nigeria.

It is not news that some people grew up meeting the problem of WASH as children in the villages, slums even in many poor suburbs in popular Nigerian cities. In many villages, the stream served multiple purposes and is the primary source of water for domestic use.

The situation has not changed much today.

Open defecation into the stream is still a common practice. Yet the stream serves as a place for bathing, fishing, and recreation. In a few communities where you found spring water, residents regarded the scarce natural resource as a goldmine. In many instances, people still travel long distances along dangerous bush paths to source both spring and stream water and exposing themselves to bites from reptiles and sexual violations by humans.

Girls, women, and children are the most vulnerable, disproportionately burdened by

the scarcity of clean drinking water. In most African societies, women are the collectors, managers, and guardians of water, which they shared with their children, especially the girls. The trend promotes school absenteeism, increasing school dropout among girls.

Despite the emergence of boreholes, which have replaced pipe-borne water in many parts of the country, the situation is growing worse today.

Many citizens at both urban and rural community levels hardly have access to safe drinking water, hygienic toilet, and soap, despite boreholes' availability mainly dug through private efforts. Even when they have access to clean water and soap, many children forget to wash their hands, despite regular demonstrations and monitoring.

Sadly, many households cannot afford one good meal in a day to meet their educational expenses due to the economic downturn.

WASH brings together several interventions that frequently affect a wide range of direct outcomes beyond just health.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) clean water, basic toilets, and good hygiene practices are essential for the survival and development of children.

Poor access to improved water and sanitation in Nigeria remains a major contributing factor to high morbidity and mortality rates among children under five. The use of contaminated drinking water and poor sanitary conditions result in increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases, including diarrhoea, which leads to deaths of more than 70,000 children under five annually.

Seventy-three percent of the diarrhoeal and enteric disease burden is associated with poor access to adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and is disproportionately borne by poorer children.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "Frequent episodes of WASH-related ill-health in children, contribute to absenteeism in school, and malnutrition. Only 26.5 percent of the population uses improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities. Also, 23.5 percent of the population defecate in the open."

To address the WASH crisis in the country, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the National Action Plan for the Revitalisation of the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector and declared a State of Emergency in the WASH sector in 2018. The National Action Plan is a three-phase plan to revitalise the WASH sector comprising: an 18-month emergency plan; a 5-year recovery programme and a 13-year revitalisation strategy.

The National Action Plan comprises five interrelated components: Governance, Sustainability, Sanitation, Funding and Financing, and Monitoring and Evaluation. In addition to the National Action Plan, a national sanitation campaign tagged 'Clean Nigeria: Use the Toilets' was launched to address the sanitation crisis and deliver an open defecation-free Nigeria by 2025.

Indeed, this is time to strengthen health sector capacities in promote safe WASH and to take up its public health oversight role in WASH programmes including effective outbreak response systems.

EFCC: What's The Real Anti-Corruption War?

EMEKA ALEX DURU

It is becoming clear that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is not looking back in its battle against abuse of the national currency, the Naira. Or so it seems! Two quick moves by the commission within the month indicate that it perhaps means business in this regard.

Two weeks ago, EFCC arraigned a businessman and socialite, Pascal Okechukwu, popularly known as Cubana Chief Priest, before a Lagos court on three counts bordering on abuse of naira, by allegedly spraying and tampering with the nation's currency at a social event.

According to EFCC, Okechukwu had on February 13, 2024, at Eko Hotel, within the jurisdiction of the court, while dancing during a social event, tampered with funds in the denomination of N500 notes, by spraying same for two hours, and thereby committed an offence contrary to and punishable under Section 21(1) of the Central Bank Act 2007.

The commission also alleged that sometime in 2020, during a social event in Lagos, Cubana Chief Priest tampered with funds in the denomination of N500, by spraying the same for two hours.

In Count 3, EFCC alleged: "That you, Okechukwu Pascal, sometime in January 2024, in Lagos during a social event, tampered with funds in the denomination of N500 (Five Hundred Naira) issued by the Central Bank of Nigeria by spraying same and you thereby committed an offence, contrary to and punishable under Section 21(1) of the Central Bank Act 2007."

The EFCC, had on April 5, 2024, secured the conviction of controversial cross-dresser, Idris Okuneye, also known as Bobrisky, on similar charges for which he was sentenced to six-month imprisonment on Friday, April 12, 2024. The judge, Abimbola Awogboro, imposed the sentence after the 31-year-old socialite pleaded guilty to the alleged offences.

Earlier in February, a Federal High Court in

Lagos had convicted an actress, Oluwadarasimi Omoseyin, of spraying and stepping on new naira notes at a wedding in Lagos.

Ms. Omoseyin was apprehended on February 1, following the viral circulation of a video clip showing her spraying new Naira notes at a wedding in Lekki, Lagos State, on January 28.

On February 2, the trial judge, Chukwuje-kwu Aneke, sentenced Ms. Omoseyin to six months imprisonment, but with the option of a N300,000 fine.

Many celebrities, according to the EFCC, are facing investigations and will soon be prosecuted for Naira abuse. We must commend the

social circles. If proper analysis is done on the rising incidences of kidnapping, cyber fraud and the get-quick tendencies among the youth, flaunting of the Naira at public functions will have some blame in the odious acts.

The desire to be celebrated has led many into crimes. It is near impossible for anyone who had struggled and toyed to make his or her money to flaunt or spray it in meaningless fashion. Every effort at safeguarding the value and essence of the Naira should therefore be lauded.

But then, there is the greater task ahead for the EFCC. That is the real war against graft and other acts of corruption. Incidentally, that was

the properties the value of which corresponds to such proceeds.

Given the initial success of the agency in reining in advance fee criminals and scammers, it was generally seen as a bold move in tackling crime and other misdemeanors that had dented the nation's image locally and abroad.

With time, however, especially due to the closeness of the leadership of the organisation to successive administrations and the willingness to be used in executing vindictive wars of any seating president, EFCC gradually began to be seen as an instrument of blackmail and intimidation by the government. The agency began to lose steam.

The result is that Nigeria is still rated among the countries with high level of corruption. By the 2023 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI) in January this year, Nigeria ranked 145 among 180 countries surveyed. The EFCC had on its own, in 2015, admitted that about \$20 trillion had been stolen from the national treasury by leaders who had access to the nation's money between 1960 and 2005. That figure must have been exceeded over time.

Some of the perpetrators of the heinous acts against the country and their cronies are still in the government houses at state or federal level or other agencies. The opacity and dirty deals in the oil sector, also portray Nigeria as a country that is neck-deep in corruption.

It is, therefore, not enough for the EFCC to go about raking in petty thieves, internet fraudsters or those abusing the Naira at social functions, while leaving out the brains behind huge crimes. For the anti-corruption war to have meaning and be convincing, it must be comprehensive and encompassing.

The EFCC may have done well in securing conviction for those trifling with the Naira. But leaving the real thieves to roam freely casts doubt on the genuineness of its anti-corruption war.

**Duru, a journalist, writes from Lagos*

It is not enough for EFCC to go about raking in petty thieves or those abusing the Naira at social functions while leaving out the brains behind huge crimes

commission for waging the battle against abuse of the Naira.

A country's currency is its legal tender, its store of value, unit of account, and medium of exchange. It is a major tool in transactions by its nationals and residents. In the absence of money, the transactions would become inefficient, and the economy will not be able to produce. By extension, the currency counts among the indexes of national security of a country. How a country treats its currency goes a long way in determining how others see it and its citizens.

Over time, the Naira has been an object of abuse by Nigerians, especially of low value and fleeting identities. Careless spraying of the Naira or even trampling on it, has become an easy path for upstarts to announce their arrival in

even why the commission was established. Established under the Economic And Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004, EFCC has, among other functions, the investigation of all financial crimes including the advance fee fraud, money laundering, counterfeiting, illegal charge transfers, futures market fraud, fraudulent encashment of negotiable instruments, computer credit fraud and contract scam.

It is also empowered to examine and investigate all reported cases of economic and financial crimes with a view to identifying individuals, corporate bodies or groups involved. It can also identify, trace, freeze, confiscate or seize proceeds derived from terrorist activities, economic and financial crime related offences or

FG Unveils New Platform To Monitor Import Duty Exemptions

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH
LAGOS

The Federal Government has launched a new initiative to monitor import duty exemptions in the country.

The initiative is called the 'Incentive Monitoring and Evaluation Platform (IMEP).

Wale Edun, minister of finance and coordinating minister of the

economy, , said the IMEP will be integrated into the existing import duty exemption certificate (IDEC) programme.

The IDEC programme offers strategic import duty reductions for priority sectors critical to national development, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and healthcare.

Edun, said the introduction of IMEP signifies the government's commitment to ensuring "these exemptions are used effectively to stimulate economic growth".

"The newly launched IMEP ensures that only eligible entities benefit from the IDEC program," Edun said.

"This rigorous enforcement will optimise tax expenditures by reducing waste, blocking leakages, and ultimately fostering a more equitable economic environment."

Edun, also said the government sees the IMEP as a critical tool for ensuring tax breaks are strategi-

cally allocated to maximise their economic impact.

"Integrated into the IDEC framework, the newly launched IMEP ensures that only eligible entities benefit, rigorously enforcing compliance and optimising tax expenditures to reduce waste, block leakages and enhance economic equity," he added.

"IMEP aims to ensure that tax

CRUDE OIL Prices			
WTI CRUDE	51.59	-1.00	-1.90%
BRENT CRUDE	60.48	-1.20	-1.95%
MARS US -2 days	55.29	-1.00	-1.78%
OPEC BASKET	59.48	+1.24	+2.13%
URALS	59.32	+0.52	+0.88%
LOUISIANA LIGHT	59.22	+0.33	+0.56%
BONNY LIGHT	61.65	-0.73	-1.17%
MEXICAN BASKET	52.40	+0.79	+1.53%
NATURAL GAS	2.945	+0.132	+4.69%

DAILY INDEPENDENT

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FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024

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International Breweries Offers Rights Issue, Pledges Commitment To Business Continuity

International Breweries Plc (IB-PLC), a leading beverage company and member of ABInBev, the world's largest brewer has reiterated its commitment to long-term investment in Nigeria.

This came on the heels of the completion of the company's Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) held in Lagos recently.

As part of its strategy to return the company to profitability, IBPLC proposed and got overwhelming support from its shareholders, in February, to embark on a Rights issue plan. During a second EGM, the shareholders gave more resounding support in April, with the approval of a shareholder loan.

The resolution was passed with a vast vote that saw shareholders shaking hands and congratulating one another after the company's historic decision.

According to the IBPLC, the producers of Hero Lager, Trophy Lager, and Beta Malt among other leading beverages, the generated funds from the rights issue/shareholder loan are earmarked for the full and final settlement of its USD loan which was utilised to build its state-of-the-art plant - the largest in sub-Saharan Africa - in Ogun State. Due to the constraints of sourcing US Dollars, other related forex volatility challenges, surge in operational costs and other macro-economic impacts, IBPLC had difficulty paying down the loan over the years.

HRM Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe, Chairman of the Board of Directors, emphasised the full support of AB In-Bev for the shareholder's loan, stating, "We project that the repayment of the Loan will inject the desired equity to recapitalise the business, thereby setting it on the path to profitability, in addition to driving IBPLC's value which will ultimately translate to better returns for our shareholders."

Continuing, the Chairman said it is noteworthy that IBPLC's parent company's support of the rights issue is an indication of its confidence in Nigeria.

COMMODITIES				CURRENCIES			RATES		MARKETS					
BRENT	US\$88.15	COFFEE	US\$224.05		CBN	Parallel Market	MPR	24.75 %	FMDQ – NIBOR				NSE	
GOLD	US\$2,335.1	SUGAR	US\$19.66	USD	1245	1278			0/N	31.5000	-0.04 ▼	ASI	98.121.3	
COCOA	US\$10,743.00	N. GAS	US\$1.738	POUND	1540	1590	INFLATION	33.2 %	3M	23.5000	-2.54 ▼			CAP
				EURO	1350	1367			6M	24.1667	-2.65 ▼			

Nigeria Blames International Community For Illicit Funds, Illegal Mining In Africa

President Bola Tinubu has taken a swipe at the international community for its role in the escalation of illegal mining, illicit funds flow, and terrorism funding in Africa.

He said that they owed the continent and must help in the ongoing war against the menaces.

Tinubu said this in Abuja at the opening of a two-day African High-Level Meeting on Counter-terrorism.

According to Ajuri Ngelale, the Presidential Spokesman, Tinubu's message to the meeting had the theme 'Strengthening Regional Co-

operation and Institution Building to Address Evolving Threats of Terrorism'.

The President alleged that funds from other places were being used to fuel illegal mining in Africa which has in turn been funding terrorism.

He said illegal mining, which has robbed countries on the continent of the natural resources that the government ought to have been deployed to meet their national needs is now being hijacked by terrorist groups in exchange for foreign cash, which is in turn used to buy more arms and ammunition.

"While we seek to address the

root causes of terrorism, we must also attack the roots that feed this evil branch. Evolving from the tactics, terrorism is becoming a greater threat as it perfects ways to continuously finance, re-equip, and re-supply itself for its sinister mission.

"Not only does it kidnap people, it kidnaps precious resources. Billions upon billions of dollars that legitimate governments should be using to sculpt better societies by providing education, health care, and food for its people now go to pay for weapons and mayhem.

"Look at the illegal mining that plagues so many of our nations to-

day. Those who think illegal mining has no connection with financing terrorism are sorely mistaken.

"The international community has both the moral and legal obligation to help in this cause because it is outside money not African money that fuels the illegal operations.

"We shall be knocking on this door of the international community to answer this call for justice, peace, and fair play", he said.

Terrorism snipes at the very fabric of the tranquil, prosperous, and just societies we seek to build for



Amal Haruna, Director, Enterprise Risk Management Department, Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) (left); Mustapha M. Ibrahim, Executive Director, Operations, NDIC (second left); Olusegun Adigun, Acting Director, System Study and Review, Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) (third left); Bashir A. Nuhu, Director, Communication and Public Affairs Department, NDIC (fourth left); Mutiat Musa, Assistant Director, ICPC (fourth right); Idongesit Essien, Director, Internal Audit Department, NDIC (third right); Barr. Adebimpe Abodunrin, ICPC Desk Officer overseeing the NDIC (second right), and Bashir Mande, Chairman, NDIC Anti-Corruption and Transparency Unit (ACTU), during the inauguration of the NDIC ACTU at the NDIC headquarters, Abuja.

Business

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH
LAGOS

AI Orchestration Market Expected To Reach \$35.2bn By 2031

Allied Market Research new published report has made a projection that the AI Orchestration market will reach \$35.2 billion by 2031.

The report offers an extensive analysis of key growth strategies, drivers, opportunities, key segment, Porter's Five Forces analysis, and competitive landscape.

The global AI orchestration market was valued at USD 5.2 billion in 2021, and is projected to reach USD 35.2 billion by 2031, growing at a CAGR of 21.5% from 2022 to 2031.

Rising adoption of AI orchestration solutions across several industry verticals and growth in demand for optimum resource utilisation, drive the growth of the global AI orchestration market.

Based on industry vertical, the manufacturing sector contributed the major share in 2021. By region,

on the other hand, Asia-Pacific would showcase the fastest CAGR by 2031.

The AI orchestration market is segmented into component, deployment mode, application, organization size, industry vertical, and region. By component, it is bifurcated into solution and services. By deployment mode, it is divided into on-premise and cloud.

On the basis of application, it is categorized into workflow orchestration, customer service orchestration, infrastructure orchestration, manufacturing orchestration, and others.

By organization size, the market is segmented into large enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises. On the basis of industry

vertical, the market is categorised into IT and telecommunications, manufacturing, healthcare, BFSI, consumer goods and retail, government and defense, energy and utilities, and others. Region wise, it is analyzed across North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and LAMEA.

By component, the solution segment held the largest share in 2021, garnering around three-fourths of the global AI orchestration market revenue, and is projected to maintain its dominance by 2031. The same segment would also showcase the fastest CAGR of 20.4% during the forecast period.

By deployment mode, the on-premise segment contributed to nearly three-fourths of the global AI orchestration market share

in 2021, and is projected to rule the roost by 2031. The Cloud segment, on the other hand, would display the fastest CAGR of 24.9% throughout the forecast period.

By application, the workflow orchestration segment accounted for the highest share in 2021, generating nearly 30% share of the global AI orchestration market revenue. The same segment would also portray the fastest CAGR of 18.4% during the forecast period.

By organization size, the large enterprises segment accounted for the highest share in 2021, generating more than 50% share of the global AI orchestration market revenue. The same segment would also portray the fastest CAGR of 19.9% during the forecast period.

FG Unveils New Platform To Monitor Import Duty Exemptions

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incentives are rationalised to deliver maximum economic impact, aligning with the government's commitment to reducing waste, blocking leakages, and fostering a robust and equitable economic environment.

"IMEP's precise monitoring capabilities will significantly enhance the strategic allocation of exemptions and support the government's objective to ultimately reduce tax expenditures."

Edun said the ministry would host a webinar on April 25, to acquaint stakeholders with the upgraded IDEC framework.

The minister said the virtual meeting would provide key industry participants, including manufacturers, importers, representatives from relevant government ministries, and NGOs, with an opportunity to learn more about the IMEP's features and the benefits it offers.

Nigeria Blames International Community For Illicit Funds, Illegal Mining In Africa

CONTINUED FROM 13

ourselves and our children. It seeks to frighten the farmer from his field, children from their schools, women from the marketplace, and families from their very homes.

"Terror cannot co-exist in the same space as democracy and good governance, just as darkness and light cannot endure in the same room at the same time", he said.

He said terrorism had no respect for national boundaries, ethnic bloodlines, or religious creeds, and therefore requires a comprehensive and collective approach to combat it. "We must address the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, marginalisation, and social injustice. However, this important fact should not become empty rhetoric, devoid of meaning or action", he added.

Tinubu highlighted the need for a fully operational Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre to serve as a hub for intelligence sharing, operational coordination, and capacity building.

He also emphasised the importance of strengthening existing counter-terrorism structures, such as the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU), the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA).

The president stressed the need for a Regional Standby Force that includes tackling terrorism as part of its mandate saying "Such a force can serve as a rapid deployment mechanism, capable of swiftly responding to major threats and bolstering the security of our region."

"It can stand as a strong deterrent to large-scale and protracted terrorist operations and the capture, occupation, or disruption of strategic land and resources", he said.



Dulce Chicon, Vice President, Global Finance in the Americas (left); Idowu Thompson, Group Executive, Private Banking and Wealth Management, FirstBank (middle), and Folake Ani-Mumoney, Group Head, Marketing and Corporate Communications Department, FirstBank, during a networking session at the dinner and award ceremony of the Global Finance ninth annual World's Best Private Banks Awards for 2024 held in New York, USA, recently.

FirstBank Emerges Best Private Bank For Sustainable Investment In Africa At Global Finance Awards

First Bank of Nigeria Limited, West Africa's premier financial institution and leading financial inclusion services provider, announced its recognition as the Best Private Bank in Nigeria and Best Private Bank for Sustainable Investment in Africa at the Global Finance ninth annual World's Best Private Banks Awards for 2024 held at the Harvard Club of New York.

According to Global Finance, its Private Bank Awards honour banks that best serve the specialised needs of high-net-worth individuals as they seek to enhance, preserve, and

pass on their wealth.

FirstBank Private Banking business model was revamped in January 2023 on the back of a stellar performance in 2022, to consolidate its position and maintain its pride of place as the leading Private Bank in Nigeria with distinct product offerings covering investment advisory, wealth management, asset management and lifestyle solutions.

The Bank has remained consistent in reinventing itself, enabling success through the years of its existence for the last 130 years, responding to the changes in the

private wealth space and the opportunities presented by certain factors like borderless technology, renewed interest in mineral wealth, migration opportunities, concerns for wealth preservation amongst many others.

Idowu Thompson, the Group Executive, Private Banking and Wealth Management, FirstBank, while receiving the awards, said: "we are greatly honoured to be recipients of the awards Best Private Bank in Nigeria and Best Private Bank for Sustainable Investment in Africa, both testaments to our enduring

commitment to continuously creating value by strengthening financial awareness and driving inclusiveness in our customers journeys from wealth creation, growth, preservation and its orderly transfer."

"We are delighted with the impact we have made in putting our customers first as this has played a very vital role in enabling their successes and contributing to national development. These awards are dedicated to our esteemed customers. We reaffirm our continued dedication to continuing to improve and delivering excellence in banking".

CAP: LASBCA Trains Officials Towards Seamless Take-Off

DADA JACKSON
LAGOS

As part of efforts to ensure a seamless take-off of the Lagos State Certified Accreditors Programme (CAP) in line with the recommendation of Government White Paper on the Report of the Lagos State Tribunal on the collapsed 21-floor structure at 44 B,C,D Gerrard Road, Ikoyi - Lagos, which recommended a synergy between the Public and Private sector in the built industry, the Lagos State Building Con-

trol Agency, LASBCA, has commenced a rigorous integrated training for its officials stationed across all districts, divisions and departments.

Welcoming participants to the in-house training programme, the General Manager of the Agency, Arc. Gbolahan Oki, represented by the Agency Secretary, Mrs. Omolara Daba urged them to be open minded, ask questions where clarifications are needed and ready to take ownership of the "CAP" program as they are at the drivers seat.

The training program taking place

at LASBCA Auditorium in Ikeja will be in batches and is being facilitated by seasoned professionals in the built industry.

It is divided into different modules meant to acquaint officials across LASBCA formations about the workings, practicability and understanding of the CAP/LASBCA program synergy and processes.

The synergy which is to be christened "Certified Accreditors Programme" is aimed at strengthening the capacity of government officials in monitoring and enforcement of build-

ing regulations in the state.

The Certified Accredited Program (CAP) which is expected to commence soon is designed to engage Consultants who will act as Certified Accreditors in the built environment to complement the activities of Government Officials in Screening of Drawings, Stage Inspections and monitoring activities for compliance with the Lagos State Building Control Regulations in line with Government policy of making Lagos sustainable, resilient and attractive to businesses through Physical Planning and Urban Development.

Personal Finance



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Work On Your Financial Mindset

ISEGHE AJAYI

We are really in dire hard times and reaching financial goals, if any, can be very challenging due to the unfavourable state of the economy.

The situation is so scary that the very existence of the populace especially the common folks, appears to be threatened.

With the persistent hike in the standard of living occasioned by unrelenting inflation, attaining your financial dreams may be almost impossible unless you are resolute and optimistic in your quest for financial freedom.

Besides, your way of thinking plays an active role in making headway in your financial future.

Do you know that several people have given up on their financial focus or goals owing to the unfavourable state of the economy and have lost confidence in their abilities to make progress?

The unpleasant situation has affected their belief system adversely such that they do not know how to set their priorities correctly.

It is quite true that this present economy is killing as depending on a single source of income is no longer sustainable due to the high cost of living.

The hardships experienced by the masses have seen so many of them forgoing their financial goals since they have lost the willpower to think positively, especially in the area of enhancing their financial life.

Do you know that your way of thinking about financial freedom will determine how far you can go in the area of wealth creation? That is why it is imperative to know that if you are the type that easily gives up on your aspirations, making progress in your financial life may be difficult unless you change your mindset of negativity.

Financial freedom comes with a price - hard work, determination, and self-discipline. However, to some people, it is just a dream and nothing more because they are pessimists and do not believe in their abilities.

Also, they are content with their current financial situation even if they are not happy.

With the right mindset, you can enhance your financial horizon by chasing your dreams vigorously, and not minding your fears.

Reaching your financial goals has nothing to do with the money in your savings account or the amount of money you earn, but with your attitude to money and how you view it.

The under-listed tips will help you to work on your financial mindset positively to remain afloat in a harsh economy.

Pursue Your Dream Vigorously

It would do you good to have a vision of your financial desires, focus on it, and ensure you accomplish your set goals.

Several people are indeed too ner-



vous to disclose they yearn for something and go for it but when there is something that you want to achieve in life, do not be pessimistic about it, pursue your dream by being optimistic and do not accept defeat!

Set Realistic Goals

It is practically unfeasible to accomplish anything without setting firm financial goals.

With it, you will be conscious of your set target and try as much as possible to reach it. That is why it is imperative to set financial goals that are attainable to get there at your own pace.

Do not try to get wealthy quickly through fraudulent means to avoid regret and financial losses but look for ways to boost your earnings; it could be through a change of job or alternative sources of income.

Invest Your Money Early

One vital way to accumulate or build wealth is early investment; it is essential you begin investing as soon as you start earning money.

The amount of wealth you can amass depends on when you start investing. Mind you, starting early allows your

money to multiply and increase progressively over time, even if you do not have enough money to invest.

Therefore, do not forget to start investing as early as possible. Besides, it is a big blunder to assume that your earnings are not enough to invest at the moment as it will certainly catch up with you later, leading to financial regrets.

Be Frugal

Most billionaires try as much as possible to live within their means even though they have the money, they are not extravagant because they know what it takes to make money, and remaining at the top or sustaining their financial status or position is paramount to them.

One way of being prudent is to create a budget that you can adhere to strictly as it will help you curtail your expenses and also know how much money is coming in.

Never Stop Learning

Education is the best thing you can invest in yourself. That is why if you want to be at the top financially, you must never stop learning! Most people when they are done with their education, feel that their learning days are over which is surely a wrong mindset.

Do you know that successful people are always eager to read and learn new skills that will be profitable to them? This is one good habit of billionaires; their minds are active and calculating.

They do not just read for entertainment alone but take time to study business trends, ideas, and financial news to become an authority in their field. Billionaires ensure they stay up to date on what is modern.

Advertise Yourself

To thrive in your business or career, you must be willing to advertise yourself and profit from the attention to a certain extent.

Currently, the attention does not need to be on yourself, it could be on your brand, but it will surely attract money.

Be Creative

Many billionaires have this notion that having passion is key to attaining financial success and as such instead of chasing money; they pursue their financial dreams vigorously. And in the process of doing what they derive pleasure or are passionate about, they do not waiver as they believe that their dreams will certainly produce financial success.

Besides, it is expedient to pursue that dream or passion you love if you want to experience financial independence because if you are just doing it to make money, you may lose your heart and may not get financial satisfaction. That is why if you have not found that passion that gives you joy or that thing you love doing, keep looking for it until you find it. Do not settle for anything!

Be Hardworking

Successful people are hardworking and very diligent in their work as whatever financial goals either long or short-term they set to achieve, with so much effort and determination, they ensure to reach such goals.

They will not take 'No' for an answer for any given task or project inasmuch as they believe it is achievable.

Wealth builders tend to work harder than everyone else but still enjoy life. Besides, they are known for their insane work ethics.

Successful people are hardworking and very diligent in their work as whatever financial goals either long or short-term they set to achieve, with so much effort and determination, they ensure to reach such goals

Industry

Manufacturers List Woes, Incur N266bn Losses In 2023

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH

LAGOS

Manufacturers of consumer goods have expressed their concerns over the continuous rising cost of raw materials and operational costs they are incurring, warning that they will also in turn increase the prices of their products to recover their cost.

They said they have been counting their losses to high cost of raw materials due to inflation and exchange rate volatility, which resulted to N266 billion loss in 2023, from profit of 320.5 billion in 2022, a development which would likely keep the prices of goods high in the months ahead despite positive trends in exchange rate in recent weeks.

The manufacturers have recorded about 25.5 per cent rise in cost of raw materials in 2023 and indicate that current stocks of raw materials in their warehouses were procured at even higher cost through the first quarter of 2024.

While most of them have recorded erosion of profit, declaring massive losses in their full year financial statement, the companies have strategised to recover the losses through inflation targeting price mark ups in 2024.

Nigeria's headline inflation surged to 33.2 percent at end of first Quarter 2024, from 21.8 percent at

• Plan Further Price Increases

the beginning of last year while exchange rate surged to average N1500/\$1 in the Q1 '24 from N650/\$1 in the corresponding period of last year.

The manufacturers said these two developments resulted in an unprecedented rise in the cost of raw material inputs and cost of producing consumer goods, thereby resulting in massive rise in prices of goods and services which Nigerians have continued to bear.

Financial statements of some leading Fast Moving Consumer Goods Companies, FMCG, showed that the amount spent by the companies on raw materials' procurement rose to N2.77 trillion in 2023 up from N2.21 trillion in 2022, indicating a 25.5 percent increase.

The manufacturers said as a result of the increase in the cost of raw materials, the cost of sales jumped 24.8 percent to N3.53 trillion in 2023, from N2.83 trillion in 2022.

Moreover, the companies spent more than half of their revenue on raw materials in 2023. Specifically, the companies' spent 57.8 percent of their total revenue of N4.795 trillion in 2023 on raw materials procurement.

The huge increase in the cost of sales in addition to the effect of revaluation of their dollar loans resulted in a N266.51 billion combined loss before tax, indicating a massive

reversal of fortune for companies that had declared N320.5 billion profit before tax the previous year.

The companies affected by this adverse fortune includes Unilever Nigeria Plc, Nestle Nigeria Plc, Cadbury Nigeria Plc, Dangote Sugar Refinery Plc, NASCON Allied Industries Plc, BUA Foods Plc, Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc, Honeywell Flour Mills Plc, Nigerian Breweries Plc, and Champion Breweries Plc.

Others are Guinness Nigeria Plc, International Breweries Plc, May & Baker Nigeria Plc, and Neimeth Pharmaceutical Plc.

While attributing the jump in the cost of raw materials to the twin problem of exchange rate volatility and inflation, the Managing Director/Chief Executive of Nigerian Breweries (NB) Plc, Hans Essaadi, said that the 15 percent drop in the company's operating profit and N106 billion net loss during the year, were due, mainly, to high input cost.

NB posted a 16 percent Year-on-Year (YoY) increase in its raw material costs to N286.06 billion, while the ratio of its raw material cost to the cost of sales stood at 73.9 percent.

Speaking at the Pre-AGM media briefing in Lagos last week, Essaadi noted a corresponding increase in the prices of raw materials as inflationary pressures heightened and the Naira depreciated. He stated:

"Our operating profit fell by 15% due to higher input cost and one-off re-organisation cost despite strong and aggressive cost savings and other efficiency measures.

"Coupled with the impact of the devaluation of the naira which resulted in a foreign exchange loss of N153 billion, the company recorded a net loss of N106 billion during the year.

"So, the drivers of our cost were inflation and devaluation. For example, when we have raw materials like malt and barley, they go directly up with devaluation. And because they are imported, there's a sort of price raising."

He, therefore, said that consumers should expect price increments as a direct result of Naira devaluation and inflation.

"And at the moment, on the basis of this inflation, we will continue to see prices go up.

"Food inflation is hitting almost 40% at this point and so for the short term, we will also continue to see consumer pricing going up."

He, however, said that the company's input costs "are going up more than the prices that we are selling today because we are very conscious of affordability."

Also, BUA Foods Plc, in its 2023 earnings release noted that the increase in its cost of sales was 64%, amounting to N468.98 billion in 2023 which was driven by increase in raw materials cost and energy cost.

BPE Set To Work With NLC To Enhance Privatisation Process

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH

LAGOS

The Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), has sought collaboration with the Labour Union in the ongoing reform and privatisation programme of the Federal Government.

Mr. Ignatius O. Ayewoh, the Acting Director General of BPE, sought the collaboration when he paid a courtesy visit to the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Comrade Joe Ajero, in Abuja, on Tuesday.

Ayewoh emphasized the importance of collaboration with the labour unions to ensure the welfare of workers during and after government agency reforms.

He expressed gratitude to Ajero and the union for their past support and urged them to continue partnering with the Bureau, particularly as members of the Technical Committee (TC) of the National Council on Privatisation (NCP).

Highlighting BPE's previous successes in various sectors of the Nigerian economy such as telecoms, banking, Eleme petrochemical, and port terminal concessions, Ayewoh stated that the Bureau's current strategy is focused on implementing Public Private Partnership (PPP) and concessioning in its transactions.

Furthermore, Ayewoh informed Ajero that BPE is working closely with the Accountant General's Office to ensure the payment of all outstanding severance liabilities arising from the 2013 privatisation of the power sector, in accordance with agreements made with labour unions.

In response, Ajero thanked the Ag. DG for the visit and pledged the collaboration of the NLC with the Bureau in its reform activities.



Gbenga Onimowo, Commercial Director, Lafarge Africa Plc (left); Folashade Ambrose-Mededem, Commissioner for Commerce, Cooperatives, Trade and Investment, Lagos State (second left); Adebode Adefioye, Chairman, Lafarge Africa Plc (third left); Lolu Alade-Akinyemi, GMD/CEO, Lafarge Africa Plc (third right); Bimbola Salu-Hundeyin, Secretary to Lagos State Government and representative of Governor, Lagos State (second right), and Adenike Ogunlesi, Independent Non-Executive Director, Lafarge Africa Plc, during the official launch of Lafarge Africa's Watershield Cement, Nigeria's first waterproof cement in Lagos, on Wednesday.

MSME Week: FG To Award Small Business Owners With Houses, Cars, Cash

JUSTUS ADEJUMOH

LAGOS

The Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced a new initiative for the 2024 MSME Week celebrations to acknowledge and incentivise innovative and resilient entrepreneurs who have demonstrated exceptional success in their ventures.

Temitola Adekunle-Johnson, Se-

nior Special Assistant on Job Creation and MSMEs, announced this saying that distinguished entrepreneurs will be rewarded with houses, cars, and cash prizes during the 2024 MSMEs Week celebrations.

The Federal Government created a national MSME clinic to offer a platform for businesses to showcase their products, secure investments, and improve in critical areas such as funding, skill development, infrastructure, mar-

ket access, and technology.

A key requirement to be eligible for the selection and awards is registration with key regulatory bodies including the Standard Organisation of Nigeria, the Corporate Affairs Commission, and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control.

This initiative is set to commemorate the 2024 United Nations World MSMEs Day, with the goal of promoting and celebrating the achievements

of small-scale businesses throughout the nation.

The MSMEs award ceremony, an annual highlight, recognises the contributions of indigenous MSMEs and the supportive role of both businesses and state governments in nurturing the growth of small enterprises.

Significant awards, including sports utility vehicles, houses, and financial grants, will be presented to deserving small businesses.

The MSMEs application portal will be available from May 1 to May 30, offering easy access for applicants in multiple languages.

The event, marking the conclusion of the National MSME Week, will showcase the innovative spirit and contributions of MSMEs in Nigeria. Vice-President Kashim Shettima is slated to attend the FCT MSMEs clinic at the International Conference Centre in Abuja on June 25.

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AgriBusiness



Cocoa Pricing: We're Currently Enjoying Our Best Moment – CFAN

The National President of the Cocoa Farmers Association of Nigeria (CFAN), Comrade Adeola Adegoke, has said that cocoa farmers are currently enjoying the best moment due to the prices of cocoa beans in the international markets, especially considering Nigeria's deregulated cocoa economy since the abolition of the cocoa board in 1986.

Adegoke, in a statement made available to Daily Independent, expressed satisfaction by the current pricing system of cocoa in the global market, stating that it was satisfactory with the current price levels despite the non-implementation of the Living Income Differential (LID).

He said that cocoa farmers in Nigeria are neither negatively affected nor envious of their counterparts in Ghana and Ivory Coast due to differences in their economic systems, which prevent them from benefiting from the current opportunities in the global

market, stating that the farmers in the cocoa industry are pleased with the industry's current pricing structure, considering the recent surge in cocoa prices on the international market.

"We are not envying our counterparts' cocoa farmers in Ghana and Ivory Coast due to the system of their cocoa economy, which does not allow them to enjoy the present surge in cocoa prices resulting from the future cocoa contracts executed by their respective cocoa boards.

"In fact, we have been reliably informed that the prices the two respective giant cocoa origin countries are paying their cocoa farmers were the prices of cocoa as of April 2023, which was around \$2,700 per ton. Let's not forget the recent 50 percent increment in cocoa prices in Ivory Coast and Ghana, last week and this week respectively."

He further urged Nigerians to manage and sustain control of cocoa production and management in the country.

He noted that in order to increase production and productivity of smallholder cocoa farmers' farms and improve their livelihoods, there is a need to make available and increase provisions of subsidized farm inputs, credit facilities, capacity building, among others.

"We must start to regulate and promote the Nigerian cocoa economy through the National Cocoa Management Committee (NCMC), where more investment into the sector will be guaranteed if the Committee can achieve a stable regulatory framework controlling quality, smuggling, pesticide control, extension management, research and development, traceability, FMAFS & State Cocoa Producing Governments synergy, child labor eradication, deforestation control, and National Cocoa Plan implementation.

"The National Cocoa Management Committee (NCMC) must not get involved in buying and selling

cocoa beans except for cocoa bean stabilization support funding in the future when necessary, especially when cocoa prices nosedive beyond cocoa farmers' economic capacity, as is done in other developed countries with other commodities," he advised.

He, however, disclosed that the EUDR policy has called for greater participation of cocoa stakeholders in collaboration to achieve a national traceability system ensuring transparency in our cocoa economy business with sustainability.

According to him, Nigeria has better opportunities to surpass Ivory Coast and Ghana considering the downward slide of their cocoa production due to pests and diseases, climate change, smuggling, mining activities, land degradation, unfavorable cocoa economy governance (government involvement in buying and selling cocoa beans), and poor remuneration of their smallholder cocoa farmers, among others.

Okediji Gets FCAH&PT Awards On Agric Innovation

KAZEEM AWOJODU

IBADAN

The Federal College of Animal Health and Production Technology, Moor Plantation Ibadan, Oyo State, has honored Ayooluwa Okediji, the founder of AgroInfoTech Africa Group with the Alumni Achievement Award and the Distinguished Innovative Award.

The award was presented to him and AgroInfoTech Africa in recognition of their exceptional contributions to the field of agriculture, particularly in pioneering digital agriculture and agribusiness innovations.

As an illustrious alumnus, Okediji has led AgroInfoTech Africa since 2006, consistently demonstrating an unwavering commitment to enhancing the agricultural landscape through technological advancements.

His visionary leadership has transformed traditional farming into a tech-driven, youth-led enterprise, integrating digital tools to propel agri-food businesses and projects forward and translating research into practical, climate-smart farming applications.

Under his stewardship, AgroInfoTech Africa through its triad of ventures has not only established Nigeria's first Digital Agribusiness Innovation Center and an agri-food business management consulting outfit, but has also successfully launched initiatives like FarmClusters, Farm-sured and Farmtrove.

These platforms have redefined agri-food cooperatives, finance, insurance, and pension schemes to farmers, thereby fostering resilience and empowering the agricultural community, offering zero-cost social protection mechanisms - all leveraging technology.

The awards underscore Okediji's trailblazing work in creating a sustainable and innovative agricultural ecosystem.

His strategic initiatives continue to empower a new generation of agripreneurs, with AgroInfoTech Africa's efforts significantly enhancing productivity and sustainability within the sector.



Abisola Olusanya (middle) during a handout with Agri innovation club in Lagos

The Federal Government has stressed the urgent need to confront issues such as land degradation, erosion, and drought, particularly in the Sahel region.

Kashim Shettima, the Nigeria's Vice President, made the call at the launch of a groundbreaking agricultural initiative in Nigeria known as 'Soil Values,' held in Abuja, stating that land degradation, erosion, and drought are exacerbating due to over-exploitation, deforestation, and overgrazing, particularly in the northern regions.

The Vice President, who was represented by Kingsley Uzoma, his senior special adviser on Agribusiness and Productivity, reaffirmed the government's commitment to agricultural reforms aimed at bolstering production and improving soil management practices.

While addressing Nigeria's challenges with soil degradation and nu-

FG Stresses Need To Confront Issues Of Land Degradation, Erosion In Sahel Region

trient depletion, Shettima underscored the pivotal role of agriculture in the nation's economy, contributing 24 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), stated that agriculture is a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, contributing significantly to the national GDP.

He, however, said that the sector faces various constraints hindering its progress.

Shettima, further highlighted Nigeria's unwavering support for the soil values programme and its potential to empower farmers and revolutionise agricultural practices in the region, while calling on other participating nations to collaborate effectively in implementing the initiative.

"Nigeria is proud to be part of this programme, which will truly benefit our farmers, as well as farmers in other countries involved, who have been facing this soil fertility problem for years.

"We are truly committed to supporting the effective and sustainable implementation of the program in Nigeria. We also invite all the other countries included to put in place various mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of the Soil Values programme activities," he noted.

Abubakar Kyari, the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, urged stakeholders to embrace innovative interventions to combat declining

soil fertility.

Kyari, who was represented by Bello Mohammed, Director, Department of Agricultural Land & Climate Change Management Services, emphasised Nigeria's readiness to collaborate with international partners in implementing the Soil Values program.

"Nigeria extends its hand in collaboration with international partners. We are committed to implementing the Soil Values program, and stakeholders should adopt these new interventions to address the challenges of poor soil fertility."

Henk Duijn, the Chief Executive Officer of International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC), emphasised

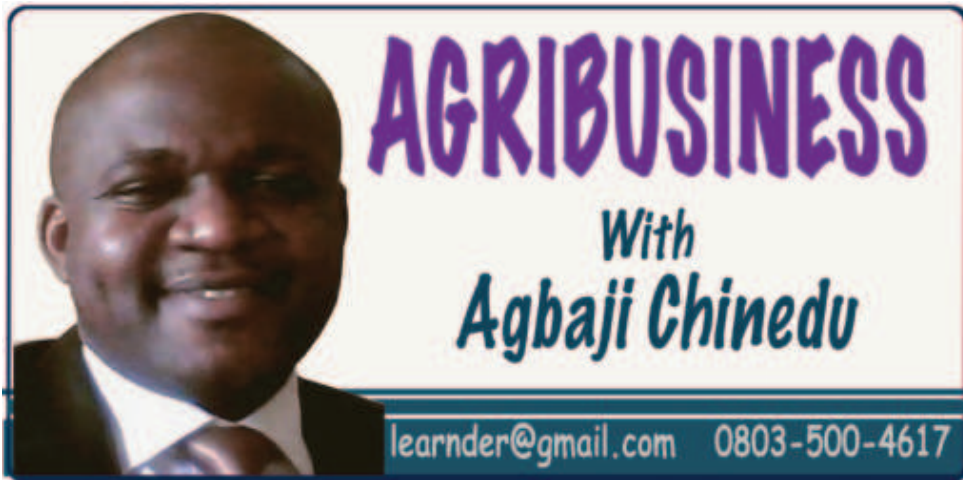
the significance of long-term investments in the soil health.

He urged governments and donors to prioritize funding for initiatives with sustainable outcomes.

Duijn highlighted Soil Values collaborative approach, aiming to partner with regional and national institutions to maximize impact and implementation efficiency.

According to him, "Given the current situation of soil degradation in the Sahel, investment in soil health will take a long time to produce visible and tangible results. Governments and donors must prioritise funding for soil health initiatives that offer long-term benefits.

Agribusiness



How To Invest In Vegetable Farming Business

Producing vegetables such as tomatoes, ugu, watermelon, cucumber, pepper, okro, ewedu, can guarantee you a bumper harvest and an amazing return on investment [every 60 – 80 days] that could reach 100 % in profit using Home Universal Gardening Solution Concept.

This is a concept that encourages farming within the home using sack bags.

It could be organic or inorganic. Vegetable is very important source of vitamins and minerals that forms an essential source of the human diet.

There is no much difference between vegetable farming and other types of farming.

The only little difference is the duration of cultivation and maturity.

Depending on the variety planted, vegetables take very short time to mature, compared to other crops. For instance, Spinach takes less than 70 days to mature. Others like cucumber, pepper among others, may take up to 90 days to mature.

How Lucrative Is Vegetable Farming?

It is a lucrative business in the sense that it takes shorter period to mature and the demands for vegetables in the market is high.

Cucumber, as an example, provides a unique combination of nutrients, as a result the demand is high, whatever amount you invest in cucumber, it can be turned around in 90 days with 100 percent profit.

You can make over 100 percent turnovers on this investment in watermelon alone every three months. Pepper, the general one and the green one used in making salad and all sorts of things.

Pepper is planted and harvested within three months, attracting considerable profit in the market. Pepper is always selling in the market - because almost everybody eats pepper.

Okro sells fast and we have two times for planting it - March and September and it runs through three months for rain fed farming.

The September period, which is the late season, is the best planting season, as it can raise farmers up, if done in a very large space.

Ugu is another fast selling vegetable and I think this is because it is used by all the tribes in Nigeria people compared to other kinds of vegetables. With the Home universal gardening solution concept you can farm



all year around

Cultivation during the Dry Season:

Irrigation is the way out for vegetable farmers during the dry season.

It is actually in the dry season that you sell more. In the dry season, a bed of vegetable costs double of what it will cost in the raining season.

This implies that vegetables

are scarce in the dry season. With the Home universal gardening solution concept you can farm all year around without irrigation. I mean farming using sack.

Minimum Start-Up Capital

To grow vegetables using the Home universal gardening solution concept, you can use just 50 sacks, need between

N70,000 to N90,000.

This amount is due to the cost of sack, dark loamy soil, organic liquid fertilizer with insecticides".

Well, it depends on an individual's target. For instance, if you want to cultivate vegetables on commercial basis in sack, I will advise that the minimum sack you need is 50 and above.

Appropriate Farming Con-

ditions:

Contrary to popular belief, vegetables can be grown anywhere: it is the system that is used that would be different.

A normal land that is not swampy; that you can grow vegetables during dry season. You make use of sandy-loamy soil. Sandy loamy soil is dark in colour. And this type of land requires less fertilizer because they are rich in organic matter. You can also grow vegetables on sandy soil.

Most sandy soil is best used for vegetables during the rainy season because it doesn't hold water. It drains water easily.

While you can't use it during the dry season because you would need to be applying water every day because of the fact that it drains water easily.

Another soil is the clay soil. You should avoid clay soil during the dry season because you would have to need a lot of water. Hence, during rainy season, you can grow on virtually any type of soil.

Challenges:

There could be vegetable glut - a time when the harvest of farmers mature and are brought to the market at the same time. It is not peculiar to vegetable farmers alone. It could also affect other farmers.

You can contact us for the Home universal gardening solution concept. You can farm vegetable all year around.



Increase In Electricity Tariff Has Worsened Plight Of Businesses – Iche

IKECHI NZEAKO

Electricity is critical to socio-economic and industrial development of any nation.

It has become indispensable in the industrialisation and economic development of any country.

Electricity enables factories to stay open through night-time hours, facilitate more rapid communication and leads to the expansion of demand for fossil fuels to power factories, street-lights, and homes.

Electricity contributes to economic growth and development in several ways.

First, electricity serves as a key factor of production for firms and constrains output when unavailable.

Effective infrastructure is key to ensuring energy can be used productively. The entire electricity grid – a network of infrastructure that includes generation, transmission, distribution, and wiring and metering – needs to work together.

However, the Nigerian electricity grid does not have qualities listed above and does work all the time.

It has collapsed many times, leading to power outages. Indeed the number of megawatts generated by the Generating Company of Nigeria is not sufficient to serve the country, leading to load shedding most of the time.

In spite of the inadequate generation of electricity in the country, the Distribution Companies (DisCos) have increased tariffs in the country and the country has been divided into bands with Band A areas promised 18 hours of electricity every day and others in Bands B and C getting less.

However, the areas in Band A areas have not been getting the 18 hours they were promised under the new tariff regime. Others in other areas are worse off as many of them get less than five and six hours of electricity every day.



Iche

Speaking on the situation, Comrade Saviour Iche, the national president of the Association of Micro-Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (AMEN), said in an interview with Daily Independent that the increase in tariff was uncalled for.

He said that the government should have provided adequate megawatts of electricity before increasing tariffs.

He argued that what the government is doing amounted to trying to sell a non-existent product.

“What the government did was not right; how do you increase the cost of a product that you do not have. What the government should have done was to increase the megawatts available in the country and the people will buy into the idea and pay the new tariff.

“Again the Distribution Companies have refused to supply pre-paid meters to customers; they prefer to distribute

crazy bills to the people without giving them power. The Distribution Companies are ripping Nigerians off and smiling to the bank. There is a need for the Federal Government to prevent the companies from taking advantage of Nigerians.”

He stated that the electricity situation has not improved despite the increase in tariff and promise to improve electricity supply.

According to Iche, “Despite the increase in tariffs by the Distribution Company, the electricity situation has not improved; indeed, the situation has worsened. In the area where my company is situated, we have not had like for more than eight hours in the past one week.

“This has not stopped the Distribution Company from bringing illegal bills and forcing residents and companies in the area to pay.

“We are being forced to pay for darkness. There is the urgent need for the government to stop this illegality; it is the duty of the government to protect the interests of Nigerians.”

When asked why he has not obtained a pre-paid meter, he said: “We done everything to get a pre-paid meter but the Destruction Company is deliberating frustrating the efforts because they want to continue to rip us off through illegal bills.

“During the last administration, the Senate passed a law that made the distribution of pre-paid meters the business of Distribution Companies, but the companies have refused to obey the law regarding the supply of pre-meter.

“The Senate ordered that if you are given a pre-paid meter, you should not be charged on estimated billing. Estimated billing is stealing by trick and it is illegal. How do you determine the bill when there is no meter to read; they just imagine an amount and send it to different people in the area. They do distribute bills by paper these days; they now send the bills through text messages.”

Iche, said that the increase in electricity bills has worsened the plight of small business people in the country, adding that many of them are on the verge of going out of business.

He stated that companies that are in business have to generate their electricity at great costs.

“We have to generate our electricity and the cost of diesel is very high. The government should reduce the cost of diesel so that small businesses can survive.

“Small businesses are the soul of the Nigerian economy and the government needs to do everything to help them to thrive. Without small businesses, the economy cannot develop and grow,” he posited.

He called on the government to implement policies and programmes that will help small businesses to thrive.

Nigerian Business Environment Becoming More Hostile – Tella

IKECHI NZEAKO
LAGOS

The Nigerian business environment is becoming more hostile and certain as the years go by. Policy somersaults and reversals have been the order of the day. And inadequate supply of electricity has worsened the situation, leading businesses and others to generate power on their own.

However, Temidayo Tella, the founder and chief executive officer of Tella Resources, a Lagos-based business development company, identified some of the challenges that are stopping businesses and entrepreneurs from attaining their full potential.

He said that the economic

environment in the country is full of uncertain policies around costs, especially with the dollar to naira behaviour. He stated that the foreign exchange regime is negatively affecting businesses in the country.

He identified the high cost of materials as a challenge, leading to inflation and high cost of running businesses.

He argued that the high cost of fuel for powering generators, high cost of transportation and rent and high cost of raw materials are challenges to entrepreneurs and business people.

Tella observed that power/electricity costs lead many businesses to shut down.

Lack of confidence in the government - according to him, the political environment is such that people are losing

confidence in the government to be able to give dividends of democracy. With rising costs of everything, it is making people sit on the edge and wonder if ease would come at all.

He added that as a business man, one gets weary of investing due to lack of confidence and trust in the government policies.

The Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Tella Resources Insecurity stated that kidnapping and violence have not reduced, “In fact they have turned up a new high volume, any environment that is not safe would not get invested in; such an economy would experience capital flight and other negative issues. No business man wants to put in money where he is scared of his life.”



Tella

WomenInBusiness

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You started your Foundation in the year 2000, can you share with us the journey that led you to start the foundation?

My journey started at a very tender age of five. I found myself always giving out things to my friend as a child.

If my parents bought clothes for me during Christmas and we travelled to the village for the celebration, I would give out my new clothes to my friends in the village and wear their old ones.

Anything my parents bought for me I will keep it and when we get to the village I will give it to other children, and collect their torn clothes in exchange.

It gives me joy that my friends are okay, because I know we are better off than them then. That was how it started.

If I go to school and they give me something I will share what I have with everybody and I will be fine.

Sometimes my parents will be worried especially my mother but my father noticed it and encouraged me that it is a call and I have to obey the call.

He will always pray for me that God will bless me to do the work that God has given to me, so that I can touch lives and bring people out of poverty.

If I have money I will give it to people and within a short period of time I will get that money back.

The people that I am giving to are those that cannot repay me back and I am not even expecting anything from them. I am only fulfilling the mandate of God in my life.

How has it been since you started?

I started from my village in Umuakabuike-Umudike Ukpok in Nnewi-South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Every time I travel back home in December I will call people and give things out to them.

I like investing in human beings, mainly the widow and the less privileged. I give out motorcycles, tricycles, food stuff, pay children's school fees and there are so many people on my payroll. With what I do some people call me Mother Theresa.

The foundation showcased me to the world and everybody knew that I give out things to the less privileged in society.

If I go to empower people, the crowd will be too much on me and I don't know how I will do it and everything will go peacefully and everybody will be happy.

Sometimes I give something that everybody will be confused about.

How am I able to do this? Something that people will think that it is not possible God will just help me.

There is no doubt you have touched so many lives, what drives your intention?

Seeing people happy and successful is what drives my intention. Through the foundation, we have empowered many, but with greater emphasis on the unemployed youths, orphans and widows.

As it stands today, we have given out a total of 50 cars and buses of various classes, 500 motorcycles, 1000 sewing machines, 1000 vulcanizing machines, 1000 cellophane machines, 500 sets of hair-dressing equipment, and 1000 generators among others.

We have also opened barbing salons for over 400 youths across the 326 wards in Anambra State and built houses for widows, provided funds for people to establish small-scale businesses.

We have vocational centers where we teach people how to do things with their hands.

We employed professionals in the various fields to train these people and after the training we empower them with necessary equipment needed for what they have been taught, so that they can start working on their own and also employ

Seeing People Happy, Successful Drives My Intention – Imoh

Dr. Nkoli Imoh is the founder and Executive Director of Adadioramma Foundation. In this interview with SEYI TAIWO-OGUNTUASE, she speaks on her foundation, what needs to be done to reduce unemployment and what her foundation is doing in the area of empowerment, among several other salient issues. Excerpts:



Imoh

others around them.

How are the beneficiaries fairing, are their monitoring mechanisms put in place to ensure that what you empowered them with is not sold?

We have our monitoring team, as we are empowering them we are watching their progress. If we give you money and we check that you are doing well with it, we will increase it for you, so that makes them serious and eager to make the best use of what is given to them judiciously and we are happy with that.

We did empowerment in Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Benin, mainly in the South East and South-South.

What has been the driving force that has been keeping you going since you started?

We pay people's hospital bills, I bring medical personnel to do free surgeries to people and conduct various health screening and also give medications to people

I like putting smiles on people's faces, I use my resources and I am not expecting anything in returns.

I am just doing it because I know it's a call that I have and if I don't do it, it will seem as if something is missing.

We pay people's hospital bills, I bring medical personnel to do free surgeries to people and conduct various health screening and also give medications to people.

Has there been any regret since you started and has there been a time where you feel like quitting?

There has never been any regret since I started and there will not be any because I see what I do as a call of God and God has been my sustenance.

The only time we stopped a little bit was during this time of insecurity in Anambra state, but the place is okay now.

What are some of the challenges you have encountered in the past and how do you surmount those problems?

There is not much challenge because I am doing it willingly from my heart. I don't force myself to do what I do.

I do it the way that I will be happy and the person I will give it to will also be happy. There is nothing like any challenge

Before you venture into touching the lives of the less privileged, what were you doing?

I am doing my business and like I said I started this from a young age, when I grew up I got married and had my children and I still continue with my business

and empowering people. If I don't do it, it's like I am not complete.

Can you share with us your business side of life?

I am a successful trader, dealing mostly in vehicle tyres in Lagos, I do importation, and I am also into oil and gas and real estate businesses.

My flagship organisation is Windward International Limited and my business philosophy is anchored on quality, efficiency, transparency and perfect finishing.

This business philosophy coupled with our unconditional use of a formidable team of intellectuals as consultants holds the key to my business successes and God has been faithful.

Who are your mentors and who are those you are looking forward to in this philanthropic world?

Seeing how Bill Gates is helping people, I know that one day God will do it in such a way that the whole world will know of this.

Your Foundation will be 25 next year. Where do you want to see your Foundation in the next five to 10 years?

We will be 25 years by the grace of God next year 2025, another one is 50 years which we are looking forward to.

Before that I know that all the people I am helping now will help others so that the foundation will be growing from strength to strength so that by the next few years the whole world will be talking about my foundation.

What advice do you have for well-meaning Nigerians as regards helping the needy?

My advice for other well-meaning Nigerians is to emulate what we do at Adadioramma Foundation, where we help and empower people.

There are so many people that need help in this country, we cannot be everywhere, but the little you have, share it with others and don't say you don't have much, the little that you have, start from there.

By doing this the world will be a better place to live in. I pray that Nigerians will cultivate the habit of helping people without expecting anything in return.

For instance, the first award I got in Switzerland, the organisers of the award came to my village to ask about the foundation from people in the village, anyone they see to make enquiries of me will tell them 'this motorcycle that I am ridding she is the one that bought it for me', everywhere they went they are just asking people randomly and they got a pleasing response, like all the houses I built for the windows, they told them.

I will tell you, I am not doing it for praise, I am just doing what God sent me and I am happy doing it. I want you to know that all these crimes going on in the country are because people don't have anything to do, if everybody shares the little they have with others all will be fine and the crime will reduce.

Travel&Leisure

Delta Tourism Board Talks Tough On Violation Of Rules, Regulations By Hoteliers, Owners, Others

The Delta State Tourism Board has warned players in the hospitality sector, especially hotel owners in the state that are yet to register with the government to do so and adhere strictly to its rules and regulations or face sanctions.

Addressing people at Osubi Airport, Warri in the Okpe Local Government Area of the state on the importance of tourism, the General Manager of the Board, Josephine Anyameluho Ogbolu, said the board has the responsibility to register, classify, grade and monitor operations of hospitality establishments in the state to avoid any breach of peace and security.

She added that the hospitality establishment includes accommodation facilities, restaurants, lounges, and apartments among others.

She said: "We have security issues across the country, but on our own as a state, we try to minimise as much as possible, so what we have done over time, we have a very cordial relationship and understanding with the Delta state police command, Asaba, where assigned officers monitored the hospitality sector.

"So, the police work between the board and hotel associations. Like Warri, Sapele and Asaba hotel associations and others. So, whatever comes up, we liaise between hotels hospitality establishments and the police for any security issues that come up. Hotels in the state are registered with the state government,



Bible site, Araya

also as an IGR drive to the state."

She said the board has taken it upon itself to establish 'Tourism and Information Desks' at the Osubi Airport and Asaba International Airport and other places acting as gateways to the state will follow as a way of propelling Delta State into the global spotlight, presenting the world with a captivating blend of the state's culture, heritage, and diverse attractions.

"Delta State Tourism and Information Desk is basically for

tourists coming into the state, it's a desk where they can get first-hand information on tourism where some information materials and others will be on display and basically to sell Delta state as a preferred destination.

"We will replicate the same in Asaba, we have two airports in Delta state. Delta State Tourism Board has the mandate to market and promote tourism in the state, so, this is part of our mandate. We are trying to achieve the mandate that the govern-



McCarthy Beach

ment has set up for the board to do.

"Delta State is a tourist hub, you will find out that we are endowed with symbolic rivers, creeks, and lakes; they are just beautiful sites that you cannot do without.

"We have historical sites to behold in the state, like the largest waterpark in West Africa, Park Vega Waterpark located in Agbor, the national museum, the Mungo Park house, and the first office of the Royal Niger Company, all of that are historical sites.

"We have the Lander Brothers Anchorage. We have the source of the River Ethiope in Umuaja, the deepest inland waterways in Africa located at Umuaja, Mariam Babangida leisure park for fun activities, Delta State film village which has become a hub for production of epic dramas in Nollywood, the Turf, Falcon Mangrove Park, Nana living history museum, Araya Bible Site, Mandela Garden, the burial palace of Olu of Warri, Olona Ranch and Holiday Resort."

Annual 150m Tourists Influx: Saudi Arabia Projects 320,000 New Hotel Rooms By 2030

Saudi Arabia is projected to have 320,000 new hotel rooms by 2030 as the Kingdom ramps up efforts to accommodate an annual influx of 150 million tourists, domestic and international, according to a report by global property consultancy Knight Frank.

This massive expansion of the hospitality sector is central to achieving Saudi Arabia's goal of increasing the travel and tourism industry's contribution to the economy from nearly 6% to 10% by the end of this decade, the report stated.

The analysis comes on the heels of record tourism numbers for Saudi Arabia in 2022, with visitor spending reaching \$23.2bn in the first half of 2023 alone - a 132% jump from last year. International arrivals surged 142% year-on-year to 14.6 million in the first six months.

While nearby Gulf nations like Bahrain, Kuwait and Egypt emerged as top source markets, Saudi authorities are exploring strategies to attract visitors from further afield, said Turab Saleem, Knight Frank's head of hospitality and tourism advisory for the Middle East.

"This includes developing cultural and entertainment offerings nationwide to complement existing attractions like the Jeddah F1 Grand Prix and numerous 'Entertainment Seasons,'" Saleem added.

Notable projects include theme parks like Boulevard World and Qiddiya in Ri-

yadh, and Saudi Arabia's successful bid to host the 2030 World Expo, which is expected to draw 40 million visitors and inject \$94.6 billion into the local economy.

The report highlights that 67% of the projected 320,000 new hotel rooms will be upscale or luxury properties, typically requiring one to two staff members per room. This suggests between 232,000 and 387,000 hospitality workers may need accommodation as the sector expands rapidly.

Knight Frank expects Marriott International to overtake Accor as Saudi Arabia's largest hotel operator by 2030, with 26,200 rooms under its management compared to Accor's projected 25,400 rooms.

"Provision of quality housing for hospitality staff will be essential to ensure the success of Saudi's tourism ambitions," said Faisal Durrani, Knight Frank's head of research for the Middle East.

The holy cities of Mecca and Medina are set for a significant hotel boom, with 221,000 new rooms announced, planned or under construction to cater to religious tourists - expected to reach 30mn annually by 2025 and 50mn by 2030.

Knight Frank estimates around \$104bn will be required for construction costs alone to realize the 320,000 new hotel rooms nationwide, with \$70bn dedicated to the religious tourism hubs of Mecca and Medina.

Amsterdam To Restrict New Hotels, River Cruises To Curb Number Of Tourists

The city of Amsterdam is escalating its campaign against over tourism on top of existing efforts to discourage problematic Brits abroad and crack down on tourist etiquette.

The latest measures, a limit on the number of river cruises that enter the Dutch capital's waterways and plans to reduce overnight visitors by banning the construction of new hotels intended to discourage tourists from making the trip.

The proposals to restrict the way tourists enter and stay in the city predict 271,000 fewer visitors per year via river cruise and aim to limit overnight stays to just 20 million tourists annually.

For river cruises, this means cutting voyages to Amsterdam by half to just 1,150 a year by 2028. In 2023, 2,300 boats floated into the city's canals - a sharp increase from the 1,327 boats that visited in 2011.

A statement from Amsterdam City Coun-

cil said: "Amsterdam must be and remain liveable, for residents and visitors. That is why we take measures to combat over-tourism. We want to halve the number of river cruise ships in the city within five years to a maximum of 1,150 in 2028. Fewer river cruises means less crowds and more quality of life."

Ocean-going cruise ships were banned from docking in the city centre last July.

"River cruises therefore remain part of the Amsterdam visitor economy. We focus on the most sustainable ships that have a connection for green shore power."

The attempts to curb the environmental and social impact of over-tourism by the city's council will also introduce a limit of 20 million overnight stays.

Excluding holiday rentals, this is 665,000 less than the total hotel nights stayed in 2023.

Ostrich At Kansas Zoo Dies After Swallowing Employee's Keys

A popular ostrich at a zoo in Kansas known as the "Dancing Queen" has died after swallowing an employee's keys.

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center announced the death of Karen on Friday after she "reached beyond her exhibit fence to grab the keys of a staff member" and then swallowed them.

Zoo staff tried both "surgical and non-surgical efforts" after getting expert advice to save Karen, but in vain.

"We are devastated by the loss of Karen," said Fawn Moser, the zoo's interim

director.

The animal care team formed deep bonds with the ostrich, she said. "She was not just an animal; she was a beloved member of our community."

The zoo said it would investigate how the keys were in reach of the ostrich and review its safety measures protocols.

Karen has been part of the zoo's Giraffe & Friends exhibition since March 2023, attracting visitors with water activities such as swimming in the pool and playing in the sprinkler.

AL-FAHM

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Despite Court Judgments, JAMB's Sanction, Overzealous Staff Ask Candidates To Remove Hijab, Skull Caps In Lagos, Ogun

Barely a day after the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) sanctioned some of its members of staff over harassment of students using the hijab, another case of violation of Muslim candidates' rights has been recorded.

The officials of Duntro High School, Ijeshatedo, Surulere, Lagos, on Monday, April 22, harassed some Muslim students and forced them to remove their scarves (skull caps) before they could be allowed to sit for the 2024 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), which began on Friday, April 19, nationwide.

When contacted, the officials at the JAMB accredited center said they were only informed by the examination body to permit students using hijab, adding that the directive didn't include students using headscarves or skull caps.

The Amir (President) of Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), Itire-Ikate Area Council, Mallam Elias Adeyemo, who led some of his members to the center, confirmed the development.

According to him, "Today, Monday, 22nd April 2024, I led some members on a voluntary monitoring of compliance to the JAMB directive on Hijab to Duntro High School, Oremaji, Ijeshatedo, Lagos.

"While monitoring, we observed that candidates in hijab were given free access into the exam hall. However, we noted that other candidates using scarf and skull caps were denied access. Before the team could approach the security agents on duty, the parents of the candidates had asked their children to remove the head covers due to the fear of missing the exam.

"It is worthy of note that some of the candidates use the hijab as evidenced in their photocards, but due to fear of being victimized, they had to use the skull cap. Unfortunately again, those who use hijab were allowed, perhaps due to the latest directive from JAMB while those who changed to scarf or skull caps were denied and forced to remove it.

One of the victims, Sadallahi Ameenah, a student of Ansar-Ud-Deen Girl High School, while speaking with Muslim News, said she was prevented from entering until she removed her scarf.

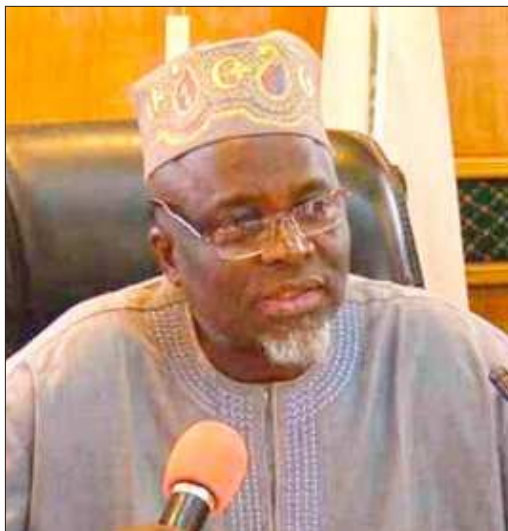
"I feel so sad about it because this is the way I dress", said Ameenah who also showed us her JAMB slip where she was wearing a skull cap on a school uniform and scarf on mufti in the two passport photographs.

Hijab harassment at Ogun center

Another Muslim student, Haliyah Sheriffdeen also shared her ordeal at another JAMB accredited center, Peak International School, Iken-



Kamor Disu



Oloyede



Oloru-Balogun

ne, Ogun state where she and other female candidates were subjected to harassment by overzealous officials which led to the removal of their hijabs.

We learnt that Haliyah also took the UTME examination on Friday, the same day Aisha Tiamiyu was also forced to remove her hijab at Bafuto Institute in Lagos.

The overzealous officials were later sanctioned by the examination body.

Haliyah said she resisted when the official told her to remove her hijab, adding, "Sadly, I had to remove it in order not to miss the examination."

According to her, When we got to the center around 6:47 am, the security man was saying the use of hijab wasn't allowed. We were two that went together. I initially stood my ground. I told him I cannot remove my hijab and he said he would not allow me to go inside. We kept dragging it for a long time that I had to remove it in order not to miss the exam.

"When I entered the hall with my hijab removed, I didn't see any student using hijab. That means I wasn't the only one that was asked not to put on hijab. I noticed that because when I finished the exam I saw a lot of girls putting on their hijab back, even some jilbab.

"Muslim candidates putting on scarves were also told to remove it. The security officers said it was an instruction from the school authority," Haliyah added.

Go Beyond Sanction, De-register Erring Centers: Hijab Rights group Urges JAMB

The Hijab Rights Advocacy Initiative, HRAI, has described the latest cases of harassment as worrisome and a flagrant disregard to Supreme Court verdict and JAMB policy on Hijab, thereby calling on the examination body to go beyond sanction but also de-register erring centers.

The Director of HRAI, Hajia Mutiat Oloru-Balogun said, "Sanctions are part of the measures but might not be enough. I believe that any center where their local staff have turned themselves to instrument of discrimination should be de-registered. They can be handed like 3 years suspension or asked to reapply on terms that they would not engage in such lawlessness and bigotry again.

According to her, they will be the one to apply to JAMB to make them centers yet they are not ready to follow the directives of the board. It used to be a serious matter with those faith based institutions year in, year out until our organisation did something about it. At least, this year, we haven't heard anything like that from them. Discrimination against women and students who choose to wear Hijab or scarf should not be allowed in our country. Violators should be made to face the law.

Hajia Oloru-Balogun noted that the harassment over the use of Hijab has psychological effects on the students, adding that it may affect their performance in writing the examination.

"What about the psychological harm and torture that has been done to these children? Obviously, they cannot write the examinations in the right frame of mind. A student came prepared to write exam only for her to be told to strip before she could write the exam.

"Yes, they were later allowed in some cases after several intervention, but the fact that they have harassed is enough for them not to perform.

"That's why we at HRAI believe sanction isn't enough, JAMB should do better and I think, those children should be compensated because the harassment can make them underperform and which may lead to them staying at home for a whole year.

The Director of HRAI, however, commended JAMB for its proactive

step, saying that the solution to the incessant harassment of students in Hijab and disregard to apex court judgement is for the examination body to issue official statement on its website and copy all the accredited centers.

Educational institutions, exams bodies must do more to protect hijab-wearing Muslims: MPAC

The Executive Chairman of MPAC Nigeria, Kamor Disu, while reacting to the news, declared that discrimination against Muslims wearing Hijab is still a major problem in the country, adding that schools and employers of labour are the worst offenders.

He maintained that educational institutions, examination bodies and employers must do more to protect women in Hijab.

While MPAC commends the swift intervention of the JAMB authorities to prevent the escalation and immediately sanction the erring officials involved in the first case involving Aisha Tiamiyu on Friday, April 19th, 2024, it is now most important for JAMB to recognize this criminal behaviour amongst its own officials as a manifestation of Islamophobia present in our society, and as such do more to stop it festering.

According to him, "Discrimination against Muslims is still a major problem in Nigeria, and Muslim women in hijab, being the most visible symbol of Islam bear the brunt of this discrimination most. The cases of Muslim girls in hijab who face repeated discrimination during JAMB and similar national examinations is just a scratch on the surface, as most cases of discrimination against Muslim women in hijab do not make it to the national news. In 2019, MPAC conducted a poll to evaluate the experiences of Muslim women in hijab in Nigeria.

"Out of the total 675 representative entries received across the country, staggering 41% claimed

they face discrimination at school, 30% say they face discrimination in the workplace, 22% while receiving public services and 16% at job interviews. 87% of respondents are a mix of youth and adults up to the age of 40. The result of the poll indicated that 4 of 5 respondents experienced discrimination, exclusion or bullying in some form, as a result of wearing the hijab. Most of these incidents happened to Muslim women either in school or workplace. These figures are a sad reflection of how much discrimination, a societal ill, has been allowed to fester in the country and the sad incidents in our examination centres are a reflection of that.

"Because schools and employers are the worst offenders, educational institutions, examination bodies and employers must do more to protect students (and others who are "visibly Muslim") from discrimination, in order not to hamper their rights to effectively engage and participate in civic life or properly function in the society. Our examination bodies must now recognize and declare the incessant attack on Muslim students in hijab as a manifestation of Islamophobia, for which stiffer penalties must be imposed. It is very good to see the manner that JAMB dealt with the first case reported in Lagos State this year and it is hoped that this will become the standard practice in all cases of discrimination against hijab-wearing students writing their exams.

"Sanctions are very important and effective as a form of punishment for offenders, individuals and the schools, and also as a deterrence to those who may have it in mind to commit the same offense.

Beyond this however, there must be sustained and appropriate educational support for all JAMB accredited examination centres to recognise and respect the religious freedom of all candidates, which includes the right to wear religious garb, such as headscarves or hijabs," he added.

Friday S sermon

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Muhammad (sa): The Great Exemplar

‘Incidents from the Life of the Holy Prophet(sa) - ‘Martyrs of the Battle of Uhud & the Expedition of Hamra’ al-Asad’

After reciting Tashahhud, Ta’awwuz and Surah al-Fatihah, His Holiness, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad(aba) said that he would continue mentioning incidents from the Battle of Uhud, which further highlight the beautiful aspects of the life of the Holy Prophet(sa).

Consoling the Families of the Martyrs of Uhud

His Holiness(aba) said that the Holy Prophet(sa) prayed for the martyrs of the Battle of Uhud. Once passing by an elderly lady whose son was martyred, the Holy Prophet(sa) consoled her. Then the Holy Prophet(sa) prayed, ‘Grant the families of the martyrs of Uhud excellent guardians.’ Even in the moments where the Holy Prophet(sa) would have been extremely sad upon the martyrdoms of his dearest family members and Companions, and despite himself having endured injury, the Holy Prophet(sa) was still more mindful of being present to console and comfort the family members of those who had been martyred. In fact, to another widow of a martyr from Uhud, the Holy Prophet(sa) prayed, ‘May God grant you an even better guardian than your husband.’ These were incidents as the Holy Prophet(sa) was returning to Madinah, which exhibit his most lofty and esteemed morals.

His Holiness(aba) said that the Holy Prophet(sa) informed his cousin Hamnah bint Jahsh(ra) about the martyrdoms of her uncle and her brother. Upon receiving this news, she very patiently recited, ‘Verily to Allah we belong and to Him shall we return’ and then said they had died very honourable deaths. When the Holy Prophet(sa) also informed her of her husband’s martyrdom, he could not keep herself from weeping and expressed her grief. Upon this, the Holy Prophet(sa) said, ‘See the intricate bond between a husband and wife.’ The Holy Prophet(sa) further went on to say that in such times, a woman is able to bear the loss of her blood relatives; however for her, nothing exceeds her bond of love for her husband. His Holiness(aba) said that this is a lesson for husbands to treat their wives with love and compassion rather than being cruel to them. These words of the Holy Prophet(sa) were not just for a single person; instead, they serve as a lesson for all.

His Holiness(aba) said that when the Holy Prophet(sa) asked her why she had expressed her grief as such, she replied saying she became worried about who would provide for their children. Upon this, the Holy Prophet(sa) prayed, ‘May God provide for them a person who becomes an even better guardian for them than he was.’ These words were fulfilled when Hamnah(ra) went on to marry Hazrat Talhah(ra). It is recorded that he treated her children even better than his own.

Instructions Regarding Mourning a Loss

His Holiness(aba) said that when the Holy Prophet(sa) returned to Madinah, the companions helped him off of his mount, he offered prayers and then went home to rest due to his injuries. In the meantime, the women of Madinah learned about the martyrdoms of their loved ones and began to weep. This pained the Holy Prophet(sa), and he said that his uncle Hamzah(ra) had also been martyred, yet there was no one to lament over his demise. Upon this, the companions, who wished to fulfil even the slight-



Ahmad

est desire of the Holy Prophet(sa), went to their women and told them to mourn the martyrdom of Hazrat Hamzah(ra) instead. When the Holy Prophet(sa) came out of his home and saw the women mourning, he asked what was happening. Upon being informed that they were mourning Hazrat Hamzah(ra), the Holy Prophet(sa) said that he already knew that the Ansar (residents of Madinah) had a great deal of love for him. He went on to say that however, Allah does not like for people to wail in such a manner. The companions(ra) said that this was the only way for them to reconcile their grief. The Holy Prophet(sa) said that he did not forbid them from crying; however, he forbade them from expressing this grief by striking their own faces, pulling their hair and ripping their clothes. This again shows how the Holy Prophet(sa), even during his own grief, was more mindful of the sentiments of others.

His Holiness(aba) said that history has also recorded about the swords which rendered service during the Battle of Uhud. Upon arriving home, the Holy Prophet(sa) handed his sword to Fatimah(ra) saying that she should wash the blood off of it, and that it had done justice in battle. Similarly, Hazrat Ali(ra) also handed his sword to Hazrat Fatimah(ra) whilst repeating the same words that the Holy Prophet(sa) had said. Upon this, the Holy Prophet(sa) said that the swords of Sahl bin Hunaif(ra) and Abu Dujanah, Harith bin Thabit(ra), and Asim bin Simmah(ra) had also displayed great valour in battle. This shows that the Holy Prophet(sa) did not wish for his son-in-law to say something that would even remotely diminish the services of others. In other words, this was the intricacy with which the Holy Prophet(sa), even during difficult times, tended to the sentiments of others.

His Holiness(aba) said that this completes the incidents pertaining to the Battle of Uhud.

The Expedition of Hamra’ al-Asad

His Holiness(aba) said that another battle was the Battle of Hamra’ al-Asad, which took place in Shawwal 3 AH. In fact, this battle was part of the Battle of Uhud. It is the battle that turned the Battle of Uhud into a victory for the Muslims.

His Holiness(aba) said that after the Battle of Uhud, the Holy Prophet(sa) offered the prayers in the mosque despite his injuries. After the night prayer, it

seems the Holy Prophet(sa) stayed up all night, worrying that Abu Sufyan may attack Madinah. There was constant security outside the Holy Prophet’s (sa) home and there was an unease in Madinah. The Holy Prophet(sa) sent for information regarding Abu Sufyan’s movements, and learned that Abu Sufyan was speeding towards Makkah. However, the Holy Prophet(sa) did not rest, and he was right in his worry, because later that night, he received word that Abu Sufyan was in fact advancing towards Madinah. Abu Sufyan changed course because along the way to Makkah, people would taunt him, saying that they had not even been able to kill the Holy Prophet(sa) or obtain spoils of war, so what kind of victory did they win? Hence, he and his army turned towards Madinah. Despite others like Sufyan bin Umayyah advising against going to Madinah, Abu Sufyan insisted.

His Holiness(aba) said that when it was time for the morning prayer, someone informed the Holy Prophet(sa) about this state of Abu Sufyan’s army and their desire to attack Madinah and eradicate Islam. Upon learning of this, the Holy Prophet(sa) said that although Safwan was not very intelligent, he was right about his advice to Abu Sufyan. The Holy Prophet(sa) then said that if they advanced upon Madinah, then stones had already been marked, which they would be pelted with, resulting in the Makkan army being entirely annihilated.

His Holiness(aba) said that he would continue narrating these incidents in the future.

Appeal for Prayers In Light of the Dire Situation of the World

His Holiness(aba) again made an appeal for prayers. As was feared, Israel has directly attacked Iran. This will only worsen matters further. May Allah the Almighty grant sense to the world leaders who are only giving life to a third world war. May He also grant wisdom and understanding to the Muslim Ummah so that they may unite, defend themselves and employ wisdom.

Funeral Prayers

His Holiness(aba) said that he would mention two deceased members of the Community:

Maulana Ghulam Ahmad Naseem

Maulana Mir Ghulam Ahmad Naseem

who was serving as a missionary. He had served as a professor at the Ahmadiyya Institute of Languages and Theology in Rabwah, Pakistan, and had currently been residing in the USA. His father started searching for the Mahdi after seeing the signs of the lunar and solar eclipses and ultimately pledged allegiance in 1901. Ghulam Ahmad Naseem dedicated his life to the service of Islam and ultimately attended the Ahmadiyya Institute for Languages and Theology. He served in Sierra Leone for three years and was then posted as a professor in Rabwah. During this time, he also obtained his Masters in Arabic. He later served for about four years in Guyana and then returned to Rabwah where he continued serving as a professor. He also went on to serve as a missionary in Zambia. He served a total of 11 years outside of Pakistan, the entire duration of which he spent without his family. He is survived by four children. He has published three books about the interpretation of dream, mysticism and spiritual science and an autobiography. He is said to have been very humble and rendered great services to the Community. He also rendered services to the Community in Suriname in the face of great opposition during tours there. As a result of his efforts he was able to unite the Community there. His Holiness(aba) prayed that may Allah elevate his station, and enable his children and progeny to carry on the legacy of his virtues.

Dr Ihsanullah Zafar

Dr Ihsanullah Zafar former National President of the Community in the USA. He served for a long period as National Vice President and then National President from 2002 to 2016 of the Community in the USA. He possessed many great qualities. He was very loving and forbearing. He is survived by two daughters. His wife and son passed away as a result of a car crash a few years ago, and he endured that loss with great patience. He was very virtuous; he was regular in offering prayers, reciting the Holy Qur’an and was active in making efforts to strengthen his connection with God. He had a strong bond with the Caliphate. He was knowledgeable in various fields and would always be studying. He was very content and grateful and taught his children to always be grateful to God. He had a passion for helping the needy. He taught his children to always trust in God and seek whatever they needed from Him. In his work, he would instruct the executive committee under him with kindness, rather than dictating tasks to them. He would always be studying books of the Community. He could not bear the displeasure of the Caliph, and His Holiness(aba) attested to this fact. When no one was in the mosque, he would clean the area as well as the bathrooms. When asked why he did this, he replied saying that this served as an opportunity for him to cleanse his soul. He would always be studying and listening to the Holy Qur’an wherever he went. He loved everyone, especially those who were needy and had an aversion for those who were well off but did not come forward to help the less fortunate. He would often quote the Promised Messiah(as) and had a special love for him. His Holiness(aba) attested that he had a profound love for the Caliphate and obedience, such that he would happily leave his own opinions in order to obey the Caliph. His Holiness(aba) prayed that may Allah grant him forgiveness and mercy, elevate his station, protect his daughters and enable them to carry on the legacy of his virtues.

• Summary prepared by The Review of Religions

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Atiku's Leadership In PDP's Season Of Anomie

TUNDE OLUSUNLE

Sceptical reporters had indeed cast the headlines of the stories they were going to file, ahead of the 98th National Executive Committee, (NEC) meeting of the Peoples' Democratic Party, (PDP), Thursday, April 18, 2024. They were awaiting the news of the implosion of the party after what was going to be a testy, nervy convergence of the party leadership at that level. The NEC ranks next to its National Convention. The recent PDP, NEC engagement was the first since the rancorous 2023 general elections. Very bitter acrimony hallmarked the elections with partial break-aways by stakeholders at various levels. Most notable of these was the rebellion of the "G-5," an amalgam of Nyesom Wike, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, Okezie Ikpeazu and Samuel Ortom, former governors of Rivers, Enugu, Abia and Benue. Seyi Makinde, who is serving his second term as governor of Oyo State, was the last of the quintet. The last four stood in solidarity with Wike who lost out in his bid to pair with former Vice President Atiku Abubakar on the PDP presidential ticket.

The former Rivers governor came second at the presidential primary of the party held in May 2022, and automatically fancied himself as running mate for all his troubles. Wike has serially confirmed that he worked for the presidential flagbearer of the All Progressives Congress, (APC), Bola Tinubu and has been rewarded with a ministerial appointment to a plum ministry. Ortom admitted he worked for the emergence of Peter Obi who flew the flag of the Labour Party, (LP), for the nation's number one job. Like Ugwuanyi and Ikpeazu, Ortom sadly lost his bid for the senate. By some uncanny coincidence, all three were trounced by candidates from other political parties. This has generated discussions about their political rootedness in their various political spaces against the rather-too-early conversations about 2027.

Conjectures and permutations preceding the meeting of the leading oppositional NEC, envisaged a collision between pro-Atiku and pro-Wike tendencies at the event. It was presumed that the core of discourse at the programme would be the question of the replacement of the chairman of the party, Umar Iliya Damagum. Following the suspension of Iyorchia Ayu, a former university teacher and Emeritus minister, from the position early last year, Damagum, the senior deputy national chairman took over in an acting capacity. Owing to the poor funding of the party, which has always derived its oxygen courtesy of the benevolence of its governors, parliamentarians and stakeholders, it has been advanced that Wike has been supportive of Damagum. Despite being minister in an opposition government, Wike has not relinquished his membership of the PDP and has not been disciplined. He has said on several occasions that he hoped to remain in the party, but compromise its unity and stability.

The agenda for the meeting, however, precluded this particular issue. The sitting discussed the timetable for party congresses and reconstitution of the disciplinary and reconciliation committees. It also situated a



Atiku

committee to amend the constitution of the PDP; sustainable funding of the party and the need to rebrand the 25-year-old logo of the party, the very famous "umbrella." Attendance at the meeting was large and broad-based. No fewer than 350 leaders of the PDP from the 36 states and the federal capital turned up. The crammed up conference hall of the party rekindled the question about why the PDP is yet to complete its purpose-built multistorey national headquarters at the very heart of Abuja which has been abandoned for about a decade.

Atiku led the way with former Vice President Namadi Sambo in tow. There were also the former President of the Senate who is also the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, (BOT), Adolphus Wabara and some of his successors, notably David Mark and Bukola Saraki. Former Deputy Speakers of the House of Representatives, Austin Opara, Chibudom Nwuche and Emeka Ihedioha, were on the front row. The PDP has never been in short supply of formidable and reputable Nigerians with former party chairmen; former governors and serving governors; federal parliamentarians; members of the National Working Committee, (NWC); and elder statesmen in the BOT, among those in attendance. You could feel the "long-time-no-see" bonhomie, even as you could almost slice the foreboding in the air of the constrained conference hall of the party in its secretariat.

Since Ayu is from the north central, a section of the party is inclined towards what has been described as a "like for like" replacement. This will see a PDP stalwart from the same zone replace him, which is the perspective of the Atiku school of thought. Gabriel Torwua Suswam, former governor of Benue State and

three-time federal parliamentarian, fits the bill. He has seen it all in the past 25 years of fourth republic democracy and cannot be bullied by anyone. On the flip side, pro-Wike

PDP is not finished. The party has demonstrated maturity and leadership. The acting National Chairman has been holding forth for almost one year. It was the consensus that he would be replaced by a nominee from the North Central. That zone has been put on notice and given three months to put their house in order and bring a candidate

elements reportedly prefer that Damagum should indeed be formally consecrated at the NEC meeting as substantive chairman of the PDP. Strategists in the party, however, reckoned that perpetuating Damagum, who received a vote of confidence from the National Working Committee, (NWC) and the National Caucus of the party just days before, could be politically suicidal. His current relationship with Wike could be counterproductive to the global interest of party.

Atiku's reputation as an authentic nationalist with friendships and relationships built and nurtured over aeons remain very formidable. He is a foundation member of the PDP who led the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua's "Peoples Front," (PF), as a core component of the PDP when the party was in gestation in 1998. His national recognition and experience are critical to the party's consolidation and preparations for future electoral involvements. He is therefore the proverbial elder who, from his local couch, can see that which a young tree climber cannot see. He gave his famous "don't worry" smile when I engaged him a few days before about his expectations at the meeting. That ability to make light of challenges must be one of the reasons for his bouncy health even at his age.

Those who anticipated an inevitably loud combustion from the meeting were disappointed. Atiku and his loyalists, drawn primarily from the ranks of longstanding members of the party, have always desired strategic changes within the ranks of the PDP's leadership structures, as a way of strengthening the party in the run-up towards 2027. He was, however, tactically amenable to the deferment of the potentially explosive subject of leadership change which was pushed to the back-burn-

er. The need for sustained reconciliation and the enthronement of party discipline was therefore foregrounded. Two committees were activated, namely the reconciliation committee to be led by Saraki, and that of discipline which would be chaired by Udom Emmanuel, the suave immediate past governor of Akwa Ibom State.

Atiku thus supported the continuation of the Damagum-led NWC for the following few months during which the north central zone will build consensus around a specific candidate from the zone for the position of national chairman. This followed the proposition that a follow-up NEC meeting be called in August 2024. Overtime, Wike is said to have foisted leaders on the PDP and fallen out with them as soon as he considered them not in alignment with his designs. In the recent history of the party, Wike it was who proposed Ali Modu Sheriff, Ahmed Makarfi and Uche Secondus, who, instructively, is his kinsman from Rivers State, as chairmen of the PDP. He reportedly also supported the ascension of Iyorchia Ayu on the recommendation of Samuel Ortom, preparatory to launching his presidential bid in 2022. The Atiku camp came prepared to take Wike on if the issue of the replacement of the national chairman came up for discussion. Atiku diplomatically talked them out of the issue.

Atiku differed pointedly from those who reacted in the aftermath of the meeting that the party had lost its gravitas. His words: "PDP is not finished. The party has demonstrated maturity and leadership. The acting National Chairman has been holding forth for almost one year. It was the consensus that he would be replaced by a nominee from the North Central. That zone has been put on notice and given three months to put their house in order and bring a candidate." Foreign Affairs Minister in the Obasanjo/Atiku administration, Dubem Onyia, in alliance with Atiku, also admonished dissenters to listen to the former Vice President, a father figure in the party. He seemed to rehash the popular African parable, which educates that when a tree is being hewn from its bottom, the old man is concerned about how and where it will land, not the rhythm of the axe or the sound of its fall.

Segun Sowunmi, a former Atiku spokesman, warns members of the party against de-marketing the party. He enjoins party stalwarts to push out the narrative that the PDP is being a much more democratic and organised party than is imagined. This, he says, is important so the party does not, inadvertently, play into the hands of haters and traducers. Quoting a biblical verse from Ecclesiastes Chapter 9, Verse 11 to buttress his point, Sowunmi reminded PDP supporters thus: "The race is not for the swift nor victory for the strong. But it is the Lord that shows mercy." Dagogo Farah, a former parliamentarian from Rivers State, saluted Atiku's "maturity and sagacity" in preventing the PDP ship from losing course at the NEC meeting. Without a doubt, the PDP is capable of a rebound so long it avoids the pitfalls of the past.

** Dr Olusunle is a Fellow of the Association of Nigerian Authors (FANA)*

Otunba Mike Adenuga (The Bull) At 71: Deconstructing The Nigerian Colossus

DAN AIBANGBE

If he looks big, thinks big, does big, sounds big, then, smells big, he must be the Big Bull, Otunba Mike Adenuga, GCON.

This enigmatic business tycoon of our time is someone who has enjoyed wide coverage, especially on the occasions of his birthday anniversaries.

This is in spite of his rather reclusive personal positioning. If you see the dailies and tabloids blown up in volumes, do not be alarmed. Rather, check the date and you will find it is April the 29th! You will find that people are commemorating the birth of Dr Adenuga!

From the foregoing, it is a big risk writing about such a personality. The risk of obsolescence of your content, the risk of obscurity of your placement, are all enough to deter any pedestrian writer.

But, on the occasion of this year's event, I have determined to take a look at this phenomenal gentleman's birthday from a slightly different perspective.

My approach is to dissect this personality, to bring out his notable virtues, with the hope that our teaming youthful population will be presented with viable options for role modelling, mentorship and prosperous followership.

All the yahoo-yahoos, the get-rich-quick-or-die-trying mentality must be countered with virtues that are traceable, sustainable and on the right side of the law!

The Yorubas pride themselves in the Omoluabi code, which embodies courage, hard work, humility and respect.

An omoluabi is a person of honor who believes in hard work and gives to the community in deeds and in action.

Above all, an Omoluabi is a person of integrity and intelligence. Africa's non-lettered elders are repositories of valuable primary knowledge.

As can be observed from this analysis, an Omoluabi is not necessarily exclusively a Yoruba stuff, but rather a persona of all who embodies these sterling qualities.

On this occasion, I strive to collate the attributes of this celebrated icon of success fondly called The Bull and juxtapose his persona alongside the Omoluabi code, to measure the level of fitness as a suitable role model.

This is to liberate the present and future generations from degenerative attitudes currently threatening the future of our nation.

Otunba Michael Adeniyi Agbolade Ishola Adenuga Jr GCON, CSG, born 29 April 1953 remains the richest Yoruba man dead or alive, home and away! His company Globacom is one of Nigeria's largest telecom operators, with presence in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Republique du Benin.

He also owned stakes in the former Equitorial Trust Bank (now subsumed into Sterling Bank) and the oil exploration firm Conoil (formerly Consolidated Oil Company).

His business interests also extend to the real estate, construction (the ubiquitous giant Julius Berger) and other lighter enterprises.

In all the spheres of his business life, Adenuga has demonstrated doggedness, audacity, focus, hard work, innovation and acuity, among other sterling qualities which have been the driving forces behind his resounding success.

To the uninitiated, that famous picture of Otunba Adenuga Jr brimming with smiles and contentment, may portray effortless success, but as the sages say 'the water duck coasting smoothly on the water surface, is actually extra-busy paddling below surface with its feet!'

The Mike Adenuga dynasty has had to



Adenuga

contend with many challenges along the line. For instance, the Globacom Telecoms came with initial setback that would ordinarily truncate most other entrepreneurs of less sterner stuff.

The Licence fee was paid but bungled through adverse timing differences, leading to the forfeiture of the initial deposit and loss of office to the then First Bank CEO, who mediated the deal.

This singular issue exemplifies the magnitude of challenges that successful men face along the tracks of their success stories.

The journey to prosperity by Otunba Adenuga started from relatively humble beginnings.

His father, Oloye Michael Agbolade Adenuga Sr, was a school teacher and his mother, Omoba Juliana Oyindamola Adenuga (née Onashile, of Okesopin, Ijebu Igbo), a businesswoman of royal Ijebu descent.

Adenuga received his secondary school education at Ibadan Grammar School, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria and Comprehensive High School, Aiyetoro, for his Higher School Certificate, HSC.

He did not have the privilege of attending the bespoke private schools that children of the affluent today take for granted.

He worked as a taxi driver to help fund his university education, just as many 'Japari-ans' of today have to contend with.

He graduated from Northwestern Oklahoma State University and Pace University, New York, with degrees in Business Administration.

Regardless of these humble onsets, the virtues needed for success were engrained in his DNA right from time.

Someone suggested that his business acumen and industry must have resulted from his early life participation in his Mother's businesses – at a point he supervised her Sawmill enterprise!

Adenuga made his first million in 1979, at age 26, selling lace and distributing soft drinks.

He even dived into commodity trading. His big breaks came in 1990, when he received a drilling license.

In 1991, his Consolidated Oil company struck oil in the shallow waters of South-western Ondo State, making him the first indigenous oil company to do so in commercial quantity.

He was issued a conditional GSM license in 1999. After it was revoked, he received a second one when the government held another auction in 2003.

He subsequently was named African Entrepreneur of The Year at the first African Telecoms Awards (ATA) in August 2007.

As recognition for his industry, national development and employment generation, Mike Adenuga has been honoured at the highest levels by countries such as Nigeria way back in 2012 (Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger, GCON); Ghana (Companion of the Star of Ghana, CSG) and in 2018, he was decorated with the insignia of a Commander of the Legion of Honour by President Emmanuel Macron of France for his role in promoting Nigerian – French relations through the establishment of the iconic Allianz Francais Centre at the prime location in Victoria Island.

Regardless of these extensive laurels and performance indicators, The Bull has not relented in his pursuit of excellence.

In fact, he often leaves his many mentees and team members gasping for breath with his go-getter, workaholic, resilient, innovative, mobile-solution workshop and what-to-

do-next attitudes. Adenuga remains discipline, futuristic and consistent, as he strives to be consistently Numero Uno, always on top and ahead of his game. Regardless of this, be assured, Dr Mike also celebrates equally hard.

Stories abound about how he instantly favour-bombs those on hand whenever he receives good news of successes and breakthroughs!

Mike Adenuga is a Nigerian patriot par excellence! This is a virtue abysmally lacking in the character of most Nigerians of today (even including captains of industry).

He is widely travelled with detailed knowledge of Nigeria. He is well-embedded in the economic, social, cultural development.

I guess it is this drive that compelled Mike Adenuga to enter the telecoms ecosystem with the ground-breaking per-second billing and crash in cost of SIMs, which the industry vehemently swore was unattainable! Even thereafter, the Glo Network has persistently churned out mega 'berekete' promos to placate the purse of the entire Nigerian subscribers.

The personal lifestyle of Mike Adenuga is loudly low-profile and un-obstructive. He loves his privacy and family to the extent that he eschews partisan politics and non-essential socializing.

He is deeply devout of his close-knit family. To this extent, he is a complete enigma and close to reclusive.

In spite of deliberate efforts to remain very private, the many acts of Dr. Mike Adenuga's philanthropies are too big to be hushed. For instance, how can you hide the fact that an individual is committed to granting annual scholarships to the tune of some thirty-two million dollars per annum? Through his group of companies, he has donated professorial chairs for research and development.

Through Globacom, he has immensely supported and promoted art, artistes, sports, music and the whole artistry chain in Nigeria and Africa.

He is, perhaps, the biggest votary of Nigeria's Nollywood and music festivals. The company's Ambassadorial Programme has been a veritable Launchpad for many practitioners into the world of corporate endorsements which require character conformity to the brand values.

This may often be the first real character moulding for many of these artistes. Chief Adenuga, unassuming and modest, continues to support the arts in Nigeria without seeking personal recognition or credit.

He has become a Launchpad of sorts to the creative industry in Nigeria with neither furore nor fanfare. In his recreational preference for listening to indigenous African music of the masters, you will also find glimmers of his patriotic mien.

Having taken the rigour to dissect this iconic colossus of our time, I hope the blind can see and the deaf will hear how to be a billionaire, from these snippets.

There is a straight and narrow but assured path to success, which parents, leaders and governments should deliberately begin to inculcate is our youths and future leaders, if truly 'the labours of our heroes past, shall never be in vain!' Nigeria must begin to deliberately identify, codify and inculcate the effigies of heroes such as Otunba Mike Adenuga into our community spaces, living spaces and social media, in place of the get-rich-quick-or-die-trying ones that litter our public domains.

Wishing Otunba Mike Adenuga many happy returns as he pockets the first of his extra years on earth.

Maybe we might even see a Mike Adenuga Institute of Technology one of these days, who knows?

• Dan Aibangbe is a Media and Public Relations Consultant

News

Katsina NSCDC Cooperative, Credit Society Holds AGM

SEGUN OLANIYAN
KATSINA

The Katsina State Command of NSCDC Cooperative and Credit Society has held its annual general meeting (AGM), ascribing the the leadership performance as prudent and excellent.

The meeting presented the financial reports and activities of the society for the year 2023.

Jamilu Indabawa, the state Civil Defence Corp Commandant, who doubles as the society's patron, stated this in a good will message at the event held at the State Command Headquarters in Katsina.

The state Corps Commandant, represented by DCC Akpoo James Uhaa, the Deputy Commandant, commended the cooperative society's leadership of the state branch cooperative for ensuring prudence, efficient management and excellent performance during the period under review.

He emphasized the relevance of such society, urging the personnel to make good use of the opportunities created by the cooperative society to achieve desired dreams.

He charged officials of the cooperative society to put the fear of God in their dealings and ensure accountability, as well avoid all necessary loopholes.

While congratulating all the members for the successes recorded, the state Civil Defence Corp boss, however, enjoined them to judiciously use their dividends to better themselves and their families.

SC Aliyu Jamilu, the branch President of the Cooperative and Credit Society, earlier, commended the state commandant for the guidance and admirable policy of non-interference in the activities of the cooperative.

He said the achievements of the society included growth in capital base, membership, settling the savings of 19 members who voluntarily left or passed away, non-interest cash and commodity loans to members, introduction of a profitable non-interest investment for the cooperative society and the introduction of profitable business of acquiring motorcycles.



Ademola Osanyinro, Acting Bursar, McPherson University (McU); Abiola Omotoso, Acting Librarian (second left); Prof. Olatunji Okesola, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (third left); Rev. Bola Adams, donor of Jehovah Shammah Hall (middle); Prof. Francis Igbasan, Vice-Chancellor, McU (third right); his wife, Omolara (second right), and Olufemi Adebawale, Acting Registrar, during the commissioning of the hall of residence at the university campus in Seriki Sotayo, Ogun State, on Wednesday.

IPMAN Gives Soludo 30 Days' Ultimatum To Meet Demands

CHUKWUJEKWU ILOZUE
AWKA

The Independent Petroleum Marketers' Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) has given Governor Chukwuma Soludo of Anambra State 30 days' ultimatum to address the demands of marketers in the state or face total shutdown of operations without further notice.

The people of Anambra State woke up on Wednesday morning to meet filling stations shut as marketers were locked in a meeting.

Rising from the meeting later, the marketers reached this decision after that meeting.

Chairman of IPMAN, Enugu Depot Community in charge of Anambra, Ebonyi and Enugu states, Chinedu Anyaso, who addressed journalists in Awka, said the association had made cases, which affected members without any response from the governor.

Anyaso said the grievances of marketers in Anambra included the issue of consolidated revenue payable and withdrawal of all litigations against members based on multiple taxation, which was

not in line with the understanding IPMAN had with Anambra State government.

According to Anyaso, IPMAN has discussed the problem of non-payment of debt amounting to about N900 million owed to contractors who supplied diesel for powering streetlight projects in the state.

He said the demands of the association included restoration of part of the property of Chris Tee Nigeria Limited, a marketer at Trans-Nkissi Phase 1, along Onitsha-Otuocha Road, which was destroyed by agents of the government.

He said IPMAN would not

issue further notice upon the expiration of the deadline before shutting their outlets.

Anyaso thanked Ken Maduako, a patron of the association, Golden Iloh, member of the Anambra State House of Assembly and representative of the Anambra Internal Revenue Service, for their intervention and hoped that the Soludo administration would act on their plea to prevent full industrial action.

He commended Governor Soludo for his efforts to make Anambra a peaceful and liveable state while urging him to make the business environment conducive for investors, especially marketers.

Cross River Okays Infrastructural Intervention Across Senatorial Districts

The Cross River State Executive Council, presided over by Governor Bassey Otu, met on Wednesday and granted approvals for development initiatives, including infrastructural interventions and construction of some key roads in the three senatorial districts of the state.

Governor Otu, who opened the meeting with a remark, noted that the public opinion about the performance of his administration was clearly posi-

tive, but commissioners and other members of the State Executive Council should re-double their efforts to ensure sustainable benefits to the people.

The state's Commissioner for Works, Pius Ankpo, who briefed journalists after the monthly State Executive Council meeting in Calabar, spoke on the approval given for intervention and construction of some key roads across the three senatorial districts.

Ankpo disclosed that the

approved memo, tagged: "Aggregate Infrastructural Interest," would bring significant development across the three senatorial districts of the state.

In the northern part of the state, the works commissioner revealed that Ogoja and Yala local government areas would receive repairs to their network of roads, including the Ukelle road, Akreha bridge, and the Yache-Ali-fokpa road.

In the central senatorial

district, Yakurr and Ikom local government areas have been earmarked for massive road interventions.

The works commissioner informed that approval was also given for the construction of Adiabo-Ikoneto Bridge, which was initiated during the military era in the 90s, but abandoned by successive Federal Governments.

Ankpo noted that the bridge, when completed, would serve as a better alternative to the Calabar-Odukpani Junction-Itu Federal Highway, as an easier route into and out from Calabar to Akwa Ibom.

Ogbomoso Shooting: Police Detain Officers Involved

RAJI ADEBAYO
IBADAN

The Oyo State Police Command has disclosed that all the operatives, including Inspector Rasheed Saheed involved in the shooting in Ogbomoso, which resulted in the death of one person, named Iyanda Damilola, are currently under detention at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Iyaganku.

This disclosure was made by the Commissioner of Police, Oyo State Command, CP Adebola Hamzat, in statement made available to journalists by state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), SP Osifeso Adewale, on Thursday.

According to the statement: "The Oyo State Police Command wishes to clear the air about the unfortunate shooting incident that occurred on Monday 22/4/2024 at about 0130hrs around a popular night club along, "Under G" Area, Owode-Ogbomoso resulting to demise of Iyanda Damilola, 'm'.

"Investigation report reveals that during the early hours of the same date and time, a distress call was received by operatives of the Command's Monitoring Unit stationed within Ogbomoso through the director of a popular night club within the axis, requesting for immediate intervention and protection from rampaging suspected student cultists who were at the time harassing guests and destroying the club's property.

"In a swift response to the call by the club's director, a team of officers, led by one Inspector Rasheed Saheed arrived at the scene.

"The fracas worsened as deliberate efforts were made by the suspected cultists to prevent the Police from further gaining access into the crime-scene while shots were allegedly fired from different angles, including from the intervening officers who fired warning shots to disperse onlookers.

"The incident recorded the death of one Iyanda Damilola, 'm' and the injury of his brother, one Iyanda Femi Israel, who has since been discharged from the hospital after treatment."

Q1: Dangote Cement Volume Rises By 26.1% To 4.6MT

Strategies adopted by Dangote Cement to increase sales and ensure an adequate supply of products to customers are yielding the desired results as domestic sales volume increased, by 26.1 percent to 4.6Mt in the first quarter of 2024.

According to the cement manufacturers' unaudited results for the three months that ended, on

April 30, 2024, the Nigerian operations volume rose significantly and positively affected the rise in the Group's overall volume to 7.0 Mt.

The company recorded a Group revenue of N817.4 billion, even as profit after tax inched, up by 2.9 percent to N112.7 billion. Earnings per share closed the quarter at N6.68 rep-

resenting an increase of 3.7 percent. As part of its sustainability programme, Dangote Cement commissioned ten of the 17 Alternative Fuel Projects across the Group.

Chief Executive Officer, of Dangote Cement, Arvind Pathak, in his comments on the results, said, "Driven by an uptick in economic activities, our

Nigerian operations witnessed a strong rebound, with volumes up 26.1 percent to 4.6Mt in the quarter. Similarly, our pan-Africa operations continued an upward trajectory, with volumes up 3.1 percent to 2.7Mt, buoyed by increased sales in Zambia and Congo. Despite elevated cost pressures, increased borrowing costs, and a fur-

ther currency weakening, our first-quarter results reflect our commitment to navigating challenges effectively."

He added, "Group revenue more than doubled to N817.4 billion, while Group EBITDA rose 66.6 percent to N309.5 billion. Profit After Tax was up 2.9 percent at N112.7 billion. These results underscore our

ability to adapt and thrive in a dynamic business environment while delivering value to our stakeholders.

During the quarter, we intensified our emphasis on exports, dispatching 7 ships from Nigeria to Ghana and Cameroon. As a result, our Nigerian exports surged by 87.2 percent, reflecting our commitment to expanding our presence in regional markets and capitalising on our export-to-import strategy.

News

SAfER: Ibarapa Farmers Laud Makinde For Intervention

KAZEEM AWOJODU
IBADAN

Farmers as well as local government chairmen and other stakeholders in Ibarapa axis of Oyo State have commended Governor Seyi Makinde for his timely intervention and his efforts in ensuring food security in the state.

The genuine farmers who are beneficiaries of the fourth phase of the food sector of the Sustainable Action for Economic Recovery (SAfER) expressed their joy while receiving their farm inputs at Ibarapa East Local Government Area secretariat, Eruwa, on Wednesday.

The farm inputs distributed for farmers in Eruwa and other parts of Ibarapa zone included knapsack sprayers, maize seeds, cassava stems, herbicides and fertiliser among others. The input distribution exercise was carried out simultaneously in Eruwa, Igangan, Igboora and Ayete town.

Speaking with journalists shortly after the distribution of the items, state Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Barrister Oluksanmi Olaleye, revealed that the farm inputs such as cassava stems, hybrid maize seeds, herbicides and knapsack sprayers were distributed to arable farmers in the state as part of the ongoing efforts of the state government in ensuring food security across all the geo-political zones of the state.

He noted that the fourth phase of the distribution of SAfER food sector would cover no fewer than 2,537 arable farmers across the state.

Olaleye also maintained that the flag-off is also going on simultaneously at Igboora, Igangan and Ayete, hinting that the fifth phase of the SAfER scheme food sector, includes free vaccination for cattle, distribution of feeds to goat and sheep farmers, subsidy on the use of tractors for farmers in the next few weeks.



Prof. Ayo Omotayo Director-General, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) (left); Lai Mohammed, former Minister of Information and Managing Partner of Bruit Costaud (middle), and Prof. Sola Adeyanju, Director, External Affairs, NIPSS, during a press conference on a two-day national stakeholders' roundtable on the development of the mining industry in Nigeria, held in Abuja, on Thursday.

North Central APC Warns State Chairmen Against Ganduje's Endorsement

ONOJA AUDU
JOS

The North Central All Progressive Congress (APC) Forum has asked state chairmen of the party from the region to dissociate themselves from the recent vote of confidence passed on the national chairman of the party, Abdullahi Ganduje.

Speaking with newsmen in Jos, the Plateau State capital, on Thursday, the forum's chairman, Alhaji Saleh Mandung Zazzaga, said the vote of confidence which the

state chairmen of the party passed on Ganduje last Tuesday was not in the interest of the North Central region or the party.

The chairman said the North Central APC Forum, along with various leaders and chieftains of the party from the region, has been intensifying push for the zoning of the national chairmanship position of the party to the region because that position is well deserved by the region owing to its contribution to the progress of the party and its victory in the 2023 elections.

Zazzaga who was also a member of the Presidential

Campaign Council in the last election pointed out that apart from the strong contribution of North Central to the development and sustenance of the APC over the years, as well as the tremendous support it gave to the emergence of Bola Tinubu as the president, the region has also delivered five governors for the APC out of the six states in the North Central region.

He said apart from Plateau State which is of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of which they are still working hard to return it back to APC, Kwara, Niger, Benue, Kogi and Nasarawa State are of the APC, and therefore the

North Central region has made a strong statement on in its achievement for the party and therefore deserves the national chairmanship position.

"So, it is therefore unreasonable that while we are pushing for the national chairmanship position of the party to be zoned to the North Central in view of our efforts for the progress of the APC and its victories at elections, the party state chairmen from our region would be part of any arrangement or decision to pass a vote of confidence on the embattled national chairman, Abdullahi Ganduje.

Jonathan Inaugurates Projects To Celebrate Gov Eno At 60

IDONGESIT ASHAMERI
UYO

Former President Goodluck Jonathan has inaugurated several life-touching projects in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, to mark Governor Umo Eno's 60th birthday.

The inaugurated projects include a 1.3 Kilometers underground concrete flood control tunnel, the reconstruction of a section of Atiku Abubakar Way, with walkway, drainage, solar street lights and reconstruction of

adjoining 1Km Afaha Ube Road.

Commissioning the projects, former President Jonathan applauded Governor Eno for his leadership strides, especially as it concerns prioritisation of the needs of his people.

Such, the former president said, was demonstrated in Governor Eno's ingenuity of initiating and completing such major life-touching projects within his first year in office.

Making reference to a recent flood alert by Nigerian

Meteorological Agency, Dr. Jonathan described Governor Eno as a proactive leader, saying he is worthy of commendation and urged Akwa Ibom people to be vigilant against antisocial elements and vandalisation of public infrastructure.

In his remark, Governor Umo Eno expressed gratitude to the former president, his own predecessor, former Governor Udom Emmanuel, Akwa Ibom people and well-wishers on his birthday.

He restated the resolve

of his administration to use the common wealth of Akwa Ibom people to put smiles on their faces through life-touching projects and programmes that would ameliorate their sufferings.

"We are committed to touching lives, we are committed to improving the standard of living of our people. We are committed to rural development and we are committed to providing those soft and hard infrastructures, but the time we are in now demands soft infrastructure."

AAC Warns Makinde Against Election Violence During Saturday's LG Polls

EJIKEME OMENAZU

The African Action Congress (AAC), Oyo State Chapter, has expressed deep concern over recent developments regarding the coming local government elections in Oyo State holding on Saturday, April 27, 2024.

According to a statement issued signed by Kayode Babayomi, the AAC Oyo State Chairman on Thursday, the party alleged that there are plans by the state govern-

ment to employ individuals associated with the Park Management System (PMS) to disrupt the electoral process.

The AAC categorically denounced such actions as they undermine the very foundations of democracy.

it urged Governor Makinde and his administration to desist from such acts of election malpractice.

The AAC stated: "The use of thugs to manipulate the electoral process is unacceptable and goes against

the principles of free and fair elections.

"We call on all well meaning Nigerians and civil society organisations to join us in ensuring that the upcoming local government elections are conducted peacefully and without prejudice.

"Furthermore, we caution the Oyo State Independent Electoral Commission (OYSIEC) against any attempts to delay the distribution of election materials to polling units.

"We are aware of past

strategies aimed at manipulating the electoral process, and we will not tolerate any actions that undermine the integrity of the election.

"We urge the Chair- man of OYSIEC, Aare Isiaka Olagunju (SAN), to refrain from engaging in partisan politics.

The neutrality and fairness of the electoral commission are paramount to the credibility of the election process.

"A free and fair election ensures that candidates are

presented a level playing ground regardless of party differences, this Saturday should not be an exception.

"The forthcoming local government election will determine the future of local governance in Oyo State.

"We call on the people of Oyo State to reject any attempts to undermine the autonomy of local governments.

"For too long, local government projects have been neglected, and it is time for a change.

CAN Organises One Day Leadership Summit In Niger

CHINWENDU NNADOZIE
MINNA

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Niger State Chapter, has organised a one day leadership summit to remind members of the vision and mission of the Christian body, as well as their duties shepherding the flocks.

Speaking at the event with the theme, 'The Power of Unity', Pastor Pius Ogbu Sunday of the Leprosy Mission Nigeria traced disunity among the different denominations to the quest for physical expansion of churches rather than soul winning for Christ in line with the vision and mission of CAN.

Though the different denominations and blocks have similarity in vision/mission agenda, the desire to control more grounds, according to him, more often set them against each other, thereby distracting their focus to actualise set objectives by the founding fathers and early missionaries.

Pastor Ogbu who read from various portions of the Bible to buttress his points urged members of the association to take a clue from the prophets in the old testament and the apostles in the new testament and study how they worked closely with one another to complete their missions.

No single denomination can cover the entire world of Christendom, hence the need for the different denominations and blocs to tolerate and appreciate one another in love as partners in progress rather than competitors scrambling for control of geographical frontiers rather than soul winning.

The CAN president, Bishop Daniel Okoh, represented by the chaplain of National Christian Centre, Abuja, Rt. Rev. Ini Ukpuhu, expressed worry that division along denominational lines had continued to widen the gap between Christians in Nigeria State and the country generally.

Bishop Okoh who called for attitudinal change encouraged Christians in Niger State to ensure they work in line with the vision by ensuring that they live for one another as partners in progress.

He said, "Let us ensure that the vision of loving one another as Christ loves the church resonates in us. Let us also reevaluate our oneness as one big family working towards achieving a common goal."

News

Governor Bassey Otu of Cross River State has assured that his administration is committed to ensuring that the rich agricultural endowment of the state is developed and made to become the economic mainstay of the state.

Speaking from his office in Calabar when he received detailed report from the fact-finding committee he set up to look into the activities of ENG-HAUT Rubber Industries Limited located at Uyanga in Akamkpa Local Government Area of the state, the governor reminisced about the prosperous era of Sir Michael Okpara, the late Premier of the defunct Eastern Region, when oil palm, rubber and cocoa were the mainstay of

We'll Make Agriculture Our Economic Mainstay – Gov Otu

the region, which encompassed the present-day Cross River State.

He expressed confidence that his administration could rejuvenate the past glories when Cross River was renowned as a state where agriculture was the economic mainstay, and all the potential of the rubber plantations, oil palm and cocoa endowments were fully operational and profitable for the state.

Governor Otu thanked the fact-finding committee, led by the

chairman, retired Major General Okoi Ubi Obono, who was represented at the report presentation by the committee's secretary, David Amlye, noting that what they did, from the report presented, would have impact beyond the current generation.

The governor promised to critically look into their report and the committee's recommendations in order to ensure that the steps to be taken would turn around the fortunes of the industry.

Speaking when making the presentation of the committee's report to the governor, General Obono told the governor that ENG-HAUT Rubber Industries Limited owed the state over one hundred and seventy eight million naira following non-payment of ground rent dating back to 2006.

The committee made six-point recommendations, including suggesting the revocation of the Right of Occupancy, by invoking Sections 1 and 28 of the Land Use Act of 1978.

Group Links High Unemployment Rate To Unskilled Manpower

INNOCENT OWEH

ABUJA

A Civil Society Organisation, with interest in education, has linked the high level of unemployment in the country to unskilled manpower parading the streets with certificates upon graduation.

To this end, the group, under the auspices of Fides Et Ratio Academy, has rolled out massive skills training programmes for Nigerians.

Managing director of the organisation, Paul Chukwuma, while addressing a press conference on the state of education in Abuja, said a situation where graduates had certificates but lacked the required skills for employability was unacceptable.

He stressed the need for stakeholders in education to lay more emphasis on skills rather than paper qualification for economic growth.

"I discovered the basic issue we have in our educational system is that the educational system we were introduced to and to a very large extent we still carry along with is deficient in the key essential elements that every human being should think about, and that is skills.

"We prioritised paper qualifications over skills; everybody wants to be a PhD holder; everybody wants to be a professor, even when you cannot defend that title," he said.

Chukwuma said for Nigeria to be at par with other nations of the world, especially in digital technology, it was necessary to support the talent of youths.

He noted that some educational institutions in Europe have some of their technical departments headed by individuals without degrees but with skills.

He, therefore, said Fides Et Ratio Academy was established to change the narrative by focusing on skill development.

"In 2006, Fides Et Ratio Academy was established as a training institute that will basically engage in fulfilling this mandate, which I have identified in my own little way while planning to also set up a higher institution of learning.

"In 2020/2021, I was able to establish a private university but it took off effectively in 2022," he said.



Kayode Moshood Akiolu, Chairman, House Committee on Anti-Corruption (left); Kadri Obafemi Hamzat, Deputy Governor, Lagos State (second left); Justice Olayinka Faji (second right), and Mohammed Dan Abba, Deputy Chairman, House Committee on Anti-Corruption, during a 2-day national anti-corruption colloquium in Lagos, on Thursday.

Ogun Govt Sympathises With Victims Of Ado Odo/Ota Rainstorm Destruction

The Ogun State Government said it was in touch with the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC) to ensure the immediate fixing of poles destroyed by the rainstorm occasioned by Sunday's downpour in some parts of Sango in Ado Odo/Ota Local Government Area of the state.

The government, in a statement signed by the Special Adviser on Media, Hon. Kayode Akinmade, said a team from the state government was in the area on Monday to physically ascertain the extent of damage and to know how to engage with IBEDC, as well as sympathising with victims.

Akinmade noted the cables had not been energised before the destruction, which saved lots of lives.

"Our team went on physical site inspection of the affected area on

Monday to ascertain the extent of the damage and to know how to engage with the IBEDC team.

"We are currently working with the IBEDC team, led by the regional manager and the technical head for the Ogun Region. Some of the less affected feeders have been restored and energised while the clean-up of the most affected areas has already started.

"Most of the poles on the roads have been removed while the remaining will be taken out as soon as possible. We are working with IBEDC to ensure there will be full restoration of power in Sango Ota before the week runs out.

"The government is not relenting in its effort to make sure that we restore power to Sango Ota and its environs and we can assure the citizens

that we are on top on the matter.

"We, therefore, commiserate with those whose properties were destroyed by the fallen poles, as the government urged those living in the area to remain calm."

It would be recalled that residents of Iyana Iyesi, Osuke Town, Egan Road, Iyana Ilogbo, Ijaba, Ijagba, Itele, Lafenwa, Singer, Joju, Alishiba, Oju Ore, Tollgate, Eledi, Akeja, Abebi, Osi Roundabout, Ota Town, Ota Industrial Estate, Igberen, Iju, Atan, Onipanu, Obasanjo, Lusada, Arigba, Odugbe, Ado-Odo, Igbesa, Owode, Olokuta, Hanushi, Bamtish Camp Lufiwape, Eltees Farm, August Engineering, Spark Cear Soap Ayetoro, Amazing Grace Oil, Christopher University, Royal Garden Estate were affected by the disaster.

CHUKWUJEKWU ILOZUE

AWKA

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Anambra State Command, has met with the Nigerian Army to strategise on how to improve security in Anambra State.

This is coming on the heels of reports of cult killings in Awka, Anambra State capital, and kidnappings by herdsmen in Ukwulu-Nawgu, Nawgu-Isuaniocha and Nawgu-Enugu-Agidi Roads in Dunukofia Local Government Area, which is also within the state capital territory.

The Public Relations Officer of NSCDC, Anambra State Command, Mr. Okadigbo Edwin, revealed the partnership in a press statement made available to the media in Awka.

NSCDC, Army Strategise On Enhanced Security In Anambra

Okadigbo said the resolve was made during a courtesy call by the state commandant of the corps, Mr. Olatunde Maku, to the Commander of 302 Artillery Regiment of Nigerian Army, Onitsha, Anambra State, Col. M. B. Abubakar.

Maku who sought the collaboration of the army to tackle the insecurity in Anambra said: "Most of the confidence we have as NSCDC personnel is as a result of the Nigerian Army.

"You remember when I resumed my tour of duty, I saw the existing relationship between all security agencies and I keyed into it.

"I am proud to say that you have not disappointed me in executing our core mandate in the protection of critical national, state and local government assets and infrastructure. We have sought for your synergy and I am happy to say you have without hesitation availed us. Thank you for always partnering with us.

"We commend the Nigerian Army for being a supportive partner to NSCDC in the area of training and retraining of the corps' personnel, joint operations, fight against illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, illegal oil refining and petroleum black market racketeering."

Fight Against Terrorism: Group Commends Tinubu, Ribadu

JULIET OYOYO

A group, Forum for Good Governance in Nigeria (FGGN), has commended President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the National Security Adviser, Malam Nuhu Ribadu, for spearheading efforts to tackle terrorism across Africa.

The group said, "It is worthy of note that the two-day high level counter-terrorism summit held at Abuja is a well attended conference by African leaders, United Nations officials and several stakeholders across the world.

In a statement made available to journalists in Kaduna, the forum said in the face of rising insecurity in the country and Africa, the summit would no doubt be more comprehensive in finding solutions.

In the statement jointly signed by the national coordinator and secretary, Comrade Abraham Douglas and Comrade Bala Galadima Ikara respectively and made available to journalists, it stated that in the face of rising insecurity in the country and Africa, the summit would no doubt be more comprehensive in finding solutions.

According to the statement, "The summit organised by the Federal Government, with the support of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) with the theme: 'Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Institution Building to Address the Evolving Threat of Terrorism' will enhance multilateral counter-terrorism cooperation and reshape the international community's collective response to terrorism in Africa."

Ashaolu Launches First e-Bike Delivery Service In Nigeria

CHIBUZOR EMEJOR

ABUJA

Landre Ashaolu, a leading entrepreneur in sustainable transport solutions, has announced the launch of Ecowheels, a fleet of electric motorcycles designed for last-mile delivery service in Nigeria.

A statement on Thursday from the company explained that the cost of transportation and package delivery in Nigeria has gone up due to the removal of fuel subsidies.

"Ecowheels aims to address this challenge by deploying its fleet of cost-effective, eco-friendly e-bikes for delivery operations in Nigeria, significantly lowering delivery costs for customers and combating air pollution and climate change in our congested cities.

"Ecowheels aims to provide a versatile and efficient delivery service tailored to the needs of individuals and businesses, including online retailers and e-commerce platforms; restaurants and food delivery businesses and individuals who need on-demand delivery for personal items and groceries," the statement explained.

Enumerating some of the benefits Nigerians expect from the Ecowheels initiative, the statement said there would be affordable delivery service, reduced emissions, enhanced efficiency, green jobs for Nigerians and climate-friendly transport.

CONTINUED FROM P1

The service is to begin with texting which will be launched in 2024, while voice, data, and IoT services are expected to be launched in 2025.

According to the service provider, people will not need to change their phones when the service is launched as it will work with current 4G-enabled devices.

Speaking to *Daily Independent*, the president of National Association of Telecommunications Consumers (NATCOMS), Deolu Ogunbanjo, said the development is a welcome one, as it will create competition in the industry.

“I am particularly happy about the entry of Starlink into the industry’s market. It is a welcome development that will give Nigerians more available and affordable services.

“Our existing telecom operators have no cause to fear, because there is more room for everyone to operate in.

“For some months now, the telecom operators have been pushing for tariff hikes in the face of the challenges consumers have been facing. I think the deployment of Starlink would give Nigerians the room to choose their preferred service provider(s), if only they will offer quality and affordable service,” Ogunbanjo said.

In the past few years, telecom operators have been grappling with various challenges such as rising cost of diesel, multiple taxation, naira depreciation which triggered hyperinflation and low Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), among others.

However, the country’s eco-

Telcos Fear Revenue Loss As Starlink Targets Data Market Share

conomic policies have hugely impacted the telecom industry negatively in recent times. Drawing from the financial reports of some leading operators in the country, MTN and Airtel, it is evident that they are facing the hardest of times, as they posted unpleasant results. The story will definitely not be different from other operators’ revenue status if their financial reports are made public.

In his remarks, Ajibola Olude, Secretary, Association of Telecommunication Companies of Nigeria (ATCON), said that the performance of these existing satellites especially NIGCOMSAT-1 has been limited due to negligence from the government.

ATCON secretary disclosed that Starlink will be positioned to serve both public, corporate organisations and the retail market, a feature which makes it totally different from already existing satellites in Nigeria.

He said, “There are other satellite companies. The only difference is that they are going to serve the retail market, and corporate organisations. However the previous satellite in Nigeria concentrated on selling capacity to our members.”

Years past, mobile voice was the major source of revenue for telecom companies. The revenue comes from charges on domestic and international calls, in addition to charges each telco collects when their subscribers call other domestic networks (interconnect fees).

Meanwhile, that revenue stream is now under threat, in part from digital platforms. Voice revenue is increasingly coming under pressure as mobile subscribers adopt digital services for their communication.

In 2023, Airtel’s revenue dropped in every quarter. Its revenue for Q1 2023 was \$543 million, a \$2 million drop compared to the previous quarter — \$545 million in Q4 2022. By Q2 2022, the drop in revenue increased by \$15 million, from \$543 million to \$528 million. The telco’s largest revenue decline of the year was in Q3 2023 which saw a \$178 million drop in revenue to \$350 million. In fact, Q3 2023 revenue is lower than all the revenue Airtel recorded in the past 12 quarters.

On its part, while MTN’s revenue has seen growth throughout the years, however, its PBT has been on a downward trend in 2023.

MTN’s Q3 2023 PBT of N32 billion (\$39.6 billion) is lower than its PBT in the past 19 quarters. This means its Q3 2023 PBT is lower than what it has been recording since 2019.

The financial struggle being faced by the operators is expected to assume a tougher dimension because of the competition Starlink would pose, coupled with the tough economic environment.

The satellite, operated by SpaceX, owned by the world’s former richest man, Elon Musk, aims to deliver a global broadband network, using a constellation of Low Earth Orbit to provide high-speed internet coverage with capacity to penetrate into rural and geographically isolated areas where internet connectivity is hardly achievable.

Starlink’s operations in Africa have been rocked by regulatory concerns and challenges, where about 40% of Africa’s 1.3 billion population have internet access, the lowest in the world.

Reports say that Starlink recently announced that it has grown its global user base by 500,000, bringing the total number of international subscribers to about 2.7 million.

Elon Musk, owner of Starlink, said the company’s user base grew from 2.2 million to the current figure in just four months.

Few weeks ago, Starlink slashed the price of its hardware by 45% to N440,000 from N800,000. The standard internet service subscription remains the same at N38,000 monthly.

A representative of Starlink in Nigeria, who preferred anonymity, said there is a high level of patronage for the internet service.

“Many Nigerians have been buying Starlink devices from us. The fact is that those who have tested it know the difference it brings to internet exploration. Since we slashed the price of the devices by 50 percent, the demand for it has been growing.”

Starlink announced its availability in Nigeria, months after it signed an agreement with the Nigerian government to bring in its satellite-based internet coverage, thereby, making Nigeria the first African country to use satellite internet and 46th in the world.

Konga, Nigeria’s only official Starlink shop-in-shop e-commerce partner, is already offering customers a 50% discount on satellite kits for a limited period subject to stock availability.

Starlink, which recently appointed a leading Nigerian tech distribution company as its first African distributor in February, this year, also appointed Konga Online Shopping as its first on-line shop-in-shop partner.

Industry observers believe that with the introduction of Elon Musk’s satellite internet service, Starlink will widen competition in the Nigerian internet market while disrupting the internet market which telecom operators now major in. Starlink was included alongside 37 other Internet Service Providers (ISP), increasing the number of ISPs issued licences to operate in Nigeria to 255 as of September 2022, up from the 187 reported in December 2021.

threatens the industry’s sustainability and can erode investors’ confidence.

In a statement issued and signed by ALTON and ATCON, they urged the government to take decisive action in addressing the numerous challenges confronting the telecommunications industry.

The associations underscored the urgent need for collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors to overcome obstacles hindering the sector’s growth and development.

On infrastructure, ALTON and ATCON said their members still lack access to essential telecommunication services due to a myriad of challenges, including multiple taxation and regulations and prohibitive Right of Way (RoW) charges, inadequate electric power supply and vandalism of telecommunications infrastructure.

“Telecommunications infrastructure development requires substantial investments in network expansion, maintenance, and technology upgrades.

“Despite the adverse economic headwinds, the telecommunications industry remains the only industry yet to review its general service pricing framework upward in the last 11 years, primarily due to regulatory constraints.

“For a fully liberalised and deregulated sector, the current price control mechanism, which is not aligned with economic realities, threatens the industry’s sustainability and can erode investors’ confidence,” they added.

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“Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd) wishes to clarify that the tightness in the supply of premium motor spirit currently being experienced in some areas across the country is as a result of logistics issues and that have been resolved.

“It also wishes to reiterate that the prices of petroleum products are not changing.

“It urges Nigerians to avoid panic buying as there is a sufficiency of products in the country”, the statement reads.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, was still reeling under acute scarcity of the product with queues extending some kilometers from any filling station that have petrol, and leaving many commuters stranded.

The development which start-

NNPC Explains Fuel Scarcity As It Bites Harder In Abuja, Kaduna

ed on Monday has continued to increase, dominating discussions among many residents of the nation’s capital.

Our correspondent, who monitored the situation, reports that most fuel stations along Maraba, Nyanya along Keffi-Abuja Expressway were not opened for business, with hawkers suddenly springing up at different areas of the city.

Frank Idoko, a motorist, lamented the development, saying he was caught unawares, as he had no fuel at all in his car.

Idoko who spoke to our correspondent at Central Area axis, said that he was forced to buy fuel at N1500 per litre, when he drove on a reserve tank from Mararaba to town without seeing any filling station that was selling fuel.

“We are tired in this country.

Even at the exorbitant price of N680 per litre, we cannot see fuel to buy. Can you imagine, I bought 10 litres of fuel at N15,000 this morning. I was forced to because I drove on reserve from Mararaba to town, no filling station was selling. Look for yourself, anywhere you see open filling station, the queue will extend to God-knows-where”, he said.

It was learnt that the story in areas such as Gwarimpa, Katampe, Garki, Wuse, and Lugbe is the same.

Mrs. Juliet Nwosu narrated how she also got stranded at Gwarimpa area looking for fuel, adding that she was forced to buy from black market when it became obvious she was not going to be lucky.

“I left early enough to look for fuel. From my house at Wuye, I drove all the way to Gwarimpa without success; my husband was calling me to buy black market but I thought I could be lucky, when I got to Gwarimpa, the fuel was already on reserve, and you know this is Honda, I had to buy black market to avoid being stranded on the way”, she said.

The unexpectedly closure of filling stations has also affected the traffic as well as transport fares.

While the situation reduced the number of vehicles on the roads, the limited number of commercial vehicles on the road significantly raised fares by more than 200 percent.

Commercial transporters charge N500 for a trip of N200, as a trip of N500 costs between N1,200 and N1,500.

In Kaduna, fuel scarcity is biting hard on the residents as motorists are forced to buy the product for as high as N1,100 per litre from black marketers.

Our correspondent reports that many passengers going to work and their business premises were stranded following the scarcity and very few commercial operators were providing services.

Most filling stations were not dispensing fuel and the few which had the product hiked the pump price to between N750 and N810 per litre. Despite the hike, long queues were seen at the stations.

A resident, Mohammed Amin, said he bought half a gallon of fuel which amounts to two litres for N2,200. He said he was considering dropping his vehicle and opting for commercial means of transportation if the problem persisted.

Our correspondent further gathered that commercial operators are also taking advantage of the scarcity to hike their fares.

A commuter, Amina Isa, who said she usually paid N100 from NNPC filling station in Millennium city to a roundabout where she picks another tricycle to her destination, revealed that, “After waiting three hours without getting a ride, I had no option but to board the next available *keke* that charged me N300 to the same destination.”

Another passenger, Moses Joseph, said he paid N400 instead of N200 from Kakuri to Ahmadu Bello Way.

Also, Mrs. Anna Yohanna, who boarded a bus from Goni Gora to Kaduna Central Market, said she paid N500 instead of N250.

CONTINUED FROM P1

saying Nigeria seeks robust, balanced, and mutually beneficial partnerships that will bring about value-addition in areas like solid minerals.

“Taking a holistic view of the world order, there is a tremendous opportunity between us across trade spheres but especially in solid minerals, where we have high-grade lithium deposits that we know can power the clean energy future of the world. There is excellent value-additive opportunity in Nigeria. The world knows us for oil. They will soon know us for greater innovative exploits in other areas.

“We have an extremely dynamic youth population in Nigeria. It is a young country 70% of our people

Tinubu Markets High Grade Lithium Deposits In Nigeria To European Govts

are under the age of 30, and when we are referring to 200 million plus citizens, it represents both a massive workforce and a massive market for Dutch and other international investors.

“If our young people know they can achieve a good future in Nigeria, they will stay home and build our nation to greatness. Lawful migration of trained Nigerian minds and hands will be a benefit to Europe, and irregular migration will no longer be a source of fear in Europe if we partner effectively.

“This is what we want and it is why we are adamant about providing student loans and new credit opportunities to not only enhance the skills of our people but also to ensure that they can access a higher quality of life within their legitimate incomes. We will transform our economy, and our young people will be the reason why,” the president stated.

President Tinubu asserted that Nigerians have tremendous confidence in themselves and that his confidence in the Nigerian people gave him the courage to take difficult decisions on their behalf, given his full awareness of the need to give Nigerians the long-term tools they need to succeed.

“I am a determined leader of my people. I have and will continue to take the difficult decisions that will benefit our people, even if there is short-term pain. We have gone through the worst of the storms. I am unafraid of the consequences once I know that my actions are in the best long-term interests of all Nigerians.

“The Nigerian naira is one of the world’s best performing currencies today. We took the necessary risk, and all resilient Nigerians kept faith with us. They will be rewarded, and the reward will only be greater as we partner effectively with you on new opportunities for development. As leaders, we must take decisions for the benefit of our nations, and we cannot shy away from that,” the president said.

The Prime Minister of the Netherlands noted that President Tinubu’s economic reforms have engendered greater confidence in the Nigerian economy by international investors and that Dutch investors have activated another set of \$250 million worth of new investments over the next few months, including a \$100 million investment in a waste-to-wealth industrial facility in Lagos State.

“You are promoting democratic governance and the solutions it can bring in dealing with problems of development. I saw how you went through democratic channels to remove an incumbent president in 2015 in partnership with President Buhari and how that has led to development in your country.

“I saw you take the courageous decision to deal with fuel subsidies and other reforms, and we are interested in what allowed you to take the decisions that many before you could not take. And you took those decisions early in your term. It shows rare determination. And your stand in ECOWAS, all of these point to your commitment in leadership,” the Prime Minister stated.

Tinubu further expressed his firm commitment to develop the developmental partnership between the European Union (EU) and Nigeria, noting that symbiotic economic ties remain the best long-term path to sustainable and mutual prosperity rather than one-sided relationships in which bilateral trade is skewed too much in one direction.

Sport

Tit Bits

ASFU Mourns Veteran Sports Administrator, Owusu-Ansah

AYO BADA
LAGOS

The Africa Students Football Union (ASFU) has expressed its condolences over the passing of patron of the union, Dr. Emmanuel Owusu-Ansah, who served as the COO of the just concluded 13th Africa Games held in Ghana.

Dr. Owusu-Ansah's death was announced on Tuesday, April 23, 2024.

Until his death, Owusu-Ansah contributed immensely to sports development on the continent and the world at large, leaving an indelible impact on the lives of Students-Athletes coupled with sports administration across Africa countries.

ASFU president, Professor Oluwaseun Omotayo, who was shocked at the news of the demise of Owusu-Ansah, described the deceased as a pillar, saying his departure had left a great vacuum in sports management.

Edo First Lady Congratulates Edo Queens On Super Six Qualification

As Edo Queens Football Club of Benin secured a place in the Super Six of the Nigeria Women Football Premier League (NWFL) in Delta state, the First Lady of Edo state, Mrs Betsy Obaseki, has congratulated the victorious team and promised to receive today.

On his own, executive chairman of Edo State Sports Commission, Olympian Yussuf Alli, made the disclosure while expressing joy over the success of the Edo State-owned team.

He said the news of Edo Queens' superlative performance and qualification for the women league's Super Six excited His Excellency Governor Godwin Obaseki and the wife Betsy Obaseki who have been very supportive besides sponsorship of the team.

"I am so happy that our girls made it against all odds. I have informed His Excellency the Governor and Her Excellency the wife of our Governor and they are so happy.

"Her Excellency wants to receive the victorious Edo Queens tomorrow by 2pm," Alli said while also congratulating the team.

Amuneke Has Needed Experience To Manage S'Eagles, Coach, Yusuf Tells NFF

CHIBUIKE CHUKWU

Yusuf Salihu, the Chief coach of Kogi United, has charged the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) to consider former Tanzanian manager, Emmanuel Amuneke, for the vacant Super Eagles coaching job.

Speaking to sports writers recently at the Kontagora Township Stadium, one of the venues of the ongoing New Year Mega Lottery Nationwide League One playoffs, Yusuf said apart from the fact that Coach Emmanuel Amunike has paid his dues in the footballing world, he is highly experienced and will surely do well if saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the affairs of the national team.

He said the coach has all the necessary requirements to handle the Super Eagles having been saddled with national responsibilities in the past and has discharged effectively and efficiently



He said the call for another foreign coach to handle the Eagles after the departure of Portuguese tactician Jose Peseiro immediately the AFCON ended was not the best at this point. Yusuf said he has 100% confidence and assurance in the leadership of the Nigeria Football Federation under Alhaji Ibrahim Musa Gusau to do

justice to the issue of home-grown coaches for the Super Eagles.

He also called on the 1994 set of the Super Eagles who conquered Africa in Tunisia and also went on to the world stage for the first time to dazzle the world and make tremendous impact to rally round one of their own for the Super Eagles top job.

Paris Games: Nigeria Olympians Association Lauds Enoh, Urges Synergy

CHIBUIKE CHUKWU

Nigerian Olympians Association has lauded Senator John Owan Enoh, the Minister of Sports Development, on his commitment to Nigeria's participation and doing well at the fast-approaching 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, France.

The commendation was giving when the association visited the minister in Abuja on Wednesday where they praised his vision and achievements in sports development since he assumed office.

During the visit, Olumide Ayodeji, president of the association, expressed their desire to not only support the minister's vision but also contribute to the growth of sports in Nigeria through mentoring of athletes.

He highlighted the Olympians' contributions to the country and urged the minister to look into their welfare in line with his vision for sports development.

Emmanuel Babayaro, a former member of the Nigerian football team that won a gold medal during the 1996 Atlanta Olympic games, described the minister as a leader with a human face and assured him of the support of Nigerian Olympians Association in consolidating his achievements so far.

He also emphasised the Olympians' willingness to offer their support and experience as mentors to help grow sports in Nigeria. Christy Opara Thompson, Olufemi Ebenezer were members of the NOA delegation where they outlined the individual contributions of members of

the NOA to sports development to include building of infrastructure for use of athletes in communities to enhance sports development.

Senator Enoh, in his response, expressed his gratitude for the visit and pledged to provide a platform for the Olympians to engage with athletes to achieve desired outcomes. He assured the association that the ministry would work out modalities to include them as part of the contingent for the Olympic Games on a sport-to-sport basis. Additionally, he promised to do things differently to achieve the desired results under his leadership.

"There's so much the ministry is willing to do, including working with the right people to register desired results," he said.

Federation Cup: Insurance Begin Title Defence Against Stormers, Pillars Battle Rangers

CHIBUIKE CHUKWU

Federation Cup holders, Bendel Insurance of Benin, will start their title defence against FC Stormers as the Round of 64 games of the 2024 Federations Cup gets underway.

This is as a heavyweight battle between Kano Pillars and Rangers International of Enugu will be the cynosure of all eyes at the Bwari Stadium in Abuja on Thursday, May 2.

The only match involving two NPFL clubs at this stage,

Rangers, 2018 winners and 2023 runners up will be aiming to inflict more wounds on Pillars having defeated them home-and away in the league.

Area 3, still in Abuja, is the venue of Insurance FC vs Stormers FC as the former begin their title defence. Insurance beat Rangers 1-0 in the 2023 final in Asaba, Delta State capital.

This year's President Federation Cup competition at the national level will kick off with the men's Round of 64 matches

on Wednesday and Thursday next week.

Abuja, Kaduna, Owerri, Lafia, Awka, Enugu, Benin City, Ibadan, Asaba, Ilorin, Aba and Kano are the centres to host the 32 matches, which will then produce the candidate-teams for the Round of 32.

The women's teams, whose competition will take off at the Round of 32, will sit out next week's attrition, but will take to the battlegrounds when the men are also fighting for slots in the Round of 16.

U17 Women W'Cup Qualifier: Olowookere Invites 25 For Burkina Faso

AYO BADA
LAGOS

Bankole Olowookere, the coach of U17 women national team, has invited 25 players to camp ahead of next month's FIFA U17 Women's World Cup qualifying fixture against Burkina Faso.

The list includes four goalkeepers, seven defenders, seven midfielders and seven forwards.

Olowookere, who led the

Flamingos to a first-ever World Cup bronze medal-finish in India last year, saw the girls fire from all cylinders in a 12-0 rout of their counterparts from Central African Republic (CAR) over two legs in Douala and Abuja in the second round of the African qualifying series in February.

Harmony Chidi, who scored five of the 12 goals, as well as Ramota Kareem and Shakirat Moshood who netted a brace each in the 12-goal haul, are among the 25 players called.

2024 Basketball Africa League: Hoopers Can Match Any Team – Amayo

AYO BADA
LAGOS

Ahead of the Sahara Conference phase of the 2024 Basketball Africa League (BAL), Rivers Hoopers guard, Kelvin Amayo, has said the Nigerian Champions could match any team at Africa's elite club basketball showpiece.

Amayo, who joined Rivers Hoopers ahead of the 2024 BAL, has been in training camp with the rest of the Hoopers squad since April 9 hailed the quality of his teammates and coaching crew.

"(We have a) good team. Everyone is playing hard, playing defence, and we're learn-

ing every day. (My teammates) play very hard and catch up to things very quickly. Coach is doing a really good job with conditioning, teaching the concept of defence, and helping us understand who is who early so that everyone knows what they need to do from the beginning," he said.

In a chat with Hoopers media, Amayo, who was an integral member of the Stade Malien team that won the Sahara Conference and placed third overall at last season's BAL, also stated that he hopes his experience will help Rivers Hoopers perform better at this year's BAL than in their debut appearance three years ago.

Olympics: Be Strong, Focused, Shorunmu Charges Super Falcons

CHIBUIKE CHUKWU

Former Nigeria's Super Eagles goalkeeper Ike Shorunmu has warned the Super Falcons to be wary of their group opponents in the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympics.

The nine-time African champions are placed in a tough group that has Brazil, Spain, and Japan.

While speaking to the News Agency of Nigeria, the former Besiktas of Turkey goalkeeper urged the team to be resilient.

"I urge the Falcons to be

strong, focused, and resilient in their game at the group stage because the team belongs to the group of World champions.

"At the same time, it's a necessity for the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) and the technical crew to be involved in the seasoned players.

"Beware of aged players for better performance by the team at the group stage," he said.

Falcons have missed the last three Olympics with their last appearance in 2008 in Beijing.

Ndidi Targets Top Six Teams Ahead Summer Move

AYO BADA
LAGOS

Super Eagles and Leicester City midfielder, Wilfred Ndidi, has set his sights on a move to one of the top six Premier League clubs when the transfer window opens.

The 27-year-old midfielder has been in fine form for the Foxes this season, scoring six goals and recording six assists in 34 games in the Championship under Enzo Maresca.

The former Genk man signed a six-year deal with the one-time FA Cup winners in

the summer of 2018, and his contract runs out this summer.

The club are yet to hold renewal talks with Ndidi and Kelechi Iheanacho, hinting that their promotion journey to the English top flight will be the last time both players don the blue colours of Leicester.

Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray, Sevilla and Tottenham Hotspur are interested in securing Ndidi's services. According to report, the player's preference is a move to one of the top six Premier League clubs. Anything outside of that, the Nigerian will move away from England.

EPL Title Race: Liverpool Need Arsenal, City To Have Crisis – Klopp

Jürgen Klopp might have lost any hope of winning the English topflight this season after The Red's title ambition was virtually ended by Everton at Merseyside on Wednesday.

However, the manager said for the title, they need both Arsenal and Manchester City to have crisis along the line.

However, Klopp hugged Everton manager Sean Dyche, patted his Liverpool players on the back and then disappeared down the players' tunnel with 38,000 Evertonians singing "You lost the league at Goodison Park" at full volume. Klopp didn't need the reminder. The manager knew it was all over for him and for Liverpool after losing 0-2 at Goodison Park on Wednesday night.

Having been so desperate to step down from Liverpool at the end of this season with the Premier League trophy back at Anfield, Klopp must now face up to a long, empty farewell.

In the space of five weeks, hopes of a quadruple have evaporated with elimination from the FA Cup against Manchester United and



Klopp

Europa League against Atalanta. That left Liverpool with only the Premier League available to add to the Carabao Cup they won against Chelsea in February.

But the league trophy has now pretty much disappeared over the horizon after this 2-0 defeat at Everton on Wednesday. Mathematically Liverpool can still win the title, but reality suggests something else.

Everton's win was their

first home victory in the Merseyside derby since 2010, but it meant so much more than three points for Dyche's team in their battle for Premier League survival. With Liverpool needing to win to move level with league leaders Arsenal and keep alive their hopes of finishing the season as champions, the joy of victory for Everton was all about wrecking their bitter rivals' chances.

Everton's win was a fully

deserved one following goals from Jarrad Branthwaite and Dominic Calvert-Lewin. Not only did it leave Liverpool as rank outsiders to pip Arsenal and Manchester City to the title, it also ended Klopp's hopes of a glorious farewell as manager at Anfield. Klopp is vacating his post at the end of the season, with Feyenoord coach Arne Slot emerging as the leading candidate to replace him.

Klopp has looked drained of energy in recent weeks as a run of four wins in nine games has derailed his team's season. Liverpool have dropped 10 points in their last seven games -- they only dropped seven in their previous 14 -- so Klopp's formidable powers of motivation have diminished as his personal finish line approaches.

There's a saying that once you think about quitting, you have already quit. Klopp would argue to the contrary, but those numbers point to everyone at Anfield beginning to switch off, subconsciously or otherwise. The result of that loss of focus and motivation was there for all to see on the pitch at Goodison.

Newcastle Join Race With Arsenal For Madrid's Mendy

Real Madrid could have a new-look squad next term. While Carlo Ancelotti will hope to maintain some continuity, it is widely reported that the club is linked with some incredible names. Endrick is already confirmed to join, Kylian Mbappe is expected to sign and other names such as Alphonso Davies and Florian Wirtz are being targeted by Madrid.

Should Alphonso Davies leave Bayern Munich to join Real Madrid, this is bad news for one Real Madrid player



Mendy

in particular. Davies is one of the best full-backs in the world, so he will not be signed to sit on the bench, meaning Ferland Mendy will either be dropped or sold, the second being the most likely option of the two.

According to a report by L'Equipe, Ferland Mendy is attracting big interest from the Premier League this summer. The French outlet claims that Newcastle United are now in the race, alongside Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United.

Newcastle United have had a horrid season in terms of injuries. It is a testament to Eddie Howe's management that the English manager still has the Magpies battling for European football this season, despite a huge chunk of their squad being missing for most of the season.

Above all else, it is the defence which Howe has been forced into manipulating throughout the season due to injuries. Therefore, it is no surprise that the St James Park board is willing to prioritise the signing of a new defender, most notably, a left-back such as Ferland Mendy.

Modric Willing To Remain At Madrid Against All Odds

Real Madrid center midfielder Luka Modric is still one of the best at his position in LaLiga, but because Los Blancos are so loaded in the middle of the park after signing Jude Bellingham this past summer, the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner has seen his role phased out.

Modric is still a key part of the squad albeit in a rotational capacity. He no longer starts every game but rather a portion of the matches, and he sometimes comes off the bench, too.

Earlier this season, there was some drama regarding Modric and his future at the club, with many wondering if he would try to leave for another European club in order to start every match at the Champions League level -- or even take a major payday in Saudi Arabia like former three-peat teammates and Ballon d'Or winners Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema.

Instead, Luka Modric has had a change of heart and



Modric

seen the light, as MARCA report the 38-year-old is now willing to re-sign with Real Madrid and accept a role as a backup player. However, he has yet to tell president Florentino Perez and CEO Jose Angel Sanchez of his final decision.

Real Madrid fans would undoubtedly love Modric to stay. He still has a lot to offer the club in terms of his creation, intelligence, leadership, and even eye for spectacular clutch goals -- which came in handy in LaLiga this season.

Ten Hag Faces 25% Pay Cut To Remain At Man United

Erik ten Hag will face a 25% pay cut as Manchester United manager next season if he holds onto his job in the wake of the failure to qualify for the Champions League, sources told ESPN.

Ten Hag, who signed a three-year contract at Old Trafford after leaving his position as Ajax head coach in May 2022, is under mounting pressure at United with the team in seventh position in the Premier League, 16 points adrift of a top-four spot, ahead of Wednesday's Old Trafford clash with bottom-placed Sheffield United.

Although United secured a place in the FA Cup final for the second successive season by defeating Championship side Coventry City on penalties last weekend, the manner of the team's progression -- United surrendered a 3-0 lead by conceding three goals in the final 20 minutes at Wembley -- has further intensified the scrutiny on Ten Hag.

Sources told ESPN that United's new football regime, headed by minority owner Sir Jim Ratcliffe, have been exploring possible alternatives to Ten Hag by as-

sessing the qualities of other managers including England's Gareth Southgate, Brighton manager Roberto De Zerbi, Brentford's Thomas Frank and Wolves' Gary O'Neil.

But despite the poor performances and exit from this season's Champions League at the group stage, sources told ESPN that United are still, at this stage, preparing for next season with Ten Hag as manager.

Sources told ESPN that Ten Hag, 54, like the vast majority of his senior players, is on an incentivised contract at Old Trafford related to the team's performances. That failure to secure Champions League qualification would trigger a 25% cut in salary for the season in which the team does not participate in UEFA's premier competition.

Manchester United are 16 points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa in the Premier League. Michael Regan - The FA/The FA via Getty Images

With Ten Hag earning £9 million-a-year (\$11.2m) as United manager, an absence from next season's Champions League



Ten Hag

would see his salary drop to £6.75m and potentially open up the prospect of a less lucrative compensation package should a decision be made to dismiss him as manager with one year remaining on his contract this summer.

Xavi Makes U-Turn, To Remain At Barcelona

Xavi Hernández has agreed to remain as Barcelona coach until the end of his contract in 2025, a source confirmed to ESPN, reversing his decision to step down in the summer.

Xavi, 44, announced in January that he would walk away from the post at the end of the season following a string of bad results, saying that the job had also taken its toll on him mentally.

However, following a meeting with president Joan Lapor-

ta on Wednesday, the former Spain international has decided to fulfil his contractual commitment with the Catalan club.

Barcelona vice president Rafa Yuste appeared to confirm the agreement when exiting the meeting late Wednesday night.

"We had a meeting with the coach and the president in which Xavi showed us his commitment," he told reporters. "He is a Barça guy, he is the coach who can lead our project and our young players from the

club. I am convinced that he will do a great job, I am very happy for him because he is a great 'culé.'

"I am happy [with Xavi staying] because I always defended the continuity of the project he started two-and-a-half years ago.

"We have not talked [in the meeting] about changes in our team at all. Xavi has shown his enthusiasm and we must support him and his staff to continue with this project."

Xavi was appointed as Barça coach in 2021, leading them to their first league title in four years last season and signing a contract extension until June 30, 2025, with an option for an additional year, in September.

The team ran into difficulties in December and January, though, when they conceded four or more goals in defeats to Girona, Real Madrid, Athletic Club and Villarreal as they were eliminated from the Spanish Super Cup and the Copa del Rey.



Xavi

Forced wins may earn you money; It may also rob you of glory, buy you stinging animosity and a hard-nut revenge at the apex of your victory.

— Lai Labode

Sunny Awhefeada The Imperative

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Samson Edema And The Quest For A 'New Dawn'

The literature curriculum that my generation of undergraduates was taught at the University of Benin, it was the same in other Nigerian universities then, was a hybrid of English and African oeuvres. There were occasional attempts at studying European Literatures in Translation, but the bulk of what we studied was English and African Literatures. One of the courses that left a lasting impact in our impressionable minds was "Twentieth Century British Literature" which in some other curricular was dubbed "Modernist Literature" or "Modern Literature". The course, never mind the nomenclature ascribed to it, was anchored on philosophy, psychology and social history. The world that literature depicted spanned from around 1901 to 1950. The incident that ushered in that world was the death of Queen Victoria, the monarch who ruled the waves for about seventy years, in 1901. From thence, the world grappled with two world wars, the 1912 sinking of the Titanic which recorded the world's highest casualties in any form of disaster before then, the Influenza in 1918, the global economic recession of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Hydrogen bomb in 1945, etc. The frightening incidents shook humanity and the shroud of disillusionment conditioned by fear and uncertainty hung over the world.

A major consequence of the foregoing was a "basic shift" which substituted religion with philosophy and psychology in humanity's attempt at coming to terms with the overwhelming crises of that era. T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, among other writers of that period authored works which frame a world in unprecedented turmoil, agony and hopelessness. Eliot's "The Wasteland" became the literary touchstone of the leit motif of the literary representation of that era. Confronted with chaos, destruction and hopelessness, the characters embark on a quest for a new order. My teacher at the University of Ibadan, Professor Sam Asein, brilliantly summed up the ethos of the literary manifestation of the period in the following memorable words: "...the underlying anxiety in these works has been to resolve the crisis of a soul in search of meaning and new value systems, be they religious, social, ethical or aesthetic". So central is Asein's thesis to the understanding of the literature in question that I have had to recommend this essay to colleagues and students again and again.

The first title of the present essay was "Samson Edema and the Search of Meaning" with the last three words lifted from Asein's article. A second thought made me settle for the present title which I lifted from the Facebook post of Samson Edema, my former student turned friend! Samson Edema was my student for four sessions at the Delta State University,



Nkiruka Onyejeocha, Minister of State for Labour and Employment

(DELSU), Abraka. In his class were the likes of Obaro Jonathan, Oge Igbeke, Andy Nwokolo, Ernest Agbonzegbe, Johnson Oruese, Dede Jolomi, Emmanuel Oboli, Paul Dorume, Dike Akassa, Joy Sefia, Affiong Ndemita, Edesiri Agbaghe, Gabriel Sanudje, Jacob Benatti, and other starry eyed young minds that passed through DELSU's famous Department of English and Literary Studies. If I remember clearly, it was their class that broke the jinx of acute paucity of Second Class Upper Division graduates per session in the department. Four or five of them graduated with Second Class Upper division and the students in the lower levels saw that it was possible to graduate with that coveted class.

Samson was not just the "Class Rep", a kind of liaison between the students and lecturers, but he was a brilliant student who also tried his hands at creative writing. Together with his friend, Obaro Jonathan, now a subaltern don at DELSU,

Samson demonstrated a commendable flair and commitment to scholarship. He read widely and could ask questions that rattled teachers. He spoke "Big English" too to reflect his status as an English undergraduate. Once he visited my family in company of Obaro, my wife had to become a spectator thrilled by the grandiloquent conversation between both friends. It remains an episode my wife remembers till this day. In their class, like all the other classes I have taught in DELSU and elsewhere, there were many brilliant and promising students who worked hard and dreamt of a great future for themselves in Nigeria. Although Nigeria was already a "wasteland" then, it was not yet the darkness that it is now. Then it was dusk and their generation thought that the country would evolve into night and then dawn. So far, it has been too long a night without the faintest hint of dawn.

Samson Edema has gone in search

of that dawn in another clime. When he called me about a month ago to say hello, he didn't give a clue that he was "escaping" from Nigeria. However, his recent Facebook posts depicted him in settings that were not Nigeria. One of them has a telling caption "NEW DAWN" from which I derived the title of the present essay. After graduation from DELSU, Edema like every brilliant youngster went onto the University of Ibadan for postgraduate studies and in the process earned the prestigious Master of Arts degree in English. He returned to his base and taught in secondary schools. Despite his diligence, focus, cerebral prowess and the certificates to his name, Nigeria undervalued him. Instead of hope, Nigeria offered him hopelessness. Everywhere he turned, he was confronted by insecurity, hunger, disease, death, political brigandage and an acute sense of hopelessness. When he thought that hope was around the corner, what comes into sight would be more disillusionment. If Nigeria failed him, certainly he could find hope and meaning elsewhere. And elsewhere could be anywhere not just Europe and America. Elsewhere for Edema's generation could be Sudan, Togo, Gambia or Benin Republic! Things are that bad for Nigeria that our young people just want to get away. Samson Edema "escaped" to the United Kingdom.

The foregoing is not just the story of Samson Edema. It is the experience of the generations of Nigerians under forty! They are fleeing the country in droves. The employed, underemployed and unemployed are leaving Nigeria in their numbers. I have lost count of the number of reference letters I have written for former students who are "fleeing" Nigeria just this year. I receive such requests every week. And I am assailed with the frightening impression that Nigeria's future is "fleeing". Growing up as a child, we were shown people who went abroad to study and happily returned home after graduation. It is no longer the case. An overwhelming number of those leaving the country at the moment, many as they are, have said their farewell to Nigeria. Some will come for occasional visits, but they have taken up homes elsewhere where they find happiness, peace and fulfillment. Not too long ago, in a class of over two hundred students, less than forty said they will stay in Nigeria after graduation. The others have resolved to "japa" after graduation. They said they see no hope in Nigeria. When I told them about Olusegun Obasanjo's pamphlet "I see Hope" they retorted "that one na im own". What is now called the "Japa syndrome" has created an escape route for our young people. Our ancestors were taken to Europe and America forcefully and in chains, but today their descendants are of their own free will relocating to the same places in "search of meaning" and a "new dawn"!

Growing up as a child, we were shown people who went abroad to study and happily returned home after graduation. It is no longer the case. An overwhelming number of those leaving the country at the moment, many as they are, have said their farewell to Nigeria. Some will come for occasional visits, but they have taken up homes elsewhere where they find happiness, peace and fulfillment