



News as it breaks

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@daybreaknews247

@daybreaknews247

@daybreaknews247

editordaybreaknews@gmail.com

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COVER

Despite initial denial by the national secretary of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Caretaker/Extra-ordinary Convention Planning Committee (CECPC), Senator John James Akpanudoedehe, the Yobe State governor, Mai Mala Buni may have lost his seat as chairman of the APC CECPC to his Niger State counterpart, Abubakar Sani Bello.

The Niger State Governor arrived at the party national secretariat on Monday in the company of certain members of the Committee and proceeded to preside over a closed-door meeting.

With him were former Senate President, Ken Nnamani, Women representative in CECPC, Stella Okotete, the Youth Leader, Ismail Ahmed and Mr David Lyon.

Also in attendance were Professor Tahir Mamman, Senator Ali Abba, and Senator Yusuf Yusuf.

National Secretary of the Party who had earlier issued a statement asking party faithful to disregard media reports of change in leadership was also at the meeting.

Investigation revealed that members of the Committee had earlier held a meeting at the residence of the former Senate President, Ken

Confusion in APC as Niger Gov, takes over party leadership

- * *"I have been acting for a while since the chairman travelled." - - Bello*
- * *Administers oath of office on state chairpersons of the APC*
- * *It is a coup in the ruling party - Shehu Sani Mocks APC*



Niger State Governor Sani Bello on resumption as the new CECPC chairman at the APC national Secretariat in Abuja

Nnamani before coming to the party national secretariat.

However, when questioned on taking over as the new

leader of the APC, Sani refused to acknowledge or deny the development but only said he has been in an acting capacity

since the chairman (Mai Mala Buni) travelled.

Speaking after presiding over a meeting of the CECPC on

the leadership 'confusion', Bell said: "Acting chairman, I have been acting for a while since the chairman travelled."

Pressed further on whether he is now fully in charge of the party, the Niger State Governor said "No comment."

During the meeting on Monday, Governor Bello confirmed he administered the oath of office on state chairpersons of the APC and they discussed issues about the party's National Convention.

"The state chairmen took their oath of office today and we discussed progress made so far on convention and what needs to be done next so that we will achieve the March 26 date for convention," he said.

It is Coup in the ruling party - Shehu Sani Mocks APC

Former Kaduna Central Senator and chieftain of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Shehu Sani has reacted to the leadership drama that has enveloped the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).

Taking to his Twitter account, Sani described the development as a coup.

"From Civil war to 'coup' in the ruling party," he wrote.

Sen. Ewruhjakpo Pledges Support To Laboratory Scientists

The Bayelsa State branch of the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN) has been assured of government's support to enable it contribute more in building a better health service delivery system in the state.

Giving the assurance at a meeting with the chairman and other executives of the association in his office, the Deputy Governor, Senator Lawrence Ewruhjakpo, underscored the role of medical laboratory scientists in the proper diagnosis of ailments in both public and private health facilities.

The Deputy Governor maintained that diagnosis was key to successful medical practice, hence its practitioners and their Association should be accorded a pride of place in the health sector of the country.

According to him, medical laboratory science was indispensable in the health care system, stressing that anything done without diagnosis was tantamount to walking with both eyes closed.

In recognition of this, he said government would always give the necessary support to the medical laboratory association with a view to improving the quality of healthcare delivery in the state.

Senator Ewruhjakpo, who congratulated the state chairman

and other officers of the Association on their successful election and inauguration last year, charged them to do better than their predecessors in office in order to write their names in gold.

While wishing them a successful tenure in office, the Bayelsa number two man encouraged them to work towards achieving best standards in the medical laboratory profession as well as improved service delivery in the health sector.

His words: "I have always said each time I have opportunity to interact with your association at any point and level, that the issue, is that, the man who does not have value for his eyes and therefore decides to close them and walk will definitely hit a brickwall or stumble and fall.

"Unfortunately that has been the practice in Nigeria. . . You are very important because nobody can do any reasonable thing in medicine without proper diagnosis. Doing anything without diagnosis is actually walking with your eyes closed.

"The essence, relevance and indispensability of medical laboratory science and practice cannot be overemphasized. I speak like this not because I have my sentiment or emotions attached to the Association but because it is the truth.

"The medical laboratory scientist is like the skin to a man. It is only when you have carried out your diagnosis that they (doctors) will actually know what is wrong with a patient and then administer the appropriate treatment.

"As a government, we recognize your role. And so, I can assure you that we will do what we can to support you and enable you to

occupy your legitimate place in the scheme of things," he said.

Speaking earlier, the State Chairman of the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria, Mrs. Seleipre Hannah Richard-Sele, thanked the Deputy Governor for his undying love and passion to promote the growth of the Association in particular and the entire health sector of the state.

Mrs. Richard-Sele said the meeting was basically to introduce the new state executive officers of the AMLSN to the Deputy Governor as well as intimate him on some of the Association programmes.

She equally appreciated Senator Ewruhjakpo for making the state Exco of AMLSN proud by attending the Association's national conference in Abuja.

Community sets for showdown with husband as eyes, tongue of wife's corpse missing

By Joyce Babayeju

There was tension in Ogbe-Ani, Ubulu-Uku community, in the Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State following the rejection of a corpse that was brought without eyes, tongue and other organs.

The deceased, Mrs Comfort Biakpara, who was in her early 50s, was said to have been brought to her family compound in Ubulu-Uku by her husband, who hailed from the Burutu Local Government Area of the state.

According to a report by the Punch the deceased was laid in

her compound on Saturday for internment when it was discovered that some vital organs were missing.

A family source said that the incident created apprehension in the community, as youths and elders said the corpse was not their daughter.

"It was terrible yesterday (Saturday). Our sister was brought without eyes, tongue and other organs.

"As they laid our sister on a bench in the canopy and family members and other people were going to see her, unfortunately, we first discovered that cotton wool was put on her eyes.

"When we raised the alarm and enquired further, we discovered

that there were no eyes and that was when youths revolted and started scattering everywhere. Some sustained minor injuries in the process.

"The husband's family members who brought the corpse ran away because we were angry over the development. Later, we found out that even her tongue was also removed," the source said.

It was learnt that the corpse was abandoned at the canopy till around 8pm when it was taken to a morgue with the help of some vigilantes in the community.

The source said the family was set for a showdown with the victim's husband.

EDITORIAL

Reawakening Defence Against Women Genital Mutilation

There are growing reports about the prevalence of girls and women genital mutilation globally. According to the United Nations, a total of 200million girls and women are victims of this health-hazardous, culturally outmoded and socially traumatising practice. Out of this number – which is still swelling – 44 million are girls of age 14 and younger.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) or circumcision is the practice of cutting or removing some or all the external female genitalia. In most instances, it is performed crudely using local methods by traditionalists. Culturally, it is believed that it prevents or reduces immoral or prostitution tendencies among women as FGM is said to reduce sexual urge among women. Hence, baby girls and teenagers go through the painful experience of circumcision.

Out of the 30 countries where FMG is most widespread, majority of girls have undergone circumcision before their fifth birthday. Africa has 27 countries on the ignoble list. Egypt, Ethiopia and Indonesia top the list of countries where female genital mutilation is practiced. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, this dangerous practice is on the increase.

Findings reveal that this practice has destroyed many marriages. Often, wives are sexually unresponsive or insensitive to their spouses and so are unable to satisfy the sexual urges of their husbands. Several divorce cases are traceable to this sad development, which is also linked to the cultural patriarchy issue in Africa and other parts of the world.

Stakeholders are really worried: Why should such an obnoxious practice such as female genital circumcision and other beliefs still flourish in a digital age? Why are female folks always at the receiving end of our inhuman culture?

In Yemen, Somalia, Guinea and Djibouti, the practice is extremely high. “Being born in those countries means you have a nine out of 10 under the practice”, says a UN report adding that 85 percent of the girls population in Yemen experience this practice within their first week of life. Somalia is 98 percent, while Guinea and Djibouti are 93 percent each. The report includes India, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, as well as pockets of such practice in Australia, North America and Europe.

In Nigeria, experts are expressing concerns that “13 percent of women – about one out of every ten – who have been genitally mutilated were cut by medical professionals”, said Eugene Kongnyuy, Acting Country Representative, UN Population Fund (UNFPA). It is called ‘medicalisation of FGM’. You wonder why professionals are involved in this kind of practice.

The UN has set 2030 target to end this ugly practice of FGM. It is a target that should be supported by all relevant stakeholders in order to ensure that this barbaric practice is brought to an end.

As Nigeria joins the rest of the world to celebrate the 2022 Female Genital Mutilation year, we urge members of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to work with medical officers, traditional, religious institutions, as well as international development partners to embark on aggressive public awareness campaign on this matter.

They should also pursue enforcement of the right of the girl child and women to determine their sensuality status with regard to FGM by invoking Child Right Act (2015). This practice is barbaric, unhealthy and professionally condemnable and must be stopped forthwith.



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Mission Statement

To tell the truth at all times and hold government accountable to the governed and to give the citizens the information they need to be active participants in the democratic process. In this light Daybreak newspaper refuses to be an ally of any special interest but to maintain objectivity, fairness and balance as its core principle especially in an age of misinformation and fake news.

News



Ukraine-Russia war: Nigeria, others may face commodity supply disruptions, says IMF

By Joy Osaji

The International Monetary Fund says countries that have very close economic links with Ukraine and Russia are at particular risk of scarcity and supply disruptions.

It added that poor households across the world would suffer from the increase in food and fuel prices, as the Ukraine-Russia war persists.

The Washington-based Fund said this in a press statement, which was titled 'IMF Staff Statement on the Economic Impact of War in Ukraine'.

The statement read in part, "Countries that have very close economic links with Ukraine and Russia are at particular risk of scarcity and supply disruptions and are most affected by the increasing inflows of refugees."

Russia is among Nigeria's top 10 import trade partners between the third quarter of 2020 and the corresponding period in 2021, with a total import trade value of N993.38bn.

The IMF Executive Board further lamented the tragic loss of life, human suffering, and the ongoing massive damage to Ukraine's physical infrastructure, adding that over million refugees were in neighbouring countries.

According to the statement, the

economic consequences are dire for the world, as there is a surge in energy and commodity prices.

"While the situation remains highly fluid and the outlook is subject to extraordinary uncertainty, the economic consequences are already very serious. Energy and commodity prices—including wheat and other grains—have surged, adding to inflationary pressures from supply chain disruptions and the rebound from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Price shocks will have an impact worldwide, especially on poor households for whom food and fuel are a higher proportion of expenses. Should the conflict escalate, the economic damage would be all the more devastating," the statement read.

The Fund also said that the sanctions on Russia would substantially impact the global economy and financial markets, with significant spillovers to other countries.

It further emphasised the need for fiscal policy to support the most vulnerable households, to help offset rising living costs.

It added that Ukraine has requested emergency financing of \$1.4bn under the IMF's Rapid Financing Instrument to help in cushioning the economic effects of the war.

NNPC moves to buy FG's power plants

By Samuel Itsede

The Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), formerly Nigerian National Corporation (NNPC), has expressed interest to participate in the acquisition of the power plants put up for sale by the Federal Government through the Nigeria Integrated Power Plants (NIPPs).

Managing Director of NNPCL, Mallam Mele Kolo Kyari, who disclosed this when he led the top management team of the Oil & Gas Company on a courtesy visit to the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) in Abuja last Friday, said the company had the requisite expertise and experience to be an active participant in the power sector in Nigeria.

Head, Public Communications, Mr. Ibeh Uzoma Chidi disclosed this in a press release yesterday.

According to the statement, Kyari said as an oil company and enabler organisation, NNPCL was determined to boost power generation and supply to Nigerian homes through increased investment

hence it had signed a contract with China Machinery Engineering Company (CME) and General Electric, (GE) to provide 50 Mega Watts of electricity to Maiduguri, Borno State.

He said the management of NNPCL was determined to run the organisation efficiently and profitably for the benefit of the shareholders hence it plans to engage in activities that would generate funds; and for the power sector, "NNPCL is a partner of choice".

He revealed that the organisation was ready to collaborate with the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) after the audit of some of its assets for the sale and divestment of those assets through the BPE. The GMD added that the planned audit would be carried out by renowned and reputable audit firms.

Earlier, Director-General of the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), Mr. Alex A. Okoh said that the NNPCL had indicated an interest in the acquisition of some NIPP plants and would be given a level playing ground to compete with other bidders.

What Bukola Saraki Must Do To Kwankwaso – PDP

The Chairman of the Kano State Peoples Democratic Party, Shehu Sagagi, has asked the leadership of the party to do everything possible to stop Senator Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso from leaving the party.

Sagagi made this known during the visit of the presidential campaign team of a former Senate President and chieftain of the PDP, Bukola Saraki, to Kano.

The team was led by the Director, Bukola Saraki Presidential Campaign Directorate, Prof Iyorwuese Hagber.

The Kano PDP chairman stated that Bukola Saraki and other party leaders must persuade Kwankwaso from defecting.

He stated that given Kwankwaso's strong political structure his exit

from the PDP at this time would spell doom for the party in the 2023 election.

"I am advising the PDP to have a dialogue with Kwankwaso because if they allow him to defect, it will not augur well for the PDP and its entirety," Sagagi said.

Recall that former Governor of Kano State, Musa Kwankwaso, on Thursday confirmed his intention to dump the PDP for the New Nigeria People Party ahead of the 2023 general elections.

Kwankwaso in an interview with BBC Hausa disclosed that he would announce his next political move before March ends.

This is coming few days after the former governor while speaking on Nasara FM, in Kano asked Nigerians

to look for an alternative to the All Progressives Congress and the PDP in the 2023 general elections.

Kwankwaso who claimed that the main political parties have nothing to offer said, "I didn't see anything that either APC or PDP will show or tell Nigerians to get convinced and vote for them in the coming 2023 elections.

"So I think people should now come to think of the right party and people to support and vote for so that we can rescue the present situation.

"In 2015, we gave the leadership of the state to some, thinking that they will make it, but not knowing that it won't yield any positive outcome. That is why we are back to rescue our state."

Only 4 states complying with Contributory Pension for workers, says PenCom

There are indications that only four states, namely Lagos, Kaduna, Edo and Benue, remitted their workers pension contributions fully as at December 2021, in line with the mandate of the Contributory Pension Scheme, CPS.

According to the 2021 fourth quarter report, Q4'21, released by the National Pension Commission, PenCom, five other states of Osun, Delta, Ekiti, Ondo, Anambra and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which are also remitting both employer

and employee contributions have backlogs in remittances.

Analysis of the report shows that 25 states had enacted pension laws on the CPS, while seven states were at the bill processing stage.

Out of the five states operating other pension schemes, four states adopted the Contributory Defined Benefits Scheme (CDBS), while one state operates the Defined Benefits Scheme (DBS).

PenCom noted that as part of its mandate, it carried out

sensitization workshops, capacity-building programs, and stakeholder engagement meetings during the quarter under review.

It added that it held a meeting with four pioneer Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs) managing majority of the RSAs of employees of Kaduna State to review the solutions proposed by the PFAs and Kaduna State to address the accrued rights liabilities owed to the retired and disengaged employees of the state.

Humanitarian Crises: Nigeria Donates \$1m to Afghanistan

The government of President Muhammadu Buhari has donated \$1 million to Afghanistan.

Secretary-General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha, disclosed this in a statement.

Commending the Nigerian government, Taha said OIC remains committed to supporting Afghanistan.

"The Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Hissein Brahim Taha has commended with appreciation the generous donation of one million dollars made by the Republic of Nigeria to the Humanitarian Trust Fund for Afghanistan."

"This donation comes in time to add a new momentum to OIC's efforts to contribute to easing the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and to help in catering for the needs

of millions of Afghan people, including women and children.

"OIC remains committed to the noble cause of supporting the Afghan people and will spare no effort in implementing to the full the special resolution on Afghanistan issued by the last extraordinary session of the

Council of Foreign Ministers held in December 2021 in Islamabad, Republic of Pakistan.

"The OIC appeals to all Member States, stakeholders and partners to come on board and make contributions to the humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan through the bank account reserved for this fund within the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)."

Afghanistan was plunged into crisis after The Taliban took control following the withdrawal of American troops in August.

The country currently faces hardship under the oppressive regime of The Taliban.

The Lagos State Commissioner for Tourism, Arts and Culture, Mrs. Uzamat Akinbile-Yussuf, who was represented at the event by Mr. Idowu Johnson, spoke on "Imperatives for Building Lasting Structures for the Sustenance of the Creative Industry."



Hissein Taha



Ukraine Returnees Receive \$100 Each, says NiDCOM

Nigerian citizens who were evacuated from war-torn Ukraine were given \$100 (about 48,000) each on Friday by the federal government, the Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM) has said.

NiDCOM spokesman Abdur-Rahman Balogun disclosed this

via a statement on Friday in Abuja.

The first batch of 450 Nigerians stranded in Ukraine returned home from Romania through the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja.

Mr Balogun said that the returnees, mostly students, arrived Nigeria with Max Air

flight 747 at 7:10 a.m.

He however, said that the evacuees from Poland could not return on Thursday because their flight was rescheduled for Friday, to arrive Abuja at 2:30p.m.

He added that Airpeace left on Thursday to pick the passengers from Hungary, and was expected to arrive Abuja at 4:30 p.m.

Lassa fever kills 98 in two months, says NCDC

By Joyce Babayeju

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has said in its latest epidemiological report that Lassa fever killed 98 Nigerians in 15 states in the last two months.

The states with the fatalities are Ondo (30), Edo (17), Bauchi (10), Benue (8), Ebonyi (9), Taraba (7), Kogi (6), Enugu (2), Oyo (1), Gombe (2), Kaduna (2), Anambra (1), Kano (1), Katsina (1) and Cross River (1).

Also, 559 persons are currently undergoing treatment at treatment centres across the country, while 38 healthcare workers have been affected so far.

The Report revealed that since the beginning of the year, 140 confirmed cases of Lassa fever were reported from 21 states and 79 local government areas.

A total of 90 confirmed new infections were reported in one week, between February 21 to 27, 2022. Also, in the said week, 12 deaths were recorded in six states: Ondo (3), Edo (3), Bauchi (1), Benue (1), Ebonyi (2), and Kogi (2).

The report further showed that of all confirmed cases, 73 per

cent were from three states: Ondo (32 per cent), Edo (24 per cent) and Bauchi (17 per cent). The predominant age-group affected is between 21 to 30 years. The male to female ratio for confirmed cases was 1:0.8.

“In week 8 (February 21 to 27), the number of new confirmed cases decreased from 91 in week 7 (February 14 to 20) to 90 cases. These were reported from Ondo, Edo, Bauchi, Gombe, Kogi, Ebonyi, Taraba, Enugu, Oyo, Benue, Plateau States and the FCT. “Cumulatively, from week 1 to week 8, 2022, 98 deaths have been reported with a case fatality rate (CFR) of 18.1 per cent, which is lower than the CFR for the same period in 2021 (22.8 per cent),” the NCDC said.

“In total for 2022, 21 States have recorded at least one confirmed case across 79 Local Government Areas. The number of suspected cases has increased compared to that reported for the same period in 2021.

“Five (5) new Healthcare workers were affected from Bauchi state in the reporting week 8. National Lassa fever multi-partner, multi-sectoral Emergency Coordination Centre (EOC) have been activated to coordinate response activities at

all levels,” the NCDC said.

To reduce the risk of the spread of Lassa fever, the NCDC offers the following advice: Ensure proper environmental sanitation – that is, keep your environment clean at all times, block all holes in your house to prevent rats from entry; Cover your dustbins and dispose of refuse properly. Communities should set up dumpsites very far from their homes to reduce the chances of having rodents within homes; Store foodstuff like rice, garri, beans, corn/maize, etc in containers that are well covered with tight-fitting lids.

Others are – Avoid drying foodstuffs outside on the floor, roadside where they will be exposed to contamination; Avoid bush burning which can lead to the displacement of rats from bushes to human dwellings; Eliminate rats in homes and communities by setting rat traps and other means; Practice good personal hygiene by frequent washing hands with soap under running water or use of hand sanitisers when appropriate; and visit the nearest health facility if you notice any of the signs and symptoms of Lassa fever as mentioned earlier, and avoid self-medication.

Insecurity: Religious leaders, monarchs, slam presidency, South-East govts

By Gabriel Udeh

The Joint Body of South-East Council of Traditional Rulers and Representatives of Igbo Archbishops and Bishops has expressed displeasure over the handling of insecurity in the South-East.

The religious and traditional rulers made their displeasure known in a communique made available to newsmen.

According to them, the presidency failed to reply to a letter seeking dialogue as a means to end insecurity in the region.

They also faulted governors from the region for refusing to honour calls for dialogue.

The body urged the president and state Governors to grant audience as requested.

Part of the communique read, “Confronted with the escalation of insecurity in the South-East, and concerned that the responses of those in authority were failing to stem the tide of violence, especially in the run-up to the Gubernatorial Elections in Anambra State, the Council issued a public appeal on Sunday, 30th October, 2021, for a de-escalation and suspension of the IPOB sit-at-home order. We undertook extensive behind-the-scenes consultations with all relevant stakeholders.

“In a bid to sustain the momentum gained, on November 3, 2021, the Joint Body wrote a letter to the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR), requesting an audience.

“The purpose of the request was to dialogue and explore avenues for peace-building, douse the tension in the South East to ensure it does not result in grave socio-economic burden on our people. The joint Body fears that further delay or inaction on this request may have the unintended consequence of giving credence, albeit erroneously, to the belief by some groups in the region

that restoring peace and stability is not the primary goal of the Federal Government.

“In the same vein, genuine efforts made through the Chairman, South East Governors’ Forum to dialogue with South East Governors have so far also met a brick wall. Taken together, the shuttered silence gives room for suspicion and presents ominous portends if left unattended to.

“It has been three months since the letter was written and delivered to the office of the President. The Presidency has neither acknowledged receipt nor responded to the letter.

“It is puzzling that the President and the South East Governors appear to be ignoring the demonstrated value of dialogue and consensus-building in finding a lasting solution to the region’s security issues.

“As leaders who are continuously required by our burden of service to interface with the populace, the Joint Body is desirous of confirming the sincerity and commitment of the Federal Government, in particular, to finding a lasting solution to the security crisis.”

Among those who signed the communique are Chairman, Ebonyi State Trad. Rulers Council and South East Council of Traditional Rulers, Igwe Charles Mkpuma; Chairman, Anambra State Trad. Rulers Council, Obi Nnaemeka Achebe; Chairman, Enugu State Trad. Rulers Council, Igwe Agubuzu; Chairman, Imo State Trad. Rulers Council, Eze Okeke; Emeritus Catholic Archbishop of Owerri, Most Rev. Dr. Anthony Obinna; Others are Methodist Archbishop of Umuahia, Most Rev. Chibuzo Opoko; Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha, Most Rev. Valerian Okeke; Past Principal Clerk Presbyterian Church Nigeria, Most Rev. Uma Onwunta; Chairman, Abia State Trad. Rulers Council, Eze Joseph Nwabeke; Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, Bishop Obi Onubogu; and Anglican Archbishop of Enugu, Most Rev. Dr Emmanuel Chukwuma.

Nigerian troops kill 17 terrorists in Borno

By Gabriel Udeh

The Nigerian Army said troops of “Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK)” eliminated 17 Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) terrorists in Damasak, Mobbar Local Government Area of Borno.

Damasak, the main town of the Mobbar Local Government Area, is located near the confluence of the Yobe River and Komadugu Gana River, adjoining the border with Niger 34 km from Difa in Niger and 3km from Damasak and the border with Niger.

Maj.-Gen. Christopher Musa, Theatre Commander, Operation Hadin Kai, North East Joint Task Force, disclosed this in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), on Monday in Maiduguri.

The commander said that the unrelenting troops had arrested three

other terrorists alive, “he said.

Musa said that the troops also recovered motorcycles and other assorted weapons from the encounter which took place on Sunday.

The commander said that the troops engaged a large number of the terrorists when they attacked a Forward Operational Base located along Walada exit gate, in the town at about 0200hours.

He said that the insurgents met with serious resistance and superior firepower of the gallant troops who engaged them in a heavy gun battle that lasted for hours, forcing the insurgents to withdraw.

Musa explained that the troops, supported by the Air Component of OPHK mounted a hot pursuit and closed up with the terrorists.

While commending them for the great feat, Musa charged the troops to be more decisive and ensure total annihilation of the insurgents

News

Fuel subsidy: World Bank projects N4tn for 2022, experts predict more loans

The Country Director, World Bank, Shubham Chaudhuri, says Nigeria's decision to postpone the full deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry by 18 months may cost the country over N4tn in subsidy payments on petrol in 2022.

He said this when he led some executives of the bank on a courtesy visit to the head office of The PUNCH in Magboro, Ogun State on Thursday.

The World Bank country director, however, noted that while the World Bank could come up with advice on subsidy removal, its role was certainly not to dictate as it had no ability to do such.

Chaudhuri said, "With economics, really, you are not meant to make a political decision. What you are meant to do is to lay out what are the cons and consequences of different decisions.

"So that is what we are doing, we are just being very clear that this would come with a fiscal cost and the fiscal cost is the number, perhaps N4tn this year."

He said despite the fact that the price of oil had gone up, the rise in global crude oil prices was not helping Nigeria that much.

Industry figures seen on Sunday showed that the price of Brent, the crude against which Nigeria's oil is priced, was \$118.11 per barrel at 5.06pm Nigerian time, as it traded at the same rate the preceding day.

On why the rising oil price was not helping Nigeria as anticipated, Chaudhuri said, "The reason is that the cost of the PMS subsidy

is going up. So at \$85 per barrel, the NNPC was projecting that the cost of the PMS subsidy will be around N180bn to N200bn per month. In January when crude oil prices had already gone up to \$90, \$93, it (subsidy) still went up to N250bn per month.

"Now you just mentioned it is \$100 per barrel, our guess right now is that we are looking at N4tn or even more in the year 2022 as the cost of PMS subsidy."

While making a calculation, he said, "You take 60 million litres a day, which the NNPC said is being evacuated from its depots, you take what is happening to the cost of imported world gas, price of gasoline, which is going up because crude oil price is going up.

"Right now, the differential I believe is about N200 per litre. So 60 million times N200 everyday is N12bn per day. Multiply that by 30, that is N360bn per month. Multiply that by 12, it will be somewhere about N4tn per year.

"And the N200bn, I think was when the oil price was around \$93. So with oil prices at \$100, the gap between N165 per litre and the (actual) cost of PMS is going to be more than N200 per litre.

"And that is the main reason we feel it is going to be a bit negative for Nigeria's fiscal situation because oil production is not going up or may even continue to stall."

Chaudhuri noted that the issue of subsidy removal was Nigeria's choice, adding that there should be a consensus among the

political elites that should be communicated and accepted by the public.

He explained that if there was no consensus earlier, it could be a time for an eclipse of discussion around what should be the choice for Nigeria, adding that it had to be a consensus.

He further noted that despite the rise in global oil prices due to the Russia/Ukraine war, this might not have a significant effect on the country's oil earnings.

Chaudhuri said, "On the oil price, historically, in the last five decades, you will see that anytime crude oil price goes up, it helps economic activities in Nigeria, just because it becomes a source of free cash flow that people spend on a lot of things.

"Because the oil sector by itself is part of a relatively small part of the economy but the spillover is large. What was also the case in the last five decades was that high oil prices were good on the federation budget, finances, that is no longer true.

"In 2021, it was not true, and in 2022 it is not likely. We could be wrong, and we will be very happy to be wrong."

The concerns raised by Chaudhuri were shared by stakeholders in the oil sector, for instance.

The National Public Relations Officer, Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria, Chief Ukadike Chinedu, said subsidy on petrol might double this year due to the rise in crude oil prices.

Agriculture responsible for 70% of Nigeria's labour force, says NEPC

By Samuel Itsede

The Executive Director of Nigerian Export Promotion Council, NEPC, Dr. Ezra Yakusak has said the Nigerian agricultural sector currently employs about 70 per cent of the country's labour force making it the dominant sector in the economy.

He said with over 25.13 per cent contribution to the GDP, the sector is critical to Nigeria's economy "in terms of both innovative outcomes and job creation, much of which is credited to the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, SMEs, ability to export their products."

Dr. Yakusak stated this at a two day capacity building programme on adopting Good Agricultural Practices, GAP, for Tiv Women Agricultural Cooperative Society held at the Tiv Traditional Council Hall, Gboko, Gboko Local Government Area of Benue state.

Represented by the Head, Makurdi Export Office, Mr. Ben Anani, the Executive Director observed however that the sector was still one of the least performing sectors in terms of growth "with the growth performance as at the end of 2019 put at 2.12 per cent."

He said to boost the sector, the NEPC "will continue to support small holder farmers, and processors of key export commodities with necessary interventions in areas of capacity building, lending support with agro farm inputs, support to acquire vital product quality certification, grants and more to improve on their productivity."

Dr. Yakusak noted that the training

in GAP for Tiv Women Agricultural Cooperative Society, an initiative of the wife of the Tiv Paramount Ruler, Her Majesty, Prof. Felicia Ayatse was a laudable programme targeted at promoting organic agriculture for four crop value chains including, ginger, cassava, sesame seed and soybeans.

"The selected value-chains are commodities which Benue state has comparative advantage in production and is among the leading producing states in Nigeria."

In her remark, Prof. Ayatse who commended the NEPC for registering the over 1,000 member cooperative society and also availing the members the training said the programme was crucial to achieving the objectives of the cooperative.

"The meeting is very crucial and important, every member is taking the programme seriously. And I can assure that the training is not going to be in vain. We have all made up our minds as a cooperative to practice what we learn and make use of organic input in our farms this year," she said.

Declaring the training open, the Commissioner for Trade and Investment, Mr. Benjamin Agber said the Ministry would support the initiative "because it will create employment and income for families, the state and the country at large."

The highpoint of the programme was the handover of organic farm inputs and knapsack sprayers from the NEPC, for the cooperative to Prof. Ayatse by the Benue State Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Dr. Kester Kyenge.

Implement 2009 agreement, or shut varsities, says ASUU

The Academic Staff Union of Universities has advised the Federal Government to either fund universities or shut them down.

The National President of ASUU, Prof Emmanuel Osodeke, who said this in an interview insisted that government must implement the agreement it signed with the union in 2009.

Osodeke was reacting to the Minister of Labour, Employment and Productivity, Dr Chris Ngige, who during an interview with Channels Television, stated that the Federal Government did not have the funds to meet its obligations in the agreement signed with ASUU.

Ngige said the government was considering renegotiation of the terms of the agreement with ASUU in the effort to end the ongoing strike by university lecturers.

However, the national president of ASUU, Osodeke, said anything concerning improving and investing in the universities, government would always say it had no money.

He stated, "The Nigerian type of politician does not take education seriously. Can they tell this country how much they spent on COVID-19? I can assure you the crisis in education is 10 times what

COVID-19 is because what shapes a nation is education. If it collapses, you have nothing. They were building railways here and there, They were bailing out DISCOs (electricity distribution companies) which they sold to private people, but they are still buying meters for them to sell to Nigerian people. But when it has to do with education that will shape this country, they will say they don't have money.

"They are increasing their tour allowances. You know they move round all over the world. You saw the wife of the president celebrating birthday in Dubai and all governors' wives were there with their aides. They have hundreds of millions of naira for their children ('s education) in the UK; they have money, government money. But to fund education, they don't have money. We have told them they either close down the universities and prepare for youths or let's for once solve this problem and move ahead so that we start having foreign students who will pay in dollars as school fees, foreign lecturers will come here to teach; so that we don't pay this huge amount we are using to move Nigerian students from Ukraine to Nigeria. They had money to go and move the children of the rich from



Ukraine. They spent over \$8m, but to fund Nigerian universities, they don't have money. It is not true, they have money they are just playing games.

"The children of the poor will suffer in Nigerian universities while their children will have good education outside the country. When they are through, they come back here and take the juicy jobs here, and keep lording it over the children of the poor. It's a class issue. For us, the option is for them; they shut down all the universities and let all the children go and learn mechanics

or they fund the universities."

He also reacted to Ngige's statement that the government was calling for renegotiation of the 2009 agreement it signed with ASUU.

Osodeke stated, "We are not signing any agreement or MoU with them. They should implement what they agreed upon 13 years ago. At that time, the exchange rate was one dollar to less than N100.00, but now, the exchange rate is one dollar to more than N500.00. Even the value of that money before we agreed in 2019 had already been eroded.

"We have finished renegotiation, but if they have gone back to their principals that there is an area we should look at, we will look at it, we are ready.

"We have finished renegotiation. All the things we asked for were scientifically calculated. On what basis do they want to reduce them?"

"He said as the strike entered the third week, the government had not made any genuine effort to meet the union's demands.

Some of the union's demands which have yet to be met are funding for revitalisation of public universities, earned academic allowances, University Transparency Accountability Solution; promotion arrears, renegotiation of 2009 ASUU-FGN Agreement, and the inconsistencies in Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System Payment.

Osodeke stated, "Nothing concrete has been done. My members are saying we don't want stories, promises. By now they should have told us the issue of UTAS has been approved. That shouldn't take them more than two days

"Nothing has changed, they can do all those things within one week. If we take it that there is a crisis in education, they can do it."



US to offer Kyari legal representation, keeps mum on extradition

The Department of Justice of the United States of America has declined comments on the planned extradition of suspended Deputy Commissioner of Police, Abba Kyari.

The justice department, however, reiterated that Kyari is facing charges filed in 2021 which led to his indictment, adding that he would be offered legal representation in the US.

In an email to an inquiry sent by Sunday PUNCH, Thom Mrozek, the Director of media relations of the United States Attorney's Office said, "We will not have any comment in relation to a pending extradition request for any defendant."

"In relation to Mr Kyari, he already faces charges that we filed last year in Los Angeles after a federal grand jury issued an indictment.

"I can tell you that all criminal defendants in the United States are entitled to legal representation."

The PUNCH had reported that Kyari was suspended in July 2021 by the Inspector-General of Police, Usman Baba, for alleged involvement in a \$1.1 million Internet fraud allegedly perpetrated by Hushpuppi and four others; AbdulRahman Juma (Abdul); Vincent Chibuzo (Kelly); Rukayat Fashola (Morayo); and Bolatito Agbabiaka (Bolamide).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation had alleged that Hushpuppi paid \$20,600 to two bank accounts allegedly provided by Kyari on January 20, 2020.

FBI Special Agent, Andrew Innocenti, said he obtained voice calls and WhatsApp conversations between Kyari and Hushpuppi, adding that Hushpuppi also paid the police officer N8m or \$20,600

for the arrest and detention of a "co-conspirator," Chibuzo Vincent.

The US court had ordered the FBI to arrest Kyari.

The PUNCH had also reported how the suspended DCP had been detained by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency since February 14, 2022 for attempting to sell 25kg of cocaine which was seized from some drug dealers.

The NDLEA had also accused him of being a drug kingpin.

The Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, SAN, in a statement by his Media Aide, Umar Gwandu, last week stated that the Nigerian government was willing to extradite Kyari to the United States where he has been indicted for his role in an international fraud involving Hushpuppi.

The NDLEA revealed that it had filed eight counts against Kyari before a Federal High Court on Monday and that Kyari would be arraigned on March 7.

But some Senior Advocate of Nigeria in separate interviews with Sunday PUNCH argued that since the US had already concluded its investigations and charges had been filed, the final decision to extradite the embattled cop lies on the court.

In an interview with our correspondent, Mr Egunolu Adegboruwa, SAN, said, "Seeing what Hushpuppi himself has gone through in the United States of America, he has confessed to the crimes and he has pleaded for a plea bargain.

"Documents have been admitted so it would be easier to conduct the prosecution of Abba Kyari since investigations in that case has already been concluded. It's better in law that he should go and face the

charges against him in US so he can exonerate himself.

"The final decision on the extradition, however, depends on the judge. The AGF has submitted the request and the NDLEA has also filed the charges".

Another SAN, Chief Mike Ozekhome in a separate interview with Sunday PUNCH argued that Abba Kyari is still presumed innocent until proven guilty, hence the court will have the final decision.

He said, "The issue as to whether or not the court will refuse the extradition of Abba Kyari seeing as he is undergoing a case in Nigeria has been laid to rest in section 9 of the Extradition Act, which states that:

"Hearing of a case by magistrate and committal or discharge of prisoner, when a fugitive criminal is brought before a magistrate on a warrant under section 7 of this Act, or when, in the case of a fugitive criminal brought before a magistrate on a provisional warrant under section 8 of this Act and remanded in pursuance of subsection (5) of the said section 8, an order of the Attorney-General under section 6 of this Act relating to that fugitive is received, the magistrate shall proceed with the case as in the same manner, as near as may be, and shall have the same jurisdiction and powers, as if the fugitive were brought before him charged with an offence committed within his jurisdiction.

"It is important to also say that while the matter is going on in court, the alleged criminal is assumed innocent until proven guilty as contained in section 36 (5) which is stated thus:

(5) Every person who is charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed to be innocent until he is proved guilty:

Provided that nothing in this section shall invalidate any law by reason only that the law imposes such person the burden of providing particular facts.

"Even when the Federal High Court gives its judgment against Abba Kyari, he is entitled to appeal such a matter at the Court of Appeal and even further appeal same at the Supreme Court".

Also, another SAN, Yomi Aliyu said, "The duty of the AGF is to file an application for extradition in court.

The defendant which in this case is Abba Kyari can raise a defence and when these have been done, the final decision lies with the judge. The judge has a discretion to determine whether or not the purported trial is fluke."

How naval officer rescued us from Anambra kidnappers –Victim

An Onitsha-based businessman, Chikamso Ugoh, has revealed how he and two other passengers were rescued from suspected kidnappers at the River Niger bridgehead in Anambra State.

Recall that a group of kidnappers had reportedly been intercepted along the bridgehead in Onitsha by some security agents.

Although the Police Public Relations Officer, Ikenga Tochukwu, said his office did not receive such a report, an official of the Federal Road Safety Corps, who did not want to be mentioned, said, "Yes, the incident happened two days ago (Thursday). The vehicle had loaded at Upper Iweka but only three people were authentic passengers among the 14 passengers on board.

"So, as the kidnappers were trying to divert the vehicle to another direction, a naval officer, who was among the passengers in the vehicle, based on intelligence, signalled to his people on the bridge, who chased after the vehicle and intercepted them. The kidnappers were forced out and ordered to lie down by the roadside and thereafter were taken to the Army barracks, Onitsha."

But narrating his experience on Saturday, Ugoh said he was one of the three lucky passengers who escaped, adding that it was the "sheer bravery and intelligence" of the naval officer, who was also in the vehicle, that saved him and the other victims from being abducted.

He said, "At the point I boarded the vehicle at Upper Iweka heading to Asaba, only

two seats were vacant. I sat on one of the seats and shortly after, another person came and occupied the remaining one. But shortly, after the vehicle took off and on getting to the River Niger bridgehead, some of the people in the vehicle told us to start making calls because we had been kidnapped, while the driver of the vehicle was making a detour to another direction different from where we were originally going.

"Luckily, one of us who boarded the vehicle was a naval officer, but he was not in uniform. I don't know how he communicated with some of the military officers along the road, and they chased the vehicle and intercepted it. They ordered the kidnappers to lie face-up by the roadside.

"What still baffles me is that, among the kidnappers, were women and some aged men, people that you would, ordinarily, not suspect. In fact, it is unbelievable. People should be extremely careful about the bus they board these days. I am still in shock and also thanking God for saving us."



Ikenga Tochukwu

Man, 42, hangs self in Benue

A 42 year-old man, Terhemen Iorbee, has committed suicide by hanging himself on a tree.

Late Terhemen Iorbee is an indigene of Mbakuha Council ward of Ushongo Local Government Area.

He is married with four children.

Iorbee hanged himself on a tree with a rope around his neck, his body dangling.

The Nations investigation revealed that 'the deceased, who is a native doctor, has been behaving strangely recently.

Though married with three wives, the deceased has been living alone and had gone missing on Friday, only for his body to be found hanging.

Ushongo Divisional Police Officer said they are yet to get the report at their station.

News

Fuel scarcity: Probe spending on refineries, SERAP tells Buhari

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has urged President Muhammadu Buhari to “direct the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Mr Abubakar Malami, SAN, and appropriate anti-corruption agencies to probe the spending on the country’s four refineries, and alleged corruption and mismanagement of public money budgeted for the rehabilitation, operation, and maintenance of the refineries since 1999.”

SERAP said, “Anyone suspected to be responsible should face prosecution as appropriate, if there is sufficient admissible evidence, and any mismanaged public funds should be fully recovered.”

SERAP also urged President Buhari to “direct Mr Malami and appropriate anti-corruption agencies to bring to justice those suspected to be responsible for the importation and distribution of dirty fuel into the country, and to urgently identify and ensure access to justice and effective remedies to affected victims.”

In the letter dated 5 March, 2022 and signed by SERAP deputy director Kolawole Oluwadare, the organisation said: “There is a legitimate public interest in ensuring justice and accountability for alleged corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector and the resulting importation and distribution of dirty fuel and protracted fuel scarcity in the country.”

SERAP said, “The importation and distribution of dirty fuel, and the current fuel scarcity across the country demonstrate the need for effective accountability measures to weed out, expose, and punish allegations of corruption in the sector, and to ensure justice and effective remedies for victims.”

According to SERAP, “Allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector have contributed to the importation and distribution of bad fuel, causing environmental problems and violating the human rights of many users, including to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”

The letter, read in part: “Investigating and prosecuting allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the spending on the refineries would be entirely consistent with constitutional guarantees and international standards. It may also galvanize public support for your government’s anti-corruption efforts.”

“Alleged corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector, the importation and distribution of dirty fuel, and protracted fuel scarcity amount to a fundamental breach of constitutional and international human rights obligations, depriving Nigerians of economic opportunities and subjecting them to cruel and degrading treatment.”

“We would be grateful if the recommended measures are taken within 7 days of the receipt and/or publication of this letter. If we have not heard from you by then, SERAP shall consider appropriate legal actions to compel your government to comply with our request in the public interest.”

“SERAP also urges you to instruct the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission

(ICPC) to jointly track and monitor the spending of public funds to rehabilitate, operate, and maintain the country’s refineries.”

“SERAP is concerned that fuel scarcity in several parts of the country has subjected many Nigerians to harsh economic and social conditions, making them incapable of developing their abilities and realising their potential.”

“Unfortunately, this is not the first time that Nigerians will be put through severe economic conditions, which may amount to torture or cruel or degrading treatment or punishment.”

“SERAP is concerned about the human rights impact of many years of alleged corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector, the importation and distribution of dirty fuel, and protracted fuel scarcity, including the impact on the environment and harm to the many people whose vehicles were damaged as a result of adulterated fuel.”

“The impunity of perpetrators has continued to expose Nigerians to a string of misfortunes: poor living conditions, ill-health, marginalisation, and an inability to enter into the life of society and assume responsibilities.”

“Ensuring justice and accountability in the spending of public funds on refineries which have for many failed to ensure the availability of petrol and access of economically and socially vulnerable Nigerians to their own natural wealth and resources would serve the public interest.”

“It would also be entirely consistent with your constitutional oath of office, and with your duty as the Minister of Petroleum Resources.”

“Ending impunity and ensuring access of victims to justice and effective remedies would contribute to preventing and combating corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector. It would also help to address the protracted problem of dirty fuel and fuel scarcity, as well as improve availability and access to fuel in the country.”

“High-ranking public officials, including officers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited suspected of complicity in the allegations of corruption and mismanagement in the oil sector, and in the importation and distribution of adulterated fuel have continued to enjoy impunity.”

“Section 13 of the Nigerian Constitution of 1999 [as amended] imposes clear responsibility on your government to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of Chapter 2 of the constitution. Section 15(5) imposes the responsibility on your government to ‘abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.’”

“Under Section 16(1) of the Constitution, your government has a responsibility to ‘secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.’ Section 16(2) further provides that, ‘the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good.’”

“Under article 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Nigerians have the ‘right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development.’”

“Similarly, articles 5 and 9 of the UN Convention against Corruption



impose legal obligations on your government to ensure proper management of public affairs and public funds, and to promote sound and transparent administration of public affairs.”

“SERAP also notes your oft-expressed commitment to give ‘the utmost priority to fighting corruption and other related offenses’ in the country.”

“According to reports, petroleum

products with methanol quantities above Nigeria’s specification were recently imported into the country. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) reportedly stated that the methanol-blended petrol was imported into the country by a few suppliers through four premium motor spirit cargoes under its Direct Sales Direct Purchase (DSDP) arrangement.”

“According to reports, for every

200 litres of the adulterated product, 800 litres of petrol with good quality would be required for the blending to be done. Millions of Nigerians are also currently witnessing fuel scarcity across the country.

There has been protracted problem of fuel scarcity under successive governments, and under your government.

“Many Nigerians are queuing up at petrol stations to buy fuel to power their cars or generators, despite their right to natural wealth and resources, and other socio-economic rights.”

“According to reports, the government spends over N264 billion annually to operate and maintain the country’s refineries. Successive governments have reportedly spent trillions of Naira to rehabilitate, operate and maintain the refineries that have produced little or no fuel.”

“Your government reportedly spent \$396 million for maintenance of the country’s refineries between 2015 and 2020 alone. Despite this huge spending, millions of Nigerians continue to lack access to full and unhindered supply of fuel.”

“About N82.82 billion was reportedly spent in 2015; N78.95 billion in 2016; N604.127 billion in 2017; N426.66 billion in 2019; N218.18 billion in 2019, and N64.534 billion expenditure was recorded from January to June 2020.”

The letter was copied to Mr Abubakar Malami, SAN, Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice.

China Backs Russia over Ukraine

By Becky Adi

China’s Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, has voiced support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“No matter how treacherous the international storm is, China and Russia will maintain their strategic determination.

“And will push forward the

comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era,” Wang said on Monday, responding to a question about the West’s sanctioning of Moscow for the invasion.

Wang described China and Russia as close neighbours and strategic partners, calling their ties “one of the most crucial bilateral relationships in the world.”

He said cooperation was not only beneficial to the peoples of both

countries but also contributed to peace, stability and development in the world.

“Both countries rejected the revival of a Cold War mentality, as well as ideological confrontation.

“They are committed to the democratisation of international relations,” Wang said at a press conference to mark the annual session of the Chinese People’s Congress in Beijing.

ASUU absent as FG inaugurates panel for 2009 agreement

By Joyce Babayeju

The Federal Government on Monday inaugurated a seven-member Committee set up to re-negotiate the FG-ASUU 2009 agreement with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) failing to send a representative to attend the meeting.

ASUU President, Prof Emmanuel Osodeke, said the union had no business attending the meeting expected to renegotiate agreements between the government and university-based unions.

In 2020, former President of ASUU, Prof Biodun Ogunyemi,

attended the inauguration of the panel chaired by Prof Munzali Jibril which produced the draft proposal of 2009 in May last year, which ASUU is insisting must be signed by the federal government.

The new government team inaugurated on Monday is chaired by Prof. Emeritus Nimi Briggs, Pro-Chancellor, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo.

Other members of the team are: Are. Lawrence Patrick Ngbale – Pro-Chancellor, Federal University, Wukari, representing the North East; Prof. Funmi Togunu-Bickersteth – Pro-Chancellor, Federal University, Birnin Kebbi, representing the South West; Sen. Chris Adighije,

Pro-Chancellor, Federal University, Lokoja, representing the South East; Prof. Olu Obafemi, Pro-Chancellor, Federal University of Technology, Minna, representing the North-Central; Prof. Zubairu Iliyasu, Pro-Chancellor, Kano State University of Science & Technology, representing the North West and Barr. Matthew B. Seiyefa, Pro-Chancellor, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, representing the South-South.

Inaugurating the Panel on Monday, Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, charged the committee to come up with proposed draft agreements within three (3) months from the date of inauguration.

By Amgbare Ekaunkumo, Yenagoa



Comment

What caused the coup in Burkina Faso?

The government of Senator Douye Diri of Bayelsa State was birthed following the Supreme Court judgement sacking the governor-elect Mr. David Lyon as a result of certificate discrepancies observed by the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC form in the 2019 gubernatorial election.

The verdict then thrown most Bayelsans especially APC supporters into a sorrowful mood in February 14, 2020 being the World Valentine day, not knowing the numerous benefits that come with it. One major benefit behind the verdict was that a messiah was giving to transform the landscape of Bayelsa State, and since then He has been displaying an egalitarian nature who give no preference to execution of life-changing projects which are scattered across the nooks and crannies of the state.

Available statistics showed that the Prosperity Government has achieved tremendously ranging from tangible to intangible sectors of the economy such as infrastructure to education, health, sports, youth and women empowerment, human capacity development, urban renewal, promotion of peace, reconciliation and unity as well as worker-to-people oriented policies and programs. The governor continues to write his name in the Golden Book of record.

There is a biblical connotation that says when the righteous rule the people rejoice, this proverb is replicated in Bayelsa within just two years of reins of governance of the state, Senator Douye Diri, has remained stoic in his avowed commitment to changing the developmental landscape of the 25-year-old state.

The governor has demonstrated the leadership of inclusion irrespective of political affiliation, economy status. He has redefined the political system of Bayelsa State by moving away from the old fashion ways of politics. It is evident that the two leading political parties in Bayelsa State can wine and dine together as one people.

The administration has roll out policies that encourage political parties to be at peace with themselves. It is an enduring legacy that can be sustained if only all concerns work together as one for the common good of the state.

In a fora, Senator Douye Diri was caught saying, "I like to use this forum to commend politicians across the parties, particularly those of the APC (All Progressives Congress) and PDP extraction. I give thumbs up to both parties for the brotherliness and for exhibiting maturity in the politics of our dear state."

The State Governor's maturity is noticeable in his style of leadership and calmness despite the challenges poised before him ranging from dwindling economy, coronavirus pandemic and people who subjectively and destructively criticizing the policies and programs of the government.

Chronicling the achievements of

the Prosperity Government, the government has recorded gigantic stride in the area of infrastructural development which has turned the state into a construction site. The legacy projects embarked upon by the state government which many have been completed while others near completion. These include the newly commissioned 4.5km Igbedi community road in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area which was built from the scratch.

Also, the Administration embarked on the construction of Yenagoa-Oporoma road project linking various communities of the River banks. Although the project is a federal government project which was in the drawing board for over five decades, inherited from the Senator Seriake Dickson led administration to lessen the suffering of the riverine people of Southern Ijaw. Being one of the largest and oldest local government council, many communities in the council area, is only accessible by boat.

The people of the council area is now jubilating as Vice President Yemi Osinbajo officially flagged off the construction of a bridge linking the council headquarters, Oporoma, at Angiama as part of the activities marking the second year anniversary.

The people of Angiama and Igbedi communities share some similarities in terms of unavailability of good road network until the Prosperity Government led by Senator Douye Diri, making the people in the Kolokuma/Opokuma and Southern Ijaw council areas to have sense of belonging, which has changed the narrative of the people.

The Angiama people are always joyful; a people that only see vehicles perhaps either on television, in books or whenever they travel to the city for greener pastures. Their farm produce now has economy value which can be exported to Yenagoa and other cities.

Another gigantic project is the Mega Media Complex housing all the state-owned media outfits – Radio Bayelsa, Niger Delta

Television and the Bayelsa State Newspaper Corporation – the imposing edifice has 340 offices, 107 restrooms, two restaurants and other facilities. The three storey building is fully equipped with state-of-the-art broadcast equipment and printing machines that will enhance the productivity of media practitioners. A model which is hard to find anywhere will compete favourably with other media outfits nationally and globally.

As government of continuity, the Prosperity Government continued all abandoned projects inherited by his predecessor including the second phase of Isaac Boro Road, the 89km Sagbama-Ekeremor Road, the 38km Yenagoa-Oporoma Road and the 22km Elebele-Igbogene Ring Road, which the first phase from Igbogene-Okarki is already inaugurated. The government also inherited uncompleted key projects like the Glory Drive Road from Igbogene to Onopa, where the Government House is located, was conceived during the Timipre Sylva administration. The road is now under construction after clearing all court litigations that put the project on hold for years.

Moreover, the Government also facilitated the commencement of commercial flight after the administration secured the certification of operational licence last year from the Nigeria Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA). Since then the airport airlifting passengers to different parts of the country with affordable fees.

To enable night-time flights at the airport, the Diri administration has procured Instrument Landing System (ILS) and other required equipment. It had earlier undertaken the construction of the airport's perimeter fencing, a condition that the NCAA insisted upon even though there were other considerations for delaying the operational licence.

The world valentine day which coincided with Bayelsa State second year anniversary, many Bayelsans describe Douye Diri as a valentine gift to Bayelsans as the state now enjoying peaceful atmosphere as he strengthening

the security architecture of the state with provision of operational vehicles to all the security and paramilitary agencies. Importantly, the government reintroduced the Bayelsa security outfit code-named "Operation Doo-Akpo", which has significantly reduced crime and criminality in Yenagoa and its environs. It also strengthened the state's complementary security outfits – Bayelsa Volunteers and Bayelsa Vigilante – by harmonising their operations with the Operation Doo-Akpo after the Bayelsa Community Safety Corps Law came into force. The inhabitants of Bayelsa can now sleep with their two eyes close, which the security personnel are visibly stationed in all the strategic locations of the state.

The administration also embarked on massive expansion of roads and roundabouts like the Swali ultra-market and the Tombia roundabouts which cultists and some criminal elements used as a hideout to perpetuate crime and criminality.

In addition, the administration also embarked on the construction of 18 new internal roads in the state capital alone out of 20, while 51 other internal roads were rehabilitated within the period under review.

The administration also commissioned The Unity Bridge connecting the Nembe people of Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri in Nembe Local Government Area of the state. It gathered that the bridge got damaged several years ago at the height of a protracted dispute between both communities. The rift was so deep that the communities could not even agree on rebuilding the strategic route that bonded them.

The Administration seen the youths roaming the streets without gainful employment, created the Centre for Youth Development and roll out programmes that making youths self-reliant and self-employed. The administration has trained youths on vocational and technical skills on Information Communication Technology (ICT).

The government in its calculated attempt to empowering the

youth population initiated the Diri Digital Entrepreneurship Empowerment Programme (DDEEP) under which 8,000 persons from the eight local government areas of the state would be trained to acquire ICT skills under the Ministry of Communication, Science and Technology. According to statistics at our disposal, out of the initial 4,700 applicants, 50 of them, also from the eight councils, were selected for a three-month pilot scheme that commenced in November last year.

Another remarkable area of achievement in education sector is the new focus on vocational, technical and science education. Apart from establishing technical and vocational colleges in all the local government areas of the state, it is vigorously pursuing the introduction of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics literacy in secondary schools.

The government also launched Ijaw history book, The Izon of the Niger Delta. An idea conceived and nurtured by late Dr. Diepreye Peter Solomon Alamiyeseigha's led government but did not see the light of the day until the present administration. The intention of the book is to revive the Ijaw language which was gradually going into extinction. It also make the compulsory learning and teaching of the Ijaw language in our primary and secondary schools across the state.

The administration has also commissioned the Kaiama Referral Hospital, which it inherited from his predecessor and increase the testing capacity of the infectious Covid-19 pandemic, and the sustenance of the Bayelsa Insurance Scheme which is enjoying by all Bayelsa civil servants and their family members.

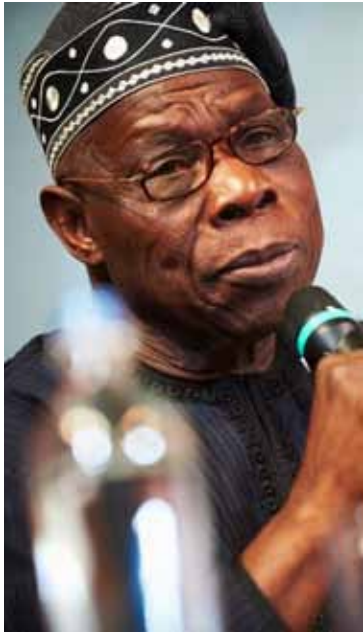
Ensuring food sufficiency, the government of Senator Douye Diri provide land and seedlings to farmers in collaboration with the apex bank (Central Bank of Nigeria) build fish processing plant of over 20,000-metric tonnes capacity, which are all effective and functional.

First in history in Nigeria that state-sponsored football clubs, the Bayelsa United and Bayelsa Queens, win the 2021 Federation/AITEO Cup for both the male and female categories. No other state in the country has achieved such feat in their football history, knowing fully well that the football teams are coming third for the first time at the Edo 2020 National Sports Festival.

It is evident that the administration created the enabling environment for its sportsmen and women to strive as well as a motivating reward system. This achievement chronicled the fact that the governor is a sports lover. It was observed in the novelty football match featuring the executive and legislative arms of the government held in Siasia Samson Sports Complex as part of activities to mark the second year anniversary in the state.

News

2023: Some presidential aspirants should be in jail if EFCC did its job – Obasanjo



Former President Olusegun Obasanjo on Saturday said some persons aspiring to be Nigeria's President in 2023 should be in jail had the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission performed its job efficiently.

Obasanjo stated this during an international symposium to mark his 85th birthday in Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital.

Speaking during the well-attended event with the theme, 'Africa Narrative with Nigeria Situation', the ex-President and strongman of Hilltop Towers also said though many presidential hopefuls have visited him to solicit support for their tall ambition, he has not endorsed any aspirant for the much-exalted seat in Aso Rock.

"I'm not sponsoring any southern candidate" He said, "As the quadrennial madness builds a head of steam and the runners and riders crisscross the nation in the quest for nomination as the party flag bearer to the highest office in the land, I read and hear about endorsement and statements in support of candidates that I frankly have not made and forming next political parties that I can never get involved in. I was told that social media credited to me the names of three people from the south that I am sponsoring for Presidency in 2023.

"My friend, Professor Ango Abdullah, who brought this to my knowledge remarked that he did not believe that I made such a statement because it was out of my character. I have neither named names nor stated my position. In a situation like the one we are in, I will not rush into naming names without necessary consultations and well-defined principles and criteria. We need to be clear about what Nigeria needs today and why Nigeria needs it. Only then can we answer the question of how that will inform us of the criteria

and characteristics for determining who."

Continuing, the celebrant said some 2023 presidential aspirants should be in jail had the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission done their jobs effectively.

Obasanjo said, "Since 1999, we have changed from one political party or another we have manoeuvred and manipulated to the point that election results are no longer reflections of the will of the people and we seemed to be progressively going back rather than going forward politically, economically and socially.

"We have activities without requisite actions and personnel to move us forward. If we continue in the same pattern of recycling, sweet-word campaigning, manoeuvring without the substance of integrity, honesty, patriotism, commitment, outreach, courage, understanding of what makes a nation and what make for development, we will soon have to say goodbye to Nigeria as a nation.

"I cast a cursory look at some of the people running around and those for whom people are running around. If EFCC and ICPC will have done their jobs properly and supported adequately by the judiciary, most of them would be in jail. Any person who has no integrity in small things cannot have integrity in big things."

Obasanjo, unarguably one of the prestigious global citizens from Africa, was Nigeria's democratically elected President between 1999 and 2007.

The former Nigerian military head of state between February 1976 and October 1979 had sat on many peace committees including those of the United Nations, African Union and Economic Community of West African States and had been instrumental to the restoration of peace in many parts of Africa including Liberia, Sudan, Ethiopia, amongst others.

On the occasion of his 85th birthday, the former military head of state restated the need for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

According to him, fixing Nigeria must begin on the principles of nation-building, not necessarily on emotion, ethnicity or religion. "The issues of security, stability, development, economy and our relationship within Africa and with the rest of the world can only be taken care of if we get the issue of the nation-building right," he emphasised.

On the way forward, Obasanjo said all presidential aspirants must be "properly x-rayed and profiled from birth and Nigerians must be educated to be able to make a choice that will be in the national interest and propel Nigeria

forward".

"Such a person will have to lead what remains of the nation to courageously continue on the path of nation-building as a national team leader, no matter on what platform he or she assumes leadership. No one can do it alone. We must, however, stop sacrificing character, track records and performance on the altar of ethnic, regional or religious jingoism. As the watchman counts on daybreak, so too do I count on Nigerians and Nigeria to bring forth that person," the elder statesman concluded.

After his prison ordeal, Obasanjo was later elected Nigeria's President on the platform of the Peoples Democratic Party. He, however, publicly tore his PDP membership card in February 2015 after a feud with ex-President Goodluck Jonathan.

Despite his stance that he won't be involved in partisan politics, Obasanjo said he won't quit nation-building, noting that the elite must have enough integrity to provide accountable leadership for Nigerians.

As the race for the next election gets keenly interesting, many politicians have expressed interest to succeed the incumbent President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (ret'd), whose second term ends in May 2023.

Northern politicians who have shown interest in getting the PDP's 2023 presidential ticket include former Vice President Atiku Abubakar; former Senate President, Bukola Saraki; Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal; Bauchi State Governor, Bala Mohammed; and ex-governor of Kano State, Rabiu Kwankwaso.

Aside from northern politicians, some southern stalwarts including former Senate President and Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Pius Anyim; former Ekiti State Governor, Ayodele Fayose; ex-governor of Anambra State, Peter Obi; media personality, Dele Momodu, amongst others have also expressed interest in clinching the party's 2023 presidential ticket in the primary which is expected to hold later this year.

Other presidential hopefuls include All Progressives Congress leader, Bola Tinubu; Governor of Ebonyi State, Dave Umahi; ex-Governor of Imo State, Rochas Okorocha; former Governor of Abia State and Majority Whip of the Senate, Senator Orji Kalu; former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Kingsley Moghalu, among others.

Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo has also been rumoured to nurse an ambition to succeed his boss through the 2023 election but the professor of law has not officially made his intention known.



NNPC releases additional 381.8 million litres of fuel, to address shortages.

By Becky Adi

The scarcity of Premium Motor Spirit, popularly called petrol, has refused to abate despite claims by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited that it has been releasing hundreds of millions of litres of petrol to address the situation.

In its latest weekly national PMS evacuation report for February 21 to 26, 2022, NNPC said it evacuated an additional 381.88 million litres of petrol during the period.

About a week ago, the oil firm stated that it distributed a total of 387.59 million litres of PMS from February 14 to 20, 2022, in its bid to bridge the petrol supply gap.

But despite its claims, the queues for petrol in filling stations that dispensed the commodity remains massive in Abuja and neighbouring Nasarawa and Niger, as well as in many other states.

Queues formed by motorists were seen at the Nipco filling station along the Kubwa end of the Kubwa-Zuba expressway in Abuja. In Zuba, Niger State, motorists besieged the few outlets that sold petrol, forming long queues.

The same situation played out in filling stations in Mararaba and Nyanya in Nasarawa State, as petrol users in many other states

complained of scarcity in their various locations.

But in its PMS weekly evacuation report for February 21 to 26, 2022, the NNPC said it evacuated a total of 381.88 million litres of petrol, representing an average daily evacuation of 63.65 million litres, while the year-to-date daily average was put at 60.86 million litres.

It said 80 per cent of all the evacuation took place at the top 20 high loading depots, while 20 per cent of the remaining evacuation took place at the other depots.

The top 20 high load-out depots include Pinnacle-Lekki with 43.259 million litres; Aiteo, 22.462 million litres; A.A. Rano, 22.43 million litre; A.Y.M Shafa, 19.232 million litres; and Prudent, 17.788 million litres, among others.

In the next category, the firms that were involved in PMS load-out, according to NNPC, include Gonzaga, 8.23 million litres; Bovas Bulk-Ibafon, 7.761 million litres; PPMC Mosimi, 7.15 million litres; and First Royal, 4.825 million litres; among others.

The scarcity of petrol in Nigeria has persisted for about a month. The development has led to the resurgence of black marketers who sell petrol at between N300 to N500/litre depending on the area of purchase.

Cocaine Saga: Abba Kyari's co-accused plead guilty to drug trafficking charges

By Joshua Tashe

Two co-defendants of the suspended Deputy Commissioner of Police, Abba Kyari, pleaded guilty to parts of the drug trafficking charges brought against them.

The defendants, Chibuinna Patrick Umeibe and Emeka Alphonsus Ezenwanne, made their plea on Monday at the Federal High Court, Abuja.

Both men, who were the only civilians arraigned in connection with Kyari's cocaine saga, were ordered to be remanded in the custody of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) till Monday when the application for

their bail would be heard.

While Kyari and three other defendants, who are police officers, pleaded not guilty to the entire eight-count charges, the two civilians pleaded guilty to the 5th, 6th, and 7th charges where their names featured.

Upon the plea of the defendants, counsel to Abba Kyari, Kanu Agabi (SAN), along with counsel to other defendants in the charge, prayed the court to admit their clients to bail.

Upon the counsels' prayer, the trial Judge, Justice Emeka Nwite adjourned till Monday to hear the bail application of the defendants and ordered that they should be remanded in the custody of the NDLEA.

Business & Economy

5G will revolutionise Nigeria's Creative Industry – Danbatta

The current efforts of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to facilitate deployment of the Fifth Generation (5G) technology will further catalyse the innovativeness and creativity of the entertainment industry in Nigeria and raise its productivity and contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) to new levels.

The Executive Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of NCC, Prof. Umar Danbatta, has said.

Danbatta, stated this in a keynote address delivered at the Nollywood Economic Outlook (NEO 2022) organised in Lagos recently, and well-attended by Nollywood personalities and other critical stakeholders in the creative industry.

The organisers of the NEO 2022 forum also presented the Award of "Best Agency in Government Sustainable and Development Agenda" to the Commission for its role in facilitating digital connectivity to fast-track Nigeria's economic growth as well as accelerate attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria.

Speaking on the theme: "Leveraging 5G Technology for the Advancement of Creative Industry," Danbatta, who was represented by the NCC's Head of Media and Public Relations, Grace Ojougboh, said 5G technology will disrupt the media business models in the creative industry just as he emphasised that need for practitioners in the creative industry to leverage the power of 5G technology to expand the frontiers of the industry for the next phase of its growth.

"The 5G will revolutionize how content is produced, distributed, and consumed, unlocking existing technologies for wider audiences and enabling a new wave of applications. It will also enable broadcasters to transmit footage back to their base within a short period of time, thus creating more coverage opportunities," Danbatta said.

He explained that 5G technology networks will transform businesses leading to higher productivity improvements via real-time flow of information. "Consequently, this will permit the optimization of business functions and creation of new value chains for customers through advances in Internet-based web technology and search engines. This is expected to lead to the development and pervasiveness of Over-the-top (OTT) services," he said.

Danbatta further stated that running 5G network, over-the-top (OTT) platforms and applications will also offer video content over the internet as against the traditional cable or satellite television. This, he said, was because technologies enabled by 5G will utilize novel and innovative channels to enhance the experience of viewers.

"So, for the creative industry, 5G will also enable delivery of high-quality content direct to consumers by the broadcast industry at the touch of a button. Accordingly, it will offer users seamless experience when they stream videos on mobile devices (Smartphones and tablets) and web televisions that use solutions such as Chromecast, Apple TV and Amazon Fire TV, as well as Smart TVs," the EVC said.

Danbatta told the audience that as demands for high-quality content and streaming increase, 5G connectivity presents the perfect opportunity to push the OTT viewer experience to the next level. He said with super-fast 5G download speeds up to 10 times faster than the current networks and therefore, lower latency that will improve viewers experience of video on demand and make them to enjoy highly reliable services.

The 5G technology will allow the creative industry to better understand future requirements, explore new creative formats, build new mobile video capabilities, pursue strategic partnerships, and assess their data collection practices and database requirements.

"Information and Communications Technology has already made the world a global village due to its ubiquitous connection to remote locations across the globe. The 5G technology capabilities will

make the world even smaller, thus enabling easy distribution of content across the globe in real time," he stated.

Danbatta concluded by stating that 5G technology is set to redefine the way people live and work and will usher the much-talked-about Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) with its promise of a rapid social and economic development of the country.

Danbatta used the opportunity of the event to intimate the audience of the policy and regulatory efforts of the government, through the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy as well as the NCC, which have culminated in the licensing of spectrum resources for the deployment of 5G network in the country.

He asserted that disruptive innovations shaping the future of the world, such as; Mobile Broadband, Internet of Things, Cloud Computing, Autonomous and Near-Autonomous Vehicles, Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality, Block-Chain Technology, Robotics and Quantum Computing and more, are pivoted on telecommunications, especially the 5G technology.

Earlier, the Host of the programme and Executive Secretary, Board of Trustees of Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Sunny McDon, said there had been all sorts of predictions about the introduction of 5G technology and the sheer number of devices that will become connected through its introduction in Nigeria. He therefore advocated a focus on the impact on the creative industry, businesses and Nigeria's socio-economic development.



Illicit Financial Flows Threaten Africa's Attainment of SDGs – ICPC Boss

The Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye, SAN, has warned that corruption and illicit financial flows may threaten Nigeria's and Africa's ability to realize the SDGs.

The ICPC Chairman gave this warning during the launch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC's) Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030 on Friday by the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, SAN.

"The illicit and sometimes criminal consignment of resources to foreign jurisdictions undermines domestic resource mobilization. Beneficiaries of corruption and enablers of illicit financial flows undermine governments and state institutions.

"A vision and plan of action underwriting the resilience of vital institutions, including anti-corruption agencies and justice system are critical to the achievement of the core SDG vision of leaving no one behind," the ICPC Chairman said.

He expressed the anti-corruption agency's support for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030.

The UNODC had in collaboration with government stakeholders, civil society and academia, private sector and development partners developed the strategic vision to assist Nigeria to achieve her Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as combat corruption, terrorism, economic and financial crimes, and drugs.

Prof. Owasanoye, who commended the UNODC for the Strategic Vision in his goodwill message, noted that it would strengthen crime prevention, enhance justice, address organized crime, ensure a balanced response to drugs, and improve the rule of

law. "The UNODC thematic areas are the global drug problem; organized crime; corruption and economic crime; terrorism; and crime prevention and criminal justice. A strategic vision that addresses these thematic areas in the context of Nigeria is directly relevant to the mandate of the ICPC as outlined in section 6 of the ICPC Act.

"I therefore commend the UNODC for the Strategic Vision for Nigeria 2030. The ICPC will continue to work with UNODC and other stakeholders in the justice sector to realise our shared vision of a crime free society," the ICPC boss was quoted in a statement by Commission's spokesperson, Azuka C. Ogugua.

He stated that the UNODC mission would provide more safety to Nigerians and Africans, government and institutions from drugs, crime, corruption, terrorism and illicit financial flows.

In his keynote address, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, also expressed the support of the Federal Government for the UNODC's Nigeria 2030 Strategic Vision.

The Minister, who was represented by the acting Solicitor-General of the Federation and Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Justice, Benjamin Okolo, conveyed the Government's assurance in implementing the strategic vision.

In her goodwill message, the Executive Director of UNODC, Mrs. Ghada Waly, emphasized the need to strengthen Nigerian laws to address drugs, economic and financial crimes, corruption and terrorism.

Waly, who was represented by UNODC's Representative in Nigeria, Dr. Oliver Stolpe, said the United Nations body would continue to work hand-in-hand with its counterpart in the Nigerian Government to achieve the SDGs.



Politics



Electoral Act Won't Guarantee Free, Fair Election, says APC Chieftain

Chieftain of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Mazi Jones Onwusoanya, has said there is no guarantee that the 2023 general elections would be free and fair. Naija News reports that the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC has assured that the forthcoming elections would be credible.

Many Nigerians have also believed the same following the signing of the Electoral Act Amendment Bill recently by President Muhammadu Buhari.

Onwusoanya, however, has noted that the APC and the main opposition, Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, would continue to explore new tricks to manipulate poll results in their favour.

The Ohanaeze Ndigbo and the immediate past Publicity Secretary of APC in Imo State stressed that the new Electoral Act is nothing but a bait meant to give Nigerians a false hope that something is going to change with the nation's electoral process. Naija News reports that Onwusoanya stated this during an interaction with newsmen on Sunday. The politician attributed problems with the nation's electoral system to the desperation of aspirants to bend those laws and impune on the processes, in collusion with civil servants manning INEC. According to him, "as long as law enforcement and prosecuting agencies remain nonchalant about ensuring that those who run foul of our laws are brought to book and our systems remain vulnerable to hijack by oligarchical cabals, even a law, making the transmission of results spiritual, will not make our election process credible.

"For some of those whose greatest pleasure is in the electronic transmission of results or the so-called BVAS, you can be sure that if any of those stands in the way of our politicians, they will bypass them and have their candidates declared winner, then, you head to court. If you haven't understood that our courts are cults, then, you might as well be more naive than I thought." Onwusoanya maintained that electronic voting is not foolproof, noting that even America and other advanced democracies with all their investments and advancements in technology still have not gotten a perfect electronic voting process.

"Elections over there are still subject to controversies and allegations of manipulation. Most Nigerian politicians will begin to focus their attention on recruiting these hackers to study and find ways of compromising the electronic voting machines and lines of communication," the APC chieftain said. Onwusoanya stated further that a few thousand dollars can actually get Nigerian politicians some Chinese or Korean folks who can hack into the system and even run out the country into a big crisis. According to him, an average Nigerian politician believes that if he can't win, then, it should be damaged completely. None of those rejoicing over the electronic voting aspect of this electoral Act has bothered to think about a cyber attack.

"Does Nigeria have what it takes to withstand a situation, say, on the eve of our elections or while the voting is going on or collation is ongoing, the entire INEC server is jammed. I will leave you to imagine what

will follow such incident?" Onwusoanya asked.

The Ohanaeze chieftain, however, advised Nigerians advice on a free and fair election to have a rethink and be vigilant at their various polling booths during elections.

"I will conclude this unsolicited intervention by further advising my fellow Nigerians; if you are banking on free and fair election merely because a new Electoral Act has been signed, you are wasting your time. "A new Electoral Act or old Electoral Act, be vigilant at your various polling booths, don't trust any BVAS or any electronic transmission of results," he advised.

PDP Refutes Claim of Releasing Timetable For 2023 Elections – PDP

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) on Sunday denied news making round that it has released a timetable for the 2023 general elections.

Describing the news as fake, the party stated in clear terms that it has not released any timetable or any schedule of activities whatsoever for the 2022/2023 electioneering year and no such document was signed and released by the National Organizing Secretary.

In a statement by its spokesman, Hon. Debo Ologunagba, PDP called on all members of the party and the general public to discountenance the said timetable and schedule of activities as it did not emanate from the PDP, adding it is the handiwork of mischievous elements who seeks to create confusion and mislead the public.

The party added that at the appropriate time, its official timetable and schedule of activities, when approved will be formally announced and published.

The statement said: "The attention of the National Working Committee (NWC) of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) has been drawn to a fake election timetable being circulated in the social media, purported to have been signed and released by the National Organizing Secretary of the PDP, Hon. Umar M. Bature, as the Schedule of Activities and Timetable of the PDP for the 2023 general elections.

"The PDP states in clear terms that it has NOT released any

timetable or any schedule of activities whatsoever for the 2022/2023 electioneering year and no such document was signed and released by the National Organizing Secretary

"For the avoidance of doubt, the PDP is a Party of Due Process and will release a Timetable and Schedule of Activities for the 2022/2023 electioneering year after extensive consultation and approval by critical and statutory organs of the Party at appropriate levels

"Clearly, the said Timetable and Schedule of Activities being circulated in the social media is the handiwork of mischievous elements who seeks to create confusion, mislead the public and distract our Party at this critical point in time."

The PDP therefore called on all its members and the general public to discountenance the said Timetable and Schedule of Activities as it did not emanate from the PDP.

"At the appropriate time, the official Timetable and Schedule of Activities of the PDP, when approved will be formally announced and published through the Official Communication Channels of our Party and not in the social media," it said.

The PDP further called on all members and Nigerians in general to remain focused and not allow themselves to be distracted in their determined mission to Rescue and Rebuild the nation from the misrule of the All Progressives Congress (APC).

Ex-gov Okorocho dragged to International Criminal Court

Pro-life advocate and neuroscientist, Prof (Dr.) Philip Njemanze, has petitioned the International Criminal Court (ICC), over the demolition of the ancestral Eke Ukwu Owerri Market, Owerri. The medical practitioner had also petitioned UNESCO to lament demolition of heritage and ancestral sites in Owerri by the Okorocho administration, now a Senator of Imo West. On August 26, 2018, then Imo State Governor, Rochas Okorocho had demolished the Eke Ukwu market, pulling down stalls and destroying goods worth over N1 billion. An 11-year-old boy, Somtochukwu Ibeanusi, was killed by a stray bullet from security forces, during the demolition of the market which attracted local and international outrage. Njemanze, a native of Amawom in Owerri, who strongly kicked against the demolition of the market held so dear by Owerri people, said he wrote to the International Criminal Court, ICC, The Hague, the Netherlands to lament "the dastardly act satanic act

accomplished with human hands." Njemanze said the demolition of the market by the Okorocho administration was a crime against humanity. In a letter to Dr. Mechtild Rossler, Director of Heritage Division and World Heritage Centre, UNESCO and copied to Prosecutor, ICC, Njemanze under the auspices of Owerri Indigenous People Youth of Amawom, partly wrote "These actions are crimes against humanity, which is under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Den Hague, The Netherlands. Some of the requests made by the Njemanze led group include: "an Executive Presidential Order stopping all interference, demolition, removal of historical sites including Eke Ukwu Owerri Market, buildings, arts and cultural centres of the Indigenous People of Owerri and in Imo State.

"To mandate UNESCO World Heritage Centre's investigators in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture to further uncover the facts of the historical sites in

Owerri using the indigenous knowledge base, for enlistment and protection under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. According to Njemanze, the ICC, in its response to his requests, had said it had taken up an investigation on the matter. Four years after the demolition of the market, Governor Hope Uzodinma, has embarked on rebuilding the market.



Some northern traditional rulers have reportedly begun lobbying former President Goodluck Jonathan to defect to the All Progressives Congress and run for President in view of the raging debate of zoning between northern and southern elements, Sunday PUNCH has learnt.

“Jonathan has spoken with Buhari on the matter and he is considering joining the APC,” an associate of the former President authoritatively confirmed this to Sunday PUNCH on Saturday.

It was learnt that two top traditional rulers in the North-West and one in the North-East had encouraged the former President to give the Presidency another shot.

“The deal is for Jonathan to join the APC, then get a waiver to contest. Currently, Jonathan can only be in office for another four years, then return power to the north. They also believe he could be a stabilising force in the country, especially now that the country is deeply divided,” another source said.

Currently, several northern elements – especially those in the Peoples Democratic Party – are insisting that there should not be zoning ahead of the 2023 poll. Some of those opposed to zoning include a former Kano State Governor, Rabiu Kwankwaso; former Governor Sule Lamido of Jigawa State; Bauchi State Governor, Bala Mohammed; and Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal.

However, many southern elements believe that since Buhari would have spent eight years by 2023, it would only be fair for the next President to be from the South. Already, former Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State; ex-Governor Orji Kalu of Abia State and Ebonyi State Governor, Dave Umahi, have declared their intentions to contest.

In the South-West, the national leader of the APC, Bola Tinubu, has revealed his intention to contest the presidency, while Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo and Governor Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State are rumoured to be eyeing the same seat.

“Former President Atiku Abubakar’s camp is selling the idea of Atiku doing just one term and returning power to the south. However, only Jonathan can promise to do one term and abide by it because he is limited by the Constitution,” said an APC chieftain.

“Also, the South-East and South-South see Jonathan as one of their own. The South-West, through Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, had been in power for eight years while the current Vice President is also from there. The north also feels there should not be zoning. Jonathan is a safe option at this point,” he added.



2023: Emirs lobby Jonathan amid zoning controversy

Jonathan had visited the President Muhammadu Buhari several times in the last couple of months, more than any other former head of state. On all occasions, Jonathan had refused to speak to State House reporters while the Presidency claimed he came to brief Buhari over happenings in troubled African countries.

Also, Jonathan had not been seen at any event organised by the PDP in the last one year. He also refused to attend the party’s national convention last year, several months after the PDP reconciliation committee led by a former Senate President, Bukola Saraki, visited him and pleaded with him not to defect.

Meanwhile, a former Governor of Jigawa State, Sule Lamido, told BBC Hausa on Saturday that he was not sure if Jonathan was still a member of the PDP.

When Lamido was asked if Jonathan was still a member of the PDP, the former governor said, “I doubt it. He has not been attending recent activities of our party.”

Attempts to get a response from Jonathan’s spokesman, Ikechukwu Eze, proved abortive as he neither responded to repeated calls nor replied a text message sent to him on Saturday.

Eze had earlier told Saturday PUNCH that the insinuations that Jonathan would defect and run for president in 2023 were mere rumours.

Although many claimed that Jonathan’s frequent visit to the President at the Presidential Villa lent credence to the overtones, Eze had said the meetings had nothing to do with defection or presidential ambition.

He insisted that Jonathan’s regular presence at the Villa was to brief his successor on his

assignments as a special envoy, Economic Community of West African States; adding that the ex-President met with Buhari to brief him on the political developments in the Republic of Mali.

Eze said, “Defection issue and presidential ambition are all rumours. It has no foundation. We do not want to be reacting to such (things) again. We have issued statements on this before.

“Former President Jonathan went to the Villa to brief the President on the forthcoming ECOWAS meeting in Ghana. The meeting will discuss the political happenings in Mali. As a special envoy, he was at the Presidential Villa to brief President Buhari.

“There are issues in Mali and at the forthcoming meeting, ECOWAS leaders are to look at the transition timetable proposed by the Malian rulers and take a position on it. It is also at this meeting that a decision would be taken on whether to sanction the Malian military ruler or not. This is the issue that took oga (Jonathan) to the villa.”

Asked about the political meeting the former Bayelsa State governor reportedly held with members of his defunct political co-ordinators, Eze said there was no iota of truth on the alleged agenda of the meeting.

He noted that there was no way Jonathan’s friends would not visit him in his home state in Bayelsa during the Yuletide.

Since Buhari assumed office, the APC administration had waged a war against some aides of the former President considered to be corrupt, with many of them tried for alleged corruption.

Why I’m against zoning of political offices – Sule Lamido

Former governor of Jigawa State, Sule Lamido, has said he doesn’t support the idea of zoning of political offices.

Speaking with BBC Hausa, Lamido said zoning of political offices has been counter-productive, adding that such should be put aside for now while the welfare and unity of Nigerians take centre stage.

He said this despite the stance of his party, the Peoples Democratic Party, on zoning which became jeopardised since the death of ex-president Umar Yar’adua.

“Even if they (PDP members) come and talk about zoning, I will tell them no. Because in these days of development, the world has passed the stage of zoning of political offices. What they discuss is how to progress. We should be discussing how best to build our people, how to ensure unity among our people. And I believe we can get that person from any part of the country, so we should not be talking of zoning now,” Lamido said.

He said as a national politician, he is ready to support whoever is a capable candidate regardless of religion or ethnicity.

“I don’t care whether such person is a Muslim or Christian, a Hausa or Angas or Yoruba. If he is capable, bring him on. We should forget about this zoning

issue because where has it taken us positively as a country?” he asked.

The former governor who spoke on the mission to “Rescue Nigeria” lamented that the regime of the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), has destroyed what the PDP built in 16 years.

“Almost everything done by the PDP has been destroyed by APC. There is high rate of poverty in the country, insecurity is at an alarming rate, lack of unity among people of the country. We sat and deliberated on how to start the mission of saving this country and that was how we decided to meet him (Obasanjo) and we met him and discussed for two hours.

“We only went there to discuss the future of this country and nothing more and we went to him because he knows how to rescue this country. He knows how he left this country in good situation and we know he so much loves Nigeria. So, we went there to beg him on the way forward. And we know that we can only rescue Nigeria through PDP but we also need to talk to everyone who matters in the party, including those who have been offended to make them return to their beloved party,” he said.



Chinese economy enjoys bright prospects for high-quality development



Photo taken on Feb. 17, 2022 shows an intelligent production line of new-energy vehicles in a factory of Chinese electric-vehicle maker Leapmotor in Jinhua city, east China's Zhejiang province. (Photo by Hu Xiaofei/People's Daily Online)

By He Yin, People's Daily

China's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 8.1 percent year on year to more than 114 trillion yuan (about \$18 trillion) in 2021, with an average two-year growth of 5.1 percent, said a statistical communiqué on China's national economic and social development released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Feb. 28.

China has remained the second largest economy in the world. Despite multiple challenges including complex international environment, prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather events, China's national economy has continued to recover and its development continuously reached new heights, which fully demonstrated the great prospects of the Chinese economy for high-quality development.

The Chinese economy can only be fully understood with a comprehensive, dialectical and long-term perspective.

Though under huge pressure brought about by changes in the domestic and international economic environment, China's economy maintained sound momentum, with major macroeconomic indicators remaining within a reasonable range and the characteristics of the economy, including strong resilience, ample potential and sound momentum in the long-term, becoming more evident.

The international community generally believes that China's economy will continue with recovery and growth this year and inject impetus into world economic recovery.

The promising prospects of the Chinese economy derived from the

country's high-quality development with greater resilience.

Last year, while responding with composure to changes and the pandemic both unseen in a century, China has made new advances in fostering a new development paradigm and pursuing high-quality development, and got off to a good start in implementing its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).

In 2021, the country maintained a leading position in the world in economic development and epidemic prevention and control, while intensifying its national strategic strength in science and technology, improving industrial chain resilience, continuously deepening supply-side structural reform, and making solid strides toward green and low-carbon transition and common prosperity.

The bright prospects of the Chinese economy stemmed from constant improvement in the country's industrial structure.

Last year, China accelerated the transformation and upgrading of its economic structure and continuously improved its industrial structure. While investment in high-tech industries increased by 17.1 percent year on year and the value added of the high-tech manufacturing industry rose 18.2 percent over the previous year, industries including new-energy vehicle, industrial robot, and integrated circuit delivered impressive performance and modern service industry witnessed rapid growth.

Driven by the recently concluded Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, ice and snow sports are generating increasing economic benefits for the country. A research report predicted that the output value of China's winter sports



The liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal Sinopec Tianran Company in northern China's Tianjin municipality, the first LNG terminal with two berths in China, receives two batches of LNG at the same time, Feb. 26, 2022. (Photo by Hu Qingming/People's Daily Online)

will reach 800 billion yuan this year and one trillion yuan in 2025.

Consumption has always been regarded as an important window into a country's economic vitality. Last year, China's consumer demands were further unleashed, with final consumption expenditure contributing 65.4 percent to the country's economic growth. Consumption has become a main driving force for the stable recovery of China's national economy.

During the Spring Festival holiday in February, China handled 20.84 billion non-cash payments involving 14.9 trillion yuan, up 10 percent and 16.2 percent, respectively, from the same period of the previous year, which signified that the country's consumption vitality was continuously unlocked.

China's economic prospects are also

a result of the country's opening-up in pursuit of win-win cooperation with the rest of the world.

In 2021, the bilateral trade volume between China and Russia exceeded 900 billion yuan for the first time, rising 26.6 percent year on year; the total trade volume between China and Africa hit a new high since 2014; China remained the largest trading partner of the European Union (EU), with the total value of imports and exports between the two sides increasing by 27.5 percent over the previous year; and the total value of trade between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) climbed 28.1 percent year on year.

By fully leveraging domestic and international markets and resources and giving play to its advantages of the largest industrial system in

the world with the most categories and a super-large market, China has not only its own development amid globalization, but achieved benefit and win-win results with countries through high-level

up. The Chinese economy is a small pond. With a solid material and technological foundation built over decades of rapid development since the beginning of reform and opening up, a super-large domestic market and enormous domestic consumption potential, as well as huge capital and a large pool of talents, the Chinese economy is bound to advance steadily along the road of high-quality development and make more contributions to the steady recovery of the global economy.

A China-Europe freight train loaded with 100 two-wheeled equivalent units of different types of goods, including raw materials, vehicle accessories, and daily necessities, leaves a multimodal transportation center at China-SCO Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Demonstration Zone in Jiaozhou city, China's Shandong province, for Mannheim, Germany, Feb. 22, 2022. (Photo by Wang Zhaomai/People's Daily Online)



Tourists enjoy plum blossoms at Meihua Mountain, Nanjing, China's Jiangsu province, Feb. 28, 2022. (Photo by Gen/People's Daily Online)

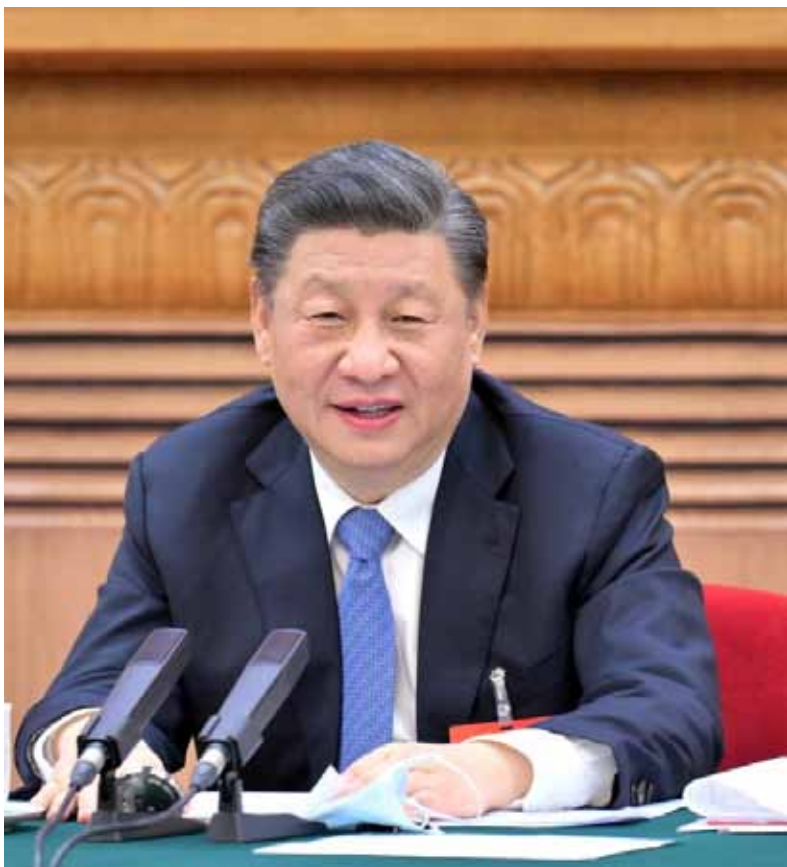
Consolidate Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation to Jointly Build the Great Motherland and Create a Better Life

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and President of the People's Republic of China, participated in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region delegation's deliberation at the Fifth Session of the 13th National People's Congress on Saturday March 5.

Xi himself is a member of the delegation. He stressed that ethnic unity is the lifeline of all ethnic groups in the country and a strong sense of community is key to ethnic unity. Efforts must be made to strengthen such sense by furthering education on ethnic unity, he added. Efforts should also be made to let people cultivate the awareness that people from all ethnicities are in the same community, where they share weel and woe, stick together in life and death, Xi said. Seeds in a pomegranate are what Xi used to describe how all ethnic groups can stick together as long as the sense of Chinese nation as a community being the foundation for ethnic unity will people from all ethnic groups join hands in building our country, Xi said. A stable and healthy economic environment is important, and so is social stability and political integrity. Ethnic unity is essential to all these, Xi said. We must do a good job in all areas to greet the convening of the 20th National Congress of the CPC, he said.

The atmosphere was warm and active in the delegation's panel deliberation. Deputies Zhang Lei, Guo Yanling, Jia Run'an, Wang Xiaohong, Feng Yanli, Zhao Huijie and Shi Yudong shared their opinions with others on how the new development philosophy can be carried out in an accurate, extensive and down-to-earth manner in the conservation of grassland ecology. They also talked about how the philosophy can be materialized in furthering the coal chemical industry to contribute to carbon emissions peaking and carbon neutrality. Cultivating a sense of community for the Chinese nation can be integrated into the entire process of school education, they said. High-quality development, rural revitalization and better development of the dairy industry are also topics they talked about. Xi took down notes of what they said and once in a while would put in a word.

Having listened carefully to the deputies, Xi made a speech. First, he expressed approval of the Report on the Work of the Government and recognition of Inner Mongolia's work in the past year. He hoped that the people in Inner Mongolia would resolutely implement the decisions and arrangements of the CPC Central Committee, coordinate efforts in epidemic control and economic and



Xi stresses ethnic unity, strengthening sense of community for Chinese nation

social development, unswervingly follow the path of high-quality development that prioritizes ecological conservation and pursues green development, and fully fulfill their political responsibilities of safeguarding national ecological, energy, food and industrial security. He also hoped the region would forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, push forward the full and rigorous self-governance of the Party, add more charm to the northern border region, and write a new chapter of high-quality development in the new era.

In 2021, China has made comprehensive advancements in reform, development and stability, with new and major achievements attained in the pursuit of the cause of the Party and the country, Xi noted. The CPC has solemnly celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Party, carried out the initiatives to study the Party's history, held the sixth plenary session of its 19th Central Committee, and adopted a resolution on the Party's historical experience and achievements over the past century. Having won the critical battle against poverty and completed the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects on schedule, China is striding forward on a new journey toward the second centenary goal of fully building a modern socialist country. Always putting the people and their lives first, China has guarded against both imported COVID-19 cases and domestic zero-COVID approach in a science-based and targeted way. While ensuring constant efforts on routine epidemic prevention and control, China has maintained a leading position in both economic growth rate and epidemic control globally, and got the 14th Five-Year Plan off to a good start. China has also

successfully hosted the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games by presenting a simple, safe and splendid event to the world. The Chinese athletes strived and achieved the country's best-ever results at the Winter Games. These achievements bear a great significance to the pursuit of the cause of the Party and the country.

Xi Jinping stressed that, in reviewing the Party and the people's endeavors in the new era, we have acquired a stronger understanding of the following:

First of all, upholding the overall Party leadership is the path we must take to stick to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics. As long as we unswervingly uphold the overall Party leadership and safeguard the Party Central Committee's authority and centralized, unified leadership, we will definitely be able to ensure that the whole Party and the country have the strong political cohesiveness to unite the people to work together, develop confidence, bring together the strong power of innovation on the basis of what has been done in the past and unity as one to surmount all difficulties, and form an anchor for the nation in the face of adversity.

Second, socialism with Chinese characteristics is the path we must take to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As long as we unwaveringly keep to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we will definitely be able to consistently see our people realize their aspirations for a better life and promote common prosperity for all the people.

Third, working hard in unity is the path the Chinese people must take to make historic achievements. As long as the people from all ethnic groups across the country, under the Party's leadership, unite together with one heart and one mind and bravely and readily stand out for ourselves, we will

definitely be able to overcome all the difficulties and challenges on our road ahead, and continue to create new impressive miracles.

Fourth, putting into practice our new development philosophy is the path we must take to develop our country into a strong nation in the new era. As long as we apply the new development philosophy in full, in the right way and in all fields of endeavor, accelerate efforts to create a new development pattern, promote high-quality development and speed up strengthening our country's science and technology capacity, we will definitely be able to consistently improve the competitiveness and sustainability of our country's development, seize the initiative and embrace a good future in the increasingly fierce global competition.

Fifth, exercising full and rigorous self-governance of the Party is the path we must take to maintain the Party's vigor and vitality and ensure its success on the new journey. China's success hinges on the Party and its self-governance. As long as we make great efforts to carry forward the great founding spirit of the Party, stay true to our founding mission, have the courage to reform ourselves, consistently remove all elements that harm the Party's advanced nature and integrity and eliminate all viruses that erode its health, we will definitely be able to ensure that the Party preserves its essence, color and character.

Xi pointed out that China is a unified nation of many ethnic groups. Only when all ethnic groups live in unity and harmony can there be a prosperous country, a stable society and a happy people. Without ethnic unity and harmony, the country would decline, society would be destabilized and the people would suffer. The CPC Central Committee has made fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation the main task in its work related to ethnic affairs in the new era. It is a major decision made to maintain the great unity of the Chinese nation and to realize the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. It is also an important conclusion drawn from a thorough review of the historical experience and lessons.

Xi stressed that what Inner Mongolia has achieved today is the results of the concerted efforts of people of all ethnic groups, and the bright future of the autonomous region would not be achieved without the unity and hard work of people of all ethnic groups. To foster a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, we should not only deliver work that can be seen and felt, but also make much "inconspicuous and subtle" efforts. In order to foster a shared sense of belonging for the Chinese nation and to promote exchanges, interactions and integration among different ethnic groups, we should do various concrete and detailed work that can be seen and felt and be effective. Officials of all ethnic groups should fully comprehend and carry out the Party's ethnic theories and policies, and always bear in mind the overall work of the Party and the country and the overall interests of the Chinese nation when contemplating a problem, making a decision and doing their work. Any work that is conducive to fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation should be done in a thorough, detailed and concrete manner. Any activity that is harmful to fostering such sense should be resolutely forbidden.

The requirements for fostering a

strong sense of community for the Chinese nation should be carried out in relevant fields across the whole autonomous region, including historical and cultural education and publicity, construction of public cultural infrastructure and urban landmark structures, and exhibitions and displays in tourism sites. The relationship between the Chinese culture and the culture of an ethnic group must be dealt with properly. With all these efforts, we can lay a solid theoretical and cultural foundation for fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

Xi pointed out that Inner Mongolia, as a border area with a large ethnic minority population, shoulders a major responsibility for safeguarding ethnic solidarity and the stability of our border. We should tell big pictures from observing details, be more mindful of difficulties ahead, maintain a strategic perspective, and take effective measures to guard against all types of risks and hidden dangers in the work related to ethnic affairs and ensure the security and stability on the north border of our country.

Xi also stressed that it is essential to respond to the COVID-19 and pursue economic and social development in a well-coordinated way. We should put into effect all measures for routine epidemic prevention and control, improve the mechanisms for routine containment and emergency response, give priority to epidemic control at port-of-entry areas, and ensure that no large-scale resurgences arise. We will take proactive and prudent steps to advance carbon emissions peaking and carbon neutrality initiatives. In light of our country's energy situation rich in coal and poor in oil and gas resources, we should act on the national plans and arrangements for carbon emissions peaking and carbon neutrality, apply systems thinking, stay committed to the principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability step by step, and coordinate efforts to reduce carbon emissions, address pollution, promote green development, and maintain continued growth. When carrying out carbon reductions, we must also ensure the security of energy, food, and industrial and supply chains, as well as the normal life and work of our people. We must not distant ourselves from realities and rush for quick results.

With the attitude and resolve to persevere in the never-ending fight against corruption, we have made integrated efforts to see that officials do not have the opportunity, desire, or audacity to engage in corruption. We remain firm in fighting corruption, removing its roots, and clearing away its negative influence. We will make strictly carrying out intra-Party political activities as the basic groundwork for further ensuring full and rigorous self-governance of the Party, and work faster to ensure intra-Party political activities are carried out in a healthy and procedure-based way, Xi said.

We will consolidate what we have achieved in studying the history of the CPC, set up long-term institutions, and educate and guide Party members and officials in taking the study and application of the CPC history as a lifelong compulsory task. We will remain confident in our history, raise our political awareness, carry forward the great founding spirit of the CPC, and forge ahead with confident strides on the new journey and make still greater achievements in the new era, Xi said.



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By Inyene Ibanga



Features

Technology: A game changer for public safety and security

Digital technology is a vital tool in helping public safety institutions to prevent and fight crime more efficiently and effectively and serve citizens better. It has the potential to transform the way public safety is delivered in our communities.

The digitisation of police and other public safety institutions is helping in facilitating effective, efficient, and proactive policing.

Through public safety technology, law enforcement and safety institutions provide more data – accurately and transparently – as a fundamental step in creating true community policing that brings officers, citizens, and decision-makers together.

Public safety involves protecting the people, communities, and the economy against crimes, disasters, and other potential dangers and threats to their wellbeing and prosperity.

Essentially, the primary goals of public safety institutions are to protect, prevent, detect and respond proactively to solve incidents/threats by ensuring effective coordination among relevant agencies during and after such incidents.

Law enforcement officers, firefighters, ambulance and rescue personnel, those in drugs and narcotics control, road traffic controllers, communications and dispatch manpower, public employees, and emergency service providers are among prominent public safety professionals.

With the effect of the global coronavirus pandemic, both citizens and safety leaders are more ready than ever to embrace technology for public safety and security.

For effective public safety and security, China has developed an AnBot to patrol banks, airports, and schools. In Dubai, touchscreen-equipped robot officers now patrol tourist attractions.

It is reported that the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is helping the city of New Orleans to analyse evidence from more than 325 cameras. This has helped police in 70 per cent of cases by providing relevant video and information, and saving the department more than 2,000 hours of manual labour.

Today, a plethora of smart devices and the rise of artificial intelligence are transforming public safety technology into an autonomous partner that can help keep society safe.

Smart streetlights with cameras, microphones and sensors, smart traffic signals, smart intersections, smart emergency vehicles, and smart buildings are among the numerous public safety technologies that use computers to gather intelligence about traffic, accidents, and crimes.

Others are audio, video, and other sensory data from smart Internet of Things (IoT) devices such as drones, body-worn cameras, facial recognition equipment, biometrics, voice technology, robots, and automatic license plate recognition tools.

These improve communications, create transparency and strengthen a community's ability to respond to crises, helping to make them safer and more resilient.

These public safety technologies are also giving first responders and emergency managers near real-time awareness and a vast knowledge base for policy decisions, training, and continuous improvement.

Globally, communication technologies are pervading every sector and bringing significant improvement in the ways we gather, process, and share information.

The emerging Fifth Generation (5G) technology and its revolutionary connectivity capabilities are at the vanguard of this transformation. This new technology provides higher speed, lower latency, and greater capacity than the existing 4G networks.

Its high connectivity speed is expected to drive emerging technologies like AI, machine learning, and IoT, among many others.

Designed to increase transmission, 5G is expected to boost public safety communications that would help create smarter, safer and more sustainable communities.

Nigeria is among the developing economies that have initiated a national policy for the deployment of the 5G communication networks to consolidate its national digital agenda and the digital economy.

Last week, President Muhammadu Buhari ordered all security and safety-related institutions to immediately leverage the emerging Fifth Generation (5G) technology to tackle insecurity in the country as soon as it is deployed.

The president declared that the Federal Government has resolved to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by 5G to improve the country's economy, national security, and well-being of the people.

To this end, he directed the minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Mallam Isa Ali Pantami, to supervise the implementation of the policy being carried out by the Nigerian Communications

Commission (NCC), alongside other government institutions.

Apart from the Nigerian armed forces, other public safety institutions are the Police, Department of State Services (DSS), the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC); the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Fire and Ambulance Services, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), just to name a few.

From the foregoing, it is evident that technology plays a pivotal role in the management of public safety and security, and Nigeria needs to embrace emerging technologies to tackle the situations in the country.

As much as the effort of the government remained commendable, there is an urgent need for the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) to liaise with NCC and NITDA to implement the adoption of emerging technologies in the public safety and security sector.

Public safety and security professionals need to embark on lifelong learning to keep abreast of technological development in their areas of specialisation.

On this point, the National Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (NCAIR) will not only suffice but it would also serve as the hub for the development of indigenous innovative solutions to our domestic public safety and security challenges.

...Ibanga, a public affairs analyst writes from Wuye District, Abuja

Boosting entrepreneurship skills in tertiary Institutions

By Rahma Olamide Oladosu

With white-collar jobs are becoming rare luxuries in modern-day Nigeria, emphasis has since shifted to promoting entrepreneurship, skills and talent development among the youth.

To drive socio-economic growth, and address the problem of unemployment, many economic experts are of the view that imparting requisite entrepreneurial skills, especially in the youth must start from tertiary institutions, preparatory to the graduation of students.

At the moment, entrepreneurship development is fully studied or better still offered as a course in most Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, which attach a great premium to boosting entrepreneurial studies, and equally offer this as courses.

While a university is a high-level educational institution in which students study for degrees and academic research is carried out, a polytechnic is a technical educational institution focusing on practical and skills-oriented training, especially in the field of engineering, technology, among others.

A college of education competes with normal schools in the preparation of teachers. Teacher education, curriculum building, and instruction remain the core offering of colleges or schools of education.

Recently, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) challenged polytechnics and colleges of education in the country to redouble their efforts in entrepreneurship and skills development.

The Executive Secretary of the Fund, Professor Suleiman Bogoro, made the call at a capacity building workshop for heads of selected institutions and staff of TETFund Centres of Excellence.

Bogoro called on the Centres of Excellence in the polytechnics to focus on skills development, entrepreneurship and the enabling of relevant start-ups, even as he lamented that most of the low and medium-skilled jobs in the country are being handled by people from Francophone countries.

Speaking in the same vein, the Executive Secretary of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), Professor Idris Muhammad Bugaje said polytechnics must wake up to their responsibility of producing skilled manpower for the country.

The NBTE boss expressed serious concern that most major infrastructure projects in the country are being dominated by skilled personnel from other countries.

"There is need for our polytechnics to be focused on skills training, that is why we say from 2023, NBTE shall never go for the accreditation of any polytechnic where there is not a single skills training centre," Bugaje said.

There are indices globally associated with Centres of Excellence, especially in bringing about innovation and development. Higher institutions of learning, especially the polytechnics should focus more on skills development and the support of entrepreneurship, start ups, among others.

In the areas of competitive advantage, skills development is central and fundamental. Polytechnics should have the capacity to develop skills or the entrepreneurial ability of students and researchers.

It is worrisome and embarrassing to observe that in some construction sites there are more foreigners than Nigerian workers, despite the fact that our polytechnics are churning more than

enough skilled manpower on engineering and technical for the construction industry.

We should recall that TETFund had recently established Centres of Excellence in six polytechnics and six colleges of education.

The beneficiary institutions selected equally from each of the six geo-political zones in the country are: Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa, Nasarawa State; Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State (North Central); Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Bauchi State; Federal College Education, Yola, Adamawa State (North East); Federal Polytechnic, Kaduna, Kaduna State; and Federal College of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State (North-West).

Also, the South-East has Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Imo State and the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo State. The South-South's beneficiaries include Federal Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State and Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, Rivers State.

Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and Adeyemi College Education, Ondo State made the list for the South-West.

At a time insecurity is ravaging Nigeria, critical stakeholders must continue to do everything possible to address youth unemployment, one of the factors aggravating the country's security challenges.

TETFund's charge to our polytechnics and Colleges of Education to 'aggressively' boost entrepreneurship and skills development could not have come at a better time.

...Oladosu, a public affairs comentstor writes from Abuja.

Inside FCT

Abaji community gets people oriented projects, as Aliyu says FCTA in hurry to add value to lives

Stories By Joyce Babayeju

The people of Abaji Area Council are now beneficiaries of some people oriented projects as the FCT Minister of State, Dr. Ramatu Tijjani Aliyu flagged off empowerment programmes in the community.

While inaugurating the projects, Aliyu noted that the All Progressives Congress governance mandate requires the FCT Administration to be in a hurry to add FCTA value to the lives of the residents of the territory especially those in rural communities.

She commended Abaji Area Council chairman for empowering citizens through the provision and distribution of motor cycles to Okada members, provision of speed boats to Kurege, Maniogi and Alu communities, purchase of irrigation pumping machines to farmers, and distribution of grinding machines to rural women, amongst other empowerment schemes.

The minister assured that the Federal Capital Territory Administration was leaving no stone unturned towards ensuring that the less privileged are empowered with skills and job creation are not encumbered with business support challenges.

“To this end, we have strengthened our leading skills development agency, the Abuja Enterprise Agency, while our Youth Centre in Nyanya has been upgraded for skill acquisition training.”

“We have also continued to fund free training for artisans and craftsmen towards building their capacity to innovate and ease of doing business. It is hope that through this, the agency will energize our youths into fulfilling their full potentials”, she emphasized.

Aliyu advised residents of benefiting communities to justify government’s investment in their communities by ensuring proper maintenance of these projects for the overall development of their communities.

In the same vein, Chairman of Abaji Area Council, Hon. Abdulrahman Ajiya, acknowledged the pragmatic role played by the FCT Minister of State during zero allocation to area councils, stressing that the minister’s efforts contributed to the provision of the empowerment programmes.

Ajiya explained that empowerment of the people is a way of curbing social vices in the area council, the administration has empowered that about 1,000 youths and women in various skills acquisition, adding that the administration was able to execute these projects with the support of the FCT Administration.

Projects inaugurated include the Abaji Police Area Command office, 0.5km market junction road, 0.45km road along Baba Mai Lema, ongoing 1.2km road, Pipeline Agyana road amongst others.



FCTA, IITA to partner on food security

The Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) Agriculture and Rural Development Secretariat is set to synergise with International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) to boost food security across the territory.

Mandate Secretary FCT Agriculture and Rural Development Secretariat, Mallam Abubakar Ibrahim disclosed this on Thursday, when the Abuja station representative/project manager of IITA, Professor Lateef Sanni led a team of senior officials on a courtesy visit to him.

According to Ibrahim the secretariat has recorded notable achievements through the collaboration that started since 1991 with IITA, promising that the the secretariat will continue to organize and mobilize farmers to benefit from the programmes of the Institute which has the mandate of research on soya bean, Yam, cassava, maize, cowpea, Banana and plantain.

“We appreciate IITA for not only making the research findings available but also providing our farmers in the FCT with improved varieties of the aforementioned crops.”

Ibrahim stated that in recognition of the important role of research in boosting Agricultural production, the FCT Administration has continued to sustain its support to the Institute, describing the recent donation of a transformer and a borehole to the Institute in 2019 as another way of enhancing the

activities of the Institute.

The IITA Abuja station representative Prof. Lateef Sanni appreciated the FCT Administration for always supporting the Institute to meet up with its mission to help resource-poor farmers raise agriculture production, as well as improve food security, and increase incomes in sub-

Saharan Africa.

He further solicited assistance in the areas of completion of the Abuja perimeter fence of about 1,630 meters, which he said exposes the station and all its assets to high security risks including land grabbing and encroachment.

Furthermore Sanni requested for an outreach and capacity

building line budget to enable IITA to bridge the gap in Agriculture interventions in the Federal Capital Territory.

Director Agriculture services in the secretariat, Mrs Francisca Ihekandu said the collaboration between IITA and FCTA will continue to yield positive results in the agriculture sector.

AMMC condemns stubborn violation of building rules, regulations by developers

The Town Planner Umar Shuaibu, the Coordinator of the Abuja Metropolitan Management Council (AMMC), today in Abuja condemned cases of the persistence violation of building rules and regulations by many stubborn developers.

Shuaibu who made the remark at a conference complained that the actions of some developers escalate the simple procedures which soon becomes security, legal and social matters, with very dire consequences to the well-being of the city.

He pointed out that the Department of Development Control had in so small way contributed to ensuring compliance with the standard and regulations for building Abuja.

“It is worrisome to note that while the department has simplified the procedure and processes for granting building permits, there are many

recalcitrant developers that always refused to abide by the set rules and regulations.”

“The first and most important procedure in the process of building plan approval is the confirmation of title document and land ownership submitted by the developer.”

“This usually become a major source of hindrance to the development of many plots in the city,” he said.

The coordinator, therefore, urged intending developers to be sure that there was no contending issues surrounding plot ownership before granting a development permit.

“Unfortunately, out of desperation or treachery on the part of some developers, our staff, in the course of ensuring due process and fairness in handling ambiguous matters become victims of unwarranted harassment with framed-up charges against them by some dubious and recalcitrant

developers.”

On the issues of land he urge security agencies to always dig and thoroughly investigate matters from the relevant FCT agencies before prosecution on any complain on land matters.



Umar Shuaibu

FCTA shares N3,668,506,36 statutory allocation to six Area Councils, Stakeholders

Stories By Joyce Babayeju

The Federal Capital Territory Administration today disbursed a total sum of N3,668,506,659.36 as statutory allocation to the six Area Councils in the FCT and other stakeholders for the month of December 2021.

In a release signed by Austine Elemue, SA Media to Minister of State made available to Daybreak the figure indicates a decline in revenue from N3,726,007,503.49 disbursed in the month of November to N3,668,506,659.36 in the month of December, representing about 1.54 percent decrease.

FCT Minister of State, Dr. Ramatu Aliyu who presided over the 161st Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC), commended all stakeholders for their cooperation, despite challenges recorded in the past..

The statement read, The figures released also indicate that the sum of N1,615,340,273.24 was made available for distribution to the six area councils, while the sum of N2,053,166,386.12 was made available to other stakeholders, bringing the total sum to N3,668,506,659.36.

Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), received N328,034,790.92, while Gwagwalada got N284, 273, 669.49 and Kuje received N259,674,786.45.

Other area councils include, Bwari Area Council received N250,649,903.10, Abaji got N250,646,804.73 and Kwali received N242,060,318.55 bringing the total sum to N1,668,506,659.36 disbursed to the six area councils.

Furthermore, distribution to other stakeholders include: Primary School Teachers which gulped N1,682,152,924.31, 15 percent Pension Funds took N226,478,989.57, One percent Training Fund gulped N36,685,066.61, while 10 percent Employer Pension Contribution gulped N107,849,405.63, bringing the total sum to N2,053,166,386.12.

Meanwhile, the minister pointed out that the ongoing FCT primary school teachers strike over the nonpayment of promotion arrears since 2013 arrears predates the present administration.

She assured the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) that a 7- Man Committee has been set up to operate a workable template to offset the debts for over a period of time.

She said, “our primary school teachers are at home over the nonpayment of their arrears that predates this administration. However, the quality of a good leader is to take responsibility, and we must work out ways to resolve this protracted issue. Workable template to offset the debts over a period of time has been put in place, and a seven man committee to look into the operation of the template will be set up.”

Present at the 161st Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC), meeting were the FCTA Permanent Secretary, Mr. Olusade Adesola, Chairman of Gwagwalada Area Council, Hon. Adamu Mustapha, Mandate Secretary Area Council Services, Malam Ibrahim Abubakar Dantsoho, FCT NUT Chairman, Comrade Stephen Knabayi, amongst others.



Alhaji Abbas Idriss

FEMA assures of transparency, as it opens bid for 2021 procurement exercise

The Federal Capital Territory Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), today opened the technical bids for 2021 procurement of goods, works and service as it assures of transparency.

Director General of FEMA, Alhaji Abbas Idriss who declared the bid open explained that representatives of the bidding companies were invited to the opening via zoom in line with Covid- 19 protocol.

Alhaji Idriss gave the assurance that the entire process would be transparent.

The Acting Director Procurement, Mallam Mohammed Chiroma, who presided over the process said that advertorial were placed accordingly in 3 National dailies, while the bids were collected today as the deadline and opened by 11am.

A total of 24 bids were opened under 4 lots viz, 1,2,3 and 4. All the bids were for goods. Lot1 had 7bids, Lot2

had 4, Lot3 had 5 and Lot4 with six bids.

Mallam Chiroma described the process as transparent stated that bids were called, the envelopes examined and recorded.

According to him representatives of the companies, Non Governmental Organizations and the private sector observed the exercise via zoom, to examine the bids and verify that they were not altered, adding that there was no late submission.

Security: Bello commends FCT joint efforts with Nasarawa, Niger, Kogi

FCT Minister, Muhammad Musa Bello has commended the joint efforts of the FCT with neighbouring states like Nasarawa, Niger and Kogi as very effective for the security of the territory.

Bello said this today in Abuja at the FCTA Expanded Stakeholders Meeting on Security matters.

The minister who noted that the meeting which is the first in 2022, brought all the 17 graded chiefs in the territory to reviewed the 2021 and look at focus for 2022.

He said, “ In our reviewed we found out that the collaborative security efforts with neighboring states of the FCT is very effective.

“And this is one aspect that we will continue to improve upon because that is where all the security agencies within the FCT and their counterpart in neighboring states of Nasarawa, Niger and Kogi work together.”

“Overall also we appreciated the efforts of all the agencies and in spite of what happened here and there within the rural communities we are quite satisfied with the efforts.”

The minister promised that the Administration has also identified and would support other areas in need of additional support.

Meanwhile the Independent National Electoral Commission

(INEC) Chairman Professor Mahmood Yakubu has revealed that ahead of the February 12 Area Council election there are 593 polling units in FCT without registered voters, 1,328 polling units with between 0-50 voters and 546 polling units with over 1,000 registered voters.

Yakubu revealed this today at the Federal Capital Territory Expanded Stakeholders Security meeting organised by the FCT Administration in Abuja.

He said that INEC had decided that no election would take place at the polling units without registered voters, adding that no materials have been produced for those units and no personnel would be deployed to them.

The INEC Chairman however assured that voting would take place in all the other polling units, noting in congested polling units, INEC would deploy more than one Biomodal Voter Accreditation System, BVAS, to facilitate a speedy accreditation of voters.

He also said that INEC would deploy additional staff to those locations, stressing that the commission has agreed with the security agencies to deploy more personnel to ensure peace and order.

According to him, for transparency, the commission is

making the hard copies of the details locations to these polling units to all stakeholders at this meeting.

“I addition, soft copies have also been uploaded to our website. By doing, so, we want to achieve two objectives.”

“First is to ensure that voters in the FCT and indeed all Nigerians are aware of these polling units and the arrangements made for them on election day.”

“Secondly, to seek the support of all stakeholders to ensure that these polling units are populated ahead of the 2023 general election.”

He implored the support of traditional, community and religious leaders in the forthcoming election.

Yakubu, who reiterated the importance of peace to the successful conduct of the area council elections, assured that INEC would protect the integrity of the process.

“Our eyes are on all our officials, be they adhoc or regular staff, to ensure that they strictly abide by the rules. All parties, candidates and their supporters should do the same, he emphasized.

Daybreak reports that INEC boss was invited to the meeting by the FCT Minister, Malam Muhammad Bello, to brief FCT stakeholders on preparations for the Area Councils Election slated for Feb. 12.



By Chris Hedges

I was in Eastern Europe in 1989 reporting on the revolutions that overthrew the ossified communist dictatorships that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a time of hope. NATO, with the breakup of the Soviet empire, became obsolete. President Mikhail Gorbachev reached out to Washington and Europe to build a new security pact that would include Russia.

Secretary of State James Baker in the Reagan administration, along with the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, assured the Soviet leader that if Germany was unified NATO would not be extended beyond the new borders. The commitment not to expand NATO, also made by Great Britain and France, appeared to herald a new global order. We saw the peace dividend dangled before us, the promise that the massive expenditures on weapons that characterized the Cold War would be converted into expenditures on social programs and infrastructures that had long been neglected to feed the insatiable appetite of the military.

There was a near universal understanding among diplomats and political leaders at the time that any attempt to expand NATO was foolish, an unwarranted provocation against Russia that would obliterate the ties and bonds that happily emerged at the end of the Cold War.

How naive we were. The war industry did not intend to shrink its power or its profits. It set out almost immediately to recruit the former Communist Bloc countries into the European Union and NATO. Countries that joined NATO, which now include Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia were forced to reconfigure their militaries, often through hefty loans, to become compatible with NATO military hardware.

There would be no peace dividend. The expansion of NATO swiftly became a multi-billion-dollar bonanza for the corporations that had profited from the Cold War. Poland, for example, just agreed to spend \$ 6 billion on M1 Abrams tanks and other U.S. military equipment. If Russia would not acquiesce to again being the enemy, then Russia would be pressured into becoming the enemy. And here we are. On the brink of another Cold War, one from which only the war industry will profit while, as W. H. Auden wrote, the little children die in the streets.

The consequences of pushing NATO up to the borders with



Perspective

Chronicle of War Foretold

Russia — there is now a NATO missile base in Poland 100 miles from the Russian border — were well known to policy makers. Yet they did it anyway. It made no geopolitical sense. But it made commercial sense. War, after all, is a business, a very lucrative one. It is why we spent two decades in Afghanistan although there was near universal consensus after a few years of fruitless fighting that we had waded into a quagmire we could never win.

In a classified diplomatic cable obtained and released by WikiLeaks dated February 1, 2008, written from Moscow, and addressed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, NATO-European Union Cooperative, National Security Council, Russia Moscow Political Collective, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State there was an unequivocal understanding that expanding NATO risked an eventual conflict with Russia, especially over the Ukraine.

“Not only does Russia perceive encirclement [by NATO], and efforts to undermine Russia’s influence

in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests,” the cable reads.

“Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face. . . . Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, expressed concern that Ukraine was, in the long-term, the most potentially destabilizing factor in U.S.-Russian relations, given the level of emotion and neuralgia triggered by its quest for NATO membership Because membership remained divisive in Ukrainian domestic politics, it created an opening for Russian intervention. Trenin expressed concern that elements within the Russian establishment would be encouraged to meddle, stimulating U.S. overt

encouragement of opposing political forces, and leaving the U.S. and Russia in a classic confrontational posture.”

The Obama administration, not wanting to further inflame tensions with Russia, blocked arms sales to Kiev. But this act of prudence was abandoned by the Trump and Biden administrations. Weapons from the U.S. and Great Britain are pouring into the Ukraine, part of the \$1.5 billion in promised military aid. The equipment includes hundreds of sophisticated Javelins and NLAW anti-tank weapons despite repeated protests by Moscow.

The United States and its NATO allies have no intention of sending troops to the Ukraine. Rather, they will flood the country with weapons, which is what it did in the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia.

The conflict in the Ukraine echoes the novel “Chronicle of a Death Foretold” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In the novel it is acknowledged by the narrator that “there had never been a death more foretold” and yet no one was

able or willing to stop it. All of us who reported from the Eastern Europe in 1989 knew the consequences of provoking Russia, and yet few have raised their voices to halt the madness. The methodical steps towards war took on a life of their own, moving us like sleepwalkers towards disaster.

Once NATO expanded into Eastern Europe the Clinton administration promised Moscow that NATO combat troops would not be stationed in Eastern Europe, the defining issue of the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations. This promise again turned out to be a lie. Then in 2014 the U.S. backed a coup against the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich who sought to build an economic alliance with Russia rather than the European Union. Of course, once integrated into the European Union, as seen in the rest of Eastern Europe, the next step is integration into NATO. Russia, spooked by the coup, alarmed at the overtures by the EU and NATO, then annexed Crimea, largely populated by Russian speakers. And the death spiral that led us to the conflict currently underway in the Ukraine became unstoppable.

The war state needs enemies to sustain itself. When an enemy can’t be found an enemy is manufactured. Putin has become, in the words of Senator Angus King, the new Hitler, out to grab the Ukraine and the rest of Eastern Europe. The full-throated cries for war, echoed shamelessly by the press, are justified by draining the conflict of historical context, by elevating ourselves as the saviors and whoever we oppose, from Saddam Hussein to Putin, as the new Nazi leader.

I don’t know where this will end up. We must remember, as Putin reminded us, that Russia is a nuclear power. We must remember that once you open the Pandora’s box of war it unleashes dark and murderous forces no one can control. I know this from personal experience. The match has been lit. The tragedy is that there was never any dispute about how the conflagration would start.

This first appeared on ScheerPost.

Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years for The New York Times, where he served as the Middle East Bureau Chief and Balkan Bureau Chief for the paper. His books include American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America, Death of the Liberal Class, and War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning and Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt, a collaboration with comics artist and journalist Joe Sacco.



By Chido Nwakanma

Arise TV The Morning Show presenter Dr Reuben Abati clearly went overboard and defamed his colleague Mary Chinda on air in the now infamous exchange about the use of first names. If it was a joke, it turned out sour. Stakeholders have been up in arms. The din is loud and overwhelming.

It is a function of the strength of that programme and station that the issue gripped national attention so much. Conversations around it have brought up many points. They include first names by broadcasters on air: is it a universal norm such as the inverted pyramid in news reporting?

Or is there room for cultural peculiarities? How far can hosts go with jests on air? AriseTV News can sort it out in several ways. One very unusual but intelligent method would be for the senior person to make it up to his junior on air. It should satisfy all stakeholders.

Please note that the junior here, Mary Chinda, is as professional as they come. She holds first and second degrees in mass communication and is pursuing the ultimate academic diadem. Chinda has stacked up experience at Enugu Broadcasting Corporation, Plus TV Africa and News Central TV. She is, as such no greenhorn.

Significantly, I have seen many commentators try to degrade Dr Reuben Abati by claiming that he is not a trained journalist or not prepared for broadcasting. Debatable claims.

Reuben is as trained in journalism as they come. He has spent more than 30 years serving in high editorial positions and winning all available awards in the profession in his area. Those awards are validation of competence and professionalism.

Not a journalist? Yet he was Chairman of the Editorial Board of The Guardian, columnist and editorial board member at Thisday and now anchor at AriseTV News. Please.

Broadcasters say the use of first names is the norm in their industry. I reached out to veterans such as Mr Kevin Ejiofor, former Ag DG of FRCN, Nnaemeka Maduegbuna, formerly



Insight

First names on air, culture and the qualifications of journalists



of NTA, Sola Omole, and Senator Chris Anyanwu, who owns broadcast organs.

Three of four responded. They affirmed the use of first names in addressing

colleagues.

Mr Ejiofor stated, "Of course, that's the norm. I had often wondered why the young lady (not the Abiola) always addressed him as Dr Abati on The

Morning Show. Of course, conventionally, there's such a thing as a house style. I had wondered if Arise was introducing its own house style to 'dobale' for 'seniors'."



Senator Chris Anyanwu: "The convention that I know of is to call people by their first names. The idea is to promote a nice, collegial atmosphere.

No one ever addresses a co-anchor by Mr... Such formality is best left off the air".

On cultural variations, Mr Ejiofor stated, "I'm afraid I'm not aware that it does. But then, with conventions being a matter of choice and long-standing habit, there's little room for a definitive yes or no. For example, no one objected to the young lady calling Reuben Dr Abati, as far as I know. I felt odd about it but. And this is Nigeria." The Morning Show is an exciting programme that has gripped the imagination, attention and interest of viewers. The first-name use incident has availed critics and fans alike the opportunity to give feedback to the station and the presenters. They should please pay attention and take all the learnings. I will urge that they script the programme more closely to reduce off-the-handle displays that happen during exclusive reliance on live shows.

"Simply Mr." was the innovation of The Guardian in 1983 to tackle the Nigerian obsession with titles. It died a year later on the eve of the Decree 4 trials when Chief Rotimi Williams as the paper's counsel voiced his year-long resentment at the insult of the denial of his title in the pages of the newspaper.

Culture fights against the quest for egalitarian usage in titles in Nigeria. Note that the use of first names is an ongoing debate in some organisations in Corporate Nigeria and has become a riddle for their internal communications teams. One bank CEO insisted on such usage for himself, staff and customers.

Well, his staff tried it with a high net worth customer in a South-South state. The High Chief took offence and exception to have customer service representatives demean him. The bank had to find exceptions to the rule.

However, the convention in broadcasting is to use first names. Will it bend to Nigeria? Not yet, and not desirable.

Entertainment



Teddy A and Bam Bam welcome their 2nd child

Former Big Brother Naija housemates Teddy A and Bam Bam have welcomed their second child together.

Bam Bam took to her Instagram pages on Sunday, March 6, 2022, where she announced the arrival of their child.

This is coming weeks after the couple revealed that they were expecting their second child.

In a recent chat with Pulse, the celebrity couple talked about their marriage, relationship and how they've been able to grow as a family.

The couple also talked about how their first date went, which according to Bam Bam, was one of the most memorable moments of her life.

Bam Bam described her husband as being protective, principled and very annoying.

When asked what Bam Bam does that annoys him the most, Teddy A said his wife's passive-aggressive nature which reminds him of his mum.

Comedian Maraji says she married the man who dumped her 2 years

Nigerian comedian and skit maker Maraji has revealed that she married the same man who broke her heart and made her weep on social media two years ago.

The soon-to-be mum made this known via her Instagram Stories on Saturday, March 5, 2022, while answering questions from her fans.

"Aunty Gloria remember that time you were heartbroken, was it your current hubby," the fan asked.

"This same guy, this same housemate of mine, na em break my heart. I would have given you guys the full story but let's just move past it," she said.

It would be recalled that in September 2020, Maraji broke down on social media as she

recounted how her partner dumped her.

"Recently I was dumped by ex for no reason. Apparently, he likes someone else. It has been a tough month because it happened just last month. It has been a tough month," she said.

She went to reveal that the reason she decided to share this part of herself is because a lot of people believe social media is only meant to share the happy side of your life.

Maraji is a Nigerian comedienne who hails from Edo state.

She has gained prominence around the country for her hilarious skits.

She holds a bachelor's degree in International Relations from Covenant University.





Why look younger than my age, by Tiwa Savage

42-year-old Tiwa Savage has spoken on why she looks younger than her age.

In a recent Instastory shared by the mother of one on Instagram, she outlined the reasons and attributes of her cute looks.

Savage listed her talent, good heart and wealth status as some of the attributes that have made her look younger than 42.

“Okay even me sef, I agree say I no look my age for this picture. I get babyface, I come sexy, get talent, good heart, I come get money again ahn ahan,” she outlined.

The singer was in the eye of a storm in 2021 after she announced that a blackmailer had a private sex video of herself and her man and is threatening to leak the video.

A few days after, a short video of Tiwa Savage engaging in sex surfaced and went viral.

Actresses are wrongly perceived - Allwell Ademola



Scriptwriter Allwell Ademola has lamented the public wrongly perceives actresses.

Ademola, in an interview, said: “A lot of things are perceived wrongly. The truth is that we are in the faces of people. They see us every day

on TV. “It is very easy for people to point fingers but things are happening everywhere in the world. Things are happening in different sectors.

“I don’t think there is any neighbourhood in Nigeria where there are no single

mums. Is it actresses that live in those places?”

“It is easy to point accusing fingers at celebrities because we are in the faces of the people.”

On why she has stayed out of controversy, the film star says it’s an intentional decision.

She said: “It is an intentional

decision. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. I have the fear of God.

“Also, my family name is important to me. It has been built over the years, even before I was born. It will be stupid of me to tarnish the image of my family.”

‘Our property, Our wife’ - Mercy Aigbe hailed as she visits

Nollywood actress Mercy Aigbe has visited her husband Kazim Adeoti’s community in Oro, Kwara State.

The movie star was accompanied to the community by her husband, Adeoti, where they were well received.

“Our wife, Our property, our thing, our blessing,” the MC hailed as the actress and her husband made way to their seats.

“Yes. I want to believe that every individual is a politician—irrespective of age, class, religion, or whatsoever it is our responsibility to be part of politics because it is all about governance. As you all know,



democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people,” he said.

“So, we just have to be part

of it whether we like it or not, it is all about us. Be it active or inactive, we are all politicians. I love my community so much.

I got some pedigree from my father. My father was someone that loved his community so much and he did so much for his community as well.”



Foreign



Why Biden's key Mideast allies aren't condemning Russia's Ukraine invasion

The United Arab Emirates surprised its Western allies last week when it abstained on a US-drafted United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The move amounted to a declaration of neutrality from one of America's closest Middle East allies in a war that has polarized the international community.

Anwar Gargash, adviser to the UAE president, said taking sides "would only lead to more violence." The UAE's priority is "to encourage all parties to resort to diplomatic action and to negotiate to find a political solution," he said.

The war in Ukraine, which began less than two months after the UAE took a seat at the Security Council, has thrust the country's changing foreign policy onto the world stage, showing how the Gulf state tries to juggle its ties between traditional allies and burgeoning partnerships. It also demonstrates the struggle faced by the West in getting unequivocal condemnation of Russia's invasion from its allies.

The UAE called for a "peaceful solution" to the "Ukraine crisis in a way that guarantees the interests and national security of all parties," the Crown Prince of

Abu Dhabi said in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday. They also discussed energy cooperation.

Other Arab states have also refrained from condemning Russia's invasion. Saudi Arabia, which counts Russia as its main partner in the OPEC+ alliance to coordinate oil output, said Tuesday it "supports international de-escalation efforts in Ukraine." The Arab League on Monday also called for de-escalation and restraint in a joint communique. Neither has condemned Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

"The UAE [shouldn't] be projected as a puppet of the United States anymore," said Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a political science professor in the UAE. "Just because we have such great relations with America, we do not take orders from Washington, and we have to do things consistent with our own strategy and priority."

The UAE's apparent paving of an independent foreign policy comes amid Abu Dhabi's frustration with the Biden administration's treatment of issues of significance to the Gulf nation. Soon after Biden came to office, he removed the Iran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen from the US' list of terrorist organizations. Less

than a year later, the Houthis have begun a campaign of fatal strikes on Abu Dhabi. The US has pledged to bolster UAE defenses, but Abu Dhabi wants a redesignation of the Houthis as terrorists.

In December, the UAE suspended talks for a \$23 billion deal with the US to acquire F-35 fighter jets after the talks were stalled by the administration. Then, last month, it announced that it was buying fighter jets from China for the first time ever.

"The UAE has yet to figure out how to navigate the new multipolar world," Cinzia Bianco, a research fellow on Europe and the Gulf at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said on Twitter. "The UAE and other Gulf monarchies are re-evaluating relations with the US who, in their strong view, reneged on its end of the bargain: providing security."

Meanwhile, ties with Moscow have only grown stronger.

Two years ago, the UAE's de facto ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin to the capital in a grand ceremony, during which the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince described Russia as his "second home" as Putin cemented \$1.3 billion worth of energy and

technology deals.

Local newspapers called it the beginning of a "special relationship" and ran live updates of the visit. "It was clear the two leaders share a strong personal bond," said Abu Dhabi's The National newspaper.

Ultimately, however, "it is a bit of a risk to elevate the position of Russia as an equal of the US," said Karen Young, senior fellow at Washington's Middle East Institute. "[Staying neutral in the Ukraine conflict] is a calculation that Russia and Russian leadership will be useful to Emirati leadership."

The last time a US president visited the UAE was 14 years ago, when George W. Bush occupied the Oval Office. It was the only US presidential visit to the country.

"You have long heard people in the Gulf, policymakers, say that when you shake Putin's hand, you know he will keep his word," said Young. "[Putin] does what he wants, so I think there is a certain attraction in the Gulf to having that kind of certainty," she added. "The frustration with the US is that when administrations change, policy changes, and that doesn't happen in Russia -- at least not yet."

Trade between the UAE and

Russia has been modest, but it has grown ten-fold since 1997, the Russian state news agency TASS reported.

As the third and seventh top oil producers respectively, Russia and the UAE coordinate crude output policies under the OPEC+ alliance. The UAE also depends heavily on Russian tourists. Russia grew to become the second-largest source market for Dubai's tourism sector in 2021, climbing from eighth place in the previous year's rankings, according to state-run Wam news agency.

The relationship goes beyond energy and trade. Russia was the biggest wheat supplier to the UAE last year with about 50% market share, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

The UAE and other Gulf states will find themselves faced with situations like Ukraine "many times" again, wrote Bianco. "Hedging will be possible but limited."

Dubai's former finance chief Nasser al-Shaikh said that neutrality may not be sustainable if the conflict drags on.

"It might be possible to maintain neutrality now... but not in the near future as things unfold/escalate. Very small window of opportunity," he tweeted.

SOME Nigerian students studying in Ukraine have complained that they were threatened with guns by Ukrainian soldiers as they struggled to escape Russia's invasion of that country.

A medical student, Adebowale Oduola, told Reuters on arrival in Abuja on Friday that he and some friends were trying to get on a train to flee Ukraine when the soldiers pointed guns at them and ordered them back.

The Ukrainian troops told them that they were only letting pregnant women on the service from the city of Lviv to the Polish border, but he said he saw them stop some pregnant African women from getting on board.

"When we asked why they were doing this, the soldiers pointed guns at us, endangering our lives," he told Reuters after he finally managed to complete his journey and landed at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, on Friday.

Reuters said it could not independently verify the accounts of Asian and African students being pulled off trains, held up at borders and pushed to the back of long lines.

Ukraine's national police and state border service did not immediately respond to requests for comment on reports that Reuters had received from refugees. But the African Union (UN) said this week that it was disturbed by what it had heard and the UN refugee agency said it had urged authorities in countries neighbouring Ukraine to open their borders to African citizens.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said on Wednesday that authorities had sent up a hotline for African and Asian students looking for help in getting out. "We are working intensively to ensure their safety and speed up their passage," he tweeted.

"The police dragged us out" Adebowale did finally manage to get away after waiting for hours for a train at Lviv then getting permission to travel to Romania. He was among 415 Nigerian students who flew into Abuja on a Nigerian government-chartered flight from Bucharest. The government has also sent planes to collect Nigerians from Poland and Hungary.

The second batch of about 180 arrived Abuja Friday evening through an Air Peace flight. One student still waiting in Warsaw told Reuters via Zoom that he and two fellow Nigerians were pulled off a train they had boarded in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.

"We were already in our cabin, and they called police on us. The police came and dragged us out. Police (said) that 'this is specifically for Ukrainians,'" Alexander Orah, a 25-year-old management student, said.

Reuters could also not independently confirm his account. Orah said he and his



Ukrainian Soldiers Threatened To Shoot Us —Returnee Students Reveal

friends were eventually allowed to board a train to Medyka, on the border with Poland, but then met guards who told them that Africans, South Asians and Arabs had to use a different crossing into Romania. When the students refused, he said the guards put up barricades to stop them crossing while allowing white people to leave. When the growing crowd began to move forward, a soldier pointed a gun at them, he said.

"He cocked his gun and stood in a shooting position, so we raised our hands up and started telling him, 'We are students; we just want to go home.'" Orah eventually made it to the Polish capital and started looking for his next exit.

Stranded Nigerians laud FG's intervention. Meanwhile, some stranded Nigerians who fled Ukraine to Poland have appreciated the Federal Government for its efforts at ensuring their safe and successful evacuation to Nigeria.

The evacuees made this known in separate interviews with newsmen on Friday before departing the Warsaw International Airport in Poland.

The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) reported that as of 8.15 a.m., the Air Peace Air craft conveying the 180 evacuees had been filled to capacity.

The evacuees, who narrated their ordeal while trying to flee Ukraine, appreciated the Federal Government and its mission in Poland for all the arrangements.

A student from Ukraine, Ms Eniola Badejo, appreciated the government's efforts but appealed for more information and better coordination as the exercise continued. "We thank the Federal Government of Nigeria because it has been really tiring. We went through a lot of stress. Many of us travelled all the way and we have barely slept.

"We want them to give us more information because we were not given enough information. 'I am just happy to be going back to my family. I feel happy and grateful that I am going back to my parents,'" Badejo said.

Another student who left Ukraine, Mr Joseph Chikwado, said what was most important to him was his successful crossing from Ukraine into Poland amidst all the challenges as he looked forward to returning to Nigeria.

"It was a very bad experience trying to get across the borders from Ukraine into Poland because of the weather. 'It was very bad and very cold; very long distance; no vehicle to convey us to the borders. We got there pretty late. We had to find a way to warm ourselves.

"We are happy we are safe now and getting back to our country, I feel relieved," Chikwado said. Ms Kella Wengwu, a student of Dnipro Medical Institute, Ukraine, said she was lucky to be on the flight, explaining that the cancelled flight of March 3 gave her the opportunity to make the

trip.

Wengwu explained that she would have missed the flight as she did not register with the Nigerian Embassy in Poland upon arrival.

She said: "Leaving Ukraine was very tough. I had left my city over two weeks to the capital because there were warnings on the invasion from Russia on social media. 'Coming here, I do not know how I got here. I was going to miss this flight because I did not go to the embassy to write my name. I got here and was told the plane was filled up. I waited to see if any opportunity would arise.

"It is mixed feelings for me. I am not quite happy I am leaving school. Ukraine is my home now because since I arrived it has been great. 'But at the same time, I am safe; I am going home to my loved ones. Thank you for the opportunity."

Nigeria's Ambassador to Poland, Christian Ugwu, appreciated President Muhammadu Buhari for his swift intervention and release of funds to get all stranded Nigerians in Ukraine back home.

Ugwu said the embassy in Poland was on top of the situation and had successfully coordinated the first batch of Nigerians who were being evacuated already. The ambassador, however, urged all Nigerians who had made it to Poland to ensure they got ready to be evacuated home rather than remain in Poland.

"We have been trying our best to convince the Nigerian students

that there is no need to remain here in Poland to constitute nuisance and that the Federal Government is trying their possible best to make them comfortable. "And that is why they have made provisions for them to be comfortable in hotels and provided aircraft to convey them back home.

"For those who refused to go, they will be remaining at their own risk.

"We advise parents to try as much as possible to counsel their wards and children that they should come back. When the crisis in Ukraine subsides, they can return. Remaining in Poland will be a difficult thing for them. "It is kudos to Nigeria that the president has granted an urgent flight evacuation to these students. He has sent funds and things are moving accordingly.

"And the Nigerian students from Ukraine are happy that they are being treated well and being taken care of," Ugwu said.

Leader of the evacuation exercise from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Bolaji Akinremi, explained that the March 3 flight was cancelled due to delay in getting all the intending evacuees together from their respective hotels.

Akinremi explained that as of when they were ready, the international law did not allow for the crew members to continue with the journey as they had overshot their duty time.

Sports

Neville claims Ronaldo wouldn't get in Man City's team as he selects zero United players in Manchester derby combined XI

The Man Utd legend said that no Red Devils players could crack City's XI at present

Gary Neville has claimed Cristiano Ronaldo would not make a combined Manchester United-Manchester City XI based on this season's form.

The two rivals meet on Sunday in the Manchester derby, with City entering the game in first place and United in fourth.

Despite his status as a Man Utd legend, Neville has said that no United players would currently be able to crack City's XI - Ronaldo included.

"I can go through them: Dias, Laporte, Cancelo, Walker - better than all of United's back four," Neville said in a video for LadBible.

"Midfield: Fernandinho, Rodri - better than United's holding midfield players.

"Bernardo Silva, Gundogan - Bruno's the only one who could [be considered] over the last 12-18 months - but De Bruyne, Bernardo Silva, Mahrez, Foden, Sterling ... I can't put Bruno in front of Bernardo Silva at the moment and De Bruyne."

"You can't put Ronaldo in at the moment," Neville added.

Ex-City star Micah Richards disagreed, saying "If Ronaldo was in City's team, he'd already be on 20, 25 goals,"

Neville responded: "Who are you dropping? 'Foden? Sterling? Mahrez? De Bruyne?'"



Iheanacho assists in Leicester City's win over Leeds

The Super Eagles forward helped the Foxes grab their first league win at the King Power Stadium in 2022

Kelechi Iheanacho provided an assist as Leicester City beat Leeds United 1-0 in a Premier League match on Saturday.

Iheanacho replaced Jamie Vardy

in the 61st minute and he made an impact six minutes later, by helping Harvey Barnes to break the deadlock for the hosts.

The 67th-minute goal was enough for Brendan Rodgers' men to grab their second straight win in the English top-flight and it pushed them to the 10th spot in the league

table with 33 points after 25 games.

Iheanacho has now contributed five assists and two goals in 17 league appearances this term.

With Saturday's contribution, the former Manchester City star joins Demarai Gray with the joint-most assists (eight) as a substitute since August 2015.

The victory was Leicester City's first league win at the King Power Stadium since their 1-0 triumph over Liverpool on December 28.

The Foxes will return to action on Thursday for their Uefa Europa Conference League fixture against Rennes before visiting Arsenal for a Premier League clash on March 13.



WBF champ, Oyekola gets Adebayo boost

Sports supporter, Prince Adewole Adebayo has pledged his support towards the title defense of World Boxing Federation (WBF) super featherweight champion Ridwan 'Scorpion' Oyekola.

He made the pledge while hosting Oyekola, his manager, Sola 'Ford' Ayodele along with the former Ekiti State governor, Segun Oni, and former Minister of Youth and Sports, Solomon Dalung and Core Afrique Boxing Promotions (COABOX)

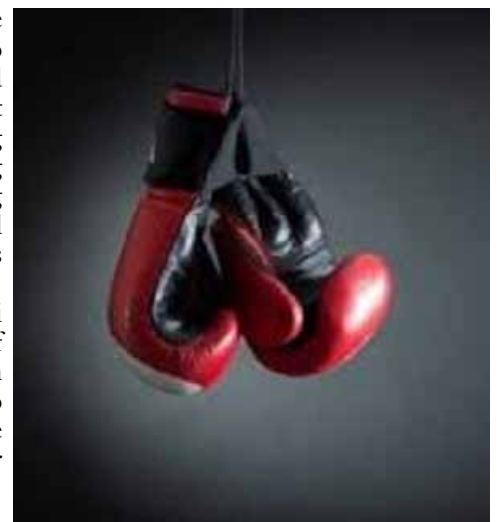
crew to his country home in Ondo town.

The boxing lover described boxing as a big avenue for the nation to rule the world considering the huge boxing talents the country blessed Nigeria by God.

World title for Nigeria while promising his support towards achieving that, saying sports, entertainment, and other youth-oriented projects, if well harnessed are enough to lead Nigeria out of its present myriad of crises.

In his response, Ayodele presented Scorpion's two belts to Adebayo and thanked him for his encouragement and support to the boxing sport, while also expressing excitement about meeting with the Ondo born legal icon, whom he described as a youth role model.

Ex-governor Segun Oni and former Minister of Youth and Sports, Solomon Dalung also took turns to encourage the boxer while pledging their support for his title defense.



Sports



Abraham on 20 goals after Roma winner

Tammy Abraham hit Roma's winner against Atalanta to become the first English player in a European top flight to score 20 goals in all competitions this season.

Nicolo Zaniolo fed the on-loan Chelsea striker who dribbled into the box before slotting home from nine yards.

He has scored 13 goals in Serie A, to go with six in the Europa Conference League and one in the Coppa Italia.

Harry Kane is the next highest-scoring English player this season with 18.

The win sees Jose Mourinho's Roma climb to sixth, and occupy the Europa Conference League spot in Serie A.



Arsenal beat Watford to go fourth

Bukayo Saka is one of only two players under 21 to score eight goals in one of Europe's top five leagues this season

Arsenal climbed into the Champions League places with an entertaining victory over lowly Watford in a game with five quality goals.

The Hornets, who remain in the relegation zone, thought they had taken the lead within the first

20 seconds as Emmanuel Dennis slotted home but he was offside.

Martin Odegaard put Arsenal ahead not long afterwards after flicking the ball into the path of Bukayo Saka and then running into the centre to slot in Saka's cross.

Watford levelled with the best individual goal of the game, Cucho Hernandez's acrobatic flying volley from Kiko Femenia's cross.

The visitors restored their lead when Saka won the ball off Tom Cleverley and found Alexandre Lacazette, who rolled the ball back into Saka's path to fire into the top corner.

England star Saka was involved again in the third goal as his quick throw-in set up a move with Lacazette laying the ball off to Gabriel Martinelli to finish.

They looked as if they were cruising, and Eddie Nketiah hit

the post, before Moussa Sissoko controlled the ball on his chest and beat Ben White before slotting in.

That set up a tense finale with Watford debutant Samuel Kalu forcing Aaron Ramsdale into a save with a long-range shot.

Arsenal move above Manchester United into fourth spot for a couple of hours at least, with United facing Manchester City in the derby.

Van Dijk takes record from Man Utd's Lee Sharpe as he goes incredible 60 games unbeaten at home with Liverpool

The defender was once more a rock for his side as they extended their winning streak to seven

Virgil van Dijk racked up his 60th Premier League home game without defeat for Liverpool to a set a new record in the English top flight.

The Dutchman played all 90 minutes of his side's 1-0 defeat of West Ham United on Saturday.

As well as his personal milestone, victory also keeps the Reds in the chase for the title behind leaders Manchester City.

Since moving from Southampton in 2018, Van Dijk has never tasted defeat in the Premier League in front of the Anfield crowd.

Going into Saturday's game the centre-back had played 59 home games for Liverpool in the competition, winning 51 and drawing eight.

And he brought 60 up as Sadio Mane's solitary goal saw the Merseysiders through in a tense clash against the Hammers.

No other player in Premier League history has managed to go through his first 60 Premier League

home games unbeaten before for a club.

The previous record-holder was Lee Sharpe, who played four league seasons for Manchester United from the start of the competition in 1992 without losing at Old Trafford and reached a total of 59 matches.

Liverpool have now won their last seven outings in the league to close the gap on City to just three points.

While their deadly forward duo of Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane

often gets the plaudits, Jurgen Klopp also has the luxury of a watertight defence marshalled by Van Dijk.

During that run the Reds have conceded just two goals, and with 20 goals against this season they have the third-best backline in the entire Premier League behind Pep Guardiola's charges and Chelsea.

They will be back in action at Anfield on Tuesday, when they defend a 2-0 Champions League last-16 advantage in the second leg against Inter.



Sadio Mane's first-half goal was enough to give Liverpool victory over West Ham at Anfield and move them back within three points of Premier League leaders Manchester City.

Jurgen Klopp's men deserved the win but it did not come without the odd scare as Pablo Fornals and Manuel Lanzini both wasted excellent chances to equalise.

The Hammers' frustrations were compounded by the loss of in-form Jarrod Bowen to what looked like a significant injury, the forward helped off the pitch and down the tunnel following a collision with former Hull team-mate Andy Robertson.

Liverpool had chances to extend their lead, with new signing Luis Diaz particularly impressive.

However, with the title race as it is, victory was all that mattered. And

now Liverpool fans are in the unusual position of hoping for a United victory in Sunday's Manchester derby at Etihad Stadium. At times, Liverpool's attack is so fast and fluid it is impossible for opposition defences to cope. And in Luis Diaz, their £37.5m January arrival from Porto, they have a player that fits that template perfectly.

The Colombian produced a wonderful piece of skill to create an early chance for himself which he drove into Craig Dawson's face.

Diaz then came close twice in the second half too, with the first of those particularly impressive in the way he manipulated Mane's pass into a scoring chance that went narrowly wide.

When he was replaced in the final minute of injury time, his standing ovation was fully deserved.





The current democratic transition in West Africa started in the early 1990s. At the formal level, it led to the establishment of constitutional rule and the re-establishment of multi-party systems. However, the problem is that democratic transition requires a more profound socio-political transformation that allows freely elected rulers and the majority of the civil population to impose their supremacy over ruling oligarchies of the military or civilian ethno-regional cabals that had been in power for decades. That did not happen in most of our countries. The end goal, which was to have been the development of a democratic political culture in which large sections of society internalise democratic values and citizens are able to determine those who exercise power, was not achieved. Most African constitutions are excellent documents; they have most of the right provisions about the rule of law, human, civil and political rights, elective institutions, governmental accountability, and separation of powers and so on. The problem however is that these provisions are often not followed.

It is important to note that West African politics has been excessively marked by a history of frequent coups d'état, civil wars and militarism. The military were in power in most countries of the region for twenty to thirty years. When liberalisation and democratisation began in the early 1990s, there was a long history of militarism and their enablers that stepped up to usurp the new political opportunities that were emerging. One of the basic outcomes of decades of militarism in West Africa has been the decomposition of the state and society with the widespread growth of private armies and armed bands. In many of the countries, the military lost control of the monopoly of the means of violence. Numerous warlords with stakes in war emerged and entrenched themselves in the political process and fought for the control of power and natural resources. These countries and regions such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, the Niger Delta and large parts of the Sahel/Sahara regions of Mali and Niger, witnessed persistent armed banditry in the 1990s.

This was the context that led the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to adopt the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (December 21, 2001). The Protocol sets out the constitutional convergence criteria to be fulfilled by Community members on the basis of the principles

Backpage Column

Jibrin Ibrahim

Enablers of the return of the military in West Africa

of good governance – respect for the rule of law, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, the promotion of a non-partisan and responsible press and the democratic control of the armed forces. It was on the basis of this Protocol that when President Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo died in 2005, and his son simply took over power in total disregard of the Constitution of the country, the Chair of ECOWAS, Mamadou Tandja of Niger Republic and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, mounted enormous pressure on Faure Gnassingbe to step down. Faced with the pressure, he stepped aside and allowed for elections.

It is ironical that the same President Tandja who was giving lessons in democracy to Faure Gnassingbe also fell afoul of the wrath of ECOWAS principles. His tenure of ten years, which consisted of two terms of five years each was to end in December 2010. Just before that time, he demanded for a constitutional review that would allow him tenure elongation. The Constitutional Court ruled that his request was unconstitutional as the Constitution had a provision that the tenure clause could not be amended. He disbanded the Constitutional Court and wrote up his own “personal” Constitution, which even had a clause allowing him to continue in power without elections for three more years. ECOWAS however came out clearly and unambiguously to oppose his move. In an unprecedented move in West Africa, ECOWAS went as far as declaring that as far as they were concerned, his tenure as president expired in December 2010, meaning they no longer recognised him as president. This clear stance gave fillip to the struggle of opposition parties and the civil society, which organised mass demonstrations against Tandja's attempt at destroying Niger's democracy. It was in this context that the military intervened, removed Tandja from power, organised fresh elections and went back to the barracks in less than a year.

ECOWAS was also very active in guiding Cote d'Ivoire back to the path of democracy from the carnage of civil war. Cote d'Ivoire is a country that was not too long ago one of the shining stars of stability and prosperity in the West African region. Political relations in the country broke down following the death of the country's founding president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny in 1993, coupled with the military coup that overthrew the government of Henri Konan Bedie who succeeded him in 1999. This threw up deep internal divisions resulting in the mutiny that escalated into a full-scale rebellion in September 2002. After his tenure in 2005, Gbagbo refused to organise another election for five years. It was only in 2010 that ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations persuaded him to hold elections under UN supervision. He lost the election but got the Constitutional Council he had appointed to declare him winner. ECOWAS however stood firm and threatened to remove him by force if he did not step down and hand over to Ouattara who won the election. Eventually, patriotic forces marched on Abidjan and removed him from power, allowing the elected president to take up his mandate, which Gbagbo had confiscated.

In Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade wanted a third term at the age of 85 in 2012. Citizens surrounded the National Assembly to stop them from passing a law to allow authorise his ambition. What was important however was that massive demonstrations were organised by the Movement, M-23, and rap musicians who galvanised the youth to chase Wade out of power. One of the leading politicians that joined the revolt was current President Macky Sall, who was the main beneficiary of the struggle. Today, Macky Sall too wants a third term.

Guinea is another country in which ECOWAS played a major role. It is a country that has not known free and fair elections since 1958. The shooting incident that led to the evacuation of

Guinea's third dictator in fifty years, Captain Dadis Camara, paved the way for a democratic transition that led to the elections of June 27, 2010. Two major candidates emerged, Cellou Dalen, seen as the leader of a rich and powerful Fulani elite who had been excluded from power since 1958, and Alpha Conde, leader of the ethnic minorities and an historic opposition figure and Malinke power broker. In the second round of the elections, Alpha Conde emerged winner and was sworn in as president. Alpha Conde came to Daura in April 2019 and stayed a week, enjoying Sallah meat with President Buhari and was even honoured with a chieftaincy title. He returned to Guinea and announced a third term agenda, which finally led to the coup. President Buhari kept quiet. At 83 years old, what did he want to remain in the presidency for?

In Mali, former President Ibrahim Boubakar Keita (IBK) died at 76 years old, after being removed in a coup. He was in power between 2013 and 2020. He had been prime minister from 1994 to 2000, after which he became the president of the National Assembly from 2002 to 2007. Why would that old man rig an election to remain in power?

The argument is simple. The people of West Africa are exhausted by the repeated cycles of bad governance. Secondly, earlier on ECOWAS was much more focused on contesting the derailment of the democratic order. It did not wait until the military took over before acting. Today, it does nothing until there is a coup and then offers medicine after death. Finally, the military are returning to power in West Africa because the politicians are enabling them. We must develop the capacity to disrupt the activities of such enablers.

...Prof Ibrahim is a Senior Fellow of the Centre for Democracy and Development, and Chair of the Editorial Board of PREMIUM TIMES.