COVID-19: No Hajj For Muslims this Year, Says FG

Olawale Ajimotokan in Abuja

For the second time in a row, there will be no Hajj for muslims beacuse of fear of COVID-19.

The federal government, yesterday, confirmed this in a statement issued by the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON).

The commission said its officials in Saudi Arabia had confirmed the development, which was reported by state television and radio stations in the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabia had announced the need to limit the annual Muslim spiritual rites to only 60,000 pilgrims and strictly to Saudi citizens and foreigners residing in the country as a precaution to obviate the spread of COVID-19.

A statement by the Ministries of Health and Hajj, Saturday, said the decision was "based on the Kingdom's constant keenness to enable the guests and visitors at the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque perform the rituals of Hajj and Umrah."

While noting that, "The Kingdom puts human health and safety first," the ministries said those wishing to perform Hajj must be free of any chronic diseases, and to be within the ages from 18 to 65 years for those vaccinated against the virus according to the Kingdom's vaccination measures.

The development marks the second year in tow that the Hajj, which is usually observed by two million pilgrims will be abridged due to the pandemic.

In a statement issued by its spokesperson, Fatima Usara

Continued on page 10

Anambra Guber: Uncertainty in PDP as Court Dissolves Congresses... Page 5

THISDAY

TRUTH & REASON

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N400



L-R: Kwara State First Lady, Olufolake Abdulrazaq; the State Governor, AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq; and Deputy British High Commissioner, Gill Atkinson; at the official launch of the Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition in Ilorin, the state capital...recently

June 12: Nigerians Stage Protests Nationwide

Our Correspondents

Nigerians yesterday staged protests and rallies around the country to mark the second anniversary of declaration June

Continued on page 6

Legislature, Judiciary Paralysed in Nigeria, Says Afe Babalola

Explains N'Assembly has power to give Nigeria a new constitution

Posits an amendment includes substitution

Gboyega Akinsanmi and **Victor Olakitan** in Ado-Ekiti

A renowned Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and founder, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti (ABUAD), Chief Afe Babalola, has said the current state of the nation presents a democracy with a paralysed legislature and judiciary, thus defeating the very essence of democracy as the most viable system of government.

In an exclusive interview with THISDAY, the legal luminary and businessman, who reckoned that Nigeria was yet to have an ideal democracy given that scenario, argued that

Continued on page 10



COURTESY VISIT TO RWANDA'S PRESIDENT...

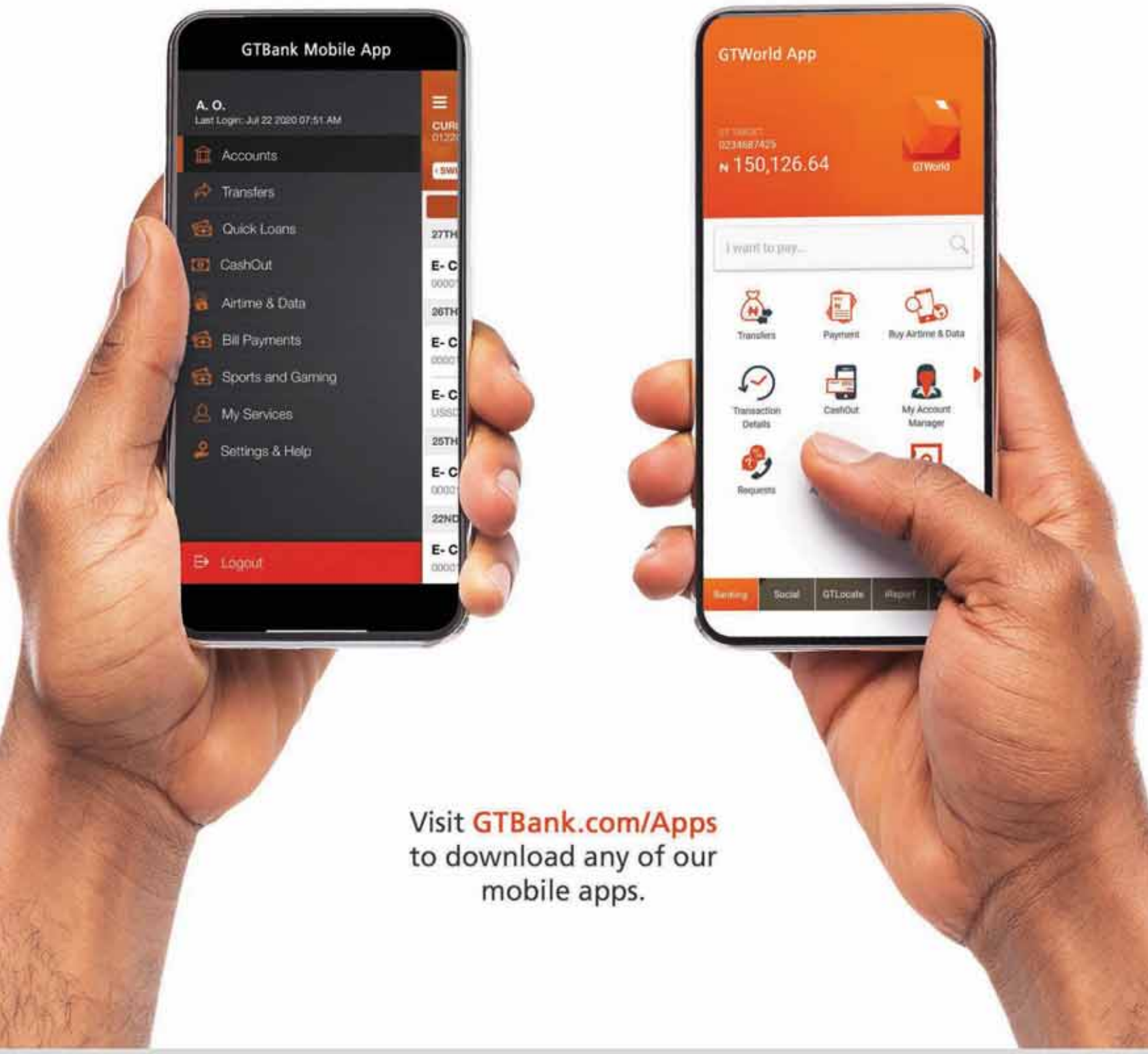
Managing Director, Access Bank Plc , Mr Herbert Wigwe and Rwanda's President, Mr Paul Kagame in Kigali during a courtesy visit to the President by Wigwe...recently



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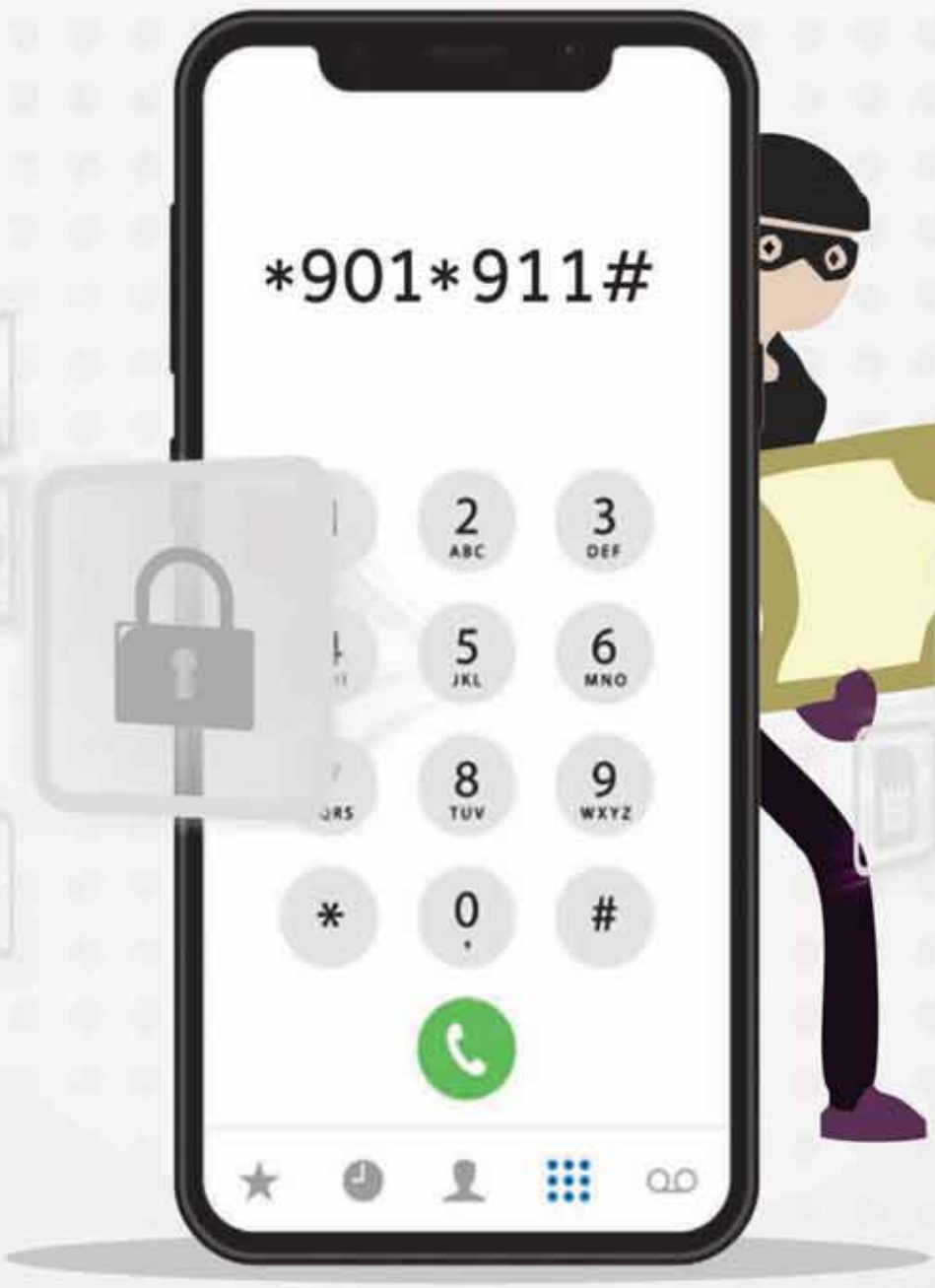
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DEMOCRACY DAY CELEBRATION...

L-R: Speaker, Ogun State House of Assembly, Olakunle Oluomo; Deputy Governor, Noimot Salako-Oyedele; Governor Dapo Abiodun and his wife, Bamidele Abiodun at the 2021 Democracy Day celebration at the MKO Abiola International Stadium, Abeokuta on Saturday

Anambra Guber: Uncertainty in PDP as Court Dissolves Congresses

● Directs PDP to use November 2017 delegate lists ● New chairman cancels elected ad hoc delegates

Chuks Okocha in Abuja and **David-Chyddy Eleke** in Awka

With less than a week to the commencement of the governorship primaries of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Anambra State, a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja, has nullified the Southeast Zonal Congresses, which held on March 6, 2021.

Consequently, the High Court has sacked the state chairman of the party, Chief Ndubuisi Nwobu and replaced him with Ejike Oguebego, while directing the PDP PDP to use the November 2017 delegate lists in conducting its governorship primary election.

Following the news, however, the court-installed chairman, Mr Chukwudi Umeaba, has announced the cancelation of the recently held ward congresses of the party to elect three-man Adhoc delegates for the forthcoming primary election of the party.

But a factional chairman of the party in the state, Mr Ndubuisi Nwobu, while reacting to the court judgement that installed Umeaba, dismissed the ruling as being of no moment and having no consequences on the party, urging his members to disregard it.

The local government congresses that is expected to produce the national delegates that will choose the governorship candidate of the PDP have been scheduled for June 17 2021.

The plaintiff, Samuel Anyakorah had approached Justice O.A. Adeniyi of the High Court of Justice, Abuja Division, seeking among others, the nullification of the March Congresses (1st defendant, PDP) to the extant list of already inaugurated party officers and delegates that emerged "from the Anambra PDP congress conducted on 28 November, 2017 and 1st December, 2017, validated by the Senator Grace Bent Ward Congress Appeal Panel Report under the supervision of Sir Chukwudi Umeaba as acting chairman, State Caretaker Committee."

In the suit with reference numbered HC/CV/774/2021, Anyakorah, on behalf of himself and all local government chairmen and ward executives, who emerged from the 28th November 2017 and 1st December 2017, by way of originating summons, sought a declaration that by virtue of Article 2 of the Constitution of the PDP (amended in 2017), "the said constitution is supreme," arguing that it has "a binding force on all members and organs of the PDP and that any action or step taken contrary to the relevant provisions of the constitution is unlawful, illegal, null and void and of no effect whatsoever."

The plaintiff also argued that it was unlawful for the PDP, "whether during its Southeast Zonal Congress of 6th March 2021, or at any other time, to adopt or publish the name of a state chairman, alongside persons purporting to be EXCO members, local government chairmen and national delegates without recourse to the officers and delegates that emerged in 2017.

He further sought an order nullifying or setting aside all Congresses, designations or appointment made by the PDP with respect to the state chairman for PDP in Anambra State, EXCO members, local government chairmen and national delegates amongst others.

This is as the plaintiff further prayed the court for an order of perpetual injunction restraining the PDP, its allies or cronies from further recognising or dealing with persons names on pages 14, 15 and 16 of the Bronchure for the South-East Zonal Congress of 6th March, 2021, "either as state Chairman, EXCO members, local government area chairmen or national delegates of PDP, Anambra State chapter.

In its judgment of June 9, 2021, the court upheld the prayer of the plaintiff, citing Article 2 of the PDP constitution,

According to Justice Adeniyi, after listening to the claimant, Anyakora, local government chairmenand ward executives that emerged from the Anambra PDP Congresses conducted on November 28 2017 under the supervision of the chairman state caretaker committee said, "I find merit in the Claimant's case and the same hereby succeeds. For avoidance of doubts and abundance of clarity, it is hereby adjudged as follows:

"It is hereby declared that by virtue of Article 2 of the Constitution of the Peoples Democratic Party (amended in 2017), the said Constitution is supreme and it has a binding force on all members and organs of the Peoples Democratic Party, and any action or step taken contrary to the relevant provisions of the Constitution is unlawful, illegal, null, void and of no effect whatsoever.

"It is hereby further declared that it is unlawful for the 1 Defendant, (PDP) whether during its Southeast Zonal Congress of 6th March, 2021, or at any time to adopt or publish the name of a State Chairman, alongside persons purporting to be his Exco members, Local Government Chairmen and National Delegates, without recourse to the extant List of already inaugurated Party Officers and Delegated that emerged from the Anambra PDP Congresses conducted on 28th November, 2017 and 1 December, 2017 validated by the Senator Grace Bent Ward Congress Appeal Panel or and Barrister Ukpai Ukairo Local Covernment Appeal Panel Report, under the supervision of Sir Chukwudi Umeaba, as Acting Chairman, State Caretaker Committee.

"It is hereby further declared that the arbitrary imposition by the 1st Defendant on its members of a State Chairman, Exco members, Local Government Chairmen and National Delegates, as contained atPages 14. 15 & 16 of the Defendant's Brochure for the Southeast Zonal Congress of 6th March, 2021, in ultra vires its power, unlawful, invalid, void and of no effcet whatsoever", Justice Adebiyi declared.

In view of this, Justice Adebiyi further ordered that, "All Congresses, designations or appointments made by the 1st Defendant with respect to the positions of the State Chairman of PDP Anambra State Chapter, Exco Members and Local Government Chairmen, as contained at Pages 14, 15 & 16 of the Southeast Zonal Congress Brochure of 6th March, 2021, are hereby nullified and set aside for being invalid, unlawful and ultra vires the powers of the 1st Defendant, the same not being in alignment with the List of already inaugurated Party Officers and Delegates that emerged from the Anambra PDP Congresses conducted on 28th November, 2017 and 1st December, 2017, valided by the Senator Grace Bent Ward Congress Appeal Panel Report and Barrister Ukpai Ukairo Local Covernment Appeal Panel Report, under the supervision of Sir Chukwudi Umeaba, as State Caretaker Committee. Acting Chairman."

Accordingly, Justice Adebiyi said the "first defendant is hereby ordered and compelled that during the conduct of all elections in Anambra State, to henceforth adopt, employ, recognise and use only the list of already inaugurated Party Officers and Delegates that emerged from the Anambra PDP Congresses conducted on 28th November, 2017 and 1st December, 2017 validated by the Senator Grace Bent Ward Congress Appeal Panel Report and Barrister Ukpai Ukairo Local Government Appeal Panel Report, under the supervision of Sir Chukwudi Umeaba, who shall continue to act in the capacities for which they were duly elected.

"An Order of injunction is hereby issued, restraining the 1st Defendant, whether by itself, cronies, allies or representatives, from further recognising, dealing with or parading any person or group of persons listed at pages 14, 15 & 16 of the Brochure for the Southeast Zonal Congress of 6th March 2021, either as State Chairman, Exco members or Local Government Area Chairmen of the Peoples Democratic Party, Anambra State Chapter, except the list of already inaugurated Party Officers and Delegates that emerged from the Anambra PDP Congresses conducted on 28th November, 2017 and 1st December, 2017 the Senator Grace Bent Ward Congress Appeal Panel Report and Barrister Ukpai Ukairo Local Government Appeal Panel Report, under the supervision of Sir Chukwudi Umeaba."

He contended that all parties shall bear their respective costs of the action.

The implication of this is that unless the party succeeds at the appellate court, if it chooses to challenge the ruling of the lower court, it may find itself fielding parallel delegates in the November 6 election, which may call for the replication of the Zamfara scenario, which cost the All Progressives Congress, the North Western state in 2019.

How the Uche Secondus-led National Working Committee (NWC) handles this slippery judicial rulingwill determine the fate of the party in Anambra, a state it governed for some years before losing out to the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA).

However, Umeaba, at a press conference yesterday told journalists that: "Based on the above (his reinstatement), I, Hon Chukwudi Umeaba, the acting chairman caretaker committee of PDP, Anambra State, working in concert with the terms of reference and the powers of my office will make pronoucements.

"I hereby suspend the ward congress of 9th June to elect a three-man Adhoc committee for the governorship primary. I will contact the NEC of our great party to give me a new date for the ward congresses that will elect the three-man ad hoc committee for the governorship primary."

Buhari: FG Cannot Afford Funds to Revive Education

Christopher Isiguzo and **Gideon Arinze** in Enugu

President Muhammadu Buhari has said the Nigerian government cannot afford the amount of funding needed to revive the country's educational system. Buhari also said the competition for funds had become keener because of the recent increase in the number of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The president spoke on Saturday at the 49th convocation ceremony of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He said the financial situation had been worsened by the global economic downturn, which also affected the national revenue.

Buhari, who was represented at the ceremony by the Minister of State for Education, Emeka Nwajiuba, however, said his administration was committed to addressing the needs of tertiary institutions through budgetary allocations to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND).

"I am optimistic that the on-going drive to diversify the national economy will provide the government with additional resources to improve funding for the education system," he said.

The president said the universities should also leverage other funding sources, such as from alumni, friends, the private sector, institutional linkages, and research grants, to attract additional revenue for infrastructure, research, and development.

"We must also address the problems of poor work ethics and the albatross of prolonged and recurrent industrial actions by staff of universities," the president stated.

Buhari advised academic institutions across the country to embark on the kind of innovative research that could help boost production and diversify the economy.

"Our universities must continue to emphasise training in entrepreneurship so school leavers and graduates are able to become job creators instead of perennial job seekers," he said.

On his part, Minister of Transportation, Chibuike Amaechi, said the government should make effort to address the perennial challenge of poverty and inequality in the country or risk losing the youth to crime.

Amaechi, who delivered the 49th convocation lecture of the university, stated that the series of protests held across the country of late, such as #ENDSARS, were as a result of increasing poverty and disaffection on the part of the citizens.

"Although, the current administration has introduced a number of programmes to help eradicate poverty, such as Transport Track for individuals who were into the transportation business, several Nigerians are yet to be lifted out of poverty," the minister said.

He stated that policies should be focused on the rural majority, and targeted at giving the citizens a good life and lifting them out of poverty.



PEACE DIALOGUE...

L-R: Vice President Yemi Osinbajo; Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence, Alhaji Muhammed Sa'ad Abubakar, and the President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) , His Eminence, Samson Supo Ayokunle, during the meeting at the Presidential Villa , Abuja …Friday GODWIN OMOIGUI

NDLEA Intercepts 100,000 Bottles of Codeine Syrup at Onne Port

146.95kg illicit drug seized at Abuja airport

About 100,000 bottles of codeine syrup with a total weight of 15,325kilograms were at the wekend intercepted and seized by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, at the Onne seaport, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

The illicit substance, cough syrup with codeine (100mg), packed in 500 cartons and concealed in a container marked MRKU 1565305, bearing imported food masks made in India, was discovered on Thursday, 10th June 2021 in a warehouse at the Onne port complex during a joint examination with officers of the Nigeria Customs Service, State Security Service, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, among others.

According to Femi Babafemi, Director, Media and Advocacy, the seizure followed an intelligence received by NDLEA, as a result of which the container was put on hold and moved to the Customs Government warehouse within the port complex.

The NDLEA claimed no importer or agent has since come forward in respect of the container but noted that efforts were ongoing to track the owner for further investigation and prosecution.

In another development, operatives of the NDLEA at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja, seized nine cartons of khat, weighing 146.95kilograms at the cargo wing of the airport.

The consignment packaged as dried green tea was shipped from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on board Ethiopian airline flight ET911.

After initial examination and suspicion, a clearing agent was asked to report with the consignee before the release but failed to do so for fear of arrest, a development that led to a laboratory test on the consignment, which tested positive to khat and the eventual seizure.

Chairman/Chief Executive of NDLEA, Brig. General Mohamed Buba Marwa (Retd) has however hailed the synergy among the various government agencies at the Onne port and charged them not to rest on their oars as they daily work hard to keep Nigeria safe.

He particularly commended the Commander, officers and men of the Port Harcourt Port Command and their Abuja airport Command counterparts for their vigilance and commitment to the task of ridding Nigeria of illicit drugs.

"The damage 100,000 bottles of codeine would have done to our youths if they had slipped through the port to our villages, towns and cities is unimaginable. 146.95 kilograms of khat could have done the same damage if allowed to go into our streets.

"We'll continue to motivate our officers and men so that they can give their best in the discharge of their responsibilities across the country and ultimately with the support of all our stakeholders and partners, we'll win the battle against illicit drug trafficking and abuse", Marwa stated.

JUNE 12: NIGERIANS STAGE PROTESTS NATIONWIDE

12 as Democracy Day and protest the state of affairs in the country.

And in what has been widely condemned as double standard, the Nigeria Police, yesterday, protected and permitted pro-President Muhammadu Buhari campaigners to hold a solidarity rally in Abuja without any form of harassment, while at the same time disrupting the rallies organised by anti-Buhari groups in many parts of the country, using teargas.

A mega rally organised for the president by his supporters, who trooped to Unity Fountain in Maitama, Abuja, to celebrate Democracy Day, was populated by dozens of youths drawn from the Youth Coalition for Development (YCD). They closed a section of the Shehu Shagari Road to traffic.

Interestingly, there was heavy security in place, including a helicopter, which hovered above to protect those at the rally convened by Aminu Aminu.

That was in stark contrast to the riotous atmosphere at the Gudu area of Abuja, where activists, led by Omoyele Sowore, who were opposed to the Buhari administration, clashed with policemen who were sent to disperse them with teargas. The police also dispersed anti-Buhari marchers in other parts of the country, like Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abeokuta,

But the Federal Capital Territory Police Command justified its decision to disperse the anti-government protesters.

Many of those who showed up for the solidarity procession for the president were clad in branded white T-shirts with the inscription, "I Stand With Buhari, How about You?" boldly on the shirts. They also held placards bearing messages, like "#IStandwithBuhari", "We are Indivisible", "We stay as one, We are Nigeria!"

One of the president's supporters also carried a declarative message that read: "Protest is only about getting your voice heard not a means of changing the government".

Speaking with reporters at the rally, the organiser said the solidarity march was put together in recognition of the efforts of many people, who campaigned and laboured to institute a culture of democracy in the country since 1993. He lauded Buhari for recognising the importance of the day.

Aminu said, "June 12 is a watershed in the annals of Nigeria's democratic history. It is a day to celebrate the beginning of a consistent and ideological struggle that eventually gave birth to a foundation for the democratic renaissance Nigeria is now building."

But, earlier, the police teargased a group protesting at the Gudu area of the Federal Capital Territory. Sowore, the Publisher of Sahara Reporters, led the protesters comprising many youths and middle-aged persons. They said they were gathered to protest against the prevailing insecurity in the country.

The anti-Buhari rally began about 8.30am and was peaceful until the police stormed the area and started firing teargas to disperse the rally. The Gudu road was also cordoned off while traffic flow was disrupted as a result.

The development forced the protesters, who carried placards bearing inscriptions, such as "Buhari must go", "Say no to injustice", "33.3% Unemployment Rate is Criminal", " Digital Right is Human Right", to scamper to safety.

The FCT Police Public Relations Officer, Yusuf Mariam, in a statement said policemen had to disperse the protesters to prevent members of the proscribed Islamic Movement of Nigeria and others from "inciting public disturbance." Mariam added that calm had been restored around the axis and said nobody was arrested.

In the statement titled, "FCT Police foils attempt to incite public disturbance, disperse members of the proscribed Islamic Movement of Nigeria and others", Mariam stated, "The FCT Police Command on Saturday, June 12, 2021, successfully restored calm at Apo-Gudu axis after professionally dispersing a protest by some members of the proscribed Islamic Movement of Nigeria – Shiites and others targeted at inciting public disturbance and breaching public peace.

"Consequently, the action of the command was necessitated by the concerns of some agitated residents. However, no arrest was made.

"In view of the above, the command wishes to state that it is committed to ensuring that FCT residents enjoy a hitch-free Democracy Day celebration and will not hesitate to bring to book every person or entity that attempts to breach the peace or cause a breakdown of law and order in the Federal Capital Territory.

"The command implores residents to remain calm and law-abiding while reaffirming its unwavering commitment to the protection of lives and property within the FCT."

In Yola, the Adamawa State capital, residents staged a protest and demanded a revolution to change the present leadership of Buhari, citing incompetence in handing the country's affairs. The protesters, who came under the banner of #Buharimustgo, defied a heavy rainfall and continued their protest for about three hours, demanding good governance and a leader who would pull Nigeria out of its numerous challenges. They also called on Buhairi to relinquish power, brandishing banners of #revolutionnow, which asked Buhari to quit immediately.

Continued on page 12

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Nigerian CSOs Ask African Commission to Invalidate Twitter Ban

Tobi Soniyi

Two civil society organisations – Global Rights and Tap Initiative for Citizens Development have applied to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in Banjul, the Gambia to invalidatethe Twitter ban by the Nigerian government and any measures or steps taken to implement the ban.

The groups also asked the commission to issue an order directing the federal government to afford just satisfaction to them by way of damages for the losses suffered by them in consequence of the ban.

Further, they asked the commission to hold that Nigeria, by imposing a ban on the use of Twitter has violated Nigerians' right to freedom of expression as provided for by the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Nigeria is a state party to the Charter, having deposited its instrument of ratification of the Charter on 22 July 1983.

The Charter is also part of Nigeria's law having been domesticated by the African Charter (Ratification and Enforcement) Act of 1983.

The applicants therefore asked the commission to declare that the twitter ban ordered on June 4, 2021 amounted to internet shutdown or disruption incompatible with the charter.

They prayed the commission to declare that the ban and the threat to prosecute anyone using Twitterviolate Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 22 and 26 of the charter.

Other reliefs sought by the applicants are: A declaration that the threat of the federal government issued on or about 5 June, 2021, to prosecute all or any users of Twitter within its territory is an abuse of power, which has a chilling effect on and violates the exercise of the rights guaranteed in Articles 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 17 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

A declaration that the order issued by the Respondent State on or about 7 June, 2021, to all media houses to deactivate their Twitter handles and stop tweeting violates Articles 9, 10, 11, 13, 16 and 17of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

A declaration that the failure of the Respondent State to maintain the courts and keep them open since 6 April 2021, is a denial of the right of the applicants to local remedies and violates Articles 1 and 26 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

A declaration that by reason of the violations aforesaid, the Respondent State is in violation of its obligations under Article 1 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

There are hurdles the applicants must scale before the commission can hear their application, one of which is that they must have exhausted local remedies before approaching the commission.

To scale these hurdles, the applicants argued that as at the time they filed the communication, courts in Nigeria were shut as a result of the strike embarked upon by the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria.

In accordance with Rule 100 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the applicants prayed the commission for provisional measures against Nigeria pending the determination of the communication.

One of such measures asked for by the applicants is for the commission to stop the federal government from arresting or prosecuting them, their staff, personnel or associates or taking any steps to impair their rights of on grounds of their use of Twitter pending the determination of the present complaint or the lifting of the ban on Twitter by Nigeria.

They also asked the commission to refer the complaint against Nigeria to the African Court on Humanand Peoples' Rights for determination.

Nigeria deposited with the Commission of the African Union its instrument of ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights on 9 June, 2004 (hereafter called "the African Court Protocol".

However, Nigerian citizens cannot file a case directly at the African Court on Human and People's Rights, because Nigeria has not made a declaration under Article 34(6) of the African Court's Protocol accepting the competence of the court to receive cases from individuals and non governmental organisations.

But the applicants claimed that Internet disruptions violated the right to receive information and freeexpression (Article 9(1)-(2)), the right to freedom of association (Article 10), and right to freedom of assembly (Article 11).

According to them, freedom from censorship, including freedom from blocking or filtering of the Internet, is central for the exercise of freedom of expression.

"The right of access to information (Article 9(1)) is also an important part of th right to freedom of expression, as it is needed in order to build opinions and express them. Blocking, filtering and censorship, plus the possibility of criminal prosecution, limit access to information and stifle online debate. State manipulation of the information that citizens are permitted to see (and not see) online also impedes the right of access to accurate information", they added.

The applicants argued further that disrupting access to the Internet services hinders the full enjoyment of a wide range of fundamental rights and freedoms, particularly the right Articles 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 13(1) and 16 of the African Charter.

They said: "The Twitter ban adversely impacts on ordinary lives by preventing people fromcommunicating, harming businesses and livelihoods. In practical terms, it impacts most adversely on the poorest people, who are less able to afford alternative or more costly means of communication thereby creating unjustifiable discrimination, promoting inequality, and unlawfully impinging on the dignity of persons contrary to Articles 2, 3 and 4 of the African Charter."

In its resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression on the Internet in Africa, the commission recognises the role of the Internet in advancing human and peoples' rights in Africa.

The applicants argued that, "The current ban on Twitter in Nigeria clearly contravenes the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, issued by this honorable commission, according to which 'States shall not interfere with the right of individuals to seek, receiveand impart information through any means of communication and digital technologies, through measures such as the removal, blocking or filtering of content, unless such interference is justifiable and compatible with international human rights law and standards."



PHOTO EXHIBITION...

L-R: Ayo Adeagbo takes President of the Senate, Ahmad Lawan; the Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo SAN; Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila, Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu and special guests on a tour of the photo exhibition hall at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel...recently

LEGISLATURE, JUDICIARY PARALYSED IN NIGERIA, SAYS AFE BABALOLA

the National Assembly has the power to give Nigeria a brand new constitution contrary to the position of NASS leadership. "Let me say that it was totally wrong for the National Assembly to say they cannot produce or write a new constitution. Under the 1999 Constitution, the National Assembly can produce a new constitution. One, the 1999 Constitution gave the National Assembly the power to amend. In its broad interpretation, an amendment includes substitution. They can exercise their powers and say the 1999 Constitution needs a substitution. They gave a narrow interpretation to the amendment clause. This same process was undertaken in Sudan and many other countries. All the National Assembly needed to do is to call for a conference where people will advise on where and how the 1999 constitution can be substituted. That is all."

Babalola also spoke on the recent Twitter row with the federal government, and posited that President Muhammadu Buhari erred by his decision to suspend the operations of the microblogging giant in the country.

Answering to a question on the autonomy of the judiciary, which had prompted a strike by judicial workers for over two months, Babalola said, "Democracy thrives on three fundamentals pillars – the executive, legislature and judiciary. If a man with two legs has one of its legs cut off, will he be able to move freely?

"But out of the three arms we have, two have been paralysed. I mean the legislature and judiciary. Do we now say we have a democracy? Where can people ventilate their anger? Do they want them to resort to self-help? There can be no fairness and justice, where the executive continues to pay those in the judiciary."

Supporting his claims, the Ekiti-born lawyer, noted: "I have been in the legal practice for 60 years or thereabouts. I knew how our courts were when I came back to the country from England in the early 60s. Then, we had lawyers from Ghana, West Indies and many other countries competing with us in the Nigerian courts. So, it was very competitive. In my 60 years of practice, however, Nigerian courts have never been shut for a day. Even in those days, lawyers and judges were respected.

"Don't forget the aphorism that says he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Commonsense dictates that there should be independence for legislature and judiciary. If the car of a judge breaks down and he only relies on a president or governor to get it fixed, then, it will be difficult for him to pass a judgment that will be against the state."

Speaking on the process of recruiting members of the Bench in Nigeria, he said,

"That is critical. But we have not got it right. A practice, whereby people are asked to apply to become a judge, is affecting the system. The process cannot guarantee fairness and justice. After filing the application, the governor will now decide, who to pick among them. In those days, people did not need to apply to become judges.

"It is the system itself that looks for qualified men of integrity to become judges. That is part of the rot in our system. I believe that the judiciary must not only be autonomous, but also the courts must be accessible and open to all. The president and governors, as high as they are, are equal before the courts. That is the beauty of it."

On the suspension of Twitter operations in Nigeria, Babalola said, "I do not believe the president was right to have given the directive just because Twitter removed his post about the security in the Southeast. Don't forget that the English law we are operating presumes that you are innocent until the court proves otherwise.

"Twitter, like human beings, has the right to suspend Buhari's personal account in this context. The president cannot be a judge in his own case. If he felt wronged by what Twitter did, what he ought to have done is to approach the court of law, which has power of adjudication. He cannot jail Twitter for removing his comment. Only the court has such powers and not the president."

COVID-19: NO HAJJ FOR MUSLIMS THIS YEAR, SAYS FG

Sanda, NAHCON said it respected the decision of Saudi Arabia in this regard no matter how painful the decision might be to the country and to intending pilgrims worldwide.

"We have accepted that it is Allah's divine design that multitudes will again this year not perform the Hajj: the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is only playing out a script ordained by our Maker long before creation of the universe. Our prayer is that we collectively turn to Him in repentance so that He admits us for Hajj in the coming years," NAHCON said.

NAHCON's Chairman, Alhaji Zikrullah Kunle Hassan, the statement claimed, commended the resilience of Nigerian intending pilgrims and the support they had exhibited during the long and tortuous wait, including their adherence to each instruction given by the Commission and the total compliance in receiving Covid-19 jab with the hope of performing the 2021 Hajj.

NAHCON, however, added that as in the previous year, the pilgrims seeking refund of their Hajj deposits would be granted such without unnecessary delay.

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JUNE 12: NIGERIANS STAGE PROTESTS NATIONWIDE

Sporting black T-shirts marked with inscriptions, such as "Buhari Must Go", the protesters chanted, "Freedom comes by struggle" and maintained, "we must come together to salvage our nation".

Leader of the group, Tony Sudan Gompwel, told journalists that Buhari and other political leaders had failed the country.

Gompwel stated, "The kind of political leaders we have in our nation cannot give us the desired change." He said bad leadership was the reason the country was bedevilled by insecurity and economic backwardness.

"They are hardened, they are tyrants, they are bankrupt of ideas. That's why great Nigerian youths are converging all over the nation to demand that they should leave the stage," he maintained.

However, while the protest against the Buhari administration subsisted, his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), in Adamawa State read out Buhari's scorecard to residents to mark the second year of designating June 12 as Democracy Day.

Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF), Boss Mustapha, who was represented by Honourable Abdulrazask Namdas, commended the Buhari administration. Namdas, a member representing Jada, Ganye, Toungo and Mayobelwa Federal Constituency at the National Assembly, said the celebration was also to intimate the citizens of the performance of the APC in the state.

At the event held at Muna Hotel, Yola, to mark the June 12 celebration, the scorecards of all serving senators and House of Representatives members from the state, and that of Buhari, were read out.

Adamawa State Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri praised the courage and desire of the citizenry to allow democracy thrive after two decades of uninterrupted process.

Fintiri, in a press release by his Press Secretary, Mr. Humwashi Wonosikou, commended the electorate for trusting him with their mandate.

The governor said in the release, "We will continue to ensure we keep to our promise – a government that is a progressive instrument of the common good, rooted in our values of opportunity, responsibility, determined to give our people the tools they need to make the most of their lives in a difficult period made worse by the dwindling economic hardship.

"Our desire to strengthen democracy and give it its true meaning informed the investment we are making in the social reengineering of the state through the provision of infrastructure and human capital development needed to unlock the growth and development of the Adamawa of our dream. The projects spread across the state represent the value and meaning of Democracy Day."

In Lagos, it was quiet in most parts of the state even though there were reports of skirmishes between protesters and men of the Nigerian Police at the Gani Fawehinmi Park at Ojota.

At the Mile Two area of the state also, there were reports of violent confrontations, which were promptly quelled by security operatives.

However, all was peaceful in known flashpoints in the state, like Oshodi, Ojodu-Berger, Ojuelegba, Fagba, and Ketu, as many residents celebrated the June 12 Democracy Day in their homes.

THISDAY gathered that although the protesters at Gani Fawehinmi Park were peaceful initially, it was the attempt by the police to forcibly disperse them from the venue that resulted in a face-off, leading to the use of teargas by the police. There were no reports of casualties or injuries.

There were no reports of breakdown of law and order in any other part of the state, even though many businesses were closed.

In Iju, Agege, Ojodu, Ikeja, Abule Egba, and Ogba areas, many people were indoors as commercial buses also stayed off roads.

THISDAY checks revealed that security was normal in most of these places, as no policemen and other security agents were noticed on the streets, and traffic was light.

Speaking on the conduct of the police, human rights lawyer, Mr. Femi Falana, SAN, said even though he had to go and effect the release of some youths arrested by the police, he was glad that there were no reports of killings. He said the situation was remarkably better than the previous months.

Falana alleged that last year, the Nigeria Police had no canister of teargas to quell protests, hence their resort to the use of live bullets, as happened during the #EndSARS protest.

Falana, who spoke at the 25th Anti-Corruption Situation Room organised by the Heda Resources Centre, disclosed that it was the lack of the teargas canisters that led to the killing of 99 persons during the October 2020 protest.

In Edo State, protesters called on the federal government to deliver good governance and adequate security, stating that the ineptitude of Buhari has brought Nigeria to its knees. The protesters, who began their match at King Square (Ring Road), Benin City, were provided security by the police, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and the state vigilante group. They accompanied the protesters to the Government House, where the Deputy Governor, Comrade Philip Shaibu, received them.

Speaking on behalf of about seven groups of protesters and civil society organisations, Marxist Kola Edokpayi of the Talakawa Assembly, lamented that the nonchalant attitude of the president towards security of life and property had brought the country to its present unacceptable situation.

Edokpayi said, "The ineptitude of President Buhari has brought us to this sorry state. His nonchalant attitude has caused a lot of security problems. It has been difficult to combat Boko Haram, banditry and kidnapping. Nigerians now live in fear and nobody knows what will happen next.

"What we now hear is 'unknown gunmen' who are killing people in the South-east, while other parts of the country are becoming unsafe to live in because of insecurity. The prices of goods and services are moving up daily beyond the reach of the common man."

Responding, the deputy governor commended the protesters for conducting themselves peacefully and promised that all their grievances would be channelled to the right quarters.

Shaibu used the opportunity to speak on some political issues in the state. He said of the 14 state lawmakers whose seats were declared vacant, "We did everything possible to have them in the House but they decided to follow a godfather, who misled them. Even with a month until their seats would be declared vacant, we urged them to join the assembly but they were asking for a second proclamation.

"They also went to court and that had stopped the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) from conducting a fresh election. The INEC has said no new election can be conducted until the cases are decided. So, we have to wait for the courts before the next move can be made."

Meanwhile, governors and prominent Nigerians across the country, yesterday, spoke on the second anniversary of June 12 as Democracy Day, focusing on the swirling frustrations in different parts of the country.

KWARA

Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq of Kwara State says the country has made progress despite its current challenges, which include the challenges of nation building, population bulge, and insecurity. In a statement issued in Ilorin on Saturday by his Chief Press Secretary, Rafiu Ajakaye, to commemorate June 12, the governor said, "I felicitate with Kwarans, and, indeed, all Nigerians, on this day of June 12, which has come to symbolise the struggle of our people for human rights, participatory democracy, and development.

"Whatever the challenges of nation-building confronting our fatherland, the truth is that we are pacing ahead in all indices of development while institutions of democracy are growing stronger and getting more mature."

GOMBE

The Gombe State governor, Alhaji Inuwa Yahaya, yesterday, praised Nigerians for resolving to maintain democracy as the means of governance, saying 22 years of interrupted democratic rule has proven naysayers wrong. Yahaya said Nigeria's "democratic maturity has shattered the myths about African democracy being under the grip of one single leader or political party."

He noted that as the largest country in Africa, Nigeria would continue to hold the torch of nation building, democratic pluralism, and political stability in Africa and the world at large.

"After 22 years of uninterrupted democracy, I make bold to say Nigeria's democracy has come of age. We have witnessed successful transitions of power from one administration to the next, and from one political party to another," the governor stated.

BAUCHI

Bauchi State Governor, Senator Bala Mohammed, saluted the courage and patriotism of all democrats – dead or alive – who strived to ensure that democracy was well grounded in the country.

In a goodwill message, the governor said, "We laboured together to arrive where we are today and we shall continue to march the state forward to greatness with determination and sincerity of purpose with your support and prayers."

The governor, who explained that his two-year journey in power had not been a bed of roses, added, "But with determination and the support enjoyed from the good people of the state, we were able to pilot the affairs of government to a sound socio-political pedestal."

EKITI

Ekiti State Governor, Dr Kayode Fayemi, urged Nigerians to be more determined in ensuring that democracy worked in the country. Fayemi said despite its imperfections, democracy remained the best option for the country, adding that through the determination of the citizens and their active participation in the democratic process, Nigerians can achieve a truly great country of their dream.

He urged Nigerians not to relent in their search for lasting peace as a necessary condition for progress and prosperity.

The governor saluted the heroic deeds of patriots, who worked assiduously to actualise democratic rule in the country, especially, the symbol of the June 12 struggle, the late Chief Moshood Abiola, saying only a truly great, peaceful and prosperous Nigeria can be a befitting compensation for their sacrifices

"We may not have reached the promised land, but we have left Egypt. We may not have attained the best, but we surely have made some progress as a nation," Fayemi said.

ABIOLA'S DAUGHTER

Hafsat Abiola-Costello, one of the daughters of the presumed winner of the June 12 1993 presidential election, Chief Moshood Abiola, said her family would not forget the role played by the Minister of Interior, Ogbeni Rauf Aregbesola, in ensuring that their late patriarch was immortalised for his contribution to democracy. Abiola-Costello also praised the minister for his role in the renaming of Kudirat Abiola Road, in memory of her mother, who was brutally murdered during her struggles to regain the stolen mandate of her husband.

She said long before President Muhammadu Buhari came in as president, Aregbesola, who was then governor of Osun State, had embarked on a one-man campaign to press for recognition of Abiola as winner of the 1993 election and, indeed, to be recognised as a former president.

OGUN

Ogun State Governor Dapo Abiodun said the best way for Nigerians to immortalise and celebrate the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, the late Chief MKO Abiola, and June 12, was to build bridges and demolish sectarian fences. Abiodun stated this on Saturday in his speech at the 2021 Democracy Day celebration, held at the MKO Abiola International Stadium, Kuto, Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital.

The governor, who said Nigerians could not afford to bring down the country or despair in its future, noted that the supreme price paid by the Abiola and his mandate should serve as a reminder that Nigerians were stronger together as a nation.

"Until Nigerians embrace the essence of the MKO persona, internalise belief in self, faith in a united country and other initiatives that help to engender a sense of shared heritage amongst Nigerian people, we will continue to be a country in search of nationhood," he said.

Abiodun urged Nigerians to push all the negative and divisive forces and policies on the back-foot and embrace the symbolism of June 12, saying, "Let us join hands to make Nigeria work for all Nigerians. June 12 represents what will strengthen the country's unity, indivisibility and oneness." He added that such unity would end all quests for self-determination and other sectarian agitations, as well as calm frayed nerves.

BAYELSA

Bayelsa State Governor, Senator Douye Diri, expressed his administration's determination to change the development narrative of the state. Diri spoke on Saturday at Government House, Yenagoa, during his maiden media chat that was broadcast live on all Yenagoa-based radio stations.

The media interaction was part of activities to commemorate this year's Democracy Day.

The governor, in a press statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Daniel Alabrah, said democracy was about the people and Nigeria had come a long way with 22 years of uninterrupted civil rule, which he said had not been smooth but worth celebrating.

He noted that the urban renewal programme and other projects and policies of his administration were part of the drive to give the state a new look and make it more attractive to investors.

Diri said the state had a lot of tourism potential and the government was open to discussion and ready to sign memorandum of understanding with partners to develop projects in the sector.

On the federal government's infrastructure development refund to the state, the governor clarified that the actual amount it received was N27.5 billion and not N38.4 billion, as being speculated in some quarters.

He explained that though the total refund due the state was N38.4 billion, according to the federal government, its release would not be possible in the next four years. He said the state was offered a second option of a discounted amount of N27.5 billion through the Debt Management Office, which it got last December.

Responding to a question on President Muhammadu Buhari's recent directive to revive cattle grazing routes across the country, Diri said there were no such routes in the state. He explained that although he was not countering the federal government's decision to resuscitate grazing routes, his administration had put in place a legal framework to ban open grazing and movement of cattle on foot.

The Bayelsa governor also emphasised that the southern governors had adopted the same position on the issue as part of measures to check farmers/herders clashes across the country.

Diri maintained that his government could not afford to expose its citizenry to the looming danger.

KADUNA CAN

Chairman of the Kaduna State chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Rev. Joseph Hayab, said June 12 could not be celebrated as Democracy Day because Nigerian leaders were not democratic. Hayab said Nigerians could not be governed by intimidation and still celebrate June 12 as Democracy Day.

In an interview with THISDAY on Saturday, Hayab said in a true democracy, there was rule of law and freedom of speech.

According to him, June 12 is merely a date set aside by the government, though there is no evidence of democracy worth celebrating.

Hayab stated, "We are simply celebrating a date set aside by the government but there is no evidence of democracy worth celebrating. The spirit behind June 12 is supposed to make our current leaders truly democratic but what we see is governance by intimidation and creating fear in the minds of citizens.

"A true sign of democracy is the freedom citizens enjoy and respect for the rule of law, which is visibly absent in the way we have been governed in this country. I wish the government should have remembered that in a few days or in the second week of June. We will have this day to be reminded to celebrate before announcing the ban on Twitter and many uncomplimentary comments about other regions by the president."

In a related development, Benue State Governor Samuel Ortom said he was not against Buhari as a person but often disagreed with him on the constitutionality of issues and policy. Ortom said those who insinuated that his disagreement with the president was bone out of hatred were wrong. He stated that the attack on him would not force his administration to repeal the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in the state.

The governor declared that anyone who thought the state government would be intimidated to repeal the law was making a great mistake. He said his administration was trying to amend the law to increase the penalties against anyone who flouted it.

Speaking yesterday at the Banquet Hall of Government House, Makurdi, while giving his midterm scorecard as part of activities marking this year's Democracy Day, Ortom said, "I have always prayed and supported the president but when it comes to issues of fairness and illegality, I will disagree.

"The law on ranching has come to stay and no amount of intimidation can make us to repeal it. Instead, we will soon amend the law in order to increase the penalties against offenders."

The governor, who listed his administration's achievements in the areas of education, agriculture, infrastructure, and health, among others, lamented the humanitarian situation caused by the continued attacks by armed herdsmen, bandits and other criminals in Benue communities.

He said, "The security threat from armed herdsmen, bandits and other criminals in our communities has resulted in wanton killings and the displacement of people in large numbers across the state.

"Today, Benue State has over one million IDPs with many of them living in the camps we have set up and others staying with their relations. The situation has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the state."

He said despite the huge sums of money his administration had been spending to cater for the Internally displaced persons, resources were always inadequate because the number of IDPs increased daily.

The governor stated, "My desire is to ensure that the IDPs return to their ancestral homes. Most of them are farmers, and the longer they stay in the camps, the more food production is affected. We hope that the federal government will also fulfil its promise to assist Benue and other states in the North-central, which have been badly affected by the attacks to resettle the victims."

He disclosed that many of his colleagues had been coming around to encourage him on his stand to hold the presidency accountable over insecurity in the country but were too afraid to talk.

52 hearty cheers



On behalf my family and friends, I join the good people of the FCT in raising our glasses to toast the 52nd birthday celebration of a perfect gentleman, an achiever, a philanthropist, wonderful team player, generous, selfless and humble son of the soil: Distinguished Senator Phillp Tanimu Aduda, Mayor emeritus of FCT!

May the blessing of God remain with you always.

Happy 52nd birthday and many happy returns, Distinguished Senator!



SEN. PHILIP TANIMU
ADUDA

Signed:
Dr. Ramatu Tijjani Aliyu
Honourable Minister of State, FCT

OPINION

THE DILEMMA OVER GRAZING LAWS

Eric Teniola argues that the grazing laws available are localised

President Muhammadu Buhari has often referred to the gazette which published the grazing laws in Nigeria. In his television interview to mark his sixth anniversary in power, he made reference to the so -called gazette. The president was echoing what his Chief of Staff, Professor Ibrahim Gambari said on April 1, 2018 when he was the Chancellor of the Kwara State University, Ilorin. On that day Gambari referred to existing laws on grazing and that the major problem facing us now is the non-implementation of the grazing laws as contained in the gazette. My understanding is that both the president and his chief of staff were equating the laws of Northern Nigeria on grazing as laws passed by the central government. The grazing laws which the two men referred to were passed into a decree by the then the Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. The laws were not operative in the West, Mid-West and Eastern regions.

According to Dr. Ismaila Iro, grazing reserves in Nigeria started during the pre-colonial era. Although formally introduced by the British, grazing reserves were demarcated by the Fulani who conquered and ruled Northern Nigeria. The attempt by the British in 1940 to separate the grazing land from farm land, however, faltered because the Europeans imposed land use controls divorced from economic and demographic dynamics in the pastoral system. Formal grazing reserves in Nigeria started accidentally in the 1950s when Hamisu Kano, working with pastoralists on livestock vaccination, foresaw the shortages of grazing land in Northern Nigeria. Supported by the government, he initiated the grazing reserve scheme from the abandoned government resettlement schemes (Fulani Settlement Scheme). The resettlement schemes collapsed because the government had neither the financial nor the managerial ability to continue with the burdensome scheme, and the best alternative use of the land, the government thought, was to convert it into grazing reserves. Grazing reserves was hatched in 1954 after a study of the Fulani production system in the "Fulani Amenities Proposal." The proposal suggested the creation of grazing reserves, the improvement of Fulani welfare, and the transformation of the herd management system. By 1964, the government had gazetted about 6.4 million hectares of the forest reserve, 98 percent in the savannah. Sokoto Province had 21 percent of the land, followed by Kabba, Bauchi, Zaria, Ilorin, and Katsina, with 11-15 percent each. The Wase, Zamfara, and Udubo reserves followed in succession.

In 1965, the Northern Nigerian government incorporated the Fulani Amenities Proposal into the grazing reserve law. Before the enactment of the grazing reserve law of Northern Nigeria, the pastoral Fulani relied on the goodwill of the farmers, who conferred upon themselves the lordliness of occupied and unoccupied land. Because interpersonal and kinship affiliations governed the dispensation of land, the Fulani worried about being evicted from the land when their relationship with the hosts become strained. The planners, however, applied a top-down approach that excluded the Fulani from formulating and implementing this well-intentioned program. Accordingly, the Fulani gave less than the expected cooperation in the scheme. Professor Gambari coming from Kwara State had in mind, the Kwara State grazing laws that were in existence years ago. In an article by Professor Ade Olomola, he said the grazing laws in Kwara State were in operation only in Kwara. According to him, the main focus of the settlement policy is the development of grazing reserves in the state. The objectives of the policy are, one, to provide feed and water for pastoralists on a year-round basis; two, to eliminate nomadism, improve cattle production and raise the living standard of pastoralists; three, to ensure efficient use and protection of environmental resources and four, to prevent or minimize incessant clashes between herders and farmers which often result in bloodshed and loss of life. The procedures involved in the implementation of the policy include land acquisition, demarcation, surveying, gazetting of grazing reserve, development of grazing reserve and settlement of pastoralists. The following are the grazing reserves at various stages of acquisition in Kwara State. They are Nweri, Kinikini, Gidan Magajia, Moli, Wuru, Okuta, Olodan, Igbaja, Alapa, Babanla, Chita, Lata, Oro, Sharagi, Shao, Kaiama and Omi-Eran (LSC).

The Gidan Magajia is one of the two grazing reserves that had been gazetted in the state. It is the largest in the state and the focus of attention. Two implementation committees were set up for the purpose of development and management of the reserve as well as settlement of pastoralists. They are the policy committee at the state level and grazing reserve management committee at the local government level. The former is charged with the responsibility of formulating and defining development policy and ensuring that the management committee is provided with the means to achieve management objectives. The latter is to advise and assist on matters affecting the settlers on a day-to-day basis as well as identifying settlers for the reserve. The order setting up the reserve stipulates that it should be maintained through proper grazing management and improvement activities such as water development, fodder conservation plan, range reseeding and fertilization, control of undesirable weeds and fire tracing. Other development activities include construction of earth dams, boreholes and wells to provide watering facilities, construction of roads, office and residential quarters, establishment of livestock services centre and pasture development. Moreover, efforts are to be made to ensure that the highest possible level of productivity is achieved without endangering the reserve.

To this end the government stipulates that soil and water conservation and other erosion control methods should be used to prevent degradation, desertification and overgrazing, and to maintain the carrying capacity of the reserve. Both the federal and Kwara State governments are supposed to play active part in the development of the grazing reserve. The federal government is to be involved in the provision of infrastructure such as dams, roads and means of transport for range guards through the agency of the National Livestock Projects Division (NLPD). The Kwara State government has the responsibility to acquire the land following stipulated legal procedures and provide staff for the management of the reserve. As at 1992, five government officials consisting of a project officer, a veterinary assistant, two range guards and a security guard were operating in the reserve.

In short the central government did not enact any grazing law. The best it has done was the promulgation of National Commission for Nomadic Education, Decree 25, 1989 and National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Decree 17, 1990. These two decrees were promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd.). The Minister of Education at that time was Professor Babatunde Aliu Fafunwa. All the military governors at that time were ordered by General Babangida to launch it in their states. I remember at that time there were public outcries about the decree that they favoured the Fulani people. I think it was the best thing at that time that the central government ever did for the Fulani people. The commission devised a series of innovative approaches and strategies.

—Teniola was a director in the Presidency

(See concluding part of the article on www.thisdaylive.com)

The central government did not enact any grazing law. The best it has done was the promulgation of National Commission for Nomadic Education, Decree 25, 1989 and National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education, Decree 17, 1990. These two decrees were promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida

THE MEDIA AND JUNE 12

The media played a central role in the country's return to democracy, writes **Lanre Arogundade**

At a stage we constructed a cage at the secretariat of the Lagos Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Shomolu area of Lagos in which we inserted images of incarcerated journalists to demonstrate to the world that the Nigerian media was in chains. It was in the aftermath of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections during which journalists and media outlets who stood with the people in the struggle to get rid of the military through the validation of the mandate freely given by Nigerians to Bashorun MKO Abiola were being hounded.

Lagos NUJ was very much part of the June 12 struggle having been led into the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and the Joint Action Commitee of Nigeria (JACON) by the radical Ladi Lawal leadership in the thick of the battles in 1993/94. Once we got elected into the exco on the banner of 'Change '95', we picked the gauntlet of the struggle.

Early occupants of the cage were Chris Anyanwu (The Sunday Magazine – TSM), Ben Charles Obi (Weekend Classique), Gorge Mba (Tell) and Kunle Ajibade (The News). Others followed in flurry – Nosa Igiebor (Tell), Osa Director (Tell), Femi Ojudu (The News), George Onah (Vanguard), Bunmi Aborisade (June 12 magazine), Soji Omotunde (African Concord), Niran Malaolu (The Diet), Moshood Fayemiwo (Razor), etc.

We fought their battles here and abroad. Amnesty International adopted some as prisoners of conscience and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) spearheaded the mobilisation of the international media freedom and free expression community including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Kabral Amihere-led West African Journalists Association (WAJA).

The escape into exile of Bunmi Aborisade leaving behind a pregnant wife, and Dapo Olorunyomi, whose wife and three-month-old baby were arrested as proxies when the security agents could not lay their hands on him to drag him before their instructors dead or alive, turned out a positive factor on the international front.

Working in both the National Concord and Vanguard newspapers at different points during the period, I knew what editors Frank Aigbogun and Nsikak Essien went through managing invitations or visits by security agents along with their newspapers. Some other editors and even publishers were traumatised.

The likes of Olu Akerele and Frank Igwuebeze, journalists and personal assistants to MKO Abiola were equally of vital link to the Nigerian human rights and the international community especially during the later's incarceration before he unfortunately died on July 7, 1998.

The struggles yielded desired results and in the thick of it for example, I as Lagos NUJ Chairman secretly received Chris Anyanwu's PEN International award on her behalf, kept it along with the donation and handed it over to her after she was released from prolonged detention.

But we were also fighting our collective battles. Outside the jails, which the Lagos NUJ cage symbolised, there were many other journalists in chains. Journalists working in The News/Tempo group and Tell magazine who had to go underground to consummate a marriage with guerrilla journalism following persistent raids by armed military personnel. Journalists working in the Concord group of Newspapers, The Punch and The Guardian, etc, who faced the ordeal of forced closures and job losses.

The Guardian demonstrated courage in consistently referring to MKO Abiola as the presumed winner of the June 12 election and in the case of Concord it was particularly painful that the publications in the stable never made it back to the newsstands. Beyond job losses, there were lost pensions and lost insurances with some dying in frustration. There were brutalities meted to reporters, editors and photo journalists covering the series of protests. Painfully too, journalist Bagauda Kaltho became a martyr when he was bombed in Kaduna.

The role played by the media in the June 12 struggle and the ultimate triumph over the military would make several volumes of books just like that of non-journalists like Chima Ubani, Beko Kuti, Gani Fawehinmi, Olisa Agbakoba, Fredrick Fasheun, Frank Kokori, Arthur Nwankwo, Shehu Sani, Femi Falana, Segun Sango, Uba Sani, Col. Umar Dangiwa, Anthony Enahoro - who I met and had prolonged conversation with on the way forward in the company of Dapo Olorunyomi and Femi Ojudu in New York in 1997 - among several others.

It can be no exaggeration to say that without the media, there would be no democracy in Nigeria today. Let the current wielders of power be reminded of this fact so that they can know that their current battles against the media and free expression are a fight against history in which they will end on the losing side. The media will always survive governments no matter how tyrannical or dictatorial.

On the media and spiritual fronts, I certainly belong to the Thomas Jefferson school of thought. The former stated: "Were it left to me to decide if we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter" and on the later he said: "Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God".

––Arogundade, Executive Director of International Press Centre, Lagos, is a pro-democracy activist and former Chairman of Lagos NUJ.

LETTERS

THE TWITTER BAN: ANOTHER VIEW

I first heard about Twitter during my final year at OAU, Ife, in 2011. I neither knew how it worked nor how to even be a part at the time. I only knew of Facebook which I rarely used since Twitter users made themselves appear like an elitist, members-only club. I didn't open a Twitter account until three years later. This is how I became, like most users, addicted to the network ever since, largely running political commentaries and advocating social changes.

Like many people, I was affected by the sudden, and rather harsh decision of the Nigerian government to suspend Twitter operations in the country. The government followed this swiftly by directing telecommunications networks to carry out the decision to the letter. This was obviously not a decision anyone welcomed, including me.

Since the Nigerian government announced the suspension of Twitter operations, there has been series of reactions to the development – even from those who have never tweeted or opened



Jack Patrick Dorsey, Twitter CEO

Twitter in their lives. This is understandable when we consider the fact that Twitter has become popular as a source of news for many media stations and entertainment for young internet users. However, we may need to take away sentiments or emotions in other to set records straight or put issues in proper perspectives.

Many reactions on this issue have come from the background that it was wrong for the government to have swiftly responded with an indefinite suspension after Twitter deleted President Muhammad Buhari's tweets. The strength of this argument lies in the fact that Twitter has previously deleted the tweets and account of President Donald Trump of the United States in December 2020. With this, they saw nothing wrong with Twitter's action on Buhari.

Anyone familiar with US politics leading to Twitter deleting Trump's account will clearly see the folly in this line of thought. First, Twitter deleted Trump's tweets after several warnings. There's no such warning to President Buhari. This, in itself, is disrespectful to, perhaps, the most powerful political office in Black Africa. Second, Twitter only deleted Trump's tweets after it became clear he's, for all practical purposes, lost his reelection. It would have had serious implications on Twitter to delete Trump's account if he had won the November election. Twitter knows this for a fact. The implication of deleting a sitting president's tweets, without a previous warning, is the heat Twitter currently faces in Nigeria.

Let's even look at the deleted tweet dropping our toga of emotionalism and stepping out of collective rage. The tweet that arsonists, looters, criminals who are hell-bent on destroying democratic institutions like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s facilities, police formations, public offices in some parts of the country will be spoken to "in the language they understand", cannot mean "genocide" if we're to be honest. Twitter is a US-based private company. Did the US government roll out the red carpet for those who violently invaded the Capitol Building last year? When the US government released the National Guard against the insurrectionists, did Twitter or any other liberal media make a fuss about their human rights? Don't people have the right to freedom of expression anymore?

If Trump's supporters felt cheated during the election, as we've been made to believe, don't they have the right to express themselves like anyone else, say Africans? Or, is Twitter's case that of the wolf knows how to breastfeed its own child but devours the children of other animals? Why were US insurrectionists met with force without any international condemnation, albeit from Twitter? What was Twitter's "holier than thou" position at the time? Is Twitter hoping the President and Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria's Armed Forces – a position he got under the 1999 Constitution - will continue to watch while some over pampered outlaws continue their sustained attacks on democratic institutions and wreak havoc on the lives and properties of innocent citizens?

Even though the nation strives to improve its democratic profile, no country – not even Jack Dorsey (Twitter's CEO)'s United States - will tolerate the activities of a terrorist group like Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) under the guise of freedom of speech. Will Twitter have provided a platform for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) – who made an audacious attempt to assassinate prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1984 under the guise that IRA is fighting for Irish "home rule" and expect the UK to watch hopelessly? Twitter only started finding out that Nnamdi Kanu (IPOB' leader)'s tweets violated their rules after the decision of the Nigerian government to suspend their operations. That Twitter even took this action alone confirms some fears that the company is an international agent of destabilization.

Those who argued that the Nigerian government should not have suspended Twitter for deleting Buhari's tweet are either super-emotional or simply trying to be dubious. The Nigerian government has so many problems we citizens can complain about, but a foreign company disrespecting the Office of the President of a sovereign state is beyond any means of tolerance to start with. IPOB's continuous use of Twitter as a means of propagating hatred, sponsoring violence, and other nefarious activities under the guise of freedom of speech is not what anyone should tolerate.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of India called for suspension of more than 1,000 Twitter accounts and posts, over disseminated false information about the protests and India's agricultural laws. Twitter restored their access, including those of violent separatist leaders in the country. The government responded by taking firm action against Twitter and launching a rival social platform, Koo. It was after the Indian government's firm decision that the blue verified badge on the Vice President of India, Venkaiah Naidu's personal Twitter handle – previously stripped off - was restored. A nation won't lose its sovereignty just to keep a foreign private company happy.

Olalekan Adigun, Lagos

ODE OF A SPEAKING ASS

Scripture has it that a willing Ass was once about to be ridden to its' death and an angel got in the way as an adversary action, adverse reaction, a reverse action and when the ridder continued to goad the LORD opened a door of utterance unto the Ass and the rider heard from the horses' mouth which we know is usually truth and reason, because its' utterance but speech is fact and logic, there is usually no reason for logistics, the philosopher is bored… permit me to speak for a season not as someone but an Ass, for learning may abound on the lip but the mouth is taught by the heart of the wise…the prayer of the wise shall be for their lips to keep them and for their tongue to be meek…When a man's sense of duty will be like that of a woman, his master shall have to consider his chastity, but some men are like that, they can go to war-front and put their lives on first line charge to hear their master…

This man is now an old man but every-time he'll be doing like a child. Is this the manner of approach to things. Doesn't he know he should be having lots of regrets. He never mourns with the bereaved nor Jubilant with them that rejoice. He finds it easy to keep at nothing, jack of all trade, is it by force he will teach we Ehugbo. He thinks of himself as a man of thought but does not think. An imbecile of old…. If I eat now, its' not going to digest, I had no respite in the day and no rest at night, only debt and blame came calling. When you came to yourself you've forgotten who it were on the line, they were never on your mind, you're no longer young at heart to play with the boys, so, your sister will not be happy that you at once did her any good instead of you and your brother will talk down at you like his mothers' infidel…nobody likes how you sound but if not for sound-mind, how would you know you're in need, is it not the insane that is given to want. When you take the wise for a ride, you must be a fool, for nothing have you to show for his understanding…

When they call your bluff, call them back, for you cannot have blackmail as a fallback position… to over-reach own wisdom ones got to go solo, but was Solo not man of the people, did he not have one thousand concubines, servant-ministers, ruling-governors. He was not solo but lonely in the midst of his companions for they did not understand until the queen of Sheba came to prove him with questions... It was not his choice, he couldn't help himself, the rich hath many companions, neither could I have done otherwise at first if not that I got solo at last.

Doth not the Ass speak, is he not silly, he's self-righteous in his sayings but mean no justice, is he the only wise fool we know or is a mad-man not given to logic without reason, ever seen anyone sane looking forward without expectation… if not that reason failed, of what use was logic to Juris'-prudence or to the Judges'-verdict, the jury is not always prudent but not that they should not be prudent always.

We don't understand the type of person this man became but do you know the size of what became of him, though you nowadays cannot say he's wise or foolish under oath and live… tell him he's waking up too late, if I were to be him, he cannot enter my compound, his endowment is futile. But is there any blessing without a curse, is blessing not caused. Its him screened... do you know that this one is nobody and somebody snap him put for television, if you know the world of that man you'd not believe his word… so, knowledge is in the market place and I went to look for it in the forest of Lebanon, to which Solomon resorts... knowledge is for money but wisdom is a secret revealed by understanding and skill… oh so, this one is someone but does not have even one exposure, newspaper node snap everybody like Tv, am not talking about foto, was he not on television, his image was not good yet his snapshot was. What am saying is that he must be a good object but objectionable for his image that was bad, nobody gave him a chance…

The press can afford to be hypocritical but should not become cynical, there are our last hope of speaking to ourselves as a nation in search of truth and justice…newspaper them fit pretend but if them come join de do 'holier than thou' we go continue to deceive ourself in this country… sometimes when you're watching Tv and see what's going on in some parts of this country you're like in another country.

I think we joined the world, men playing into the hands of female teachers that are supposed to be learning, that's why a woman knows how to ask question and does her home-work…when people follow one another, some de follow book some the follow sense only one might look sober and will soon get to his breaking point for one was never priceless, woman is never part of a junta, she has no secret to keep… we stopped working at this game and started talking over it. If fans will depend on match-fixing the team is not good, they must have been watched and should go prepare for another tournament… Look, these guys are stoking fire, he should know that this is not the kind of speech you make off the cuff and your comments got to be reserved but he shows up on the scene of blood-letting and begins to talk at length to live-press…

–––Eleje Willy, Lagos

A BIT OF A DUST UP

Again, there is a story of science being not quite misused but certainly being "off topic". An ad on TV showed a Vacuum cleaner that could count and classify the particles it is picking up. The data is displayed on a screen on the vacuum. My eyesight isn't good enough to go through the vacuum bag and confirm the count.

Their website mentions lasers but fortunately not burnt carpet, so it seems safe to use. There is however a mention from one of the engineers involved about it being one of those in the shower moments. Hint: Don't take a vacuum into a shower, it probably won't work, and it could electrocute you if there is any damage such as exposed wiring or a broken frame.

It might be time to release all the scientists from commercial applications for a while and get them working on stopping the COVID pandemic, solving climate change, developing better energy sources and curing cancer. They can then move to solving poverty and food shortages.

Science is meant to explain the world and be used to make it a better place for everyone to live, not just make it a less dusty place.

––Dennis Fitzgerald, Melbourne, Australia.

EDITORIAL

Editor, Editorial Page PETER ISHAKA
Email peter.ishaka@thisdaylive.com

Democracy With Growing Violence

The authorities must face the hard task of containing the booming violence

The violence that defines this season speaks to a national psychology that has devalued human life to the lowest level. From North to South and East, hundreds of people are being killed almost daily either by criminal cartels or lone wolves who seem to have overpowered the capacity of the state. In his 'Democracy Day' address to Nigerians yesterday, President Muhammadu Buhari admitted the challenges of insecurity and made the usual promises. But to check these killings and restore peace to the country, there is an urgent need for a state that subscribes to a higher value on life and livelihood.

The authorities must see the growing violence in different theatres across Nigeria as a challenge not only to our corporate existence and our imperfect democracy, but also to the future of a country that is fast becoming a killing field

Unfortunately, the Nigerian state is itself providing leadership in all manner of bad behaviour that often leads to extra-judicial killings. With the wave of disenchantment by young citizens, fuelled largely by unemployment, alienation and general social and economic discontent, government ought to see peaceful protests as legitimate expressions of democratic rights. But as usual, the police yesterday betrayed a clear deficit of creative solutions to respond to civil protests without resorting to force. In Lagos, Abuja and some other cities, many of our young citizens who chose to exercise their democratic rights were brutally put down.

What we need to interrogate therefore is a democracy that can neither defend itself without resorting to military tactics nor protect citizens from dying cheaply and needlessly in the hands of a cocktail of violent vagrants. We are particularly worried that the incessant attacks by insurgents, bandits, kidnappers, and others across the country can only worsen the general feeling of insecurity with dire implications for our democracy. As we had cause to point out recently, perhaps aside the 30-month civil war, Nigeria has never been so threatened by security challenges as it is today. But this culture of impunity persists because the relevant security agencies have not succeeded in apprehending the entrepreneurs of violence to bring them to justice in accordance to law. A regime of 'neutralising' suspects who have not been tried in any court of law for alleged offenses is counterproductive under the current situation.



The authorities must see the growing violence in different theatres across Nigeria as a challenge not only to our corporate existence and our imperfect democracy, but also to the future of a country that is fast becoming a killing field. The greater danger lies in the fact that as many get killed, as we have witnessed in recent weeks, Nigerians move on unperturbed. That is fast depicting us as a people who place little premiums on human lives. Yet when such bestiality becomes a way of life, those who kill would want to recreate the scenes again and again.

Ordinarily, death ought to be an extreme penalty for crimes involving loss of lives. Where death becomes an unscheduled consequence of living a normal life, something is fatally wrong with government as the only human invention meant to separate men from beasts. Anarchy or the state of nature is the only other name for a situation in which casual killers compete to take the lives of innocent people almost as a sport. We therefore insist on bringing killers of all hues to justice in an open and transparent manner. This will require a complete retraining of our police and security agents to protect lives. The present adversarial orientation is a colonial and military legacy which has nothing to do with democracy.

In his national broadcast yesterday, President Buhari said that the change of 'Democracy Day' from May 29 to June 12 was effected by his administration not only to honour the sacrifices of the men and women who fought for the return to civil rule but also to create an environment for democracy to be an accepted way of life. As commendable as that may be, the inescapable conclusion remains that an official celebration of Democracy Day on top of a reality of total insecurity, misery and cheapened human lives is what it is: a sad hollow ritual!

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Letters to the Editor

TO OUR READERS

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Aregbesola And The Oduduwa Nation

For the first time I whole-heartedly agree with the Minister of the Interior, Ogbeni Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola when he denounced the secessionist activities of the apologists of the Oduduwa nation largely spearheaded by Sunday Adeyemo a.k.a Sunday Igboho, Professor Banji Akintoye, etc. He said: "My most important message for this gathering is to let you know that those advocating for the Yoruba nation are ignorant of the consequences of their action. Nigeria is the reason the Western nations respect the Black man globally.

"Maybe these secessionists did not know that if any crisis or war happens in Nigeria now, its fallout will linger for another 50 years. So we must guide this unity jealously. Although things are not perfect yet, I believe we should rather advocate better government rather than agitate for secession."

Secession is an ill-wind that blows nobody any good and it will only throw up an avalanche of challenges that may consume the fragmented new nations. Sunday Igboho's claim to fame was his expulsion of some alleged criminal Fulani elements in Ibarapa. Many states beckoned on him to help 'liberate' them from the yoke of the blood thirsty Fulani herdsmen. Not satisfied with his status as a Yoruba liberator, he wanted more especially as an unsuccessful GoFundMe campaign had been done by some of his fanatical supporters on his behalf in the Diaspora. He became a champion of the Oduduwa nation and has been organizing rallies in support of it all over the south west.

An Oduduwa nation isn't the solution to the challenges in the south west as the Yorubas are not as homogenous as people believe. There is still the ugly trend of discrimination based on the part of Yoruba land that you come from. An Egba man holds an Ijebu man in suspicion despite the fact that they are from the same state. There was the Ife Modakeke crisis which consumed hundreds of lives despite their being neighbours with lot of intra-marriages. There is the current fierce agitation for an Ibadan state by the people of Ibadan who feel marginalized in Oyo State. That homogeneity that is a key attribute of nationhood is lacking in Yorubaland to make an Oduduwa nation successful or even viable.

Igboho must have looked at the economic angle to the struggle as exemplified by his comrade-in-arms, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who is not only anchoring the struggle from relative comfort in the United Kingdom – far away from the theatre of blood bath, but has attracted a lot of funding from his sympathetic kinsmen as an American lobbying firm now handles his public relations abroad which doesn't come cheap. Who was Sunday Igboho before 2020?

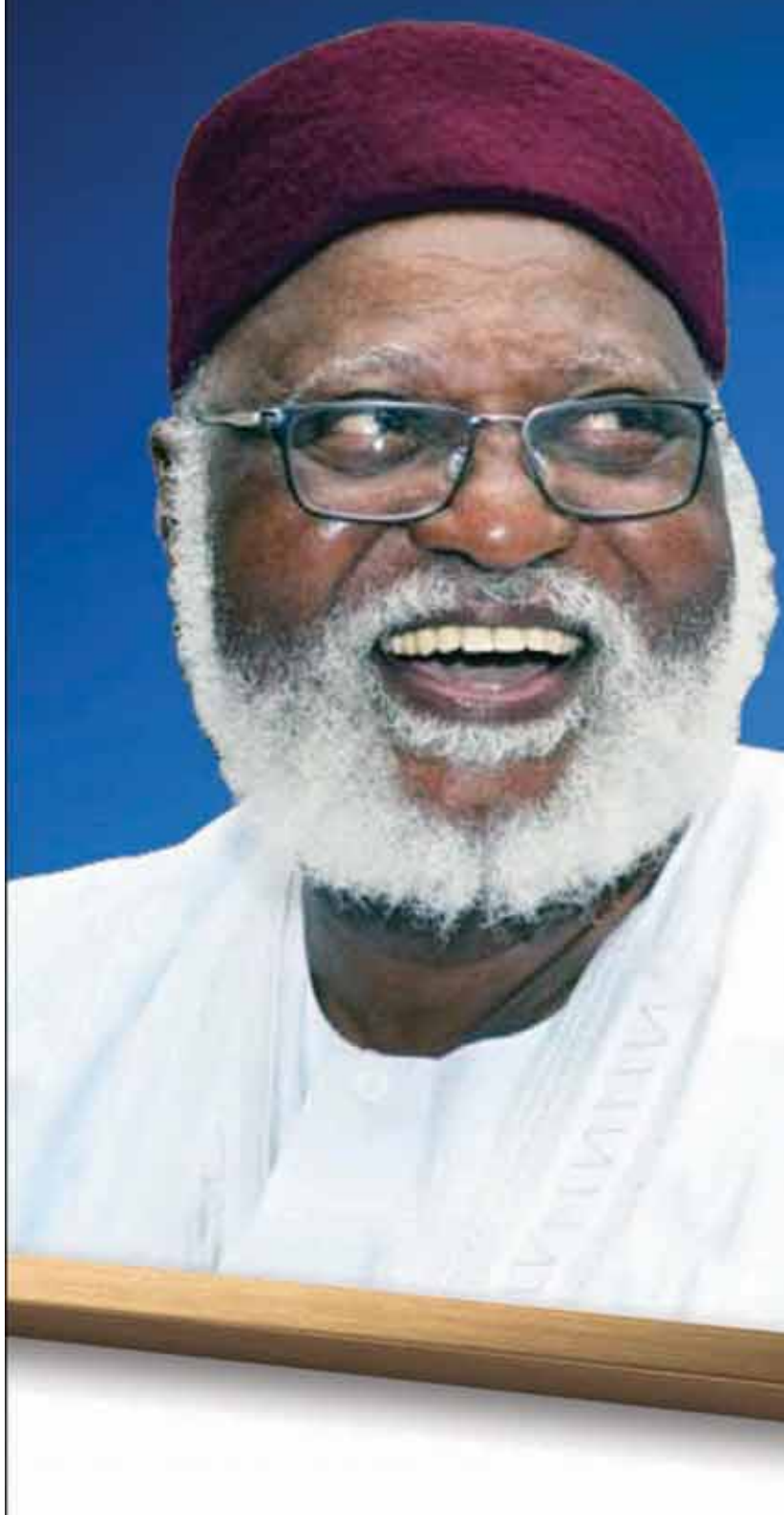
What Nigeria needs is restructuring and not secession which will cost more bloodshed. We should have learnt our lessons from the avoidable civil war where millions of lives were lost which the late Biafran warlord, Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu later described in an interview as a 'monumental waste.' True federalism should be practiced as there should be devolution of powers and fewer items on the exclusive list. Why should states be running cap in hand to Abuja at the end of the month to beg for federal government allocation like babies beg their mothers for breast milk? Why can't there be resource control similar to what obtained in the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 which enabled the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo develop the Western Region through his free primary education program, the building of Cocoa House, scholarships for undergraduate studies in the UK, the building of the Liberty Stadium, the first television station in Africa, etc?

California is rich and powerful and is the seventh largest economy in the world if it were a country because of the presence of the Silicon Valley and Hollywood. She doesn't go begging Washington DC for aid every month; rather it does the opposite by remitting to the centre. New York is powerful because it houses the Wall Street and all other financial institutions in the US. It is the economic nerve centre of the US and by extension the world. It has no business begging Washington, DC for funds. Most of the states in the south have their rich farmlands where they grow crops which they not only sell domestically but export the excess as well. Lagos shouldn't be the only part of the country where there is a major seaport. Other major seaports should be built in places like Ondo, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom which will greatly diffuse development to these places and decongest Lagos which is the smallest but the most inhabited state in the nation.

Tony Ademiluyi, Co Founder of The Vent Republic, Lagos.

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His Excellency
General Abdulsalami Abubakar, GCFR
Former Head of State,
Federal Republic of Nigeria
Chancellor, PAMO University
of Medical Sciences

We are proud to join you, your family and millions of your associates and admirers to thank God on the special occasion of your birthday.

Your life has been a shinning example of patriotic service to our fatherland and humanity. May God grant you good health to continue to build worthy legacies for posterity.

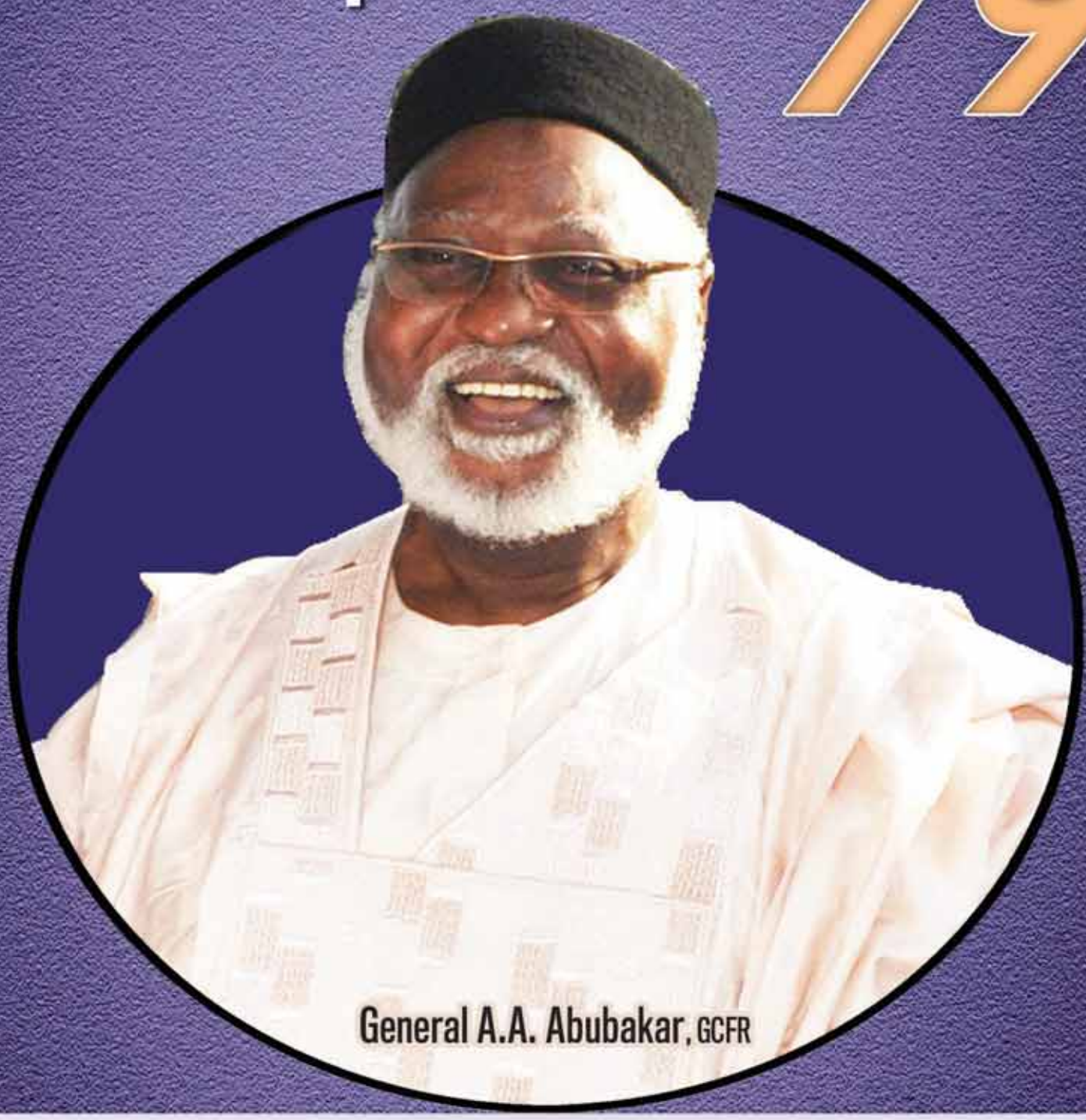
We pray God, in the decades ahead, to grant you longevity, more accomplishments and honours to the glory of His Holy name. Amen

CONGRATULATIONS, YOUR EXCELLENCY

Signed:

PROF. MICHAEL F. E. DIEJOMAOH
Vice Chancellor
On Behalf of the Board of Trustees, Governing Council, Staff and Students

Waoh, the Peoples' General is 79!



General A.A. Abubakar, GCFR

The board, management and staff of
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felicitate with the midwife of modern day democracy in Nigeria,
General A.A. Abubakar, GCFR
on the occasion of his 79th birthday today 13th June, 2021.

Signed:

Rear Admiral F.B.I. Porbeni, mni, CFR
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Tel: +234 1212 1340, 212 1341.
Email: info@africancircle.com Website: www.africancircle.com

BUSINESS

Editor: **Kunle Aderinokun**
08033204315, 08111813084 Email:kunle.aderinokun@thisdaylive.com

Monetary Policy as Tool for Economic Recovery

James Emejo assesses the effectiveness of monetary policy measures in enhancing output growth and recovery of the Nigerian economy amidst the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as summarises the outcome of the recent MPC meeting



CBN Headquarters, Abuja

The Nigerian economy posted a positive GDP growth in the first quarter of the year, further cementing its performance in the fourth quarter of the preceding year, which had help to exit the second consecutive recession in recent times.

Not many believed that the economy actually exited recession in Q4 2020, due to some theoretical misunderstanding on what should constitute an exit from recession.

While some analysts believed that if it took two consecutive quarters of negative growth to fall into recession, it also required two consecutive quarters of positive performance to exit the downturn.

However, another school of thought had argued that it requires only a quarter of positive growth to exit a recession - and this argument appeared to align with the books.

Nevertheless, the Q1 2021 GDP performance of 0.51 per cent and 0.11 per cent in the preceding quarter had finally settled the dusts - as everyone now agrees that the Nigerian economy has effectively exited recession, though still fragile.

Nonetheless, a post-recession has considered the role of the monetary authority in stimulating growth as well as pulling the economy of the woods.

Many believed the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) played a dominant role and deserved credit for the resuscitation of the economy following the bank's historic and aggressive interventions in critical sectors of the economy particularly agriculture and health among others.

Analysts also agreed that the apex bank had effectively deployed its monetary and developmental intervention tools to weather the storm.

The CBN's COVID-19 Targeted Credit Facility for households and small businesses, for example, through which about N300 billion had so far been disbursed, had been a major relief for beneficiaries and had been able to provide some level of stability to Nigerians, apart from other regulatory forbearances in the financial sector which was initiated by the CBN.

With severe inflationary pressures amidst declining productivity, and volatility in oil price, the CBN has had to fall back on the use of development finance tools to stabilise price and achieve other macroeconomic objectives which had kept the country afloat.

Also, confronted with daunting macroeconomic challenges, the MPC which appeared less swayed by the dangers of posed by inflation which is far above the Monetary Policy Rate (MPR), rather than tighten policy instruments at its recent meeting, decided to retain interest rate at 11.5 per cent.

Providing insights on the committee's resolutions as well as appraisal of the apex bank's contribution to output growth, CBN Governor, Mr. Godwin Emefiele, said: "I think it's important to say that for us at the CBN we are not surprised. We are not surprised because if you recall, Nigeria is just one country that is peculiar for what I call a situation that is out of the ordinary, because you find Nigeria among several countries, being one country that is challenged by stagflation."

According to him: "Stagflation is a situation where inflation is running high, prices are being high and at the same time output growth, in this case the GDP is contracting.

"And if you understand how this works, you will find that as monetary policy committee, your core responsibility is to rein in inflation by ensuring that you keep supreme your price and monetary stability mandate.

"And to do so means that you have to tighten to be able to rein in inflation.

"On the other hand, the economy is confronted by a contracting output where growth is negative and the normal way in economics you would want to really recover from a contracting economy is to stimulate the economy with a lot of easing and injecting liquidity into the system to stimulate consumption and investments; increase government expenditure, increase export earnings and possibly see what you can do to reduce your imports. That is basically the definition of output growth."

He said: "But what did we do? At the monetary policy, particularly at the last meeting, we said we would try as much as possible to be pro-growth so as to continue to see what can be done to accelerate output, but at the same time put an eye to whatever can be done to rein in inflation.

"And in doing this what did they say? At the last meeting, MPC said we are going to adopt a series of systematic synchronisation of monetary policy variables that will help to rein in inflation and at the same time boost output.

"MPC also encouraged the management to adopt some form of administrative measures to mop up liquidity or to control money supply in the system and in the process rein in inflation by reducing money supply that would help to control inflation while at the same time, because what you would find when you rein in inflation by mopping liqudity is that it becomes constraining but at the same time on the output side.

And what should we be doing? Let us use our development finance tools to boost output by ensuring that liquidity and funding is made available at concessionary rates to employment generating and output stimulating sectors of the economy.

"It is not surprising that we are seeing what we are seeing now. What monetary policy decided we should be doing today is how do we proceed, what are those indicators that led to us having these kinds of results?

"And that was why MPC said let's hold, look at those items - For inflation, continue your administrative measures, on the output side, continue to use your interventions at subsidised interest rates to agriculture, manufacturing, to targeted credit facilities, make sure we are able to stimulate consumption and investment that will ultimately yield results and growth for the economy.

He said indeed, out of the targeted credit facility we have, almost the whole of N300 billion has now been disbursed and monetary policy committee has encouraged the management to increase it even to N400 billion.

"So what does that also mean? More money is going to be made available to households, to small businesses for them to go back to business, which will ultimately yield employment and also grow our economy.

"So, for us, it is not science, when people begin to say they doubt all the numbers the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) is releasing, I think they are speaking from a position of being uninformed about what is happening in the Nigerian economy."

Retains Monetary Parameters

However, the CBN had resolved to retain Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) otherwise known as interest rate at 11.5 per cent.

The MPC also voted to maintain the asymmetric corridor of +100/-700 basis points around the MPR and left the Cash Reserve Ratio at 27.5 per cent and Liquidity Ratio at 30 per cent.

The MPR is the rate at which the CBN lends to commercial banks and often determines the cost of borrowing in the economy.

In arriving at a decision to hold the rates, the CBN governor, said whereas the committee remained overwhelmingly committed to supporting the efforts of the federal government in ensuring full restoration of the productive capacity of the economy, members remained much more focused towards achieving price stability in the short to medium-term.

He pointed out that economic growth could be hampered in an environment of unstable prices adding therefore, that the choice was between loosening the stance of policy to ease credit further or tighten to moderate price development or maintain a hold stance in order to allow previous policy measures continue to permeate the economy while observing global and domestic developments.

Emefiele argued that an expansionary stance of policy could transmit to reduce pricing of the loan portfolios of deposit money banks and result, therefore, in cheaper credit to the real sector of the economy.

He, added, however, that this expected transmission might be constrained by persisting security challenges and infrastructural deficits.

"On the other hand, while a contractionary stance will only address the monetary component of price development, supply side constraints such as the security crisis and infrastructural deficits can only be addressed by policies outside the purview of the central bank.

"A tight stance in the view of members, will also hamper the bank's objectives of providing low cost credit to households, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), agriculture, and other output growth and employment stimulating sectors of the economy," he said.

Recommendations to Fiscal Authority

However, the CBN, while commending government's efforts in combating the headwinds imposed by the pandemic, urged the latter to avoid an entire nationwide lockdown as was experienced in 2020, adding that this will reverse the wholesome gains jointly achieved between the government and the apex bank in response to the outbreak of COVID-19.

He said the MPC carefully assessed the options on direction of policy in the short to medium term and re-appraised current measures by the government to purchase COVID-19 vaccines and the general preparedness of relevant public health agencies to guard against the spread of the mutating strains of the virus.

To this end, the CBN governor said the committee noted the appropriate steps taken by the government to ensure that up to 70 per cent of the populace get vaccinated to drastically drive down the infection rate in the country and hence, sustain economic activities.

He said: "The committee noted the persisting security crisis, especially in major food producing regions of the country and the severe toll on food supply and prices. It noted that inflation had moderated marginally due to the unrelenting effort of the bank in supporting agriculture to boost food supply and prices.

See concluding part on www.thisdaylive.com

MONEY

Polaris Democratising Banking with VULTe

Raheem Akingbolu writes on digitisation in the banking industry and how the recently unveiled VULTe by Polaris Bank will change the game and deepen the bank's penetration in the market place

Few years ago, the debate among stakeholders in the banking industry was centered around whether Nigerians can easily key into the world of digital or not. Like every new innovation, it appeared cumbersome and even those who were positive thought it would take decades before the final switch over. Today, the adaptation to the new regime appears faster than imagined. Digitalisation in the banking industry hasn't only revolutionised banking, it has stepped up competition and enhanced seamless operation. The bottom line is that the banking public is in for a new and better regime.

Within a span of 10 years, major banks in the market that want to stay relevant and play big have all rolled out digitalized innovations.

The beauty of it all is that every day, digitisation is taking the world by storm, with technology and advanced analytics penetrating every industry. In a way, this has rendered traditional banking systems almost obsolete, as BigTech and Fintech companies close in on the banking industry faster than ever. Banks are left with no option but to adopt digital banking in a major way if they hope to compete, and mass digitisation is no longer a choice, but inevitable. The truth is that banks have now embraced digital banking.

Digital banking is not a fixed concept, but a spectrum, and individual banks need to decide where on that spectrum they wish to place themselves. All of this is really a stepping stone to where the real future of banking lies - in platforms. The concept of Banking as A Platform (BAAP) is relatively new but has immense potential. Platform banking would provide a digital marketplace for banking (and perhaps even non-banking) services, increasing the limits of what it can provide. Yet, this objective is not easily achievable, and banks have many factors to consider before undertaking such an endeavour.

As things stand, existing banks are working hard to position themselves from the threat of entry of BigTech and Fintechs, and now they seem to be giving themselves the biggest advantages to stay on top. Digitisation of banking services has successfully eliminated the need for consumers to physically visit a bank branch. In the context of a global pandemic, traditional banking systems have become outmoded. Consumers want efficiency, accessibility, and demand essential banking services in a physically safe manner. This is where Big tech airmeirms and Fintechs are giving traditional banks a run for their money. No wonder, tech titans like Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon are offering banking and financial services products directly to the consumer, at the tap of a button.



Ike

Enters the VULTe Platform…

Few weeks ago, Polaris Bank came out with a bang and unveiled The VULTe, which many analysts have since described as a democratic approach to banking services. With the VULTe, the Polaris brand has thus turned itself to bank of the people, by the people and for the people because of the demystification of the banking process.

As a digital tool, the VULTe is a convenient, easy and quick self-service digital solution from Polaris Bank, which allows users (New and Existing) access to range of banking services which includes; open account & wallet (NGN and USD), airtime & data top-up, fund account, funds transfer, bills payment and other banking operations.

In an apt description of what the bank was out to achieve with the new innovation, the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) of Polaris Bank, Dele Adeyinka, in one sentence explained what differentiates VULTe from any other digital banking platform out there.

According to the CDO, "VULTe is built as a platform; a rendezvous where value providers and value consumers align with payment as a fundamental medium of exchange."

Feedbacks

Few weeks after, the results are rolling out as users of VULTe share their experiences and how the tool is making the brand trend. The beauty of it all is that it takes only two key steps to access VULTe; a potential user's Biometric Verification Number (BVN) and a selfie. The face on the selfie will be automatically compared with the one on the BVN using an advanced cognitive and artificial intelligence facial recognition technology before access is granted.

Part of the offering available in Polaris Bank's VULTe that enables users to "serve themselves the way they want to be served" include: opening of accounts, setting of transaction limits, making multiple fund transfers at a go, verify identity documents, register biometrics, making inquiries and getting speedy responses and applying for instant loans.

A week after the official launch – the product had been made available to some persons, including customers before then, feedback on its use has been largely positive and elevating.

Speaking on the new innovation, Polaris Bank Managing Director, Innocent C Ike, describes it as the brand's bold declaration to hand over control of banking services to its customers and allow them to serve themselves as they would want to be served.

This also aligns with some of the patrons of the brand who have shared their experiences. For instance, Superman Zia Usman. On May 20, 2021 noted; "Deep…rich contents…No fail transactions…user friendly. Earlier, Godwin Ikechukwu Allanah, had on May 19, 2021 commented; "Excellent app. With this app I am not scared of hacking because of the biometric features..It's superb." Another customer, Yinus Hassan on May 20, 2021 noted; "Indeed Vulte app is one of the best mobile banking services, it's very convenient easy to transfer and no need for you to go (to) the bank for setup you can do it easily by yourself and you can even add the transaction limit on your own." This was also the thought of Angor Edet, also on May 19, 2021, who exclaimed, "Wow, this is what you call a banking app. From now henceforth this is how you update an app, the interface totally set my soul on fire. The response time is great, Polaris just made it better."

Through VULTe, Polaris Bank has received positive ratings from customers, with many describing the platform as convenient, user-friendly and secure.

Checks from a wide spectrum of customers in their various testimonials as captured on the Google Play and App store, assigned the digital bank service a five-star rating, stating that their user experience of the Polaris Bank's VULTe was highly positive.

Considering the feedback it has generated in a few weeks, one is not surprised that the promoters of the Polaris brand rolled out the drums to usher in an innovative tool that is poised to deepen the bank's penetration and services. In a way, the conversation it has generated shows that, as Foreman noted, Digital Banking's future is already here. VULTe, as a new entrant in the growing community of Digital Banking solutions in Nigeria, has been created as a convenient, easy and quick self-service digital solution to enable access to banking services via mobile devices or on desktops.

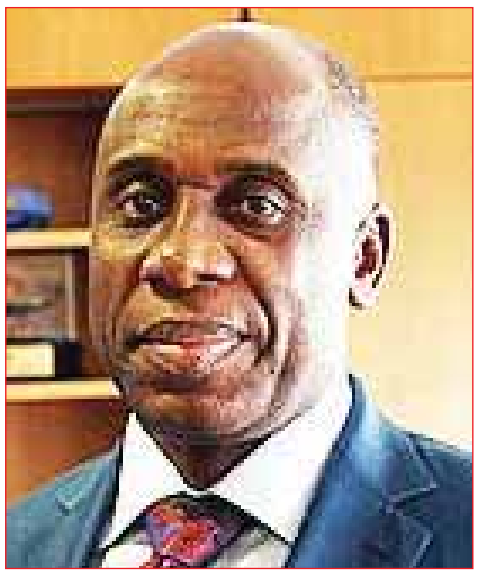
Happening immediately following the announcement of an impressive full year customer deposits growth margin of N56billion, it would seem the launch of VULTe was designed for a singular purpose – to spike shareholder value through the time-honored route of enhanced consumer experience.

Meanwhile, in what looks like a major endorsement for the App, it can now be said to be BAAP embedded as many agencies and Fintech partners are signing on the open banking platform and positioning it to be the best in class, as of today in the digital banking space.

MARITIME

Troubled W'African Waters and New Conversation on Coastal Security

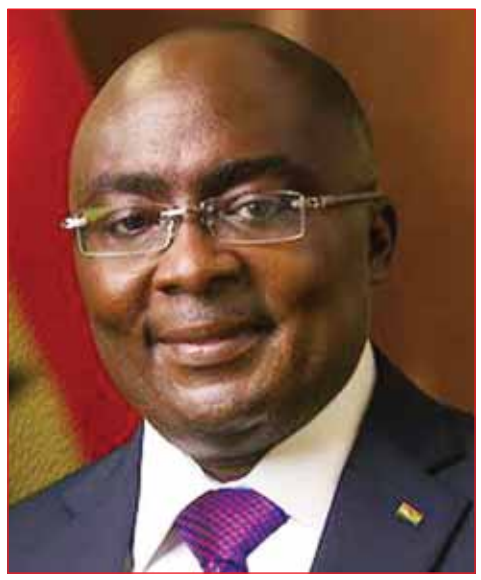
While insecurity is surging on land, even the seas are no longer safe in West Africa. Last year, it was reported that over 95 per cent of all sea kidnappings occurred across the West African waters, in the Gulf of Guinea. The need to safeguard the regional waterways has necessitated a conversation on maritime security, which will hold at the 2nd International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference. **Chris Paul** reports



Ameachi



Jamon



Bawumia

The increasing wave of insecurity on West African Waters and the urgent need for talks on maritime security in region has become an urgent task.

Thankfully, the second edition of International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference (IMDEC) provides opportunities for maritime operators and regulators to air their views, experiences and exchange ideas on how to tackle the trade and economy-disruptive activities by criminals across the region.

Over 15 Chiefs of Navy, Chiefs of Air Staff and 300 international Senior Officials will be hosted by the Ghanaian Navy and Air Force; on July 6-8, in Ghana.

Held in partnership with Ghana Navy and Ghana Air Force, the IMDEC will be graced by the participation of key government leaders including the Vice President of Ghana, Alhaji Mahamudu Bawumia.

Maritime security, in recent times, has become a more important issue in West African region, where attacks on ships and crew jumped at an alarming level, last year, especially, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. This is expected to top the agenda to be deliberated upon by the 15 Chiefs of Navies and Air Forces along with 300 senior officials attending the IMDEC.

Organised by Great Minds Event Management, a global strategic events management organisation that closely works with governments, IMDEC will address key defence and maritime security issues, showcase new technology for the defence sector where multi-million dollars' worth of deals would be negotiated. Participating companies will be demonstrating their best products and services that could equip the naval and air forces and enhance their defence capabilities at sea.

The Gulf of Guinea is a vast and diverse region stretching from Senegal to Angola, covering 6,000 kilometres of coastline. It is an important shipping zone transporting oil and gas, as well as goods to and from central and southern Africa.

Around 1,500 fishing vessels, tankers, and cargo ships navigate its waters at any given day. Piracy, armed robbery at sea, kidnapping of seafarers, illegal fishing, smuggling and trafficking, and transnational organised crime pose a major threat to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and ultimately to the economic development of the entire region.

The Gulf of Guinea saw 84 attacks on ships, with 135 seafarers kidnaped for ransom in 2020, according to the International Maritime Bureau, nearly 50 per cent increase in kidnapping for ransom between 2018 and 2019, and around 10 per cent increase between 2019 and 2020.

The region now accounts for just over 95 per cent of all kidnappings for ransom at sea. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about increased economic hardship resulting in emboldened reliance on illicit, yet lucrative, activities.

According to a 2020 report published by Africa Risk Compliance, issued about piracy attacks, revealed that a total of 147 vessels were attacked in 2020.

The report stated some other alarming figures, noting 149 members of the crew were kidnapped with 27 kidnapped for ransom.

In response, regional Armed Forces are acquiring resources and combining capabilities to effectively address these threats at the 2nd IMDEC, taking place in Ghana.

The three-day conference and exhibition including exclusive site visit will see senior officials discuss and address how to continue tackling the issues of securing the increasingly volatile maritime threats facing Africa's territorial waters.

Actual and attempted piracy attacks in the West African coast increased from 34 per cent to 79 in 2020, up from 59 in 2019; while total of 147 vessels were attacked in 2020 and 149 crew were kidnapped with 27 kidnapped for ransom.

Expressing concerns over the spate of attacks on vessels on West African waterways and the timeliness of the coming conference, the newly-appointed Rear Admiral Issah Adam Yakubu, Chief of Naval Staff, Ghana Navy, said, "It is troubling to know that 95 per cent of all kidnappings at sea in 2020 occurred in the Gulf of Guinea. Regrettably, the actual and attempted attacks in the region also increased by 34 per cent from the 2019 figure of 59 – 79 in the year 2020 despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all of us."

According to the Rear Admiral, these statistics call for urgent and concerted efforts to deal with the menace, stressing, "that is why I Rear Admiral Issah Adam Yakub, Chief of the Naval Staff of Ghana is inviting my colleague chiefs of Navy and coastguards, other law enforcement agencies, experts, industry and all other stakeholders in the maritime domain to meet in Accra."

"I am hopeful that by the end of this conference we can collectively find innovative ways to curb the rise of criminal activities in the Gulf of Guinea for the benefit of our nations and the people who trade and derive their livelihoods from the sea. Great Minds Event Management and my team here in Ghana will ensure strict adherence to all COVID protocols to ensure the safety of all," he concluded.

Commenting on their participation in this edition, Ghana's Chief of the Air Staff, AVM Frank Hanson, said, "For several years the maritime space remains one of the most vital components of our national security and with a coastline of 550 kilometres and an exclusive economic zone of 200 miles, Ghana's maritime space accounts for more than 80 per cent of Ghana's GDP and that impacts positively on our neighbours in the region.

"The proximity of the Gulf of Guinea to Europe and North America for the transportation of low oil further raises its importance in the global supply of energy.

"As you're aware, more than 5.4 million barrels of crude oil are produced from the Gulf of Guinea each year. In recent years, it has also become very clear that the force behind maritime security is air power, certainly it is air power that is very smart, flexible and responsible to provide reach for surface forces to dominate the maritime domain," Hanson enlightened.

He said, "It is therefore not surprising that the key highlights of IMDEC 2021 will feature, for the first time, the role of air power in maritime operations. The strategic objectives of the Ghana Air Force are to redefine the national maritime capability as an economic multiplier to national and sub-regional development. This capability is to connect the maritime domain to strategic economic centers of our sub region. I therefore wish to encourage our neighbours to take advantage of IMDEC 2021.

"The Ghana Air Force works very closely with the Ghana Navy and other international partners to develop an integrated maritime and air operations to cover our territorial waters," he said.

Threatened by this growing insecurity at sea, are tens of billions of dollars in Investments on the West African maritime sector.

By 2020, the African port sector had collectively attracted $50 billion in public and private investments.

This has heralded an emergence of world-class ports in Africa spread out in Morocco, South Africa and Egypt. Tangier Med Port was ranked at position 35 in this year's Lloyd's List report on the world's busiest seaports, rubbing shoulders with renowned ports from developed nations such as the UK and USA.

These investments offer massive business opportunities for contractors, suppliers and technology providers who could get a slice of the defence and maritime spending by participating at the IMDEC.

In this second edition, the regional naval chiefs will be discussing on the theme: maritime security and trade: the nexus between a secure maritime domain in a developed blue economy.

Some of the companies that have confirmed participation at the event include Paramount, Israel Shipyards Ltd, Israel Aerospace Industries, MBDA and Airbus.

They will all be showcasing their latest technologies and services throughout the two-day exhibition.

Similarly, among the Chiefs of Naval Staff and VIPs who confirmed their attendance as guests and speakers at IMDEC include Rear Admiral Nguessan Kouame, Chief of Naval Staff, Cote d'Ivoire Navy; Vice Admiral Awwal Zubairu Gambo, Chief of Naval Staff, Nigeria Navy; Rear Admiral Oumar Wade, Chief of Naval Staff, Senegalese Navy; Rear Admiral Jean Mendoua, Chief of Naval Staff, Cameroon Navy; Rear Admiral Carlos Alfredo Mandungal, Chief of Naval Staff, Guinea Bissau Navy; Rear Admiral Jeffrey S. Spivey, Vice Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet, Royal Navy; Rear Admiral Ben Reynolds, Director of Maritime Headquarters U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa / U.S. 6th Fleet; Captain Pedro Santana, Commander of the Coast Guard, Cape Verde; Captain Philip Juana, Commander, Sierra Leone Navy and Dr. Dieng Abdourahmane (Rtd.Col.), Head Regional Security Division, ECOWAS Commission.

Increased security breach onshore have forced governments of African countries to focus on upgrading the ports and maritime infrastructure and security to combat incidents and strengthen the security of commodities–food, energy and other products that are crucial for the rest of the world.

Port development received extensive consideration from governments, with most of the 38 African nations with coastlines having a port development project in the pipeline or ongoing.

Despite the pandemic, most of these projects were still in operation, although logistical support was hindered by the lockdowns in 2020.

The largest maritime security exhibition and conference in West Africa, the three-day IMDEC conference and exhibition will feature exclusive tours of Ghana's Air and Naval bases and will consist of in-depth walk-throughs of the naval dockyard and air base as well as private vessel tours to further display the advanced capabilities of Ghana's Naval and Air Force fleet.

It will be recalled that Nigerian Navy Increases security presence in the Gulf of Guinea with the inauguration of Obangame 2021.

This involved the deployment of deployed six ships, two tugboats, two helicopters and a Nigerian Air Force ATR42 aircraft by the Nigerian Navy; toward addressing maritime challenges in the Gulf of Guinea.

The Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), Vice Admiral Awwal Gambo, announced the increase of security assets in the region during the inauguration of the 11th Exercise Obangame Express 2021.

Gambo explained that the exercise was an annual multinational maritime exercise borne out of the need for the Gulf of Guinea Navies to work together for regional maritime safety and security.

The inaugurated exercise was held onboard the Nigerian Navy Ship (NNS), THUNDER, at the Naval Dockyard Ltd., in Victoria Island, Lagos.

Flagging off the exercise onboard NNS Thunder, recently, at the Naval Dockyard Limited Victoria Island, Lagos, the Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Awwal Gambo, explained that the exercise was aimed at contributing to the freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Guinea, by strengthening coordination in the fight against insecurity for socioeconomic activities among member states to thrive.

He informed that it would also enhance the collective capabilities of Gulf of Guinea and West African nations to counter sea-based illicit activities. According to him, the exercise was introduced to foster togetherness of regional navies as a result of the huge resources and vast potential being continuously undermined by multifaceted domestic and cross border threats.

"This challenges the dwindling prosperity of member states," he said.

The CNS said that the exercise would present an ample opportunity for the Nigerian Navy to work together with other national and regional navies in the spirit of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

"This code is designed to improve operational readiness, maritime domain awareness, information-sharing practices and tactical interdiction expertise.

The US Consul General, Claire Pierangelo, described maritime security, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, as a common interest to all nations, adding that no fewer than 16 countries shared the same waters.

She stated that the annual sea exercise attested to the strong partnership between US and Nigeria, pointing out that "executing it despite the COVID-19 restrictions was a true testament to the richness and quality of both countries' relationship."

FOCUS

Access Bank: Staying Ahead of the Pack

Oluchi Chibuzor writes that with the recent visit to the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame by the Chief Executive Officer of Access Bank Plc, Herbert Wigwe, the financial institution is positioning itself as the gateway in the continent actualising the objectives of the African Continental Free Trade Area

With the commencement of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement in January this year, stakeholders have continued to list the benefits to businesses in the continent.

The AfCFTA agreement is expected to create the largest free trade area in the world measured by the number of countries participating.

The pact connects 1.3 billion people across 55 countries with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) valued at $3.4 trillion. It has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty, but achieving its full potential will depend on putting in place significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures.

In fact, it is expected that full implementation of AfCFTA would reshape markets and economies across the region and boost output in the services, manufacturing and natural resources sectors.

According to the World Bank, as the global economy continues to face the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the creation of the vast AfCFTA regional market is a major opportunity to help African countries diversify their exports, accelerate growth, and attract foreign direct investment.

The multilateral institution noted that AfCFTA would be a huge step forward for Africa, demonstrating to the world that it is emerging as a leader on the global trade agenda.

"The African Continental Free Trade Area has the potential to increase employment opportunities and incomes, helping to expand opportunities for all Africans. The AfCFTA is expected to lift around 68 million people out of moderate poverty and make African countries more competitive.

"But successful implementation will be key, including careful monitoring of impacts on all workers—women and men, skilled and unskilled—across all countries and sectors, ensuring the agreement's full benefit," the bank added.

In addition, the AfCFTA represents a major opportunity for countries to boost growth, reduce poverty, and broaden economic inclusion as its implementation is expected to lift 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty and boost the incomes of nearly 68 million others who live on less than $5.50 a day; increase Africa's exports by $560 billion, mostly in manufacturing; and spur larger wage gains for women (10.5 percent) than for men (9.9 percent), among others.

However, analysts have stressed that the success of AfCFTA will rely heavily on Africa's financial services industry's ability to serve as the brain of the liberalisation process.

The analysts noted that for Nigeria, with most Tier-1 banks already operating in many African countries and continually expanding, it gives them an edge over their counterparts in other African countries.

They added that with the increase in trade that would spur economic activities and increased lending, many banks are already in a liquid position to take advantage of AfCTA.

To a former President of the Chartered Institute of Bankers (CIBN), Mr. Uche Olowu, Nigerian banks with more trade will be in a better position to increase lending to the real sector which in turn will spur economic activities.

He said: "Banks are ready especially as banks have procured good lines that would support trading and supporting manufacturers, exporters, Nigerians products, which would thereby jumpstart economic activities.

"Nigerian banks are liquid and are prepared to lend out to those channels and outlets to serious manufacturers because it poses great opportunities for Nigerian banks and the Nigerian economy.

"Banks are there to intermediate and they have the information, data and all that it takes to support Nigerian businesses that are serious and credit worthy."

Also, the President of Risk Management Association of Nigeria, (RIMAN) Mr. Magnus Nnoka, noted that Nigerian banks are well capitalised and have outlets across Africa which put them at an advantage.



Managing Director, Access Bank Plc , Mr Herbert Wigwe and Rwanda's President, Mr Paul Kagame in Kigali recently during a courtesy visit to the President by Wigwe, recently

Nnoka said: "We are amongst the most prepared country from the financial services point of view. Apart from a few banks in Egypt and South Africa, Nigerian banks are reasonably capitalised compared to other African countries."

According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international economic organisations, the continent's financial services sector should take a lead role in providing the major tools necessary to implement robust trade agreements.

Banks must position themselves to lead the way under this agreement and also introduce innovations and new technologies to adapt to the diversifications which will result from the agreement.

This opportunity will provide competition within the industry and therefore banks that position themselves appropriately, will benefit enormously.

This clearly must have informed the recent aggressive drive for continental expansion by Nigeria's Access Bank Plc, with Herbert Wigwe as the driving force.

The bank chief executive officer recently paid a working visit to the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, in his quest to further expand the financial institution's presence in the continent.

Access Bank recently unfolded plans to expand to more African countries as part of a strategy to support trade and finance in the continent and take advantage of the AfCFTA.

According to Wigwe, across Africa, there is an opportunity for the bank to expand to high-potential markets, leveraging the benefits of AfCFTA.

He said AfCFTA, among other benefits, would expand intra-Africa trade and provide real opportunities for Africa.

He stated that the plan is for the bank to establish its presence in 22 African countries so as to diversify its earnings and take advantage of growth opportunities in the continent.

According to him, Africa has enormous potential and there are opportunities for an African bank that is well run, that understands compliance and has the capacity to support trade and the right technology infrastructure to support payments and remittances, without taking incremental risks.

"We believe that we are best positioned to basically do all of that. Our focus is to become an aggregator in Africa and we are building a global payment gateway and providing trade finance support and correspondent banking across the continent. We are focusing on the key markets.

"The approach would always be that in the country we wish to go to, that we have the right skills. We would not just be a drop in the country in which we are present, we would make sure that we have an impactful presence in each of the major countries in which we are present.

"In doing this, we are also mindful of the country we are going to so as to make sure that it is of benefit to the bank. As we do this, we are working with our friends and partners.

"We are diversifying our earnings away from volatile markets as well and we are orchestrating our operations from the global payments gateway and ensuring that using Access Bank UK, providing corresponding services from digital platforms, the overall profitability of our franchise," he explained.

Commenting further, on AfCFTA, he said the bank would use its digital framework to benefit from the continental agreement.

"Coming to Nigeria, we think we need to continue to entrench ourselves in the local market because there is still so much work to be done.

"So, we are doing everything possible to satisfy our customers and also to ensure that our channels are adequately secured. We are also ensuring that our staff are very efficient," the CEO said.

In line with its expansion drive, Access Bank in April entered into a definitive and binding agreement with ABC Holdings Limited to acquire 78.15 per cent shareholding in the African Banking Corporation of Botswana Limited (BancABC Botswana).

The transaction, which is subject to regulatory approvals and customary conditions precedent, is expected to close before the end of this quarter.

ABC Holdings is a subsidiary of London Stock Exchange listed group – Atlas Mara Limited.

Bostwana is renowned for its quality sovereign credit rating and stability. Access Bank's market entry is expected to further solidify its strategy as, "a strong banking partner in key verticals across retail and corporate banking, including especially supporting trade in payments across southern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly."

Commenting on the deal, Wigwe, said: "We remain committed to a disciplined and thoughtful expansion strategy in Africa, which we believe will create strong, sustainable returns for our shareholders and stakeholders at large, over the medium and long-term.

"The establishment of Access Bank through this acquisition in the Republic of Botswana will position the bank to deliver a more complete set of banking solutions to its clients active in and across the SADC and COMESA regions.

"This transaction complements our recent strategic growth acquisitions in South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique. We are building a bank of the future that Africans across Africa and the world would be proud of and look forward to welcoming the employees, customers and other stakeholders of BancABC Botswana to Access Bank."

In 2018, the bank launched its 'Africa's Gateway to the World' campaign – a strategic initiative which aims to promote 'access to finance' in Africa and beyond. It started this campaign by leveraging technology to offer its consumers new products. An example was its partnership with Remita, which has offered PayDay loans to over five million external customers. The product was available on the web, through the bank's USSD code, via ATMs, Access Mobile, WhatsApp Banking, and QuickBucks – its instant loan disbursal application.

Access Bank has also continued to strengthen its digital technology to propel both its sustainability targets and its African gateway strategic drive.

This was evident in the bank's partnership with the Africa Fintech Foundry (AFF), aimed at nurturing the next generation of cutting-edge financial-technology firms.

Equally, Access Bank has been driving its revenue growth through retail expansion, which has grown consistently across all income lines, driven by a strong focus on consumer lending, payments and remittances, digitalisation of customer journeys, and customer acquisition at scale

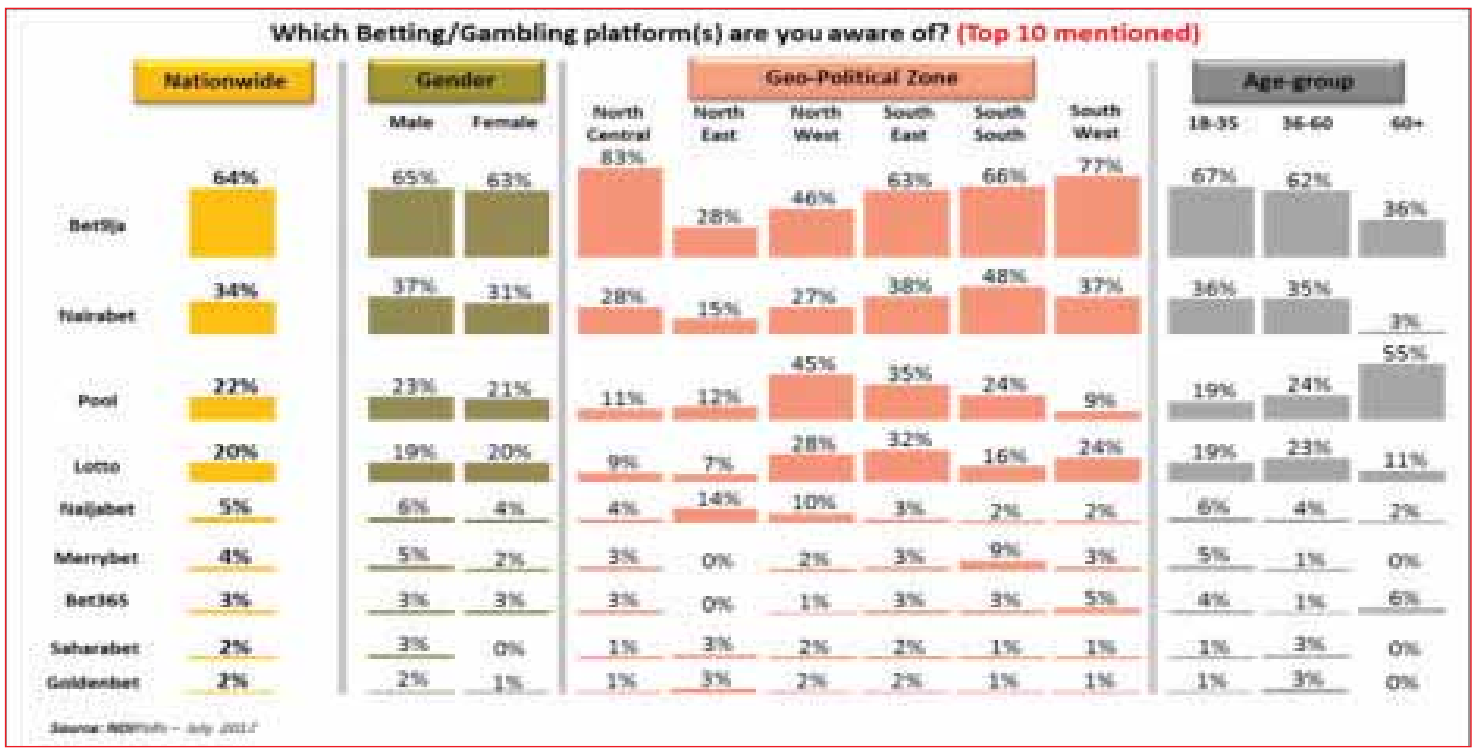
It has also maintained strong capital levels despite investments for growth and has accumulated capital over time.

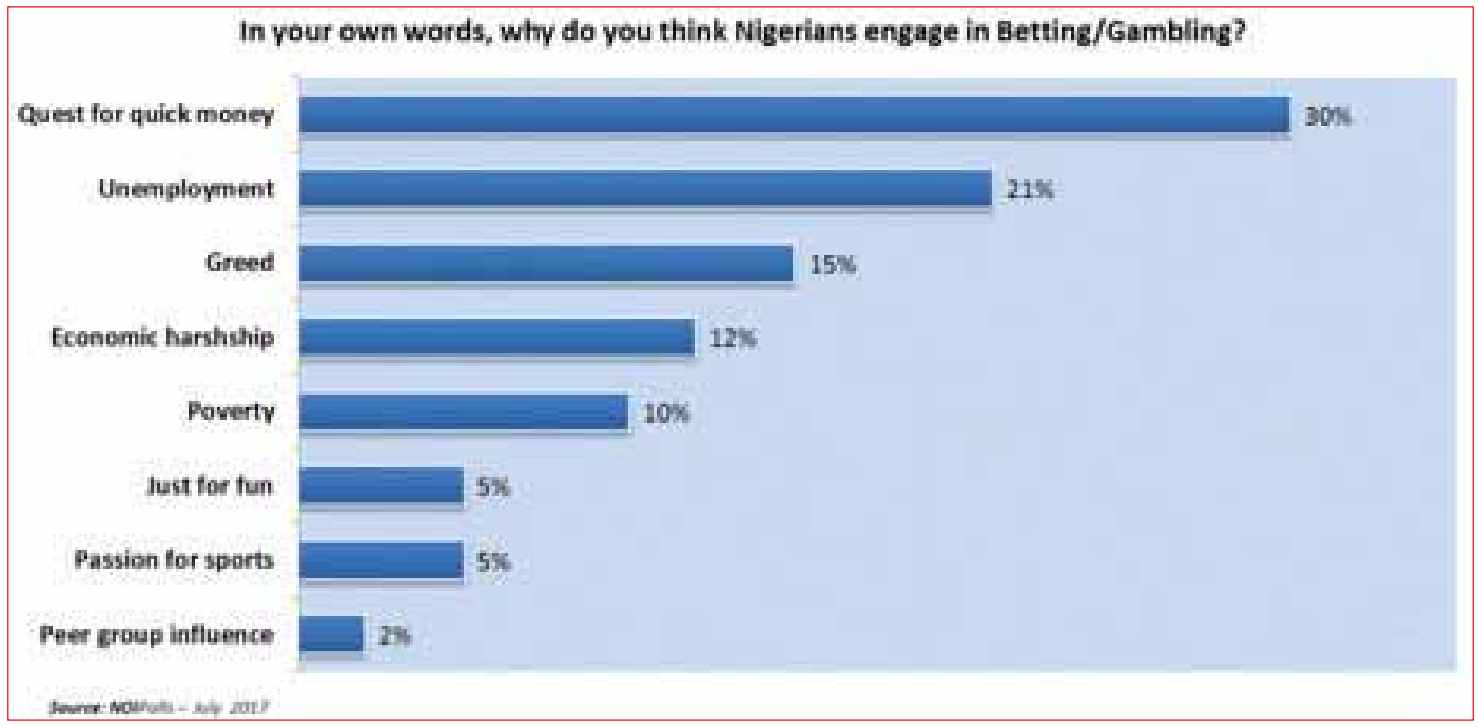
Therefore, as one of Africa's most capitalised banks as well as its expanding footprints and digital platforms, Access Bank has effectively positioned itsslf as one of the leading financial institutions in the continent to reap from the new continental deal.

BUSINESS OUTSIDER

The Business of Gaming : A Nuanced Goldmine

Tunji Adegbite





In Nigeria, a survey by NOI Polls showed that the young population (18-35) has a stronger online betting preference. The most popular online betting activity being sports betting, and as a football-loving nation, football remains one of the most popular sports betting options. However, as the age range goes up, there is more awareness in both pools and lotto.

The allusion of Pools and Lotto to be the "poor man's stock exchange" might hold given that investment and gaming have similar characteristics, yet both differ. Many of the pool/lotto participants are not as wealthy as those who manage investment portfolios. These pool/lotto participants are usually those looking for ways to make fast windfall gains, as depicted by the survey's reasons people participate in gambling.

Gaming activities in Nigeria have skyrocketed mainly due to socioeconomic reasons. Today, betting shops are littered across the country. On campuses, libraries, newsstands, and everywhere you can think of, little bet slips are littered on the floors dashed like the hopes of the persons that owned them before.

The poor are not the only demography participating in gaming. With the increasing proliferation of technology, globalisation, and particularly internet access, the gaming demography has shifted to more educated and wealthier populations in casinos (offline or online), online sports betting, etc. Technology has made it such that it is easier to place bets from the confines of your room; as gaming remains unpopular, there exist many closet gamblers who enjoy the privacy technology offers them to gamble anonymously. Also, an increase in the media's reach has led to advertisements getting to a broader audience whose risk appetite has already been shaped by the prevailing economic conditions.

Gambling exists on a continuum. So, irrespective of risk tolerance, some people will never gamble, some will gamble sparingly, others are compulsive gamblers and have been called various names in sociological and psychological texts- problem gamblers, addicted gamblers, gambling deviants, etc. The problem arising from those on this end of the continuum are numerous. Researchers have inextricably linked gambling to an increase in theft. Some of the criminal activities are perpetrated by gamblers, others by miscreants taking advantage of the influx of gamblers arriving in gaming/casino hotspots. On the other hand, compulsive gamblers go to the extent of borrowing and increasing family indebtedness—a rising public health concern.

Many jurisdictions either ban gaming or heavily control it by licensing the operators. The variances in the unilateral regulations generally lead to "gaming tourism" and illegal gaming in the areas where it is not allowed. The government's involvement via regulation and taxation has led to a close nexus between some governments and gaming companies, especially where it provides significant government revenue, for example, Monaco and Las Vegas.

Establishing a business in this industry is very capital intensive, although lucrative because the returns on investment are guaranteed, as "the house always wins" via commissions, losses, etc.

Companies in this sector may have a multiplier effect on the economy as they create jobs and income for people who manage these outfits. Starting a betting shop has a low entry barrier requiring just thermal printers, A4 printer, fixtures board, selling point cubicle, computer (desktop or laptop), and a generator. There are opportunities for technical support systems to partner with local operators in the country by providing IT services, virtual games, gaming software, etc., to cater to the growing demand in this sector adequately. The adoption of blockchain technology and the emergence of cryptocurrency is disrupting the gaming industry. Cryptocurrencies have gradually become popular in casinos across Europe, used either as the primary payment system or as an alternative to fiat-based systems. This trend would cater more to the needs of gaming tourists and the online community as it would cushion the costs of converting and withdrawing foreign currency.

With Nigerians reportedly spending over N730 billion annually — N2 billion daily on sports betting, the sector remains a goldmine of opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs though the irony is that bankruptcy risks to their consumers remains extremely high.

• Tunji Adegbite is a thought leader in Strategy and Supply Chain, who has worked with leading organisations like PwC and an IOC. He also founded Naspire, a business research platform using business insights to help entrepreneurs and professionals succeed in Africa. He can be reached via tunji@naspire.com

WOMEN ENTERPRENEURS

DUPE KILLA-KAFIDIPE

Running Business in Nigeria, Not for the Faint-hearted

Dupe Killa-Kafidipe is the founder of Platinum Fisheries, which has the ultimate vision to help alleviate food scarcity and directly address urgent social, environmental, and other sustainability issues. For three years, Killa-Kafidipe was the Chief Strategy Officer at The North East Children's Trust (NECT), a not for-profit organisation that supports children orphaned by terrorism, with care bundles including health, nutrition, shelter, counselling, education, recreation, and livelihood skills. She had prior roles in process re-engineering, change management, aviation management and business consulting. Her educational qualification include executive stints at Harvard-IESE and the China-Europe International Business School (CEIBS). A child/women advocate and change agent, Killa-Kafidipe explains to **Oyinlola Sale** how she has sustained Platinum Fisheries in the midst of an unstable economy

Agriculture is the next oil and yet the economy of Nigeria is not dependent on it. As a stakeholder in that sector, tell us how Platinum Fisheries can make an impact on Nigeria's economy?

Platinum Fisheries' goal is not just to produce seafood, but to produce healthy seafood using ethical aqua cultural methods to address urgent problems of increasing shortage of animal protein, Nigeria's snowballing population and the alarming incursions into our fragile rivers and ultimately, ocean. This way, Platinum Fisheries' focus is primarily on proximate issues that affect a large swathe of Nigerians significantly. Our business solution, whilst generating decent financial yield, also stimulates productivity and economic buoyancy throughout related value chains to the point where there is visible economic impact on a national level.

Platinum Fisheries will be celebrating its fifth anniversary this June. How did you achieve such a milestone in an unstable economy?

I do not want to be near-cliché about this, but it has been God all the way, Don't take my word for it in a rush - check my trajectory to Platinum Fisheries: in all the opportunities I have had to learn and grow cross-industry/multidisciplinary skills; in all the people one has been blessed with (from friends and family to mentors and mentees, from amazing team members and critics to forerunners in the different industries one has worked in), I believe there has been an unseen, but definite influence that has made these discrete events seem like an intentional and even linear chain of events leading me to this journey with Platinum Fisheries. So, if I were to ascribe the journey to just one factor, that would be the God-factor.

In what way has Platinum Fisheries helped in alleviating food scarcity in Nigeria?

The hydra-headed problems of logistics, preservation and sub-optimised value chains in the agricultural and related food-processing sectors are well-documented. By the end of this year, the bouquet of products and services offered by Platinum Fisheries will include production and sales of fish and other seafood, farm share programmes, commercial operation of hatcheries, cold store systems, kiln operations, feed mill operations, fish farming training institute and agritourism. So essentially, at least 90% of our operations target yields maximisation and optimising value chains – all the way from live seafood to smoked and frozen fish, there is minimal wastage which directly converts to reducing food scarcity in Nigeria. I feel this a philosophy companies and their decision-makers may consider adopting or adapting. A creative, sustainable and concerted focus on food scarcity alleviation must now urgently be adopted by all.

What are the important things to note to start up a fisheries business?



Killa-Kafidipe

In fish farming, we like to say that the tripod factors of wholesome seedlings (i.e. fish at their earliest stage), good feed and good farm practice (including water/waste management) make for a good fisheries/seafood business. I can confirm that as broad outlines go, this is correct. However, there is a world of other factors involved. Apart from the generic factors required for any business (a clear vision, efficient planning, an excellent team, premium leadership, risk management, marketing and customer relationship management), there are other specialised/technical factors relating to efficient operations, processes and of course, a specific, technical competitive edge. In summary, a successful fisheries business will tick most boxes for any generic business and for industry-specific businesses.

Entrepreneurs learnt a lot of life lessons during this pandemic, so in what way did it restructure your mode of operation?

Build resilience and flexibility into your business when you do not have to. You will later thank yourself for this over and over again. From deploying technology (to manage operations, finances, customer relations engagement and management) to mindfully building and training your team and last, but not least planning for the proverbial rainy day or year (as 2020 came to be known due to the pandemic), the biggest validation for us at Platinum Fisheries was to see our investments in robust, resilient, but agile systems/structures really pay off and keep the business afloat during the pandemic. We are now considering strategies that would further build on that.

The unemployment rate keeps rising in the country and the agricultural sector has many opportunities that have not been tapped, how has your organisation helped in encouraging the youths to take up roles in the agricultural sector?

We do this in different ways. The average team member's age at Platinum Fisheries is 28 years. Every job opening or outsourced service is offered first to a local youth provider before any other provider. We do the same with regards to procurement. Ultimately our training institute will be designed with youths in focus. In addition to that, our tours and exhibition service lines targeting school-age children aims to stoke their interest in aquaculture very early in life. This hopefully will translate to proactive engagement as they come of age and positively affect employment rates. Finally, all our CSR commitments are pro-youth and focus on improved employment rates.

How has it been like, in terms of running a fishery business in Nigeria?

In summary – it has been a bit of a roller-coaster ride. Dizzying highs, frightening lows, but holding on and making decent progress has been all the more fulfilling and worthwhile because of it. We have had national policy changes that favoured us, side-by-side with policy changes that nearly broke us. There have been windfalls and droughts. And of course, there was the pandemic and we are still dealing with the fallouts of that. Running a business in Nigeria for a day is not for the faint-hearted. This is why we are genuinely grateful and honoured to not just be here, but also on an upward trajectory.

Is this business capital intensive? How did you manage to finance Platinum Fisheries throughout the years?

If you want to run the business from your garden or backyard with a target of say, a maximum of 500kg or units per annum, then the capital outlay can be modest. However if your projection is anything from 50,000kg per annum, expectedly the figures get serious here. Any position between these two reference points are valid depending on the resources available to you. For us at Platinum Fisheries, we started modestly and gradually grew. Funding was and still is from bootstrapping.

Running a business comes with challenges that might be road blocks, have you come across a difficult time and how did you overcome it?

The beauty (and to be candid, sometimes horror) of running a business is that you have to keep replicating what went well and eliminating what has not gone so well. It would be disingenuous to imagine we have struggled from time to time. What I do to overcome setbacks caused by self or others is to fully understand what went wrong, why it did and what could have been done differently. Most times, it pays to share the big picture of difficult times with team members. They are actually the stakeholders closest to the business and arguably have the greatest influence, even if it is indirectly. Taking responsibility (even if is only because you are the leader) is critical and exemplary. These are some of the ways and attitudes that have helped us forged a way through extremely difficult times.

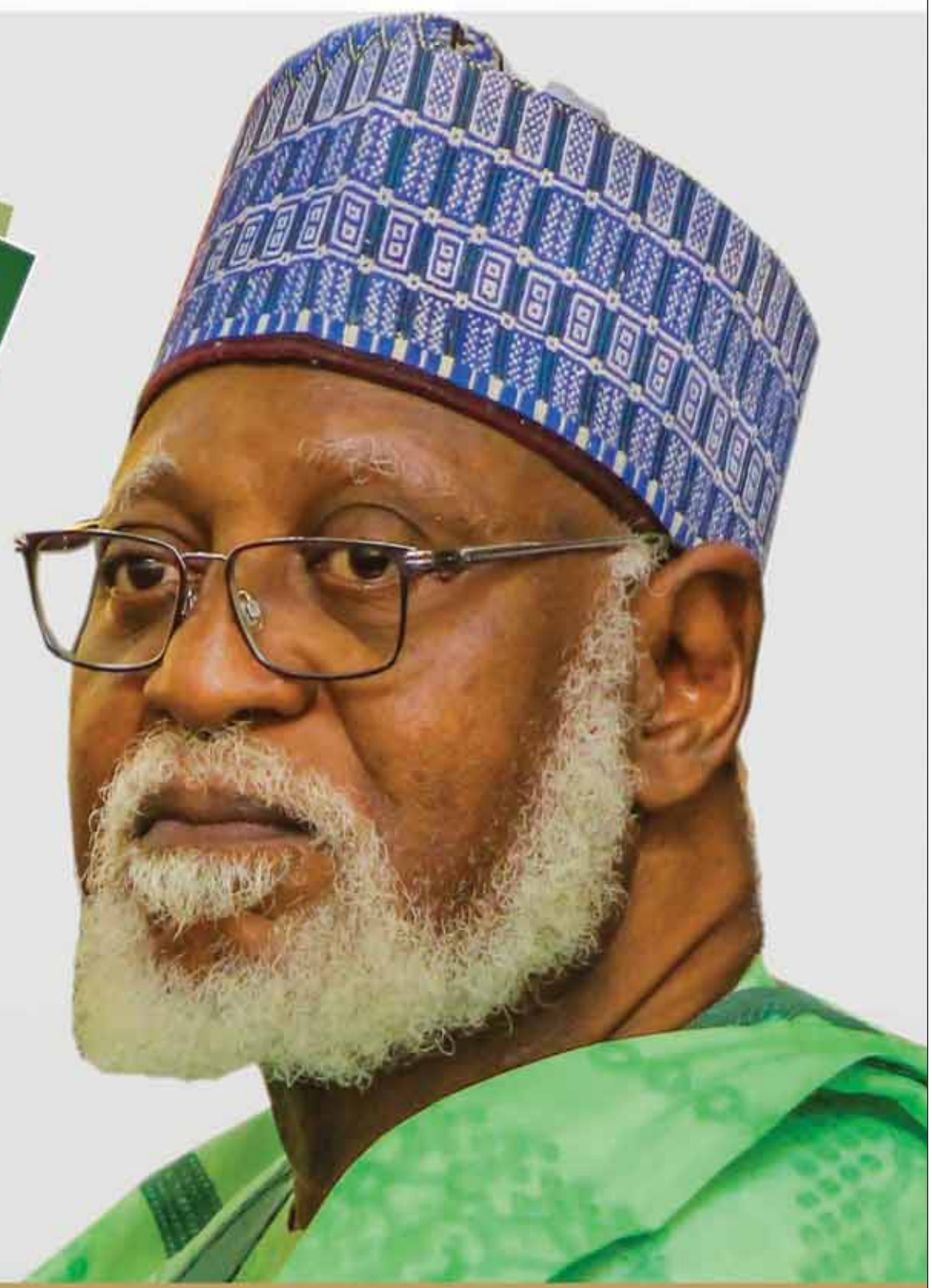
So what makes Platinum Fisheries to stand out in the midst of its competitors?

Our mission at Platinum Fisheries goes beyond selling products and rendering services for a profit. That immediately sets up apart from the rest. Our methods are sustainability-driven with a commitment to ensuring we do not engage in any activity that further degrades the environment. This is a unique side to our business. We are fully committed to the people-over-profit ethos – be it in product design, human capital management or ultimate vision to supply affordable and healthy seafood.

GOVERNMENT OF ENUGU STATE OF NIGERIA

Lion Building, Independence Layout, Enugu

79
Hearty
CHEERS



His Excellency

General Abdulsalami Abubakar (Rtd.) GCFR

Former Head of State
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Rt. Hon. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi

Governor, Enugu State

ENUGU STATE IS IN THE HANDS OF GOD.

TRIBUTE

60 Gun-salute to the Literary General

Louis Odion



Omatseye

Back in the 90s, we used to time each of his literary parturitions, the way a sprinter's dash on the track to the finish-line is scored. The digital age hadn't yet fully dawned in newsrooms in this corner of the earth then. So, it was still largely an intense communion between the pen and "offcuts" (writing sheets improvised from stumps of newsprint reel).

From crafting often uniquely creative intro to the final word, it never used to take Sam Omatseye more than a fleeting moment to consummate, say, a great column or pithy analysis for Concord titles.

"So, timekeeper," he would inquire convivially, facing me in the small office that sheltered Concord's Politics Desk as the lady typist took the last page, "Did I miss?"

"On target!," I would exclaim, laughing with adulating thumb-up.

Of course, the stop-watch never exceeded thirty or forty minutes for Sam to churn out a masterpiece of between 1,000 and 1,200 words. A feat around which his fame had partly been built within the Concord family. The other half being the vigour of his thought and the charm of his language — lyrical, even laconic. His prodigious knowledge is undoubtedly reflected in his uncannily relentless facility to lead and buffet readers with ideas and quotations from great thinkers in history.

In inter-personal conversations, no less commanding is Sam's ability to recite copious portions of the Holy Bible with the seamless ease of a computer that would fill even a seasoned Pentecostal pastor with envy. A skill matched equally by an adroitness at recalling, off-hand, long passages from literary classics. And then his bonhomie accentuated by deep-set eyes and an easy throaty laughter that unfurls remarkably immaculate full dentition.

Looking back, what a great fraternity we built at Concord, bonded by a spirit that turned office to family. Led by Mr. Tunji Bello (presently Lagos Commissioner for Environment and Water Resources), the clan included Victor Ifijeh, Kayode Komolafe, Segun Adeniyi, Waheed Odusile, Yomi Idowu, Jonas Agwu, Abdulwarees Solanke, Gboyega Amonboye, Goke Odeyinka, Jill Agbiliazau-Okeke among others. (More elaboration on this in a forthcoming 300-page book devoted to Tunji Bello's Diamond Jubilee.)

A bard of crisp imagery, withering wit and sometimes subversive metaphor, Sam would, for instance, characterize Segun Adeniyi and I as "passion versus prose" in his reading of the distinction between our respective creative temperaments.

Almost three decades later, it is gratifying to note that Sam's energy has not waned. In fact, it will be no exaggeration to say his muse has since ramified into a Trojan of sorts, straddling Nigeria's literary space. As he turns 60 on June 15, there can, therefore, be no better time to pause and salute this sterling ambassador of the letters.

Indeed, in Nigeria's contemporary artistic firmament, very few literary avians could be said to soar close, let alone higher than Sam. In the simultaneous expression of multiple art forms, he obviously engages our space today with peerless virtuosity. Name it: from journalistic exertion of column-writing (In-Touch in The Nation) and show-hosting (TVC); to churning out, with prodigious frequency, critically acclaimed works of poetry, drama and prose.

For instance, since 2006, he has penned the widely acclaimed column weekly without a single break. And as his regular readers would attest, an encounter with Sam through the written words remains an enchanting voyage around art, history, philosophy and political thought.

With such remarkable testimonial in industry, Sam can then be said to be living out, even if symbolically, his own precept against, for instance, sloth in the civic space. Indeed, he demonstrates that his critical spirit over the years as a columnist is not hypocrisy. That he, by no means, is not an armchair critic. Through the power of personal example, he is thus able to rise to the very high standards he chooses to hold those in leadership perches as a public intellectual. It can then be understood why, after several awards in punditry, the nation's custodian of academic tradition, the Nigerian Academy of Letters, finally considered Sam worthy to be inducted into its hall of fame as an honorary fellow in 2018. (Co-awardees included Dr. Yemi Ogunbiyi, Pro Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, and Segun Adeniyi, popular author and columnist). Next was a formal acknowledgement by the Nigerian state of Sam's prodigious talent last year with his investiture with the National Productivity Award by the Federal Ministry of Labour at a solemn ceremony in Abuja.

However, this is not a mission to interrogate Sam's art, but extoll his humanity — a unique convergence of the values of decency, loyalty and generosity. In transcendental terms, talent, it bears restating, is meaningless without a character defined by higher personal virtues.

You may not agree with him all the time, but what can never be faulted his sincerity of purpose and the restless quest for the common good. Sure, there is never going to be a consensus on the best road to travel or policy option to make in the stated pursuit of the public cause. Such critical contestation will, of course, always be driven and defined by the values we share individually or by which ideological aperture we view civil engagements.

However, at a time when championing of sectional agenda seems increasingly glorified and entrepreneurs of hate scramble for visibility, one point that is beyond dispute is that Sam sticks to a different dialectics which rather view the nation's contemporary existential crisis through starkly distinct lens of the good Nigerian against the bad Nigerian. Like every conscientious artist, Sam remains unabashedly an advocate of the vulnerable and the voiceless in the ensuing dialectical struggle.

In identifying suspects or classifying culprits, his own objective yardstick is, therefore, social justice, regardless of tongue or faith. Against the backcloth of a rising call for the annulment of the national union, there can be no mistaking the persistently conciliatory standpoint of this gangling teetotaler from Niger Delta married to a Yoruba lady (from Ido-Ani in Ondo State), fluent in Yoruba, based in Lagos and whose circle of friends and allies cuts across all ethnic categories.

It is a perhaps a measure of his consistency of character that prominent among the company he keeps or would be found are still the same folks with whom he associated decades ago. Indeed, any audit of Sam's engagement in the past three decades will also show an unfailing fidelity to progressive ideals and the fierce defense of the common good.

The goodwill that fetches, it would seem, saved him in the dire hour of need in the dark days of Sani Abacha. On the fateful night he was to depart to the United States in 1997 to begin a one-year Alfred Friendly Fellowship, a little drama ensued at Muritala International Airport, Lagos. It was the harrowing season when critical voices were either in graves, gulag or exile. Being a prominent Concord journalist, Abacha's roving goons easily spotted him in the crowd in the departure lounge and brusquely asked him to step out of the queue before clamping him in an improvised detention around.

While the state agents later stepped away to a quiet place apparently to consult their masters on what to do with a "big catch", a conscientious officer from another branch of the security service who had monitored the proceedings from a distance and would rather identify and sympathize with those courageous enough to stand up to the rampaging military dictatorship, miraculously came to Sam's rescue. Quickly, he whisked him through the remaining security cordons to his seat on the waiting aircraft which door was firmly locked almost immediately for take-off!

So, given that close shave, Sam was forced to remain in exile at the end of his fellowship at Denver, Colorado. Rather than being intimidated, he only intensified his sorties from exile against the military in form of critical essays published regularly in Concord titles which by now had become the main opposition publication in Nigeria.

But, overall, regardless of his habitual retail of lofty ideas with sometimes fierce words, the essential Sam is soft at heart, almost childlike in spirit. This accustomed innocence or instinctive trust has however often predisposed him to be easy target for traitors or emotional blackmailers. I dare say this as someone with intimate association with him in almost three decades, first as junior professional colleague and eventually a friend close enough to be considered a brother.

In the office environment, Sam certainly lacked the guile that many others would traffick in — that cold-heartedness to knife colleagues in the back, if only to rise rapidly on the ladder or gain favour. His mirth is genuine, not to be confused with the saccharin laughter of the treacherous who, as the Yoruba say, will conceal blood on the tongue and spit out phlegm.

On a personal note, it took the exile years for me to appreciate, in more intimate terms, two of Sam's defining qualities — a sense of solidarity and loyalty on the one hand and material generosity on the other. When Sun newspapers started in 2003 and I became the pioneer editor of the Sunday title, he put at my disposal the totality of his professional support, offering invaluable editorial advice. To ensure I succeeded, he began to write a weekly column for us and became our resourceful, omni-present "special contributor" from US, never failing to file rich human-angle stories and analyses every week.

Until his final return to Nigeria in 2006 to take up an appointment as Chairman of The Nation editorial board, I doubled as Sam's literary agent locally. I attest that all his earnings by way of honoraria for newspaper writings and academic papers were given out as charity to people, sometimes total strangers whose pain or misery he merely read or heard about.

At a reception hosted in Lagos by Benita Obaze of Bevista in 2013 to mark my 40th birthday, Sam accepted without hesitation to be co-master of ceremonies, not minding the wide age gap between us.

Such is his power to give his all for joy and upliftment of others.

—Louis Odion is the Senior Technical Assistant on Media to the President.

PERSPECTIVE

Yahaya Bello's Presidential Ambition: Fact or Farce

Sadiq Amoboye

Not a few were surprised when the calls for Kogi State Governor, Yahaya Bello, to declare his interest to run in the 2023 presidential elections began to gain momentum. Although, feelers had indicated that the controversial governor had been preparing underground to take the shot, for the first time, he indicated his ambition on prime time TV.

In the typical Nigerian politician's roundabout way of making such announcements, Bello said, "Nigerians, the youth and women, including very objective elite, are asking me to run for president in 2023. My answer will be in affirmative in a little time from now".

He highlighted the need to have a crop of leaders with capacity, who could get the job done and unify the country.

"I think they are seeing something in me, that they are asking me to come and unite and fix this country," he said.

On restructuring, the 45-year-old politician gave his personal definition of restructuring, saying, "Let's restructure and allow the younger generation take over the leadership of this country."

From the above statements, it is clear that Bello has identified two clear advantages he might have over the present crop of politicians being speculated as having in interest such as Nasir el-Rufai, Aminu Tambuwal, Anikulapo Abubakar, Kayode Fayemi and the rest.

One is that he is relatively young at 45 and might command a significant appeal among the youth, and secondly, he comes from Kogi State, which is effectively in the middle belt and is not particularly involved in the raging contest over zoning between the core northern politicians and the southern power brokers, who insist on being rewarded for facilitating Muhammadu Buhari's emergence as president in 2015 despite losing three times earlier.

Bello is apparently putting himself forward as a bridge builder and uniting factor of sorts at a time when tensions over the Buhari-led government's perceived tacit leanings towards a perceived northern agenda with the herdsmen crisis, political



Bello

appointments, economic downturn and general hardships being experienced by citizens. These are in addition to ominous separatist agitations in the South, marking down the administration.

While there is a general feeling that for Nigeria to progress, there needs to be a marked departure from a past dominated by the so called analogue leaders, Bello seeks to offer some freshness but his main challenge will be how to demonstrate that he is the right candidate.

Certainly, it will be difficult to dismiss him as a non starter in the face of some of the big wigs emerging as the contest gains traction. Bello is a sitting Governor running a second term, which shows he can win elections; members of his camp dominate the state's Senate and House of Representatives seats in the National Assembly as well as the State Assembly.

He has dealt squarely with his biggest political foe, Senator Dino Melaye, and the fear of Bello is the beginning of wisdom in Kogi politics. While some might criticize his methods and style as being brash and abrasive in turn, Bello has had his way so far.

He is a staunch ally of President Buhari and has demonstrated a knack for inserting himself in national discourse in turn even in controversial circumstances, much more so with his stance on Covid-19, which he insists does not exist, and his opposition to vaccination, citing the unfortunate outcome of a mass polio vaccination programme in Kano State many years earlier.

Despite the lack of scientific evidence to back his claims, Bello seems to have a large following among the COVID-19 deniers within the Nigerian populace, especially the lower classes, who believe it affects only the rich and wealthy.

The relatively low infection and death rates in Nigeria despite a mass failure to adhere to globally accepted safety measures reinforces this notion. And what could be more in ensuring that Bello gets a soft landing than the highly influential leader of one of the world's largest churches, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Enoch Adeboye, suggesting during a recent visit to the state that the Kogi governor was a man of faith for maintaining his controversial stance on COVID-19 even when the official church position endorsed safety and vaccination.

Bello certainly knows a thing or two about optics as that visit could subtly open an opportunity for him, being a Muslim, to garner Christian votes when it matters down the line.

Regardless, Bello's perception among the elite would be mixed even if he manages to garner grassroots appeal. For one, he has clashed with Labour unions over wages while scoring point in areas of security, health, education and some infrastructure, so the verdict on his performance in office is bound to be mixed, like others.

What could work for him is if the bigger gladiators within the ruling All Progressives Congress inflict mortal injuries on themselves as they battle to retain control amid the looming zoning imbroglio, Bello could emerge as a compromise candidate with appeal to both the north and the south.

—Sadiq Amoboye writes from Owo, Ondo State.

Transparency Under Current Administration of the NNPC

Divine C. Jude-Okeke

It has become apparent that resource rich and resource dependent countries could significantly benefit from the effective management or governance of petroleum re-sources in achieving economic growth and mitigating the resource curse. In this regard, transparency has been touted as a significant contributor to achieving an effective resource governance regime. These conversations has led to the emergence of ac-countability initiatives like 'Publish what you pay,' 'The Kimberly Thought Pro-cess' and most popular amongst them, the 'Extractive Industries Transparency Initia-tive' (EITI). These initiatives were set up to encourage the publishing of financial transactions between a country's government and oil multinational companies.

Nigeria voluntarily joined the global EITI in 2003 and inaugurated the Nigeria Ex-tractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) to promote prudent management of revenues from its abundant natural resources to reduce poverty and ensure sus-tainable development. NEITI in that regard posed itself to be the Nigerian national sub-set of the global EITI.

The NNPC towers had long cut the image of an opaque, dingy glass house where cor-ruption had become institutionalised. The KPMG, back in 2012, investigated finances of the corporation and exposed massive financial malfeasance and monumental corruption. Understandably, many had given up on the possibility of salvaging the corpo-ration from the firm grip of financial iniquities and operational lethargy, such that public cynicism had always greeted every appointment or reorganisation in the corpo-ration. Since its establishment, NEITI was construed to act as a watchdog in attacking the oil corporation and ensuring maximum levels of compliance with the transparency initiatives. However, the harmonisation and compliance NEITI has set the corporation to comport itself to, has left most stakeholders bewildered. Since the appointment of the GMD Sir Mele Kyari, it has been no surprise to see that the government has set out to transform the operations of the oil corporation.

But since his appointment positive changes have become notice-able. Large-scale insti-tutional reforms which rolled the NNPC into seven independent business units to make it a more efficient corporation; The business environment was also liberalised, and it became an enabler for the introduction of new business models which drastically reduced the losses recorded by the NNPC in the past. These reforms in the petroleum sector in the last four years has yielded over $30 billion foreign investments and commitments aimed at growing the sector. These reforms also yielded positive results in the area of personnel integrity, and nowhere is this demonstrated more than the emergence of a management staff as the GMD of the corporation. Kyari personifies the fruits of those reforms and



Kyari, MD, NNPC

his sub appointments was a grandeur endorsement of the current management of the NNPC as professionals who work to make operations in the oil and gas sector more transparent and accountable. Some of these notable achievements were seen when, the Federal Government through the Minister of State for Petroleum Resources; Chief Timipre Sylva, Sir Mele Kyari and Sir Adokiye Tom-bomieye inaugurated the crude oil cost optimization programme which was one of the top priority areas given to the Ministry of Petroleum Resources under the Next Level agenda of Mr President in ensuring reduction of the price of the crude oil extraction costs. Additionally, the domestic gas consumption got a boost as the NPDC completed its gas plant, and grand above all was NNPC BECOMING AN EITI SUPPORT COMPANY.

Despite the above achievements of the NNPC, there are some criticisms. One of such criticisms is that while the EITI relies on government and companies to report finan-cial transactions, it is unable to 'monitor or track illicit financial flows - that is money that benefits a select group of elites'. This means that it does not have the mechanism to identify and report illegitimate transfers that are diverted for private benefit. Also, another perceived weakness of the EITI is its voluntary nature. The Federal Government and companies are only encouraged to adhere to the EITI principles but are not under any obligation to do so.

Another criticism is that, although there is increased transparency, the overarching societal expectation that improved transparency will lead to greater governance and socio-economic transformations remains unachieved. It is therefore suggested that while EITI implementation fosters transparency, accountability remains a concern. Hence, the reason why corruption persists. It therefore implies that 'the EITI or the NEITI being its subset on its own cannot completely be said to be a panacea for good governance and sustainable development' of petroleum resources for oil-rich countries.

Strengthening Transparency: Moving Towards A Robust Petroleum Resource Governance Framework

While countries remain the entities with significant governance authority, there are several actors with equally important roles. Some are Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), corporations and international organisations and even the citizens. The interactions between these complex interlinkages at an international, national and lo-cal level could lead to positive solutions.

There are several requirements to ensuring a robust petroleum governance framework and the role of transparency cannot be over emphasised. As a response to the chal-lenges caused by the opacity of the petroleum industry, some analysts propose that perhaps "shining the light" could be beneficial. The idea was that through transparen-cy, institutional mechanisms that make government more accountable will be strengthened. This was further strengthened by the idea that perhaps through the transparent management of natural resources, government corruption, institutional erosion, civil conflicts and economic challenges will be resolved. Unfortunately, several years after, these concerns persist despite the popularity of transparency initiatives like the NEITI. It is therefore suggested that while efforts are made to further strengthen the NEITI, there should be a shift towards a broader petroleum resource governance framework. It is in this regard that the Natural Resource Charter is in-strumental.

The Natural Resource Charter could complement the efforts of the NNPC's implemen-tation of the NEITI's policies in achieving a comprehensive natural resource governance framework. The Charter provides a practical advice for governments, societies and the international community on how best to manage resource wealth. The Charter contains twelve precepts. The first 10 precepts provides guidance on how a government might manage its natural resources while the last two other precepts such as extractive companies are those responsible for international governance.

—Divine C. Jude-Okeke Esq,. Oil & Gas Law Governance Enthusiast.

Read the full article online - www.thisdaylive.com

A Mutual fund (Unit Trust) is an investment vehicle managed by a SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) registered Fund Manager. Investors with similar objectives buy units of the Fund so that the Fund Manager can buy securities that willl generate their desired return.

An ETF (Exchange Traded Fund) is a type of fund which owns the assets (shares of stock, bonds, oil futures, gold bars, foreign currency, etc.) and divides ownership of those assets into shares. Investors can buy these 'shares' on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange.

A REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust) is an investment vehicle that allows both small and large investors to part-own real estate ventures (eg. Offices, Houses, Hospitals) in proportion to their investments. The assets are divided into shares that are traded on the Nigerian Stock Exchange.

GUIDE TO DATA:

Date: All fund prices are quoted in Naira as at 10-Jun-2021, unless otherwise stated.

Offer price: The price at which units of a trust or ETF are bought by investors.

Bid Price: The price at which Investors redeem (sell) units of a trust or ETF.

Yield/Total Return: Denotes the total return an investor would have earned on his investment. Money Market Funds report Yield while others report Year- to-date Total Return.

NAV: Is value per share of the real estate assets held by a REIT on a specific date.

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Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Afrinvest Equity Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Afrinvest Plutus Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nigeria International Debt Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Afrinvest Dollar Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
ALTERNATIVE CAPITAL PARTNERS LTD			info@acapng.com
Web: www.acapng.com, Tel: +234 1 291 2406, +234 1 291 2868			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
ACAP Canary Growth Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
ACAP Income Funds	N/A	N/A	N/A
AIICO CAPITAL LTD			ammf@aiicocapital.com
Web: www.aiicocapital.com, Tel: +234-1-2792974			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
AIICO Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
AIICO Balanced Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
ANCHORIA ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			info@anchoriaam.com
Web:www.anchoriaam.com, Tel: 08166830267; 08036814510; 08028419180			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Anchoria Money Market	100.00	100.00	2.60%
Anchoria Equity Fund	130.85	132.31	-1.62%
Anchoria Fixed Income Fund	1.06	1.06	-20.05%
ARM INVESTMENT MANAGERS LTD			enquiries@arminvestmentcenter.com
Web: www.arm.com.ng; Tel: 0700 CALLARM (0700 225 5276)			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
ARM Aggressive Growth Fund	19.23	19.81	6.01%
ARM Discovery Balanced Fund	418.63	431.25	4.56%
ARM Ethical Fund	37.81	38.95	12.15%
ARM Eurobond Fund ($)	1.08	1.09	-11.28%
ARM Fixed Income Fund	0.96	0.96	-14.59%
ARM Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	4.71%
AVA GLOBAL ASSET MANAGERS LIMITED			info@avacapitalgroup.com
Web: www.avacapitalgroup.com			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
AVA GAM Fixed Income Dollar Fund	104.57	104.57	2.81%
AXA MANSARD INVESTMENTS LIMITED			investmentcare@axamansard.com
Web: www.axamansard.com; Tel: +2341-4488482			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
AXA Mansard Equity Income Fund	130.75	131.40	3.52%
AXA Mansard Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	9.02%
CAPITAL EXPRESS ASSET AND TRUST LIMITED			info@capitalexpressassetandtrust.com
Web: www.capitalexpressassetandtrust.com ; Tel: +234 803 307 5048			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
CEAT Fixed Income Fund	1.95	1.95	-21.49%
Capital Express Balanced Fund(Formerly: Union Trustees Mixed Fund)	2.03	2.07	-21.20%
CARDINALSTONE ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			mutualfunds@cardinalstone.com
Web: www.cardinalstoneassetmanagement.com ; Tel: +234 (1) 710 0433 4			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
CardinalStone Fixed Income Alpha Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
CHAPELHILL DENHAM MANAGEMENT LTD			investmentmanagement@chapelhilldenham.com
Web: www.chapelhilldenham.com, Tel: +234 461 0691			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Chapelhill Denham Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	4.83%
Paramount Equity Fund	16.10	16.39	0.65%
Women's Investment Fund	133.45	134.84	0.22%
CORDROS ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			assetmgtteam@cordros.com
Web: www.cordros.com, Tel: 019036947			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Cordros Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	5.82%
Cordros Milestone Fund 2023	117.16	117.94	
Cordros Milestone Fund 2028	N/A	N/A	
Cordros Dollar Fund ($)	106.75	106.75	
CORONATION ASSEST MANAGEMENT			investment@coronationam.com
Web:www.coronationam.com , Tel: 012366215			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Coronation Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	3.91%
Coronation Balanced Fund	1.19	1.21	-0.78%
Coronation Fixed Income Fund	1.37	1.37	-13.81%
EDC FUNDS MANAGEMENT LIMITED			mutualfundng@ecobank.com
Web: www.ecobank.com Tel: 012265281			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
EDC Nigeria Money Market Fund Class A	100.00	100.00	2.95%
EDC Nigeria Money Market Fund Class B	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00	2.91%
EDC Nigeria Fixed Income Fund	1,160.80	1,169.60	-3.02%
FBNQUEST ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD			invest@fbnquest.com
Web: www.fbnquest.com/asset-management; Tel: +234-81 0082 0082			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
FBN Fixed Income Fund	1,374.89	1,374.89	10.69%
FBN Balanced Fund	186.91	188.09	-0.41%
FBN Halal Fund	109.85	109.85	5.82%
FBN Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	7.77%
FBN Nigeria Eurobond (USD) Fund - Retail	125.41	125.41	3.42%
FBN Smart Beta Equity Fund	157.23	159.37	4.00%
FCMB ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			fcmbamhelpdesk@fcmb.com
Web: www.fcmbassetmanagement.com; Tel: +234 1 462 2596			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Legacy Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Legacy Debt Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Legacy Equity Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Legacy USD Bond Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
FSDH ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD			coralfunds@fsdhgroup.com
Web: www.fsdhaml.com; Tel: 01-270 4884-5; 01-280 9740-1			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Coral Balanced Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coral Income Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coral Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A

GREENWICH ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			assetmanagement@gtlgroup.com
Web: www.gtlgroup.com ; Tel: +234 1 4619261-2			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Greenwich Plus Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nigeria Entertainment Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED			assetmanagement@gdl.com.ng
Web: www.gdl.com.ng ; Tel: +234 9055691122			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
GDL Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
INVESTMENT ONE FUNDS MANAGEMENT LTD			enquiries@investment-one.com
Web: www.investment-one.com; Tel: +234 812 992 1045,+234 1 448 8888			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Abacus Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	6.39%
Vantage Balanced Fund	2.82	2.88	23.00%
Vantage Guaranteed Income Fund	1.00	1.00	4.50%
Kedari Investment Fund (KIF)	149.69	150.14	-3.68%
Vantage Equity Income Fund (VEIF) - June Year End	1.25	1.29	32.32%
Vantage Dollar Fund (VDF) - June Year End	1.09	1.09	6.88%
LOTUS CAPITAL LTD			fincon@lotuscapitallimited.com
Web: www.lotuscapitallimited.com; Tel: +234 1-291 4626 / +234 1-291 4624			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Lotus Halal Investment Fund	1.38	1.40	1.39%
Lotus Halal Fixed Income Fund	1,145.92	1,145.92	3.73%
MERISTEM WEALTH MANAGEMENT LTD			info@meristemwealth.com
Web: http://www.meristemwealth.com/funds/ ; Tel: +234 1-4488260			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Meristem Equity Market Fund	10.97	11.00	4.65%
Meristem Money Market Fund	10.00	10.00	6.55%
PAC ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD			info@pacassetmanagement.com
Web: www.pacassetmanagement.com/mutualfunds; Tel: +234 1 271 8632			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
PACAM Balanced Fund	1.66	1.69	7.16%
PACAM Fixed Income Fund	12.39	12.46	2.20%
PACAM Money Market Fund	10.00	10.00	3.24%
PACAM Equity Fund	1.59	1.61	0.73%
PACAM EuroBond Fund	111.02	112.64	0.97%
SCM CAPITAL LIMITED			info@scmcapitalng.com
Web: www.scmcapitalng.com; Tel: +234 1-280 2226,+234 1- 280 2227			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
SCM Capital Frontier Fund	128.83	131.80	8.81%
SFS CAPITAL NIGERIA LTD			investments@sfsnigeria.com
Web: www.sfsnigeria.com, Tel: +234 (01) 2801400			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
SFS Fixed Income Fund	1.01	1.01	3.21%
STANBIC IBTC ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD			assetmanagement@stanbicibtc.com
Web: www.stanbicibtcassetmanagement.com; Tel: +234 1 280 1266; 0700 MUTUALFUNDS			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Stanbic IBTC Balanced Fund	3,167.33	3,192.86	-1.51%
Stanbic IBTC Bond Fund	230.18	230.18	2.37%
Stanbic IBTC Ethical Fund	1.19	1.21	1.69%
Stanbic IBTC Guaranteed Investment Fund	301.95	301.95	2.47%
Stanbic IBTC Iman Fund	221.58	224.34	1.41%
Stanbic IBTC Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	6.70%
Stanbic IBTC Nigerian Equity Fund	10,488.52	10,620.56	-0.13%
Stanbic IBTC Dollar Fund (USD)	1.26	1.26	2.45%
Stanbic IBTC Shariah Fixed Income Fund	113.99	113.99	2.62%
Stanbic IBTC Enhanced Short-Term Fixed Income Fund	101.41	101.41	
UNITED CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD			
Web: www.unitedcapitalplcgroup.com; Tel: +234 01-6317876			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
United Capital Balanced Fund	1.36	1.38	-0.25%
United Capital Bond Fund	1.95	1.95	2.89%
United Capital Equity Fund	0.93	0.95	7.64%
United Capital Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	7.99%
United Capital Eurobond Fund	120.94	120.94	3.29%
United Capital Wealth for Women Fund	1.10	1.12	1.80%
United capital Sukuk Fund	1.05	1.05	5.26%
QUANTUM ZENITH ASSET MANAGEMENT & INVESTMENTS LTD			service@quantumzenithasset.com.ng
Web: www.quantumzenith.com.ng; Tel: +234 1-2784219			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Zenith Equity Fund	12.72	12.83	7.21%
Zenith Ethical Fund	13.98	14.10	14.45%
Zenith Income Fund	24.10	24.10	0.53%
Zenith Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	5.82%

REITS

Fund Name	NAV Per Share	Yield / T-Rtn
SFS REIT	123.83	2.56%
Union Homes REIT	51.43	-1.85%

EXCHANGE TRADED FUNDS

Fund Name	Bid Price	Offer Price	Yield / T-Rtn
Lotus Halal Equity Exchange Traded Fund	12.81	12.91	-3.06%
SIAML Pension ETF 40	125.29	125.29	2.92%
Stanbic IBTC ETF 30 Fund	98.79	100.57	-0.62%
MERGROWTH ETF	17.41	17.51	
MERVALUE ETF	17.44	17.54	
VETIVA FUND MANAGERS LTD			funds@vetiva.com
Web: www.vetiva.com; Tel: +234 1 453 0697			
Fund Name	**Bid Price**	**Offer Price**	**Yield / T-Rtn**
Vetiva Banking Exchange Traded Fund	3.70	3.74	-1.92%
Vetiva Consumer Goods Exchange Traded Fund	5.64	5.72	-0.91%
Vetiva Griffin 30 Exchange Traded Fund	17.17	17.27	4.98%
Vetiva Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	3.84%
Vetiva Industrial Goods Exchange Traded Fund	19.42	19.62	-5.34%
Vetiva S&P Nigeria Sovereign Bond Exchange Traded Fund	161.44	163.44	-26.25%

INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Fund Name	NAV Per Share	Yield / T-Rtn
Chapel Hill Denham Nigeria Infrastructure Debt Fund	107.52	13.11%

The value of investments and the income from them may fall as well as rise. Past performance is a guide and not an indication of future returns. Fund prices published in this edition are also available on each fund manager's website and FMAN's website at *www.fman.com.ng.* Fund prices are supplied by the operator of the relevant fund and are published for information purposes only.

GLITTERATI

A THISDAY WEEKLY PULL-OUT

13.6.2021



INI DIMA-OKOJIE

BORN TO ACT

Tried as much as she could to escape the hands of providence, actress, and fashion enthusiast Ini Dima-Okojie would eventually find herself in the acting world, where she is making waves with her peerless interpretation of roles, writes **Vanessa Obioha**

ASSISTANT EDITOR OLUFUNKE OLAODE/funkola2000@gmail.com

COVER

My Life, Make-believe and Passion





Dima-Okojie

"If it's meant to be, it's meant to be." That's the popular phrase of 'Namaste Wahala,' a Nollywood and Bollywood collaboration released on Netflix early this year and starred Ini Dima-Okojie. In a way, that phrase reflects Dima-Okojie's acting career.

The young actress who started as a production assistant on the set of 'Before 30' before clinching a role in the TV series 'Taste of Love' ignored her true calling in the make-believe world for most of her younger life. It is not necessarily because the passion didn't burn glowingly inside of her. In fact, there are moments of her childhood where she would escape to an imaginary world, creating a story universe for characters in her head.

To re-enact this in real life requires Dima-Okojie to outgrow her diffidence. Often, she prayed silently to be as outspoken as her sister Ivie who was at that age, in the spotlight as one of the characters in the defunct kids' programme 'Children of the World.' Both sisters share a strong sibling bond which is evident on their Instagram pages. They also have a striking semblance.

By the time she got into the university, her confidence was boosted but not high enough to pursue an acting career. Despite efforts to channel her career into investment banking after studying International Relations at Covenant University, Dima-Okojie could not resist the steady hands of providence. It was only a matter of time before she joined the movie world and is considered one of the leading actresses in the industry today.

"Every fibre of my being tried to run away from it (acting)," she said in a recent meeting. I used to be a very shy kid. I love fashion, and I found ways to express myself through that a lot. But it is a different love when I watch films. Whenever I watch films or TV shows I love, it takes me to a place where I want to be able to do the same thing and make people feel the way I do. I always wanted to act. Eventually, when I couldn't get over the feeling, I had to do it. I was even surprised, and sometimes I asked myself if this was really my path. So I guess it turned to reality and was meant to be."

Now in her sixth year as a screen actor, Dima-Okojie betrayed no hint of shyness. Known for her impressive fashion style, the actress donned a long black gown with stripy balloon sleeves. Her hands were likewise adorned with fashionable rings and bracelets. She wore a face shield in adherence to the COVID-19 health guidelinesWhen she began to speak, her words sometimes flowed in torrents; other times, they were punctuated by sighs as if weighing their implications. For instance, when asked if there was any belief about Nollywood she had before joining the industry and now found to be false today, she took a long pause before responding.

"It all looked easy from afar. You don't really know how much work actors put in to elicit the kind of reaction they get from fans. I know we have a long way to go, but I have so much appreciation for filmmakers, particularly when making films in an environment that is not necessarily structured in ways that make the process easy. You just have to give kudos to people that are able to invest in the industry and work day in, day out to make the films possible."

Her gait, in a way, reflected the meaning of her name Inibokun which she shortened during her university days because many mispronounced it. The meaning of the name, she said, is like a story.

"It's the name of a unique bird. This bird is supposed to be beautiful and stunning. Whenever she comes to the river bank, the other birds make way for her to perform. So it means to be graceful," she explained dramatically.

She recalled how many mistook her for the Nollywood actress Ini Edo when she first joined the industry. "It happened a lot. When I introduced myself as Ini, the response I often got was 'abadie,' which means 'how are you' in Ibibio, and I'm lost. I have to explain that this Ini is from Edo state," she said amusingly.

Those days are way behind her now. Mention her name, and people would easily recall her characters in different web, TV, and film productions. In the successful drama series 'Battleground', she is remembered as Teniola Bhadmus. In 'North East,' she is known as Hadiza Ahmed, who despite her father's objection to her love interest Emeka played by OC Ukeje, due to their religious and cultural differences, eventually married him. The actress insisted on learning Hausa from the locals even though it was not required of her to portray the character.

In 'Oga! Pastor,' the short-lived web series by Ndani TV, Dima-Okojie played a challenging character Olaitan Geshinde whose husband, a clergyman, turned out to be a philanderer.

"I had never experienced what I experienced with my character in 'Oga! Pastor'," she said of her character. "The character was going through a lot, and for me to play her truthfully, I really needed to break myself down emotionally, mentally, and there was almost the moment where I didn't even realise what I was capable of.

"I didn't realise that there are moments when you lose yourself. The situation feels too real. The first time I had a glimpse of that was in 'Battleground' when my character Teniola lost her baby. I truly felt like I'd lost the baby. Even when the director yelled 'stop,' I was still crying. It was Aunty Shaffy Bello that consoled me. But for Olaitan, that feeling lasted a whole month."

However, for her character Didi in 'Namaste Wahala,' the cross-cultural rom-com directed by Indian filmmaker Hamisha Daryani Ahuja, the Edo state-born actress didn't expect the feedback she received from the audience.

"I knew that people would appreciate the underlying topics in the film, such as the fight against gender-based violence and women empowerment. What I didn't expect was the global attention. I didn't expect people to relate to it so much. It apparently resonated with so many people because I got messages from all over the world. Spain, China, Britain," she said.

The film was originally slated for a cinematic release last year before the pandemic, but it gained a global audience with Netflix's enormous reach. Dima-Okojie sees this as a good thing for the Nigerian film industry. To prepare for her character, the actress researched the culture of the Asian country and was amazed by the similarities in family values between the country and Nigeria. She initially auditioned for her character's friend Angie (Anee Icha) but was asked to play the lead role on the spot.

Her outstanding performance fetched her the role, although she confessed that she spent hours on YouTube learning the Indian dance moves. The film allowed her to star alongside Richard Mofe-Damijo, described as one of her screen idols.

Another character that broke her down is 'The Wait,' her latest flick that saw her performing alongside one of her favourite actresses Nse Ikpe-Etim. She played a young wife who's been married for 10 years and unable to conceive.

"You can imagine the pressure from her family. She didn't want to adopt either."

She described the set of the film as special due to the way the cast interpreted their roles and the emotional appeal of the storyline.

"I cried during the premiere. I cried again during the first screening to an extent that I begin to wonder why I'm crying over a film I starred in. It was so emotional and addresses the topics that we need to talk about in our films. Just seeing the reaction of the audience made me grateful that I was able to get myself to play that character as truthfully as possible. It's another character that took a lot from me, but it was absolutely worth it to tell that story."

Such stories, she said, need to be told by Nollywood so that people can easily relate and share their experiences.

"I think it's important that filmmakers are confident in the story they want to tell instead of worrying about audience reactions or box-office successes."

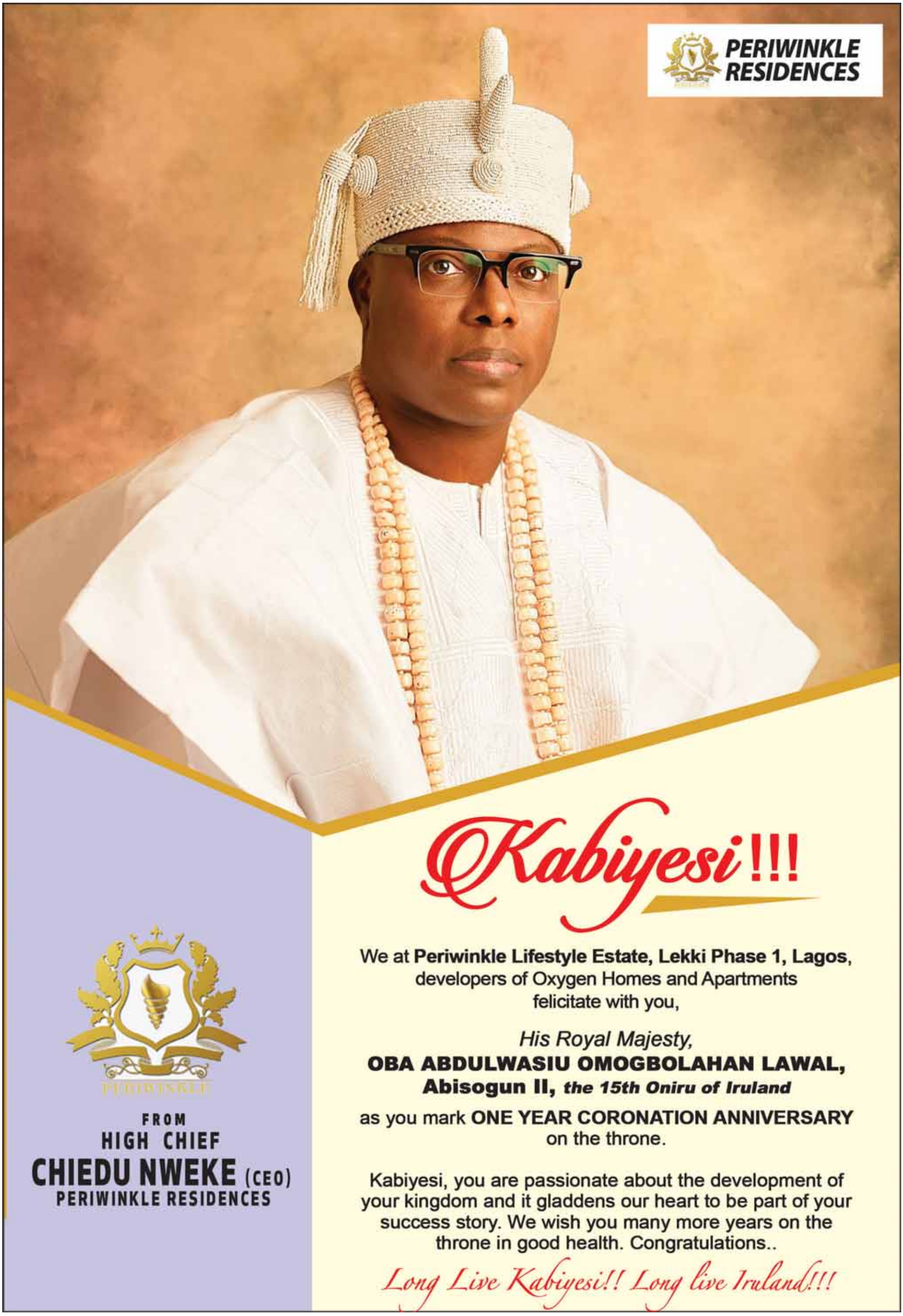
Dima-Okojie also had a story to tell, which she shared with her fans last year. Having been diagnosed with fibroids in 2017, she was advised to go for surgery last year. The actress took a bold step to share her journey with her fans on social media. Quite a few criticised her for exposing her private life to the world, but for the actress, it was more of getting the conversation going about the disease which affects more than 100,000 women in Nigeria today.

"I felt vulnerable sharing that part of my life, but I believed it was necessary to do so," she said. "You know social media is a place where we always put our best foot forward, sharing happy moments. I wanted fans to also see this part of me and help those who are going through similar situations. My parents spoke to me about it when I was first diagnosed, but there's a difference when you are experiencing it and being able to speak to someone that is also experiencing it and understands you.

"Eight out of every 10 women must be suffering from fibroids, but they are not speaking about it. I felt so alone, and I needed to put it out there so that people can be sensitive in the way they address women who unknowingly may be going through such issues. There is so much negativity and preconceived notions about fibroids."

At the moment, she is living healthy and taking each step at a time, and fulfilling her long-time dream to be an actress.

"There are many ways we can try and orchestrate how we go things through life. We can put down rules and plan for the next five or 10 years, but it all boils down to destiny. I'm a Christian, and I believe in destiny. I believe that you can't sit idly and expect destiny to happen. You must work towards it, but there's a level of destiny that you cannot orchestrate on your own. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be."



Kabiyesi!!!

We at **Periwinkle Lifestyle Estate, Lekki Phase 1, Lagos**, developers of Oxygen Homes and Apartments felicitate with you,

His Royal Majesty,
OBA ABDULWASIU OMOGBOLAHAN LAWAL,
Abisogun II, ***the 15th Oniru of Iruland***

as you mark **ONE YEAR CORONATION ANNIVERSARY** on the throne.

Kabiyesi, you are passionate about the development of your kingdom and it gladdens our heart to be part of your success story. We wish you many more years on the throne in good health. Congratulations..

Long Live Kabiyesi!! Long live Iruland!!!

PERIWINKLE

FROM
HIGH CHIEF
CHIEDU NWEKE (CEO)
PERIWINKLE RESIDENCES

GLITZ FOCUS

The New Voices of Africa

Vanessa Obioha writes that English Actor Idris Elba, MTV Base Africa, and YouTube collaborative concert to celebrate Africa Day spotlights the new wave of African stars with global appeal

Last year when the trio of English actor Idris Elba, ViacomCBS Networks Africa music channel MTV Base Africa and YouTube announced its first Africa Day Concert, the objective was to raise funds for those impacted by COVID-19. Titled 'Africa Day Benefit Concert at Home,' the concert paraded the continent's biggest music stars from Grammy winners Burna Boy and Angelique Kidjo to South Africa's Sho Madjozi, with appearances from the host of American TV 'The Daily Host', Trevor Noah and Jamaican musical artist Sean Paul. The concert was also a celebration of the African Union's fight against colonialism since its foundation in 1963.

Returning this year, the Africa Day Concert takes a new hue. The recently held virtual concert highlighted the new wave of African music stars who are breaking continental boundaries and pooling global appeal under the theme 'Africa's Next Global Wave.' This crop of music artists, mostly in their 20s, come from different parts of the continent. From Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana to Tanzania, their creativity and style have made them a reckoning force on the global stage.

"I'm committed to shining a light on African culture, heritage and the arts. During a year when globally we have all had to reflect deeply on our purpose, I've taken inspiration from the continent with its diversity of voices, creativity and innovation," said Idris Elba.

These music stars are destined to push African sounds farther than where it is today. Over the years, African music has recorded huge global appeal, mostly due to music stars' talents stamping identities on original African sounds like Afrobeats. Today, many sound fusions emanate from Africa, be it Amapiano, the South African flavourful sound of the moment that is a cocktail of jazz, house music and Kwaito basslines, or the perennial afrobeats and highlife sounds.

"It is a tremendous inspiration to see how our African artists and Africans on the continent and globally are lighting the way through creativity, collaboration and innovation. MTV through music, culture, and active citizenship unifies and strives to mobilise the youth to drive hope and positive change," said Senior Vice President and General Manager at ViacomCBS Networks Africa, Monde Twala.

For Alex Okosi, the Managing Director of Emerging Markets in Europe, the Middle East and Africa at YouTube, the time is perfect to shine the spotlight on these emerging artists that will make a global impact on African culture and music.

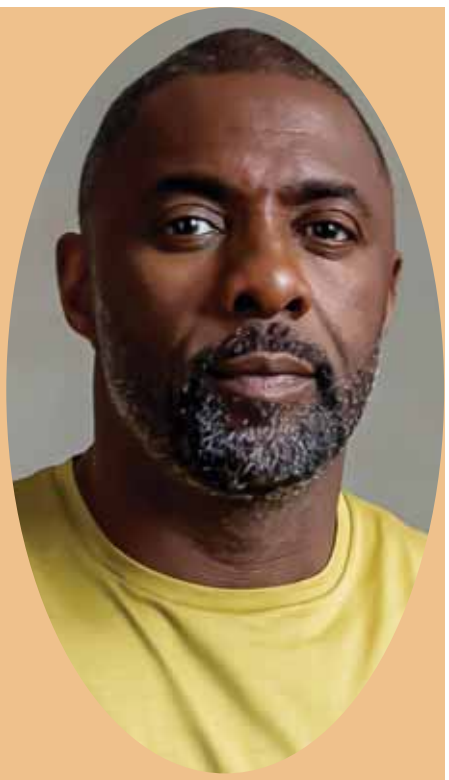
The over one-hour show strived to achieve this. It spotlighted the artists and the creative directors who worked tirelessly to translate their message and style visually. For instance, Nigerian singer Teni opened the show in a dimly lit set with a wooden cage draped in greenery. Musical legends like Yvonne Chaka Chaka of South Africa and Kidjo were featured while comedians like Mark Angel and Gabonese football star Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang spoke loftily about the African culture. Below are some of the music stars who performed at the concert and are making musical imprints on the continent and beyond.

Omah Lay: COVID-19 may have affected the world negatively, but it also brought some good tidings. One of such is the discovery of Omah Lay, a young recording producer and singer who gained prominence last year with his songs such as 'Bad Influence'. 'Infinity' featuring Nigerian rapper Olamide is one of his successful hits so far.

Born **Stanley Omah Didiah**, the singer started as a rapper under the stage name 'Lil King' as part of a rap group. By 2019, he released a self-produced single, 'Do Not Disturb.' Since his rising fame, the artist from Rivers has been collaborating with other artists, including the multi-platinum-selling American artist 6LACK on the track 'Damn'. He calls his music style 'Omah Lay Music', a fusion of sounds with global appeal. His cousin, he said, taught him how to write poems and lyrics, but he became more motivated after listening to 'That's That Shit' by Snoop Dogg. He has released two EPs so far.



Gyakie



Idris Elba



Omah Lay



Zuchu



Elaine



Focalistic

Focalistic: Born Lethabo Sebetso, the 25-year old rapper and singer from South Africa, is not entirely new in the music industry, but his fame rose after he released his 2020 song 'Ke Star.' The Amapiano star gained more prominence after he featured Davido in a remix released earlier in the year. Since numbers are very important in the music business, 'Ke Star' remix streams and views on platforms like YouTube have made it the most successful hit of the artist to date. In fact, American music mogul P.Diddy was seen jamming to the infectious hit. The artist revealed in an interview that he is working on another project with Davido.

For the Pretoria born artist, music wasn't his first love, but he never let go once he found it. He has been featured by South Africa's music superstars like Cassper Nyovest. Focalistic is unique for his blend of hip-hop and Amapiano. The rapper believes he has found a better canvas to convey his message sonically. Though he claimed it was never intentional, it has certainly made him international.

Gyakie: At age 22, Jackeline Acheampong is enjoying unprecedented fame. The Ghanaian singer is one of the most dominant sounds in Ghana and Africa. Her stardom came with the 2020 hit 'Forever' from her five-track EP, titled 'Seed'. The song topped both local and international charts, including Billboard's Top Triller Global. Last March, she released a remix featuring Nigerian Omah Lay. Gyakie is also the first African creator to be selected for Spotify's Equal Music Program.

Gyakie hails from Kumasi and comes from a family of musicians. Her father is Ghanaian highlife legend Ernest' Owoahene' Nana Acheampong, one-half of the famous Lumba Brothers. Her career dream was to work in the corporate world, but the music DNA in her blood was thicker than water. After meeting a Nigerian producer Sosa in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, she was convinced that music was her true calling.

She identifies as an afrobeats and afro-fusion musical artist. Her first single 'Love is Pretty' was released in 2019. Gyakie has an international recording deal with Sony Music Entertainment, RCA Records UK and Sony Music Africa.

Zuchu: The Tanzanian singer born Zuhura Othman Soud is one of the popular voices emerging from Africa. She is the daughter of the revered female Taarab musician Khadija Kopa and started evincing her passion for music at a young age. For her debut EP, 'I am Zuchu', she featured her mother. She was also featured on Nigerian singer Olakira's 'Sere' hit. Zuchu became the first East African female artist to be awarded the Silver Plaque Button by YouTube for hitting 100,000 subscribers within a week.

Elaine: The 22-year-old South African singer is one of the youngest music stars dominating South African charts. Her trap-soul kind of music makes her a reckoning force in the industry. She is called South Africa's new 'RnB It Girl'.

Born Ndivhuwo Elaine Mukheli, she started singing at age six and participated in the school choir and various talent competitions. She received a gold medal at the 8th World Choir Games in Riga, Latvia. Elaine began writing her music in high school, and in 2019, she released her first single 'Slip Away.' That same year she released her debut EP 'Elements' which climbed the charts and was certified Platinum by the Recording Industry of South Africa in August 2020. She was signed to Columbia Records last year. Her latest single is 'Right Now.'

GLITZ FOCUS

LOVETH UGOCHUKWU

How I Found Solace in My Passion for Music

Born with a sonorous voice capable of piercing through the hardest of hearts even in the prison yards; loved by all for her generosity, hospitality, comic and humble personality, she earned the name 'Onye Di Ndu Eje Eligwe', 'the one that would not die without going to heaven' from her mother, while siblings call her 'the good Samaritan'. Loveth Ugochukwu, a Nigerian gospel artist with the stage name 'Goldvoicz', in this recent interview with **Funke Olaode** and **Sunday Ehigiator,** shared interesting and profound moments.



Ugochukwu

How did your journey into sound begin?

I am Loveth Chinasa Ugochukwu, a computer science graduate from the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Nigeria. I Worked with THISDAY Newspaper as a system administrator (tech support), a former computer instructor at Araromi junior secondary school Orile Lagos, STEM teacher at Techyzan Coding Alagbole, Ogun State, author of the book of 'Child Of Prophecy,' founder of Treasures Techyzan World and I'm a gospel singer.

Can you tell us about your early childhood and upbringing?

I am the daughter of the late Innocent Okafor, a former photo editor at THISDAY Newspaper, and Patricia Okafor. My parents were Christians, Catholics to be precise. I had a good upbringing. My father and mother were disciplinarians, and growing up with them gave me a good head start. My childhood was fun and full of so many experiences. I would say I was naturally blessed with leadership qualities. I love to make people happy even when I don't have much. I manage what I have to make sure the other person is okay and believe it was a gift from God. Being the sixth child out of eight children, I was made the second mother of the family. I was the hard-working type, loyal to the core, honest to a fault, that even my mother gave me the name 'Onye Di Ndu Eje Eligwe.' It means the one that would not die without going to heaven.

At what stage did you embrace music?

I am naturally a talented comedian and actress. One thing I couldn't do without during my childhood and even now is music. I don't do anything without singing. As a student, listening to music helps me understand more and also inspires me. Singing, I would say, was part of me. This led me into forming cultural groups and musical bands. The first group I formed as a child was the 'Obasa Group', at age 10. The second was 'Jedidiah musical Group' at age 19, and the third was the 'Gigabyte Musical Group' at age 25. I gathered singers from my department, the computer science department. I became the choir director of my departmental school fellowship. I often did something very unique as a child. I would gather my entire family to watch me sing and climb a chair using a spatula as my microphone while they cheered and welcomed the best singer and comedian on stage. I would wave to them like a star such as Michael Jackson, Celine Dion, and Toni Braxton, etc., while I sing. I would tell one of my siblings to pretend they fainted seeing me on stage, and you know what, my voice was so unique that whenever I sing any song, you cannot differentiate who is the original singer of the song. I sang to the extent that my teachers commented on my report cards in primary and secondary school that I loved to sing.

Why did it take you so long to launch out?

I had challenges, most especially when I lost dad. I lost hope. I thought I might not complete my education, and the idea of making music was put on hold until I found my feet. But my father's advice gave me hope. An event happened while he was alive. I wouldn't forget the word he told me. He said to me, 'God is the helper of the helpless', that word gave me courage and hope. I went through difficult times trying to be successful. I thank God it has become a story that will inspire the hopeless; to help them see why they should see God as the helper of the helpless.

Could being a computer science graduate may have altered your ambition of becoming a singer?

From the beginning, my zeal and passion were to become a musician, but I didn't get any help or who to sponsor or encourage me. It really frustrated me, but the passion and faith I had made me believe that someday God will make a way. Since I didn't get any help, I decided to go to school to study computer science so that at least, if I get a good job after graduation, I can sponsor myself. Thank God I didn't lose hope or fall for people that wouldn't help you without requesting you pay them back in a carnal way.

Have you found your voice now?

I had the voice to sing as a child when I discovered I have a unique and golden voice that moves people who listen to me when I sing, but I didn't notice it was a gift or make a career out of it. I felt it was just for fun. Grace and glory be to the king of kings for revealing that it was a gift and a talent. This happened when I gave my life to Christ in 2003. My life was transformed. It was like a veil was removed from my eyes, and then I began to see things differently. I discovered I could write when I wrote my first book at age 19. Then I discovered that it was a gift from God. I was so amazed when I did my first singing job, a soundtrack for a Nigerian movie. I couldn't believe it. I said to myself, 'so this was a gift, and I didn't notice it.'

My encounter with Jesus Christ revealed to me that I don't have just a gift, but I am multi-talented. There was a time we visited Kirikiri Correctional Centre for administration. When we got there, the prisoners; some were fighting, playing games. In fact, they were busy with different things, and then the warder told them we wanted to talk to them. Some came around to listen, but others ignored, but when I started my ministry, I noticed they all arrived one after the other to join us, and I tell you, we left the prison happy likewise the prisoners. They brought prayer points for us to intercede for them. This is why we need to discover the gift God has deposited in us. Who knows, it can transform somebody's life from bad to good.

Are you into music full time?

Yes, but that doesn't stop me from doing other jobs.

How long did it take before making up your mind?

I wrote my songs 17 years ago. All I did was make sure I keep the songs safe and believe that someday, I would sing to the world. Music has always been my thing. Every other thing I did was because I didn't want to be idle, and also, I got no help, neither sponsor nor encouragement.

What was your support system, and how supportive were your husband and family?

My husband was so much in support, likewise my family members. They never discouraged me. They saw it as a part of me.

How's public acceptance, and what's your stage name?

I am into Gospel. It has been awesome, and my stage name is 'Goldvoicz'.

What were the obstacles you had to contend with before breaking into the music industry, and how were you able to overcome them?

One of the obstacles I encountered was our African mentality, where they believe nothing goes for anything. It is wicked and evil. Instead of encouraging that person in your little way, you see some talented people, knowing full well you have the resources, but out of wickedness, they become carnal and start asking to have carnal knowledge of you. Another thing that was a challenge was money. If I had my own money at that time, I would have released my album as a kid. This was why I was very serious with my studies to graduate with a good result, which I thank God for helping me out without going through hell to get a sponsor.

Do you have any regrets?

No, I do not have any regrets. I have learnt a lot through the experiences I had, and I am stronger now. It's just that it would have been better if I was known as a kid singer, but it didn't happen that way, so I believe God still knows best why it is happening now. Nobody can question God. I remain ever grateful to him.

How many recorded songs do you have at the moment?

I have recorded six songs, and my inspiring song so far is 'Somto.'

What inspired the song?

The tough life experiences I went through. Where many failed me, disappointed me, how I was nobody till Jesus Christ made me special. He made me extraordinary beyond human expectations.

Do you have an album, or working on one?

Yes, I have one titled, 'Chidinma.' I wrote it when I gave my life to Jesus Christ. I discovered that he was the only best friend humans can ever have. He sees you through when in difficult situations.

Are you signed to any record label?

Not yet.

Who are your role models?

Don Moen, Bro Lazarus and Emmanuel (voice of the cross).

What should your fans be expecting from you?

Pure song ministrations that will transform lives turn around bad situations; songs of hope, healing, breakthroughs, and the unshakeable power of God, encouragement, and satisfaction. They will experience the peace of God when this ministry goes on by the power in the name of Jesus.

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...Amazing lifestyles of Nigeria's rich and famous

Tokunbo Abiru... Starting Solid



Abiru

To evolve from a forerunner of the banking industry into a top-tier politician is not a day's job anywhere globally, not to mention Nigeria. But Tokunbo Abiru, the former GMD/CEO of Polaris Bank Limited, is taking steps to become an effective representative of his Lagos East Senatorial district at the 9th Nigerian National Assembly.

When Abiru was the top dog at Polaris, he was renowned for always adopting innovative approaches to sweep through everything. From his recent doings, it is obvious now that that was actually his style, nothing adopted from anywhere. Thus, the bill he is currently backing shows just the kind of man he is and offers a glimpse into the legacy a senator like Abiru Mukhail Adetokunbo is likely to leave behind.

Copyrights protection is taken for granted in Nigeria as if intellectual property is a shared right of all. Abiru realised the flaw in this supposition and thus sponsored the bill to enforce a stricter price for transgressing this branch of the Nigerian law.

Interestingly, the Copyrights Acts in Nigerian law does not accommodate a large fraction of emerging technologies and ways of thinking. Thus, the conceptualisation of property theft as contained in the Copyrights Act can be danced around. However, the implications of these are better known to filmmakers, authors, and all other members of the creative industry. These are the interests that Abiru is pushing to protect.

At the moment, the bill has passed the second reading and, upon acceptance and approval, will become one of the most effective instruments for securing the trust of talented Nigerians who tire themselves out trying to protect their work from bootleggers. Also, as Abiru has mentioned, this will significantly boost the odds of home-driven economic growth and development. To be sure, this is Abiru's first move since becoming Senator. What a brilliant start.

Painful! NFF President Amaju Pinnick Loses Sister Arinola Adeniyi

To be or not to be is indeed the question. Unfortunately, this is not a question that human beings can decide on their own to answer. After building one remarkable career in the corporate corridor and another in the quiet recesses of luxury, Arinola Adeniyi, the boss lady of Lagos highbrow Spa Venivici and sister to NFF President Amaju Melvin Pinnick, has passed on.

Death be not proud is the kind of sentiment that many people are wont to express in times like these, but even that seems significantly empty. The death of Arinola Adeniyi hit harder than ordinary because it seems that there is a trumpet blaring that only certain good people can hear. As has become the saying lately, good people are marching home.

The news of Adeniyi's death came a few days ago. According to the report, she had passed on at the First Cardiology Consultants in Lagos. And while many folks are insisting that she is in a better place, her relatives and friends only wish that she had stuck around for a few more decades at least.

Arinola Adeniyi was many things to many people: a mother and a daughter, a wife and a friend, a sister and a paragon of audacity and diligence. She stirred the hearts of many women when she left what would be considered a peak banking career (where she had become a Deputy General Manager) to open up a spa as if saying that many are stress to build fortunes, but few are resting from all that stress. And that is how the renowned Venivici Health Club and Urban Spa came to be, and Adeniyi established herself as a Corporate Wellness Coach, Colon Therapist, Diet & Nutrition Specialist, and Mind Coach Trainer.

That the now-deceased Arinola Adeniyi was the sister of NFF President Amaju Melvin Pinnick was a fact unknown to many. But death shrouds and unveils in equal measure. Pinnick is one of those most devastated by the loss—and it is a big loss, no doubt about it.



Pinnick



Akinyanmi

Lekoil Boss Lekan Akinyanmi Battles South African Metallon: How He Was Booted out of Own Company

"Lekoil, the oil and gas exploration and production company with a focus on Nigeria and West Africa, announces that it has terminated the employment contract of its CEO, Mr Olalekan Akinyanmi, with immediate effect, due to a corporate governance breach..."

These were the opening lines of the statement released by its main branch of the Cayman Islands-registered Lekoil Limited on June 3, 2021. Not long after, the Nigeria branch released a counter statement insisting that Lekan Akinyanmi "remains Lekoil Nigeria CEO." What gives?

The battle for supremacy in Lekoil is not news. However, the contest came to a head in April when the company's Chairman, Michael Ajukwu, suddenly resigned from the chairmanship position. Considering that Ajukwu had been appointed in January and only spent three months in office, it was obvious that the internal struggles in Lekoil had reached the zenith. Or so it was believed. And then the founder was sent packing too!

According to the reports, the press release announcing Akinyanmi's termination was engineered by South African mining group Metallon Corp, the shareholder with a 40% stake in Lekoil Nigeria accused of being the mastermind behind recent happenings. Metallon Corp has allegedly attempted to take over Lekoil Nigeria but has had to deal with the company founder. Thus, to get a proper foothold, the company supposedly threw out an accusation against Akinyanmi of a 'corporate governance breach' and went ahead with its plans.

Recall that Metallon's problem with Lekoil has been rumoured to be its executive board. The South African company reportedly attempted to increase Lekoil board members from four to seven (to include Metallon's CEO and two others from the SA company). But Akinyanmi has been fighting against this, seeing that it will give Metallon the upper hand in his company.

Thus, Akinyanmi has been reported as standing against all such and subsequent actions. Furthermore, he has reportedly secured the services of an expert corporate lawyer from the US to diffuse the fires and return orderliness to the boardrooms of Lekoil.

It is still a bit early to divine the end of this matter. Nevertheless, Metallon's first action to boot out the founder of the company is astounding.

Sujimoto to the World: Rising Profile of Sijibomi Ogundele

There is no question that Nigeria is a place of talents. With people like Sijibomi Ogundele paving the way, the nation will continue to bear a noble name outside its shores and the coming generation will have nothing but absolute regard for those that encouraged Ogundele and his kind to build and build and never stop building.

The image of Sijibomi Ogundele is gradually growing into titanic proportions and making it impossible to shove under the usual label of 'businessman', 'socialite', or 'genius'. Already standing at the apex regarding these, Ogundele has become a paragon, a progenitor, and a forerunner of awesome things to come.

Until Ogundele, who knew that a Nigerian (in Nigeria) could shed the expectations, dour as they may be, of his immediate environment and reach for the stars? But that is exactly what Ogundele has serially accomplished. At 8 years of age, Ogundele used his savings to start an okada business. A year after, his adolescent eyes caught the housing industry. And after many years of cultivating the dream of establishing a market for luxurious housing, Ogundele made it.

At this point, to not know LucreziaBySujimoto is to be ignorant. Besides Lucrezia, to have no idea that Lorenzo, Giuliano and Medici are top-selling housing accommodations is inviting a beating. And if you still think that Leonardo is only a cartoon character or Italian polymath, go back to school. All these are some of the names that Ogundele has branded his beautiful and record-making properties.

To say that Ogundele has left no stone unturned in his quest is to make an understatement. The man has revolutionised the traditional model of Real Estate, taking the label of 'top property merchant' for himself. Talk about distinction by sheer prowess!

For someone who recently turned 40, Sijibomi Ogundele is one of a kind. This is the kind that builds himself by building a radiant career, builds his immediate community, builds his nation, and builds the defining characteristic of a generation.



Ogundele

Tajudeen Adeyemi Adefisoye... Politician with Heart of Gold



Adefisoye

Say what you will about Nigerian politicians; there are a growing number of them after nothing but the interests of the people they represent. Among these is Tajudeen Adeyemi Adefisoye, the honourable member of the House of Representatives for Idanre/Ifedore Federal Constituency, Ondo. Among the handful of young policymakers, Tajudeen is a balm for the injuries of our leaders past.

To be known as Small Alaji to his people, rather than as 'Honourable Sir' or 'Your Excellency the Honourable' as others might prefer, is the first evidence of Adefisoye's dedication to the cause of those that raise him on the pedals of their expectations. What the good people of Idanre/Ifedore Federal Constituency wanted when they elected him was a representative who knew their wounds and how best to treat them. But considering recent happenings, one cannot accuse Adefisoye of shaming his people.

The most recent evidence of Adefisoye's devotion and heart of gold is the dispensation of 'community grants' to help the business people in his constituency make the most of present times. In reality, these 'grants' are massive packages that will go a long way in distinguishing the people of Idanre/Ifedore Federal Constituency among the other 360 federal constituencies in Nigeria.

This is one way Adefisoye has shown that a new wave of politics is at hand in Nigeria. As the youngest and former member of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) on the floor of the lower chamber of the National Assembly, one cannot only imagine the degree of temptations (especially to stand out and make a name for himself) that Adefisoye faces. Nevertheless, the man has not gone about making bills regarding doings that nobody cares about but has focused his attention on his people, Nigerian youths, and an inclusive, integrative, and innovative schema of economic growth and development.

This is what having a heart of gold entails, devoting everything and anything to the cause of others. And this is why Tajudeen Adeyemi Adefisoye is a shining example of a true politician, one after the people's interests and always giving back to the society that elected him.

Adesola Adeduntan: The Sleepless Achiever

Popular culture says there is no saviour in this world, therefore fight your battles and distinguish yourself. Traditional wisdom says that the best of things comes to those who are patient and wait for Truth to show its supremacy. Dr Adesola Kazeem Adeduntan, the MD of First Bank of Nigeria Limited, could have adopted the perspective of popular culture, but he did not. Now, there are awards after awards lining his desktop.

Global Banking and Finance Magazine was the first after recent happenings to recognise the efforts and accomplishments of Sola Adeduntan, the shining example of a corporate leader that is First Bank MD, Sola Adeduntan. The award of Retail Banking CEO of the Year symbolised the many contributions of Adeduntan over the years, specifically in how he has popularised First Bank by having cubicle-sized branches (Firstmonie networks) in every corner of every Nigerian city.

To be sure, Adeduntan's work at First Bank has not gone unnoticed. The man essentially revolutionised the idea of smart banking by carving out Firstmonie banking networks and having them offer banking services for First Bank customers (and those of other banks) within a walk of their homes. Moreover, it is to Adeduntan's credit that most mobile banking developers have sleepless nights in their efforts to catch up with the First Bank's mobile app. Godspeed, says Adeduntan.

Meanwhile, Adeduntan has shown himself to be more than a corporate thug with eyes pinned on the funds of First Bank customers. Under his regime, First Bank has launched many projects purposely built around helping micro-and small and medium-scale businesses. Also, the idea of inclusiveness and integration is gradually picking up.



Adeduntan

To think that Adeduntan would have retired now. Had the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) not intervened, First Bank—and the Nigerian banking industry—would have lost a treasure. And this is just the kind of treasure that Sola Adeduntan has proved himself to be: a relentless, über-driven MD.

Omolara Adebiyi: Quiet Revolutionary Making Loud Impacts

"Raise your hand if you know Omolara Adebiyi. No one? What about Lekan Adebiyi? All of you?" This is how a typical introduction of Omolara Adebiyi would go. Because the woman flies under the radar, folks don't know that she isn't only the madam of the Adebiyi household but also a peerless contributor to the entrepreneurial spirit in Nigeria. Even among Nigerian quiet achievers, Omolara Adebiyi is quiet.

A philanthropist in Nigeria faces many difficulties. The most obvious of this is the perpetual lens of the paparazzi trained on their lives. Regardless, for someone like Omolara Adebiyi, it takes divination to know what she is doing at any one time, despite the knowledge that she is doing something camera-worthy. This is how Mrs Adebiyi has hidden under cover of MD/CEO of ADDAS Mall Ikeja and wife of one of the biggest indigenous contractors in Nigeria to change people's lives.

Not too long ago, it was reported that Lekan Adebiyi had helped his wife, Omolara, open a mall in Ikeja, the now-famous Addas Mall. Because the cost of erecting the monster of an establishment ran into the billions of Naira corridor, folks assumed that Omolara was building a legacy of wealth to challenge other Nigerian women who are topping lists of wealthiest women in the world. However, it is obvious now that the good lady planned nothing of the kind.

According to reports, Omolara Adebiyi has used the proceeds of her Addas Mall to improve the welfare of the common people, especially those around the Ikeja area of Lagos. Almost '200 people' have directly benefited from her largesse in the form of active and well-paying employment. All these from her own pockets.

It is not strange that a person of Mrs Adebiyi's status would want to change lives. What is strange is how she goes about it—without any fanfare. Instead, folks sing her praises, noting that she has renovated more schools in Lagos in the last three years than some politicians have done in their entire political career. Regardless, a visionary like her only sees potential everywhere, and so her focus remains on building an entrepreneurial base that will become the pillars of the Nigerian peoples and economy.

So, in a few years, even after Omolara Adebiyi has become a paragon of entrepreneurship with thousands of successful business people as evidence of her efforts and goal, only a few people will still raise their hands when asked about her. This is who she is, a quiet revolutionary making loud impacts.

Gbenga Ashafa Taking FHA to Next Level

Under the visionary leadership of Gbenga Ashafa, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) has become a beacon of an effective ministry in Nigeria. The ministry has become more visible and has also given credit to the belief that Federal agencies are not like trees with roots everywhere sucking the nutrients of the land. No! With Ashafa at the head, FHA has begun to give back to the Nigerian people.

No individual should be able to effect a complete turnaround in the contributions of a ministry in Nigerian society. The institutional framework does not allow it. Yet, this is what Ashafa has accomplished. And without needing to sack every upper-level staff of FHA that was there before him.

Under Ashafa, FHA has become a flourishing entity. However, the measure of this success is the degree of innumerable contributions in the form of beneficial projects for every tier of the Nigerian society, from the grassroots at the bottom to the elites at the head. It is no secret now that what Ashafa intends to do is employ millions of Nigerians to build 300,000 affordable housing units all over Nigeria. This is one of the objectives of the National Housing Fund (NHF) scheme.

In the meantime, the State capitals are the main targets of FHA's groundbreaking projects. The Federal Government has already opened its first estate in Lagos, the Silvercrest Oakwood Estate. The idea is to use this estate to test the waters and see how sustainable it is to hand out housing units with 3 to 4 bedrooms to beneficiaries of the NHF loan scheme. If this works, and the chances are that it will, the plan of giving out 300,000 units in a few years will be closer to implementation. Overall, Gbenga Ashafa is leading FHA to greater heights. And isn't this what agency MDs are supposed to do?



Ashafa



Aboderin

Dr Wole Aboderin Bags Another Award

The rarity of genuinely gifted young Nigerians does not suggest that they do not exist. They do. The present is the way it is because these young people have chosen to work from the shadows, assisting in whatever way they can until the world around them is what they envisaged it to be. This is likely the philosophy of people like Dr Wole Aboderin, the special assistant on NGOs and CSOs, Office of the First Lady. Nevertheless, it is becoming more and more difficult for the peerless aide to keep his work under wraps.

Wole Aboderin recently received the Young Entrepreneurs Summit and Awards (YESA) Award of Excellence. The award was bestowed upon him as a form of recognition for all the contributions he has made towards youth empowerment in Nigeria without making a fuss about ethnicity, religion, or educational qualification. Frank Nwike, YESA's lead strategist, presented the award, who noted that Aboderin's efforts could not be more effective at the moment.

For people familiar with the tales of this young man from Oyo, it is no longer news that he is one of the spearmen in Dr Aisha Buhari's Cabinet of smart, driven and high-impact aides. However, Aboderin's place in the Cabinet bodes no argument considering that he has both ability and experience on his side.

A lesser man would start up a political party or movement, dragging the young generation behind his wagon of selfish interests and ambition. Not Aboderin. Even though he has played pivotal roles in the momentum that has become the All Progressives Congress (APC) youth category, Aboderin maintained that this is only a means to an end. The end is the full integration of Nigerians in leadership and helping to bear the burdens of the elders.

This is why Aboderin has been working nonstop, polling his technical and leadership skills together, not to mention his sphere of influence to grant ability and vision to Nigerian youths. So far, his efforts are not in vain. A little more time and more, Wole Aboderins will be empowering their brothers and sisters in every Nigerian community, receiving awards and earning accolades.

LOUD WHISPERS

with **JOSEPH EDGAR** (09095325791)

Biafra – Count Me Out

That is how the last time the baba run away and na my kinsman Philip Effiong hand over. Luckily, he wasn't slapped the way they slapped Macron. You see, this quest for Biafra is such a distraction that it is beginning to rile me. What we are facing in this country is what I want to call cowardice of strategy as we seek to engage the collective problems we face as Nigerians. Instead of us to focus on the central problem, which is weak and Janus-faced leadership, we divert attention and start to talk about separation. Today, everybody wants to leave. Even the ones we are accusing of oppressing us want to leave. If this is not national stupidity, I don't even know what else is. The other day, I asked one very vociferous advocate of Biafra on my Duke Summit: what are the ideological leanings of a post-Nigerian South-East? The mumu just dey look me. Next thing he commot for group. A grouping of about 20 million people but with investments and economic ties all over the place and controlling significant wealth and business all over the country, landlocked and seeking separation? Are these people even thinking? They need Nigeria more than the rest of us sef. The problem is that a vocal minority has seized the initiative using violence and its threat, plus expert media manipulation to push this agenda to the front burner. I challenge them to a referendum. This is the civilized thing to do rather than burning police stations up and down. Call for a referendum, and let's see what the majority of Igbo people want. Come and slap me here if the result shows that they all want a separation.

My people, this rain of maladministration is everywhere. Every tribe is suffering the thing. Not only Igbo or any other grouping. Please, the 80 that recently killed in Kebbi, were they Igbo? The ones that were slaughtered in Igangan that Sunday morning, were they Igbo? Benue state has suffered much more than most states, are they Igbo. Does the North East have any infrastructure? Is the North on any indices of development? Instead, make we face the reality of our situation and look for a collective solution so this locust no go ever happen again. We are allowing ourselves to be distracted by those who have other motives. After now, they will say we are Jews from Israel and all that. Please, we are in a serious situation, and all hands must be on deck to ensure that credible leadership is thrown up at all levels of governance to ensure that we fulfil the ethos of our promise as a nation. This is not the time to be sniffing on nostalgic stories of imagined bravery passed down by our fathers who saw the carnage of the civil war to be shouting war up and down. This is time for true selfless leaders to emerge from all ethnic colourations and persuasions to salvage the country. I am Nigeria, and I will be a Nigerian till I die.



Kanu

TWITTER–NIGERIA'S STONE-AGE REACTION

You see me, I have left that Twitter thing since. The place is a cesspool of abuse, a platform for fake news and has been used to wage an effective psychological war against the country. In fact, in my mind's eye, Twitter is a clear irritant and a tool used for the destabilization of the country, fair and square. Sadly, our leaders who do not understand that this is the new war are still using old discredited strategies to face a new threat level. This suspension of Twitter is so archaic that the thing is giving me scabies in my bum. The last I had scabies was at the University of Ibadan in 1987. How can you suspend a platform that has 40 million Nigerians on it doing all sorts? How can you gleefully just stand there and be 'nakedding' yourself internationally and be calling yourself the leaders of the largest black nation in the world? So, if Twitter delete your message nko, you no commot yourself and watch them reel from the massive PR backlash. Our leaders must begin to learn how to come up to speed. This is the new world, a digitally-driven world. You cannot be talking about suspension, registration, regulation in a borderless environment. I swear if possible, these people will bring back Decree 4. Laugh is just catching me where I am. So this Adesina, or Lai Mohammed, cannot build a team on Twitter that will counter all these negative narrations? They cannot get a team of influencers that will hedge, defend and push their policies. It is to be carrying a cane and be pursuing breeze up and down they will be doing. Sad, really sad. The vast majority of Nigerians on Twitter and social media are on it for other purposes than looking for the boil in baba's buttocks. Suspending Twitter is like waging war against the youth. 40m youths, how do you survive that? Please, whoever is in charge? Let's be more strategic in these things. He no hard like that. Unban the damn thing, build your own team and use the platform to sell your story effectively. Simple.

SANWO-OLU'S ENDEARING STYLE

You see, I have just been watching this bobo very closely. I recently went to a Lagos state-owned institution for a meeting. As the meeting progressed, I learnt that the previous administration appointed the executive management, and we could begin to see the essence in process flow and continuity. I had heard in other places that some of these appointments were carried over, and even projects and initiatives have also been 'continued'. If you understand the Nigerian variant of governance, you will understand the import of this position. You see, it takes a very big heart and a clear understanding of what governance should be to make a new governor carry on the policy of a predecessor despite the seeming ignorance of those you even want to impact. When the Stadium in Agege was commissioned, there was a lot of noise about the project being his predecessor's own. Mbok was he to demolish the stadium and relocate it to Shomolu or what? This is the kind of renaissance thinking we need in governance. Governance cannot be 'na me, Nn me'. It should be for the people, their betterment and of them. I am beginning to see the emergence of a true 'servant governor'. Think of his eagerness to jump into crises that affect the people even at the risk of getting burnt. Think of his wading into the #EndSARS wahala and taking the demands to the emperor on the rock. Or, think of his treatise on Arise on the Twitter matter, and other such things are making people like us look carefully at this brother. I see his 'intent.' I see a genuine need to work for the people despite whatever constraints he will be facing, and I am about to start a major clap for him. Bro, if you continue with this steam, I will soon owe you one bowl of afang, and you will come with only four of your aides cos I no go get money to buy for the crowd. Welldone Your Excellency, keep the pace.

AIGBOJE AIG–IMOUKHUEDE – ACCEPT MY SINCERE CONDOLENCE

I received a terse message on the passing of your dear mum during the week. Nothing prepares you for that kind of news. My mom was ill for five years, and I was telling myself that I had detached and was ready for the news. When it came, I was numb. I stood at the LASUTH emergency hall, looking at my mom lay stone cold. It shook me and messed up my confidence in my own immortality. Mbok, this is not about me but you, my brother. Let me use this medium to send you a warm hug. Be strong, don't cry too much and be strong. The inevitability of this should always give us strength to carry on, and also, the fact that she lived the good life, impacted and gave to society would further strengthen us at this time. Please send me a delivery address. Let me send you a well-made afang complete with ekwong and periwinkle. You will need it, my brother. God bless you and the family.

T.B JOSHUA – THE MIRACLE MAN OF IKOTUN

Me I use to fear this great man of God: my first introduction to him was during the fracas between my then pastor, Chris Okotie and the fine Pastor Chris of Christ Embassy. Then, Pastor Joshua was dragged into the fray. As Okotie was my pastor, na so I mumu take side. I come dey see Joshua as the son of the red one. Then he worked on Kanu Nwankwo and Daniel Amokachi. I come dey look am differently. Then I started seeing sitting African presidents swear by him and so many foreigners fly down, and then I said to myself, just maybe this man has something.

Then one day, as I was going to Egbeda to chase one girl who had said, if you



Sanwo-Olu



Aig–Imoukhuede



T.B Joshua



Charly Boy

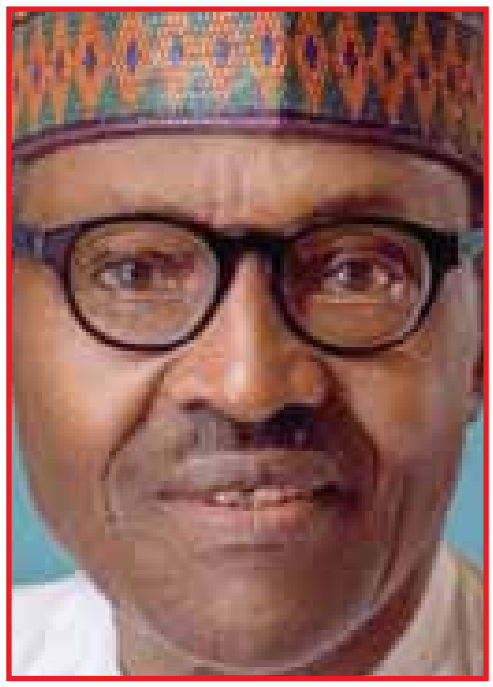
really want me, come to Egbeda. If you know how traffic for that side be, you will tell the girl to carry her k-legs go away. But I was determined to nail this one. That is how I carry myself go there o. Like Saul in the bible, that is how I got to Synagogue after four hours in traffic. I stop say, make I rest and the man was preaching, and I was listening on the public address system. I know you are waiting for me to say that I stopped and enter the church and do an altar call abi? Na lie, the force wey pull me that day was really strong. I continue my journey mbok. Anyways, his death came as a surprise, especially at his relatively young age. But God knows better. We cannot question but bow our head in supplication. Since his passing more information has been coming out showing that he was indeed special and different. God will give his family and his millions of followers the strength to handle his demise. Painful.

CHARLY BOY – MY AREA FADA

Fada says he would be 70 this week. Some have said 69, others have said 71. Whatever it is, the icon deserves much more than we can ever give to him as a nation. He has been a pioneer, a lightning rod and a wonderful inspiration to thousands, including myself. What most people do not know is the fact that I dedicated my very first book ever published to him. Na my sister Bolanle Austen Peters dash me the money to do the book o. That time, I can broke. You guys may not understand why I feel so strongly about this man because you are all not special. Eccentricity is inborn. You are born different, you feel the strong need to stand aside, and society will not understand you. You are brilliant, extremely so, and as such, you see things the millions can't see, and they call you mad. You will need a large dose of the mental strength of which, sadly, many 'different' people don't have to withstand the onslaught of the majority. Charles Oputa is imbued with the kind of strength we can only dream of and the brilliance of a Nobel laureate which has enabled him to stand aside, maintain relevance and continue to be a symbol of entrenched resistance in a society ruled by empty gargoyles. I respect him cos I see me in him. I respect him cos his own madness is extreme, and we are just starting where he is. He is introverted, quiet but mad. You think the Duke is mad, spend five minutes with this genius. I hope to do a book on him very soon. I need to document his story for posterity. He is a mutant, our leader, and in him we will find ourselves and stand. Happy birthday Lord Mutant. God bless you.

CHRIS IHEUWA - THE 'BOY' WHO CRIED WOLF

This no name so-called Nollywood producer shot himself into national infamy last week. He penned a story that told of how he escaped ritualists in Port Harcourt. The write-up was so brilliantly written that it caught the nation's imagination, and the thing went viral with people broadcasting and rebroadcasting to themselves. Days later, he came out to say it was a script for an upcoming movie. I call him 'boy' because no mature man will do this, especially with the ongoing tension in the land. After now, when the government says we should regulate social media, people will be shouting. With such irresponsibility as exhibited by this nonstarter, what do you expect? Social media is replete with stories like this, all fake but believable, going straight to deepen hatred and anger. Fear and mutual suspicion is established. I just tire. That is how during #EndSARS, a Nigerian flag with bloodstains all



Buhari



Akinfemiwa

over it and claiming that the Army shot innocent Nigerians draped in the Nigerian flag went viral. That image made me cry. I ran into the bathroom and puked. I cried the whole night, and it aroused anger and bitterness towards the leaders and the Army. But we later found out that it was from a Nollywood movie. You see where we find ourselves. Now this person, who obviously is one of the least talented in his genre but seeking relevance, cries this kind of wolf at this time. This is a national paper, so I will not call him an idiot. I know I am not supposed to use words like idiot and bagger on a page like this, so I will not use it. But wherever he is, he should self-regulate. Things like this are worsening the situation.

AKIN AKINFEMIWA – I DEY HAIL

When I was still a yeye stockbroker, they say we should come and go for a session by Forte Oil. I was working in the great Albert Okumagba's BGL, and I was a leading salesman. Forte Oil was about to come to the market and needed to tell its story directly to the stockbrokers. That is how we went o. Chief Femi Otedola, my egbon, was Chairman, and he made introductory remarks and handed over the microphone to one young chap. I sha noticed that the Executive Management of such a huge company were quite young. A testament to the confidence and empowerment strategy of Chief Otedola. I kept quiet. Let's hear what this bobo would say. He was brilliant. Very eloquent, and his clarity was mad. He spoke exponentially, taking us through their story, not even looking at the slides. Some people will be reading, but this chap was immersed. Where did Femi Otedola get these kinds of boys? These are the type of boys Christopher Columbus saw in Los Angeles that he called the place land of Angels. He dazed me, and I gave a very good report leading to BGL front loading and highly recommending the offer to our clients. Then he disappeared. But then my other brother, the well-regarded Dr Mudasiru, who I want to consider one of the most brilliant stockbrokers and investment bankers, reached out to me one day. He said, 'Duke do you know Akin reads you regularly?' I say, 'Akin'? He say, 'Yes, na the Geregu guy.' He wants to greet you for your mama passing. I say oya. He called. I was in Uyo and was very warm on the call. I felt goose pimples. His words encouraged me.

Ever since, we have been interacting, although not frequently, but I dey bow when we engage on issues. The power of his intelligence is something else—some people sha brilliant o. Well done bro, I just say make I hail you this morning. God bless.

TIWA SAVAGE – I STAND WITH YOU

Look, me I no get shame. Anything that concerns Tiwa savage, I stand with her. It is not today that I have started having a crush. Look, anybody that fights Tiwa fights me. There is no objectivity there. There is no neutrality. Mbok, come and see this girl eyes, her skin, her bum. I have died o. That is why when I saw the video of her altercation with another beauty, Sheyi Shay, I just stand beside my queen. I don't know what they were fighting over, whether it is lipstick or hairdresser. No matter what it is, Tiwa can never be wrong o. It is Seyi's fault. Seyi, you sef why did you greet my queen? Did we ask for your greeting? Or are you selling the greeting? We don't want o. Mbok darling Tiwa, please calm down. Don't vex again. These things happen. Mbok, where can I come and see you? There is something I want to tell you? I have wanted to tell you this thing for five years now. Just give me one minute. Let me come and tell you so that I can sleep. Kai, that Tiwa girl fine o. Be like angel. If you see her dancing, you will cry o—the second most beautiful woman in Nigeria after Duchess. I have to put that one before they come and seize my afang o. So Tiwa, you fine but Duchess fine pass you o. I know some people here will now go and send this piece to Duchess so they can come and \restructure my head. Kai. I don run o.



Tiwa Savage

BUHARI ON ARISE TV – I DIDN'T WATCH

The previous evening, I had just escaped a daring armed robbery attack. In the last week, my friend would say to me – Duke, be safe, and I would ask her, why do you always tell me to be safe? She would say, you are always on the road, and the spate of robbery in Lagos is on the increase, and I would say, me I am Duke of Shomolu; even the bandits will respect authority. That is how that evening, on my way home in traffic (I had dismissed my driver cos it was late, and I was listening to the radio and waiting for traffic to clear), I saw people in front scrambling out of their cars and running in different directions. I first wanted to laugh because, in things like this, you will see unity. Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Ibibio, all of us scampering together o, shouting in our different languages for help but united in fright. But me, I calm. You know I get special military training. The koboko dey give me in command secondary school has made me strong, so I watch to know my next move. The epicentre was seven cars away from me, so I decided not to run and leave my car because of the nudes on my laptop.

I turned the car and faced the opposite direction to drive towards the island. That is how I saw a police patrol van turning in front of me. The driver sef, a full policeman, no get my kind of expertise as he took almost forever to turn. I shouted oga turn na make dem no kill me here o. He say sorry. I say oya. They were four in number fully armed. Even one came down with pistol clearing road for them to escape. Then it dawned on me, wasn't police expected to drive towards the epicentre and not the other way with us. But will I stop and ask? We all needed to escape. By the time we were at a safe point, I call Duchess and say armed robber o. You see, women, she thought it was one of my fibs and said, 'greet the young girl' and drop the phone. You see life. I just honker down refusing to be distracted and later when the road was clear, I found my way home.

So you will forgive me if I didn't watch emperor, lord, and maximum ruler on Arise TV. Not really in the mood to know how the cows are doing. Fear is catching me to leave my house as a result.

SOCIETY WATCH

Adebayo Adeoye
bayoolunla@gmail.com; 08054680651



Latunji

High-Flying Banker Bukky Latunji Celebrates Mom at 80

No doubt, a former General Manager of Zenith Bank, Bukky Latunji, owes her octogenarian mother a lot in life. Watching her mother and the patriarch of the family age gracefully gives immeasurable joy to the beautiful banker.

As a result, the respected banker penultimate Sunday played host to close friends, business associates, celebrities and high-net-worth individuals across different walks of life, who all came to celebrate her mother, Mrs Christiana Latunji's 80th birthday.

The event, held in Lekki Phase 1, Lagos, was well put together, as Bukky, a lifestyle coach, did her possible best to honour her loving mother.

The celebrant, who looked posh in white lace fabrics, is an illustrious daughter of the Majekodunmi family in Mokoloki, Abeokuta, Ogun State. She was the cynosure of all eyes as she carried herself elegantly. The mother of five and grandmother could not hold down her joy as she danced to contemporary music at every opportunity with ease.

Friends from the banking, oil and gas, hospitality sectors joined in the celebration, and all had a swell time as the banker showcased her sense of hospitality.

Some of the guests included General Manager of UBA PLC, Pamela Sodipo, Managing Director of Printserve, Wemimo Akin, Former GM of the Zenith bank, Wunmi Ogunbiyi, among several others.

Bukky, an astute banker with over two decades' banking experience, held strategic positions and was a prominent part of Zenith Bank's success story, shouldering diverse responsibilities until she left in 2019 to set up her own business.

Aminu Tambuwal: A Beacon of Hope

When the country is on the precipice, many are of the view that the focus should be on individuals who can give the nation positive vibes.

Therefore, ahead of the 2023 general election, one name that has been talked about consistently is Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, Governor of Sokoto.

There are leaders, and there are leaders. The ability of a leader to inspire confidence in the people through his track record makes him stand out when leaders are counted.

Many will agree that the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Tambuwal, has proved himself to possess distinguishable qualities that make a good leader. Tambuwal dares to take very urgent and key decisions that will solve most of the nation's problems. He is clearly a leader with a vision. And because he is very young and has himself faced some of the hardships brought on us by the destructive actions of former leaders, he is prepared to create a perfect environment to change what has not been working for his generation and those to come.

Does Tambuwal have the specific traits and components of leadership? The answer lies in his track record. Described as a visionary leader, Tambuwal mixes freely with people of all religions and tribes and believes in the oneness of Nigeria.

His foray into politics has seen him move from the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) back to the ANPP to PDP and then to APC and back to PDP. His fans maintain that he never dumped his belief in the ideology of One Nigeria in all his political moves then.



Tambuwal

The moves, according to them, essentially got him close to more people from the different parts of Nigeria and prepared him for the roles ahead.

While in the House of Representatives, he was a minority leader, elected the deputy chief whip in 2007. He was a member of several committees, including the House Committees on Rules & Business, Communications, Judiciary, Inter-Parliamentary and Water Resources. He was also a member of the House Ad hoc Committee on Constitution Review.

He was chairman of the ad hoc committee that reviewed the controversial report of the power probe committee headed by Ndudi Elumelu. He was also the chairman, House Sub-Committee on the Bill for an Act to Amend the Land Use Act, and the acting chairman, House Committee on Power.

Speaking to Society Watch, a source who preferred anonymity said, "Tambuwal, when he was the PPP presidential candidate, shone like a star. His leadership skills, determination to excel and turn the fortunes of the country around within a short period, his unpolluted and unblemished name, and zero records of corruption stood for him and prompted acceptance by people from all over the country.

"Between 2011 and 2015, when Aminu Tambuwal was Speaker, he went about preaching peace, building bridges between warring communities, and personally visiting communities with ethnic/religious crisis with the sole aim of uniting them. And like a saviour on a mission, he did it with much compassion and dedication."

Tambuwal believes that every part of Nigeria is supposed to be home to every Nigerian as stipulated by the constitution. "We should all be seen to provide leadership and accommodation wherever we find ourselves. Nigeria is our country."

He has always denounced ethnic and religious conditions in Nigeria and believes Nigerians must be on the same page.



TB. Joshua

TB Joshua's Many Battles, Victories

Whenever the history of Christendom in Nigeria is written, the story of the late Prophet Temitope Balogun Joshua, popularly known as TB Joshua, and his church, the Synagogue Church of All Nations, SCOAN, will get a mention.

From the outset, TB Joshua was rejected even by the majority of Nigeria's Christendom. In the eyes of many, he was a wolf in sheep's skin. Even his miracles, which drew many to his church, were considered fake.

Despite Joshua's exploits, the Christian bodies in Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), never accepted him into their folds on the ground that he was an exorcist or a charmer.

Almost daily, stories of one attack or another from fellow pastors who never saw anything good in him filled newspaper pages. Perhaps, the most notable of his many battles was with the founder of Household of God, Reverend Chris Okotie, who once described Joshua as the vicar of the devil on earth.

Senior men of God like Pastor Enoch Adeboye, General Overseer, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, Bishop David Oyedepo and many others also refused to acknowledge him as one of them.

Sometime in 2009, Adeboye was quoted to have said, "If he wants me to come and minister in his church, we will sit down, discuss the issue of salvation the way I understand it, according to the scriptures.

"If we agree on that and he now wants me to come and preach the same message of salvation in his church, then I will go."

While he was the PFN President and CAN Chairman, Oritsejafor had reportedly said the body would not admit Joshua into its fold because he did not convince them he was a child of God. He had said then that before Joshua could even qualify to be a PFN member, he should show who tutored him as a pastor in the first place.

"Jesus did not say by their words you will know them; he said by the fruit you shall know them. If T.B. Joshua can show me his pastor who pastored him before he said he was called into the ministry; if T.B. Joshua can tell me when he got converted and how he got converted, then we would consider him. Anybody who is a Christian is a Christian because he received Jesus Christ at a point.

"I gather he said he was converted in his mother's womb and I don't see anybody like that in the Bible. It is a conscious decision you make and it doesn't happen in your mother's womb," argued Oritsejafor.

Oritsejafor, who emphasised that healing and miracles were not criteria for admitting anyone into the PFN fold or CAN, had added, "We are not taking T.B Joshua. But like I said, he too can repent and be converted tomorrow. T.B Joshua can say I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and personal saviour. I repent of my sins. Then he can say, come check me out and see what I am doing. Then we can consider accepting him. PFN is for all; nobody is really excluded."

As part of his travails, the guest house of his church collapsed, killing more than 100 people, most of them foreigners who were in Nigeria to attend his services. While the government claimed the building collapsed because of structural defects, he insisted a bomb blew up the building dropped from a small plane that flew over it shortly before it came down.

Surprisingly, he rose above all the condemnations and tribulations to become widely known across Africa and Latin America. His large social media presence with 3,500,000 fans on Facebook and YouTube channel, Emmanuel TV, with over 1,000,000 YouTube subscribers, resulted from concerted efforts in the face of serious challenges.

Chrisland Schools Celebrate Language, Arts and Culture Day

As part of its effort to promote the country's culture, popular education provider, Chrisland Schools held its Language, Arts and Culture Day on Friday.

This event, which held in the school premises at Opebi, was themed: "One Root, Many Branches", an allusion to the country's rich cultural diversity

The occasion featured pupils aged between seven and eleven, dressed in indigenous attires reflective of cultures from the six geo-political zones of the country. Also on display were local delicacies as well as cultural dances and dramas performed in Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.

Mr. Eric Van Der Merwe, principal of the school, explained the importance of the event as it helps students develop an appreciation for art and language as well as different cultures.

"Nigeria has one of the best cultures in the world and this is what has kept me back in Nigeria for the past 11 years. As a school, we have discovered that a lot of students are not in touch with their background and culture, hence the reason for this occasion. This is an event the school has successfully done each year as a way of keeping students in touch with their roots," he said.

Special guest of the occasion, Hon. Olufunke Rekiya Hassan of Onigbongbo Local Council Development Authority, described the event as remarkable and praised Chrisland High School for it's commitment to the promotion of culture.

"We must highlight and promote our culture, not just as matter of individual preferences or styles but collectively as our national identity. I applaud the organisers, Chrisland Schools, for serving as custodians of our rich cultural legacy, which is one of our resources,' she said.

Also present at the event were Oba Olusegun Adeyemi Ajasa, Awuse of Onigbongbo Kingdom; Mrs Mofoluke Oluwasanmi of the Lagos State Council for Arts and Culture and Mrs Osayande Osaro of the Centre for Black African Art and Civilization.

Two Years of AbdulRazaq's Administration in Kwara

In the face of dwindling resources, Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq's prudent management of resources has made all the difference, writes **Tobi Soniyi**

There was a time when there was enough money for governments to squander. But not any more.

As a result of the financial crunch most of the states are going through, the federal government has had to bail them out twice. This indeed is not the best time to be a state governor.

Only governors who are prudent in managing resources can record meaningful achievements. One of such governors is the Kwara State governor, AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq.

His austere lifestyle means that state's resources would not be wasted. While some governors still engage in profligacy, the governor maintains a low profile while ensuring that the state's resources are committed into developing the state.

In the face of dwindling allocation from the federal government, many are wondering how AbdulRazaq is able to raise funds to execute state projects.

It is a testimony to his prudent management of resources that his administration has not borrowed a dime from any financial institution relying only on statutory allocations from the Federation Account and internationally generated revenue (IGR).

While some governors are buying cars to replace the ones they bought in the previous year, the governor did not approve purchase of officials cars for his cabinet members. In fact, there are lessons the federal government can learn from AbdulRazaq's administration. The governor is very good at eliminating wastes and making judicious use of the state's resources.

His financial prudence is evident in various sectors, including education, agriculture, health, information, sports and the civil service.

While revenue generation took a hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kwara State Internal Revenue Service (KW-IRS) generated N9,598,504,939.90 in the first quarter of 2021.

The Executive Chairman of the agency, Mrs Shade Omoniyi attributed the feat to KWIRS' increased adoption of technology and steady blockage of leakages within the tax administration system.

According to her, the figure is the highest ever collected by the agency without any extraordinary item at any quarter since its establishment in 2016.

She explained that the feat was achieved without any new raise in the tax rate, even as the agency made deliberate steps to tackle multiple taxation. Sectoral analysis shows that the government in Kwara State is making meaningful impact in the life of the people.

This change in the state's development trajectory is making a huge difference. There is a need to sustain it.

At the beginning of his administration, AbdulRazaq injected N232 million into the health sector to tackle malaria, maternal death, and malnutrition.

Equipped with state-of-the-art ICU facilities like defibrillators, patient monitors, ventilators, Kwara for the first time now has a five-ward air-conditioned isolation centre for infectious diseases. The administration has purchased five new military-grade ambulances with the capacity to manage fragile patients on the go. Apart from training for health workers, the administration was about the first in the country to pay mouth-watering allowances for medical workers managing COVID-19 patients. The long-dead oxygen plant has now been revived. Kwara, which used to buy oxygen for its hospitals, is today self-sufficient and can sell oxygen to neighbouring states and private hospitals.

Along with a health insurance scheme for the people of the state, the government has renovated 37 primary health centres across the state, while 70 new medical personnel, including doctors, were recruited to strengthen access to quality healthcare.

Kwara prided itself as an agrarian state. It even once constructed a large cargo shed to attract agro processing investments. Yet the farming hinterlands in Kaiama, Baruten and elsewhere had no good roads connecting them to the market in the city. This is changing. The administration is today constructing the multipurpose Maigida Bani road which connects farming communities in the north to those in the central for easy access to market. The Gwanara road in Kwara north is now receiving attention. Kwara had almost lost its RAAMP III slot to Bayelsa for failing to pay N200m counterpart funds. The new administration has since paid and Kwara is back to reckoning.

To improve primary education and reduce the number of out of school children the governor paid the state's counterpart funds, which have brought back development partners, and taken the state off the Universal Basic Education (UBEC) blacklist.

The government rehabilitated 31 schools across the state spending N1.7bn.

Having taken Kwara off the UBEC blacklist, the administration has accessed the over N7bn trapped there. The state library complex has been rehabilitated, a part of it equipped with e-learning facilities powered with 24-hour solar energy.



AbdulRazaq

Teachers across the three state- owned Colleges of Education have returned to the classroom after the new administration paid their salary arrears worth N700m. Like the school of Midwifery, courses at the College of Education (Technical), Lafiagi and College of Arabic and Islamic Legal Studies, Ilorin have now been re-accredited. Monthly subventions have been restored to the institutions after many years.

For the first time, bursaries and scholarships were paid through transparent electric windows to rule out sharp practices by officials saddled with the responsibility of paying the students . The inherited N19.5m salary arrears at the International Vocational, Technical and Entrepreneurship College (IVTEC), Ajase- Ipo had been settled.

With five water works fixed and some others at various stages of repair, clean potable water is back to Kwara households at stable intervals. At least 402 boreholes were rehabilitated in the early days of the government, while 14 more have been dug in Baruten, Kwara north, where water scarcity had been a menace. The boreholes will complement the ongoing Yashikira water work.

The civil service is at its best in two decades. The new administration has not only restored running costs across the MDAs, 27 new vehicles were also recently purchased to aid mobility of workers while modern computers were given to them. The state government has commenced gradual implementation of the new minimum wage in the state. As at the time of filing this report, no civil servant earns less than N30,000 in the state.

The AbdulRazaq's government constantly sends out the right signal that a new Kwara has arrived. The NYSC camp, which was no better than a penitentiary, has undergone complete rehabilitation and is equipped with basic amenities. Fifteen years after it was held, the administration revived the Kwara State Sports Festival. The baseball court has been rehabilitated after decades of neglect. Various capacity training and enlightenment programmes have been held for youths, including a three-day Nigerian youth parliamentary workshop in Ghana.

The government has done so much to engage young people, with nearly 60 percent of AbdulRazaq's appointments going to persons below 40.

All outstanding allowances to judicial officers, some dating back to 2014, have been paid by the administration. Its expansive waterlogged compound now paved with modern interlocking tiles, the administration has undertaken a complete remodelling of the 'Centre Igboro' Area Court in Ilorin —more than 30 years after it was abandoned. For the first time since it was constructed during military rule, the administration has reroofed the State High Court complex while the Sango Magistrate Court, gutted by fire over five years ago, has been reconstructed.

The governor believes Kwara holds the ace in agriculture. He has not only paid N350m to enrol the state in the FADAMA III scheme, Kwara has keyed into the National Livestock Transformation Plan which is designed to ensure food security and end the perennial deadly clashes between herders and farmers. The governor recently launched 15 new tractors and other farming implements to boost food production in the state.

Apart from renovating the juvenile correctional home, the children reception centre, and paying counterpart funds for the World Bank-funded community and social development projects (CSDP), the administration has launched its social investment programme (KWASIP) which targets the aged, the unemployed, petty traders, and little children who would be fed in school.

On youths employment, the state government recently employed 4,701 teachers at both the basic and secondary education levels.

The process of recruiting more staff for the civil service has commenced as advertisement has been placed for the vacancies in the core civil service and KWIRS.

In the media sector, the governor has repositioned the three state owned media outfits for optimum performance. While the State Broadcasting Corporation (Radio Kwara) which had gone off the air before the inauguration of the AbdulRazaq's administration has been resuscitated and has taken back its leading position in the broadcasting space, The Herald has been fully digitised and now more regular on the newsstand. The Kwara Television Service (KWTV) is also receiving attention as a new General Manager who shall oversee its repositioning has been appointed.

As a media friendly governor, AbdulRazaq had appointed three accomplished journalists as members of his cabinet and Chief Press Secretary- Alh Sa'adu Salahu, Alh Bashir Adigun and Rafiu Ajakaye (Special Advisers on Strategy, Political Communications and Chief Press Secretary) respectively.

The governor also undertook a complete rehabilitation of the Press Centre of the Kwara State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) with a whopping sum of over N17M million. He also organised training programmes for journalists covering COVID-19 and as well extended COVID-19 palliatives to both the working and veteran journalists in the state.

INTERNATIONAL

June 12, Arise News Channel's Interview with PMB and PMB's Tweetoplomacy: Beyond the Braggadocio



VIE INTERNATIONALE

with

Bola A. Akinterinwa

Telephone : 0807-688-2846
e-mail: bolyttag@yahoo.com

Three major events of concern in the past two weeks are the marking of June 12 as Democracy Day; Arise News Channel's Exclusive Interview with President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) on Thursday, 10 June, 2021; and President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB)'s tweetoplomacy. The three events have the great potential to further attract special global attention in the foreseeable future because of their nature and strategic implications for Nigeria's foreign policy. They necessarily raise questions on the extent to which democracy can endure in Nigeria, the extent to which there can be fairness- or justice-driven governance in Nigeria, and particularly how foreign policy can be conducted and managed to protect domestic policy inconsistencies. In fact, they raise the extent to which Nigeria can remain united as an indivisible, sovereign nation-state.

On June 12, a day set aside for remembering the people's political will was slaughtered on the altar of democracy in 1993. It was the day Chief MKO Abiola was on record to have won the fairest, the freest, and the best ever-organised presidential election in Nigeria's political history. The results of the elections, for selfish militaro-ethnic considerations, were recklessly annulled by the then military president, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. As a result of the annulment, every June 12 has been marked since 1993 to celebrate Chief MKO Abiola, the President we never had, as a symbolic instrument of democracy. The impact of the celebrations is such that PMB had to put a stop to the marking of May 29 as Democracy Day in favour of June 12 with effect from ... apparently to secure the political support of the Yoruba South West.

The marking of June 12 this year, 2021, is particularly noteworthy because of its environmental insecurity and particularly the agitations for self-determination and sovereign autonomy. The statement of Mr. Sunday Igboho, an apostle of Oduduwa Republic, is a pointer to this observation. As credited to Mr. Igboho, under no circumstance should the peaceful public demonstrations scheduled for June 12 be tainted with any bloodshed. In his words, 'let us warn the Federal Government that if there is bloodshed this weekend, the international community is watching, if the military kills any Nigerian this weekend, it is going to be very hot. The Yoruba Nation rally will go ahead in every part of Yoruba land and the rest of the country where it will hold.'

And perhaps more importantly, Sunday Igboho said 'red alarm will begin on Friday. People should stock up food items from Friday night. We are not backing down this weekend. We are ready to take back what belongs to us.' This statement is self-explanatory. It is against this background of environmental insecurity that the discussion of the Arise Television Exclusive Interview with PMB and PMB's tweetoplomacy becomes relevant.

Arise Interview and PMB's Tweetoplomacy

The exclusive interview granted by PMB to the Arise News Channel on the future of Nigeria, and particularly on what to expect from the PMB administration in the next two years, enabled viewers to delineate PMB's apparent dual character in the governance of Nigeria: character of statesmanship when convenient and character of an unrepentant military dictator when helplessly pushed to a tight corner. The questions asked during the Arise News Channel interview and the mania of PMB responses clearly show that he is not, and cannot be, a good President of a truly united Nigeria, simply because he consciously dodged critical questions bordering on patriotism and fairness and clearly showed partisanship when specific questions relating to his ethnic group are raised. Put differently, a good leader, a patriotic leader, must have the discipline of always defending fairness, equity, justice and requirements of good governance, rather than conveniently seeking to defend his people indirectly. A good Nigerian must also similarly defend objectivity and honesty of purpose. They must seek to address issues rather than addressing people. This is why PMB has not been able to superintend national questions well and why policy makers now find themselves in a junction of confusion and policy inconsistencies.



Buhari

This is a major rationale for Nigeria's current problems. A review of the Arise News Channel interview is relevant and necessary at this juncture.

First, PMB hardly responds to questions asked. It is possible he does not hear the question well, or does not understand the question, or he understands the implications of providing the explanatory truth but does not want to respond to it. Whatever is the case, the attitudinal disposition of PMB simply reminds of what Chief Obafemi Awolowo said in 1985: 'our ship of state is heading towards the rock, unless the chief helmsman rises courageously to steer the ship away from its present course, the inescapable consequence will be an inexplicable disaster.' There is nothing to suggest that the inescapable consequence is not at hand with the responses of PMB.

The first question asked by Dr. Reuben Abati, after Prince Nduka Obaigbena's prolegomena, was on the deepening situation of insecurity: 'Mr. President, the nation is witnessing a rising insecurity, banditry, arson, kidnapping. How do we get here? What is the way out?' The essence of these questions is not far-fetched: that there is an intrinsic situation of insecurity in Nigeria, which is a truism. That the insecurity is also deepening is another truism. The point of interest is how did we move from the level of a crisis to that of a conflict? In other words, why the crises and the conflicts? Perhaps more interestingly, before the insecurity began to deepen, could it be that PMB was unaware? If he was unaware, why? If he was aware, what has he done to contain the worsening of the conflicts? The bottom line of Dr. Abati's question is How did we get to the level of a rising insecurity? Without doubt, 'HOW' is more about mania, rationales, factors, and what is responsible for the rise in insecurity.

The responses given by PMB did not address the question of how. As submitted by PMB: 'when we came, it is (sic) been a very difficult undertaking. But we closed the borders with Benin Republic. We closed the borders with Niger Republic. We stopped smuggling. We asked Nigerians to grow what they will eat and eat what they grow. The cost of importation of rice and other foodstuff, we stopped it. We made fertilisers available and we were very impressed and happy with the action of Nigerians. They went back to the farm. And we made sure our neighbours, especially Niger (are carried along), because there are Nigerians who order food in Niger for Nigerian market, the Nigerien government cooperated with us. So really we depended on ourselves and Nigerians do not regret it.'

PMB spoke on corruption, which he said is 'very difficult under this system and even under the military system, luckily I have experienced both occasions...' He explained how he too was arrested and detained by the security agents, how he had to put on his 'agbada and join politicians and how he may not be able to change the system, etc. From the foregoing transcribed quotation, PMB has not in any way addressed the question of how we got to the current noisome situation in the country. He also did not respond to the issue of quo vadis also raised by Dr. Abati.

The second question was raised by Prince Nduka Obaigbena who anchored the interview: 'Shekau was reported dead. Does that give us an opportunity for us to zero in and consolidate and secure the North East?' PMB responded that 'the problem of the northeast is difficult. The Governor, this present Governor, is working very hard. He is taking a lot of risk (sic). And I asked him, this Boko Haram, is it our people or is it Nigerians or people coming out...? He said they are Nigerians... Most of them. They are Nigerians. As I said, the only way to go round about it is that you cannot kill innocent people and say God is great. That works very well. But I think we have a problem of unemployment. We have a lot of youths looking basically for what to eat, not even (to) talk about accommodation... The level of poverty is almost unimaginable. So this is our problem. But those who are really keeping in touch with what we are doing, they know the difference between the time we came in and now. And the people of North East and South South, I think, are the best judges for the performances of this administration, because they knew what they were in and they know the condition now.'

Again, the essence of the second question is to know the extent to which there can be a glimmer of hope now that the Boko Haram leader is purported to have been killed. Is security in the North East now feasible? PMB cannot reply as to whether there is an opportunity or not to consolidate security in the North East. By explaining that the situation in the North East is difficult, does he imply that there is no opportunity of consolidating security in the region?

Without doubt, in virtually all the questions raised, including those of Mr. Olusegun Adeniyi and Ms. Tundun Abiola, PMB always found it convenient to justify what his administration has done, rather than seeking appropriate explanations to questions asked. For instance, while Mr. Adeniyi raised the question of the spread of insecurity from the North East to the South East, and Ms. Tundun Abiola raised the issue of formalisation of State police, PMB simply gave the usual defensive narratives. In light of this evasive attitude, we strongly believe that it cannot be possible even for a well-intentioned leader, to ensure national security in Nigeria. PMB's vision is quite questionable. His intentions and words conflict with his actions.

As regards PMB's tweetoplomacy, the Twitter.Com, a social network and podcasting private company, removed @MBuhari from its clientèle space for violating its operational regulations. Twitter.com is not a government outfit but one that all governments relate with for various reasons of force majeure. In the same vein, @Buhari.com is not governmental in character. At best, it is individual. It is PMB's private twitter handle, and, therefore, quite different from that of the Nigerian presidency, @ngr.presidency. In reaction to the de-registration of his private twitter handle, PMB declared the Twitter.com non grata in Nigeria. Did PMB act because of the dishonour done him as an individual or because of the national interest?

It is useful here to note that, as a social network and a podcasting company, twitter.com was founded on 21 March, 2006 in San Francisco, California, United States, by Jack Dorsey, Biz Stone, Noah Glass, and Evan Williams. It was launched in July 2006 to provide a social network service with an original code name, 'twttr' and an original name, called 'Status'. As Wikipedia has it, 'the original name was called "status", but after searching through the dictionary, he (Dorsey) found the word Twitter. The definition was a 'short burst of inconsequential information, and chirps from birds.' More important, when Twitter was first launched in July 2006, 'no one used "tweet as a noun or a verb. Instead, the Service referred to the tweeting process as "twittering" and those who used the Service as Twitter-ers.' Thus PMB is simply an ordinary twitterer, like many others.

More significantly, Twitter is an online micro-blogging service for the distribution of a short message service for groups. In terms of policy stand, Twitter like other social media companies, is constantly under pressure to prevent hate speech, harassment and bullying in whatever is posted in Twitter site. It is against this background that the misunderstanding between PMB and the Twitter.Com should be partly explained and understood.

Who really is in charge of Nigeria's foreign policy: the Minister of Information and Culture or the Minister of Foreign Affairs? Is it that the Information Minister is more actively engaged than the Foreign Minister? These questions are prompted by the many problems of Government's always reasoning after pronouncement of policies, and not always thinking enough about their likely implications before their pronouncements. Government should make haste slowly in acting speedily after inadequate reflection on foreign policy implications. PMB's mania of keeping silent on burning national questions or taking much delight in not wanting to speak on such questions forthrightly, can only taint whatever legacy he is claiming to want to leave for posterity. The truth as at today is that many observers believe that the rising insecurity in Nigeria is a resultant from alleged PMB's fulanisation agenda, Islamic jihadism, and his unrepentant nepotism. Besides, it is most unfortunate that PMB can say that merit should apply in the appointment of military chiefs and all those who grew in the system and qualified for appointment are only his ethnic people. Consequently, in reply to Prince Obaigbena's question of what security future, with the alleged demise of the Boko Haram leader, Nigeria's security future cannot be bright for a simple reason: Fulanisation, jihadism, nepotism, inequity, unfairness, injustice, etc, cannot be celebrated on a platter of gold and at the same time still expect goodness of purpose, patriotism and national unity from the people

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ARTS & REVIEW

A THISDAY PUBLICATION

13.06.2021

EVEN WITH COVID-19, LIMCAF REMAINS RESILIENT

After last year's suspension of its 14th edition last due to the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic, Life in My City Art Festival resumes this year as an online competition. **Okechukwu Uwaezuoke** reports

Not even the unforeseen obtrusion of the last year's COVID-19 scare can deny the Life in My City Art Festival – more often known in the art circles as LIMCAF – of its rightful claim to the crown as the country most resilient and consistent art event. It was in a bid to avoid sinking below the industry's horizon that the annual art festival held an international webinar on Saturday, December 12 last year.

The webinar, which was attended by leading internationally-acknowledged art scholars, was in an obvious nod to the government-imposed restrictions caused by the pandemic. Indeed, any attempt to host its grand finale and awards night at the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu's International Conference Centre would have been deemed ill-advised.

Now with a total of 488 entries – since 170 fresh entries were added to the previous 318 rolled over from the suspended 2020 edition – on the waiting list, the festival is set once more to take its place in the national ecosystem. This is even when this has to be achieved exclusively online.

Perhaps, industry analysts would be curious to see what the suspended 14th edition, themed "Vision 2020: So Far, So What", hopes to bring to the table. Indeed, among the aims of the last December's webinar was – according to the festival's artistic director, Dr Ayo Adewunmi – to re-examine its founding assumptions. This is besides charting a path for its future growth, which implies exploring the possibility and means open to it for an even greater contribution to the development of art in Nigeria and beyond.

Of course, it helped that the said webinar, whose lead speaker was the University of Port Harcourt's professor of art history and theory Frank Ugiomoh, also featured credible art personalities like the USA-based Prince University's professor of art history Chika Okeke-Agulu, the then USA-based artist and professor of art history Peju Layiwola, the Federal University of Lafia based artist, curator and art historian Chike Obeagu, the renowned artist and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka professor emeritus El Anatsui as well as collectors like the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe, the founder of OYASAF Omooba Yemisi Shyllon and the art patron Ufom Usoro. That online event, which was an apparent attempt to appease the disgruntled sensibilities of those who would have enthusiastically looked forward to physically attend the grand finale exhibition and the awards night, was based on the theme: "Life in My City Art Festival and the Growth of Contemporary Art in Nigeria / Africa".

On LIMCAF's new format, the entries will henceforth be sorted out and organised according to regions, which are otherwise known as exhibition centres. The competition's first level will see the national jury assess and select quality works online. These selected works will be featured for the second-round online exhibition to be held at the festival's traditional nine exhibition centres. "Going online for the 2021 festival is as a result of Covid restrictions," says Dr Adewunmi. "On dates to be advertised later, we will hold online exhibitions for each of the centres."



One of the entries at a recent edition of LIMCAF

From these exhibitions, the top 100 entries will emerge for the grand finale in Enugu, which it is hoped will hold physically under strict COVID restrictions sometime in early November this year.

As for the cash prizes, which include that of the overall, category, endowed and consolation prizes, the naira values remain unchanged.

Already, the top 12 winners of the festival's 2018 and 2019 editions – six drawn from each edition – are waiting on the sidelines to join the top winners of this 14th edition to embark on an all-expenses trip to the Dakar Art Biennale, tagged Dak'Art, which is being bankrolled by Professor El Anatsui.

The latter, on whose financial support the festival has partially been leaning in recent years, had initially sponsored its top winners in 2017 to the 2018 edition of the event, which holds biennially at the Senegalese capital city.

Sadly, the suspension of Dak'Art's 2020 edition due to the pandemic scuttled the hopes of the 12 winners from two editions, who had to wait for the next opportunity to attend the elite international art event. Had things gone on as planned, they would also have leveraged the opportunity to hold a Nigerian off-exhibition at the biennale under the banner of LIMCAF.

Still on sponsorships, LIMCAF first evolved from being the pet project of Chief Robert Orji's advertising agency Rocana Nigeria Limited and eliciting the interest of the Alliance Française network and the French Embassy to attracting big-time sponsors like Diamond Bank, FBN Holdings, the Enugu State Government and, more recently, the MTN Foundation. It is an eloquent testimonial of the festival's rising profile that the top-echelon staff members of these organisations deemed attending LIMCAF's grand finale and awards nights worth their while. Equally heartwarming was the fact that some of the annual festival's other partners, associates and supporters from within and outside the Nigerian art community, instituted category prizes.

Meanwhile, LIMCAF has, since its inception in 2007, lived up to its billings as a youth-empowerment art platform, through which a long list of aspiring young artists from across the country have clawed their way to the limelight. Among these artists are the maiden edition winner Olumide Oresegun, the 2014 winner Ngozi Omeje-Ezema, the 2011 third prize winner Sor Sen and the 2013 and 2015 category prize winner Izuchukwu Muoneme.

Besides the annual average of 400 entries that have been recorded since inception at its much looked-forward-to themed series of competitive exhibitions and graded awards, the quality of works at the event have once been endorsed by Professor Anatsui "getting better and better".

There have also been commendations by such local industry leading lights as Bruce Onobrakpeya, the late Ola Oloidi, the late Olabisi Silva, Professor Jerry Buhari, Kunle Filani, Sani Mu'azu, the late Nsikak Essien, Peju Layiwola, Joe Musa, Frank Ugiomoh, Sam Ovraiti, Blaise Gundu Gbaden, Chijioke Onuora and Tonie Okpe as well as from a gaggle of international consultants. Indeed, much of the festival's activities pivot on the participation of the art community's key figures – among whom were studio artists, curators, art scholars and gallery owners – in such role as jurors, advisers and regional centre's coordinators.

As for the awards nights – first held at the Nike Lake Hotels and Resorts and later at the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu's International Conference Centre – they have the meeting ground for such dignitaries as the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe; Nigeria's former high commissioner to the UK, Christopher Kolade; former Cross River State Governor Donald Duke; the founder of OYASAF, Prince Yemisi Shyllon and the chairman of Honeywell Group, Oba Otudeko, among others.

MUSIC

Femi Leye and the Soul Behind His Guitar

Yinka Olatunbosun

If you have ever been to Lagos International Jazz Festival or AMVCA or a private party where Femi Leye bedazzles with his guitar, then you'd understand how much of a dynamite he is on stage. He may not have mainstream popularity like the pop stars, but within the live music circles, he commands attention.

The multi-instrumentalist and actor hails from Ado-Ekiti in Ekiti State although he was born and raised in Lagos. At about the age of three or four, he began to show some interest in music.

"I was born in Celestial Church of Christ, which is known as a heavy percussive church, so that sparked my interest in music and I started with the three-faced drum known as 'Agbamole' before moving on to other instruments," he says.



Leye

His musical skills had been honed to the extent that he has gained some mastery of piano, keyboard, bass and percussion instruments such as Conga, Omele, Cord, Shekere and more. But guitar remains his preferred instrument.

When he was about 15 years old, he stumbled on George Benson's music and that made a great impact on his music taste.

"The tonality of his guitar playing drew me really close to the instrument and I knew that was what I wanted to do," he reminisces. "Even though jazz music is complex, it was a great foundation for me. Any musical situation I find myself, it is automatically simplified because I started with the hardest genre of music."

Leye had wanted to be a doctor but his passion for music became more overwhelming over time. Thankfully, he has very supportive parents who backed up his dream to be a musician.

"They bought me my first and second guitars," he continues. "They paid for lessons, allowed me travel and work with different bands. My parents are my superheroes and I love them dearly."

It is hard to keep Leye boxed into a music genre. His music style varies: it is essentially a fusion of a lot of genres right now from Soul to RnB, Funk, traditional Yoruba music, Lo fi, Afrobeats and Afropop. For him, creativity is a life wire. Other influences in his music include the Grammy-nominated juju maestro, King Sunny Ade whom he described as his 'first guitar hero.' His father also had a rich collection of African music that includes legends such as Ebenezer Obey, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Victor Uwaifo, Orlando Owoh and Victor Olaiya. But that wouldn't stop him from listening to western music.

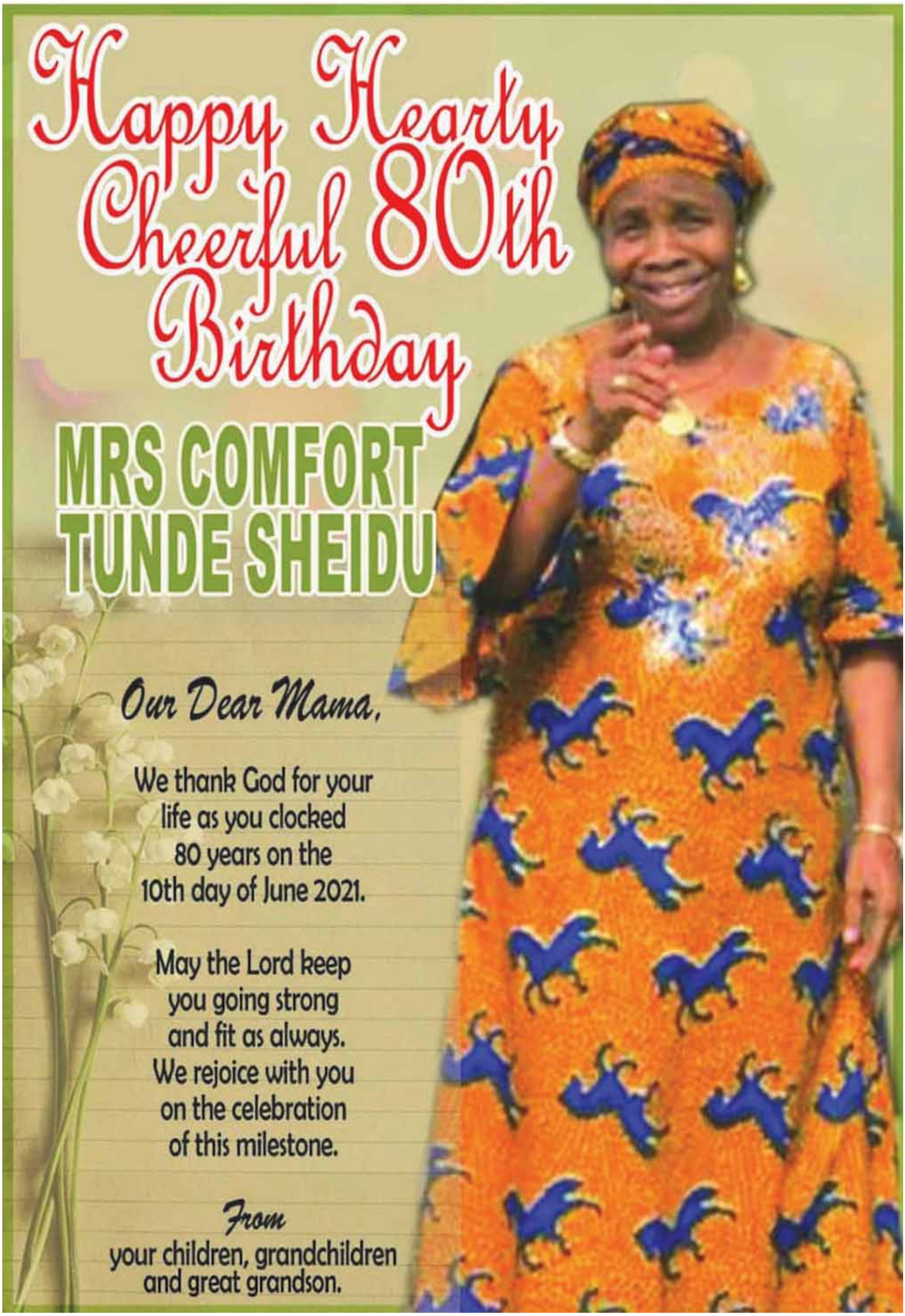
"Right now, I listen to John Mayer, Bruno Mars, Tom Misch, a lot of Lo fi artistes."

Leye has two studio albums "EKAABO" and "FEMI LEYE THE ALBUM" released in 2015 and 2019. He also released an EP in 2019 called "THE HIGHLIFE EP." At the beginning of 2021, he released "PENDULUM" which is a combination of Lo fi, Jazz, Afrobeat and Hip-hop. Right now, he is preparing to release PENDULUM VOL2.

His marriage to Iniabasi Leye who is an artist, art therapist and broadcaster has been blessed with two children.

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EDITOR OKECHUKWU UWAEZUOKE/ okechukwu.uwaezuoke@thisdaylive.com


Happy Hearty
Cheerful 80th
Birthday
MRS COMFORT
TUNDE SHEIDU
Our Dear Mama,
We thank God for your
life as you clocked
80 years on the
10th day of June 2021.
May the Lord keep
you going strong
and fit as always.
We rejoice with you
on the celebration
of this milestone.
From
your children, grandchildren
and great grandson.

CICERO

Editor:Olawale Olaleye
mail:wale.olaleye@thisdaylive.com, SMS: 08116759819

IN THE ARENA

Between Infrastructure Revamp and Numbing Insecurity

Remarkable infrastructure revamp and numbing security nightmare are two key opposing highlights defining the Muhammadu Buhari presidency. Resolving this peculiar contradiction would help history's verdict, writes **Louis Achi**

On Thursday, President Muhanmmadu Buhari inaugurated the commercial operations of Lagos-Ibadan railway project at the Mobolaji Johnson Railway Station, Ebute Metta, Lagos. An obviously elated Buhari described the accomplishment "as another milestone in the drive of this administration to revitalise the railway system and establish it as a choice mode of transportation for both passengers and freight."

Also, while inaugurating the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure Project, known as Deep Blue project, Buhari said it was the benchmark for maritime security in the West and Central African regions. He noted that the project underscores Nigeria's commitment to providing the necessary framework, resources and cooperation with other nations and maritime users and contribute to the diversification of the Nigerian economy.

Instructively, on the same day, in an Arise Television interview, the president revealed awareness that a sweeping infrastructural transformation indeed would remain a flight of fancy in an environment devoid of human security.

"Security is paramount and very important as no one will invest in an unsecured environment," he told his rapt interviewers.



Buhari in Lagos for Ebute Metta railway station's inauguration

Strangely, in the same breath, perhaps unwittingly signalling a measure of helplessness, the lanky General from Katsina State, urged that the general public should ensure the infrastructure being put in place are protected and not destroyed. How a practically cowed and frustrated 'general public' can help effectively police critical infrastructure against the depredations of heavily armed vandals, bandits and terrorists speaks to worrying philosophical governance atrophy in Aso Villa.

It could be recalled that in a report it released in November, last year, Moody's Investors Service said, Nigeria – Africa's largest economy – would need to spend at least $3 trillion over 30 years to close its infrastructure deficit. This researched projection would probably have overwhelmed most national leaders. But President Muhammadu Buhari apparently has other ideas.

A powerful vision pulls in ideas, people and other resources, despite the tough challenges. It creates the energy and will to make change happen. It inspires individuals, diverse stakeholders, partnering organisations and institutions to commit, to persist and to give their best.

Has President Buhari demonstrated these virtues within his six years on the saddle - in the spread and sweep of his appointments and quick policy responsiveness to changing governance scenarios? Big question!

It is hardly debatable that lack of infrastructure has been one of the biggest drags on Nigeria's development trajectory. Rail, road, airport and power projects stretching across Nigeria are either well advanced, recently signed off or just breaking ground in the wake of an infrastructure drive by the administration of President Buhari.

The government is not only focusing on new infrastructure but on the rehabilitation of existing assets and the completion of longstanding projects that have failed to gain traction under previous governments. It can hardly be disputed and bears repeating that Nigeria's infrastructure deficit have been one of the biggest factors holding back growth and development.

But the problems go beyond funding. Billions of dollars have been sunk into infrastructure projects that have failed to see the light of day or have been abandoned after construction has started as a result of weak institutions, lack of accountability and limited policy consistency across previous administrations. The situation is compounded by graft and the limited maintenance of existing infrastructure.

But beyond the intricacies and special challenges of building critical infrastructure is the issue of security, which has assumed the dimension of an existential threat to Nigeria.

Insecurity and terrorism have been major challenges to the Nigerian government in recent times. The activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP have led to loss of thousands of lives, dislocation of millions and destruction of properties in the country, especially, in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Add this to the spiraling kidnap for ransom (especially school children), rape, armed banditry and murder, alongside the attacks carried out by Fulani herdsmen on many communities in the North and Southern Nigeria and it could easily be appreciated that insecurity is antithetical to infrastructure development. It is now imaginable that a train journey could run into vandalised tracks, resulting in derailment and death for many.

Apparently, against this background, to ensure that the considerable effort of the Buhari administration to turn around the infrastructure deficit, especially, concerning railways, is not sabotaged, the federal government is now considering capital punishment (death penalty) for railway track vandals.

Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, said this during a Town Hall Meeting on "Protecting Public Infrastructure," on Monday, June 7, 2021, in Abuja.

According to Amaechi, rail track vandalism is a capital offence and its consequences should be treated as such and worse, the track vandalism is being done in collaboration with foreign partners.

The President Buhari administration has also announced early this year it was forming InfraCo, a public-private infrastructure fund with N1tn ($2.6bn) in seed capital from the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority and the Africa Finance Corporation, a mostly privately owned pan-African project finance firm.

InfraCo's mandate is to finance public asset development, rehabilitate old assets and construct new ones.

The considerable exertions Buhari is making to transform the nation's decrepit infrastructure will count for little if insecurity is not decisively dealt with. Nigerians will hardly remember that the president made great strides in building infrastructure and tried to write his name in gold.

Beyond rhetoric, in the coming days, he must frontally confront and conquer the shadowy crisis entrepreneurs behind national insecurity for history to pass a favourable verdict on him.

POLITICAL NOTES


Wike and Secondus

Wike Versus Secondus as PDP's Headache

That there's a struggle of interest between the Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike and his installed National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Uche Secondus, is not news. What is news, however, is the cause of their disagreement and how this might have constituted huge headache for the party leadership in the runup to 2023.

In the 2023 power struggle, Wike's major concern is how to get in a successor of choice as many governors are wont to do, when they leave office. Whatever tussle that's going on at the centre is barely of concern to him. Indeed, you can hardly find Wike in Abuja or holding meetings on how the party could seize power again at the centre. All he cares about his keeping Rivers and through a choice successor.

But someone appears to be standing in the way of that dream and that person is his chairman – a man he put in office – perhaps, to take care of his interest at the centre. How is this so? Secondus is said to have a brother from the Riverian area that he wants to succeed Wike in answering to 'power shift' in the Rivers political equation. But that person is certainly not who Wike wants.

Unfortunately, for as long as Secondus remains the party's chair, then, he seems to be well positioned to actualise his dream of installing his brother as Rivers governor. And none of this Wike wants. But the party, especially, the governors, are worried about the turn of things in the state. Yet, whomever the governors support is likely to emerge victorious in this survival battle.

Will they go with their colleague, Wike, or their national chairman, Secondus? If they went with Wike and appealed to Secondus to shelve his plan, it might be easier to achieve peace, depending on the compensation offered in place. But if they sided with Secondus at the expense of Wike, it might just be the beginning of another round of intense crisis in the Rivers PDP, a development that many fear could see Wike take very drastic options. And if that happens? Your guess is as good as anyone else's.

BRIEFINGNOTES

2023: It's Time to Embrace *e*-Voting

For a credible and acceptable election in 2023, e-voting is imperative, writes **Shola Oyeyipo**

In any democracy, the election is the most important factor since it is only through the exercise that the assertion 'government of the people' can be legitimised, when the electorate endorse leadership succession through their votes. It is also the best way to evaluate the performance of elected officers in the context of their electoral promises since those who fail to keep their promises are easily voted out of office. But in Nigeria, this has not been so, and the reason is not far-fetched: politicians have perfected ways to boycott the electorate by engaging in electoral malpractices.

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has had national elections in 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015and 2019, but the quest for free, fair, and credible election has subsisted, because many Nigerians are of the view that these elections are not fit for democratic governance, hence successive chairmen of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), have made frantic efforts at improving the quality of elections, yet, no one can boast that even the more recent elections can withstand the test of standard elections in more advanced democracies.

Though the measure was originally targeted at ensuring that people could keep the six feet social distance to avoid the COVID-19 pandemic, but optimists are already celebrating the idea in the sense that it can produce a more secure election despite the growing insecurity.

However, as part of efforts to improve the Nigerian electoral system and ensure that voting results reflect the wish and aspiration of the electorate, the INEC Chairman, Prof Mahmood Yakubu, is tinkering with the idea of introducing e-voting in Nigeria. He affirmed the commission's readiness to migrate to e-voting to lawmakers in the lower chamber of the National Assembly during his 2021 budget proposal. In fact, the INEC boss hinted at the possibility of adopting e-voting for the upcoming 2021 governorship election in Anambra State.

Electronic voting is an election system that allows voters to record a secret ballot electronically and the result too can be tabulated electronically through the computer. Votes are safely stored and can be re-counted in case there is a need. This voting method has gained prominence since the 1990s and early 2000s around the world.

Undoubtedly, the introduction of the Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs) and the Smart Card Readers (SCRs) by Yakubu's predecessor, Professor Attahiru Jega for the 2015 election created some degree of sanity in the system, but many Nigerians are optimistic that with e-voting added to the mix, the country may be entering to a realm of sustainable credible elections.

Though it is not yet clear how much support the INEC boss will be getting from politicians in the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), because the political class is the main beneficiaries of the fraudulent electoral system, already, opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is tasking the Nigerian electoral umpire to transmit the 2023 election electronically, saying the body has no excuse to do otherwise.

Calling for a transparent online voters' registration and online transmission of results, PDP National Publicity Secretary, Kola Ologbondiyan, in a recent press statement said: "The party's position is predicated on INEC's announcement of its readiness to conduct online (electronic) registration of voters for future elections in the country."

He stressed that, "Our party calls the attention of the commission to the fact that it no longer has any excuse not to employ the direct transmission of results from polling units, which will ensure credible elections by eliminating manipulations, alterations, switching, and disappearance of election results during manual collation processes."

PDP argued that if INEC could use the electronic platform for the registration of voters, it could as well deploy the same technology for electronic transmission of results in future elections, including the 2023 general election.



Yakubu, INEC Chairman

Toeing the party line, the Bayelsa State Governor, Douye Diri, also enjoined INEC to use e-voting to avoid conflicts during elections, saying the absence of e-voting has denied many electorate their franchise.

"I am an advocate and supporter of electronic voting. Many Nigerians have been denied the right to vote, because they are not in Nigeria and cannot participate in choosing their leaders. It is a challenge to Nigeria. Let INEC be challenged. If the Ijaw can do it, the federal government can also do it," Diri said in a statement by his Chief Press Secretary, Mr. Daniel Alabrah.

Cut to the bone, there are many advantages in the Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines, which INEC proposes to adopt. The 21 inch ultra-high-resolution touch screen voting system offers a contest-by-contest and allows multiple contest (one contest per page) display of ballots and a cut-and-drop paper record printer for voters to verify their selections. It displays contests page by page, showing parties per page during the voting process. Specific contests may be expanded into larger font on demand by each voter and it comes with alternate languages to English like Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and all other known languages spoken in Nigeria.

It provides accessibility to blind voters and others with physical disabilities using voice assistance, eliminates unintentional undervotes requiring a positive confirmation of any undervote by voters, eases voting, eases vote tabulation and counting. It prevents fraud and all forms of manipulations that usually characterise the Nigerian election. It reduces the cost of conducting the election, though at first, the cost of transmitting to digital might be high.

Generally, it is expected to drive considerable change in the nation's body polity, especially, when the people begin to see that their votes count, hence it drives participation and compels elected officials to perform better since they are aware that their re-election would depend on the electorate and not rigged election.

E-voting will particularly help Nigeria curb electoral violence. Usually, politicians often engage the service of hoodlums to unleash mayhem during elections, when they are sure they are on the losing side. This will make INEC cancel the ballot and eventually declare the election inconclusive but when the process is digitalised, it is a disincentive for violent obstruction of the voting process.

There are, however, concerns about the security of e-voting for fear that hackers might choose to compromise the system if it's internet-based. The only setback for e-voting among Nigerians is the suspicion that someone could illegally get into the election database and alter the results of an election, which could be done either through physical tampering or a remote attack over the internet. But stand-alone balloting machine at the polling station not connected to the internet or any local area network cannot be hacked.

Fact is, despite concerns about e-voting, manufacturing companies are still developing the machines and countries have increasingly continued to purchase and deploy them. Therefore, fully implementing an e-voting system in Nigeria would not only save the country from disgraceful elections of the past, but also guarantees free, fair, transparent, convenient, credible and confidential elections. What more, it would also ensure that results are speedily processed.

NOTES FOR FILE

The Message from Igangan



Makinde visits Igangan

Last week, the sleepy town of Igangan, Oyo State, woke up to the ugly news of attacks by persons suspected to be herdsmen or bandits, reportedly leaving about 20 people dead. the gory sight of the pictures and videos that went viral from that attack left much to be desired. In fact, they weren't for the fain-hearted. It was mindless, heinous and completely thoughtless.

Curiously, however, such a deadly attack, on a normal day, should have elicited spontaneous reactions, not only from the people of Igangan but all well-meaning people around the country and the world, with a resolve that would have compelled the government to respond constructively.

But to the shock of many, apart from the fact that the government was busy with Twitter fight, even the concerned people of Igangan didn't go beyond their video-recording of the incident and the noise that followed. The people were left to deal with their losses, although, the Oyo State Governor, 'Seyi Makinde, had since visited and promised to do better a next time in terms of security.

Now, the message from this is simple and clear. For many, and in fact, common sense presupposes that the attacks were orchestrated by certain interests, in other words, those behind it are effectively remote-controlling the situation, determining when to move forward and when to beat a retreat.

The development and its aftermath do not look like the attackers just strayed into that town and hacked down anything in sight. This was properly orchestrated, well organised and executed. What it also means, is that the political undertone to it is higher than anyone could imagine. This, therefore, is why the government at all levels must rethink the approach to security, particularly, reining in the saboteurs.

T.B Joshua: Why It's Difficult for Me to Display My Wife

Days before he passed on at 57, four select journalists spoke to Prophet Temitope Balogun Joshua of the Synagogue Church of All Nations, in what appeared to be his last interview, on sundry issues. He particularly spoke about his calling, which he said could not be extended to his wife, Evelyn, except it pleases God hence she has remained in the background in the ministry. **Segun James** presents the excerpts:

How did you get the vision to lead a church?

I was called right here many years ago. Just a few meters away was the hut where I was staying as the other one is the hut where I pray and meditate and also read in absolute serenity. Vision comes from God through meditation amidst nature. Surrounded by nature you can concentrate. It is like you are talking of good lawyers, every profession must have a library, where you can sit down and do some studying. Without this place, I will not be able to concentrate and speak with the Almighty. So this is where I started and I must have a library and a place where I can enjoy nature, not the air condition or fan. So having nature around you is very good. God is nature and without nature you cannot understand the bible, because the bible is not history. When you are reading the bible, you are reading the Holy Spirit. So if you don't allow nature, when you are reading, you will be reading history.

What is your dream for the future of the church?

We intend to build a university of science, which will incorperate our job here. When you talk of science, theology, medicine, these are the areas we will concentrate upon. When you have a student, this is where they should come and review whatever they are taught. You need some place like this,where you leave everything outside and come and hear the cocks crow. But outside here, when they are doing that, you can't hear them because of noise.

So this place is very important to me. This is where I live, sleep and everything I do. If I want to see people outside here, I go outside, there is time for that, because the bible says that there is time to rest, time to work, time to rest is time to receive from God and time to work is time to give what you receive from God. And when you talk of time to rest, this is the best place to rest, not in the midst of technology or going to New York or travelling about but you rest in the midst of nature.

You said it all started here, how did it start given that this place was a swamp?

This swamp is the rejected stone. God spoke to me and brought me here, I have been following God's vision and mission. When I am out of God's mission I am finished. That is why you cannot see me outside here, you cannot hear me speak outside of here. What I want to show you now will leave you shocked. My brother saw it three days ago and was surprised. God's time is the best and I always follow God's time. So that is why I only called key people to show them this. So I have been following God's time, that is why you will not see me preach every Sunday, or go on television to preach every day, I must hear from God before saying anything. Every time can be good for you and every time can be the best time for you, but for me, I must have a corresponding grace or power, because the Holy Spirit must suggest what to do before I do them. If not, I will not be able to have God's result.

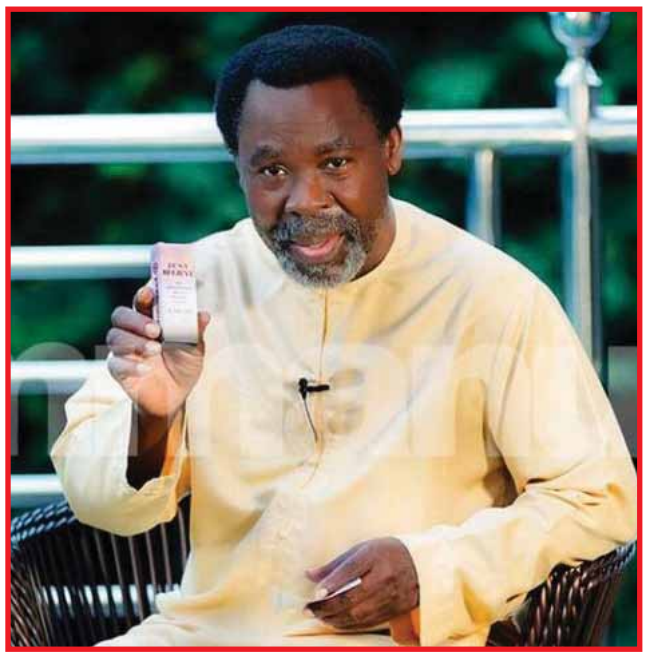
So this is why you are not seeing me out there – at weddings, naming ceremonies and coming to your office to grant and interview, this is the only church – the synagogue here in Ikotun and there is no other branch all over the world but it touches everywhere in the world. So, I am waiting for God to let me know if there will be branches or not. The important thing is that we should focus on building the people and not the church.

Given what is here, not much is reported, why?

They will soon get to know, we are just waiting for God's time. There are many things to be done in this place. So things are at about 80% completion. If people should know about this place now, we will not be able to complete this job because it will cause distraction. So, it remains a bit for us to get to 95%, when we are at 95% we will let people know. It is going to be by grace, it is not something you pay money for, you can come and see people moving and praying. So, people will get to know; we are waiting for God's time. After you leave here, I will like you to keep that information to yourself.

Why is it that you don't want to talk about money?

Not that I don't want to talk about money, because there are so many poor people around, if I begin to display what I have, can you imagine how much I will hurt those who are here? But whatever I can do to let them know that I understand what they are going through, I will do it. To give them money, to help them, supporting them, not to display what God has given me but to give them the support that they need.



Joshua...I'm called, not my wife

You are always simply dressed, why?

If I have time to dress well I will do that.

Not much is known about your wife and family?

I am very happy about this question. I have a wife and I have children, and even my first daughter is doing her Phd and the second daughter is doing her master's degree in Oxford. In all, I have three daughters, the last one is still in secondary school. I would have loved my wife to be like me but I cannot make her what I am; it is God. It is not possible for me to anoint her, God is the one that anoints people. So, it is not possible for her to sit here at the same time, this is not biological issue; it is inheritance from the saints, it is a partaker from the saints. Therefore, I should not use anything in my biological life to stop my spiritual life.

I am a native of Arigidi Akoko but as for my divine nature I am a partaker of the inheritance of the saints, therefore, it is so difficult for me. This is an apostolic ministry. It is not a ministry you read bible, go to theology school, you get it and you start preaching. No! It is purely divine. So, it is so difficult for me to display my wife, she has to be ready for God. As much as you are ready for God, God will display her.

Two things that are striking about you. One, you love gigantic projects, and two, you are heavilycriticised by many people. How do you take them when you see them say uncomplimentarythings about you?

It is always good if at the beginning they don't see what is good about you. If they don't see your journey at the beginning they will criticise you. It is good for you, at the end. So, if they praise you from the beginning it is not encouraging. If Nigeria has been accepting me right from the beginning of my mission, I think that will affect my mission to the world. I have gone all over the world, I am the only minister of God that organised a crusade in Israel. I have the certificate which was given to me in Israel. And I also went to Nazareth, where Jesus was born and organised a revival there. I am the first man of God to do that and it was carried in newspapers all over the world, Tell Magazine and the rest. An international cable news network carried it live when I was doing the crusade and a certificate was given to me. That is the greatest joy for any minister of God.

Why was there so much controversy about the crusade?

…Because it happened to Jesus, I cannot be greater than my master. A tenant cannot be greater than his landlord. If the landlord is criticised, who is the tenant? That is exactly what happened to Jesus. They said no, the Muslims were on the streets protesting, the Christian, Catholics and all. But I let them know that God sent me to do the revival in Israel. And top government functionaries, including Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu also sent his representative. So, on the second day I finished the revival, it was God that took me out of the place and millions of people attended. So, you can imagine a man like that, you know what happened to my building when almost 200 people died in synagogue.? The CD of what happened is out. If they can go to the extent of killing 200 people spread all over the world, just to get me, so anything close to Jesus can be attacked.

This is a church and you don't have a theological school and you don't have branches what happens to the church after you? How will the church grow from just this humble beginning to become a church of the world and after you who takes over?

You don't watch Emmanuel TV, this is a year now or six months since I preached last and the church still continues. There are five prophets and prophetesses, they are working. They have taken over from me already. There is an American, a British, a French, and a Nigerian.

One thing we have come to identify churches with in Nigeria, is that you have the man of God, his wife, and the his first son in the line of succession but you are not toeing that line, it shows that you are looking at something that is beyond you. Are you not worried that some of them could appropriate the church as theirs?

This is where God comes in, it is not a business venture. If it is God, then it is God and then it is true. The issue of family should not come into the issue of the church, that is it, it is undeserved grace.

You mentioned that you are going to have a university of science, is it in the pipeline?

It is the plan of God to have a university of medicine and you know you can't talk of medicine without talking of science. So it is going to be university of medicine and theology.

Where is the location of the University?

You can see the people that are working in the ministry, American, United Kingdom, Nigerian, France, so it can be anywhere. It will be a special grace to be in Nigeria.

If God can use you to do this huge projects and your country is falling apart, what do you have to say to that?

A prophet has no honour in his own country. The president of Sudan gave me a letter.

Many pastors want to be Professor, Doctor, Archbishop and all that, why have you remained just a prophet?

Let me tell you that at a university in Columbia has given me Phd, but I don't want to use it. I have OFR in Nigeria and that is number three in Nigeria, which was given to me by the late President Yar Adua. I didn't go but I sent my wife. So, if I now begin to use all that, then, what I am saying is that I am not pleased with what God has given me. God has given me so much so why should I continue to flaunt it around. I should be happy and content. It is not what you are doing but how long it lasts. Many of our rich pastors – millionaires – their legacy is gone. So, it is not what you are doing now but how it is going to last. Lasting promotion comes from God and that is why we call Him everlasting Father.

You restored peace in some countries, and you have gone to help restore hope in some countries. But hope in this country is fading away, why have you not waded in?

God's time is the best, but I want to assure you that, there is so much issue of disunity, people want to go, this section wants to leave but nothing will happen. We will continue to be Nigeria. God just wants us to learn certain experiences. Experience is the best teacher. Do you know what we have done so far, we are more of enemy of God than friend of God in the past. So, I think what we are going through is a lesson and it will soon be over. And I pray that we will live to see it when it is over. So, there is nothing to be afraid of.

How about the project?

The project is 80% completed and we are looking at bringing many more animals here, like Giraffe.

You have all of these and you don't want to intervene in the situation of the larger society, which is Nigeria?

Let me say this, if you have headache and you are not asking me to pray for you, will I now force myself to pray for you? I gave a prophecy on Nigeria that we will drink our oil. I said this oil you are seeing now we will drink it.

Sir you gave a prophecy about coronavirus on 28th December, 2019 but you still refuse to say anything about Nigeria? From what I read, it was released on January 5th , 2020 but we still want you to talk about Nigeria?

I hope you saw the video of the building that collapsed, you know they took me to the court and the case is still in court?

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

Afe Babalola



Babalola...we've changed the narrative

National Assembly Has the Powers to Give Nigeria a New Constitution

Chief Afe Babalola, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and founder, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti (ABUAD), is undoubtedly one of the oldest distinguished legal icons in Nigeria. In this interview with **Gboyega Akinsanmi** and **Victor Olakitan**, Babalola discusses diverse national concerns,including the ongoing review of the 1999 Constitution by the National Assembly, the legality of the decision of the federal government to suspend Twitter operation in Nigeria and the challenges of running a world-class university in Nigeria, among others. Excerpts:

At different times, you described the review of the 1999 Constitution by the National Assembly as a waste of time and an exercise in futility. You, also, canvassed a replacement and not an amendment to the constitution. Why did you canvass these positions?

I called the exercise a waste of time because the National Assembly said the people should attend a public hearing to discuss areas to be amended in the 1999 Constitution even when there is nothing to amend. There is nothing to amend, because we are running a presidential system of government – a system I can liken to a bungalow. You cannot amend a bungalow to a four-storey building. It will definitely fall one day.

The presidential system is very cumbersome to the effect that every state has to go to the federal government for allocations. Can the National Assembly amend the constitution to stop allocations to states? Two, the National Assembly was clear in what it wanted to do. The Constitution Review Committee, which the National Assembly set up to amend the constitution, cannot go beyond its mandate. You cannot go to court to seek separation and at the same time divorce. You cannot get the two together, because the way you file the suit for separation is different from that of divorce. They said they are only interested in an amendment and not a substitution. A member of the House of Representatives even condemned the ongoing amendment of the 1999 Constitution.

But the 1999 Constitution only gives the National Assembly the power to amend and not produce a new constitution. How can the National Assembly achieve this?

That is not true. Let me say it was totally wrong for the National Assembly to say they cannot produce or write a new constitution. Under the 1999 Constitution, the National Assembly can produce a new constitution. One, the 1999 Constitution gave the National Assembly the power to amend. In its broad interpretation, an amendment includes substitution. They can exercise their powers and say the 1999 Constitution needs a substitution. They gave a narrow interpretation to the amendment clause. This same process was undertaken in Sudan and many other countries. All the National Assembly needs to do is to call for a conference, where people will advise on where and how the 1999 constitution can be substituted. That is all.

Judicial and parliamentary unions just called off national strike, which arose from the failure of the state governments to implement full autonomy for the judiciary and legislature at the state level? Do the workers have the right to go on strike over this issue?

I have been in the legal practice for 60 years or thereabouts. I knew how our courts were when I came back to the country from England in the early 60s. Then, we had lawyers from Ghana, West Indies and many other countries competing with us in the Nigerian courts. So, it was very competitive. In my 60 years of practice, however, Nigerian courts have never been shut for a day. Even in those days, lawyers and judges were respected.

Democracy thrives on three fundamentals pillars – the executive, legislature and judiciary. If a man with two legs has one of its legs cut off, will he be able to move freely? But out of the three arms we have, two have been paralysed. I mean the legislature and judiciary. Do we now say we have a democracy? Where can people ventilate their anger? Do they want them to

• National Assembly Has the Powers to Give Nigeria a New Constitution •

resort to self-help? There can be no fairness and justice, where the executive continues to pay those in the judiciary.

Don't forget the aphorism that says he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Commonsense dictates that there should be independence for legislature and judiciary. If the car of a judge breaks down and he only relies on a president or governor to get it fixed, then, it will be difficult for him to pass a judgment that will be against the state.

Are you satisfied with the process of recruiting members of the Bench in Nigeria?

That is critical. But we have not got it right. A practice, whereby people are asked to apply to become a judge, is affecting the system. The process cannot guarantee fairness and justice. After filing the application, the governor will now decide who to pick among them. In those days, people did not need to apply to become judges. It is the system itself that looks for qualified men of integrity to become judges. That is part of the rot in our system. I believe that the judiciary must not only be autonomous, but also the courts must be accessible and open to all. The president and governors, as high as they are, are equal before the courts. That is the beauty of it.

The federal government banned Twitter operations in Nigeria last week and threatened to prosecute violators of the ban. Under the 1999 Constitution, can the federal government exercise the power to ban Twitter and prosecute its violators?

I do not believe the president was right to have given the directive just because Twitter removed his post about the security in the Southeast. Don't forget that the English law we are operating presumes that you are innocent until the court proves otherwise. Twitter, like human beings, has the right to suspend Buhari's personal account in this context. The president cannot be a judge in his own case. If he felt wronged by what Twitter did, what he ought to have done is to approach the court of law, which has power of adjudication. He cannot jail Twitter for removing his comment. Only the court has such powers and not the president.



Under the 1999 Constitution, the power to enforce Land Use Act lies with the governors. At the same time, the 2007 Minerals and Mining Act, which defines the control and ownership of minerals, is within the power of the federal government to enforce. Is it constitutional to separate the control and ownership of land from that of minerals?

All the land resources in all the 36 states of the federation were being held by governors in trust for the people. The governors are in charge. Incontrovertibly, that is the law of this land as far as Nigeria is concerned. Any other law taking away the powers of the governors in this regard is null and void and of no effect. Let me just leave it at that.

You established a university that has revolutionised Nigeria's tertiary education. As a legal icon, what inspired you to establish the university?

The establishment of Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti (ABUAD) came like a child of circumstance. I never dreamt of founding a university of my own. My vision was to retire as a judge after my exploits in litigation. Don't forget that I was offered ministerial appointments twice. But I turned them down. After turning down the appointment, I was approached again to serve as the Pro Chancellor and Chairman, Governing Council, University of Lagos (UNILAG), Akoka.

Then, former President Olusegun Obasanjo requested me to accept the offer because of the high level of corruption in the university. That made me the Pro Chancellor and Chairman, UNILAG Governing Council between 2001 and 2008. I was serving in this capacity when I saw the problems that afflicted the university system, especially, the publicly owned ones. I served in this capacity pro bono for seven years. I did not take a dime as salary or allowance. When I assumed duty, I brought my clients – Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited, Shell Nigeria, Pfizer, Julius Berger, among others, to donate to an Endowment Fund we instituted.

In the end, this really paid off. Julius Berger put up a new engineering laboratory for the university. My team and I succeeded in restoring peace, security and stability to the system. Corruption was dealt with in the university. As a result, the National Universities Commission (NUC) voted me twice as the best Pro- Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council in Nigeria. When I left UNILAG, I thought of what I could do to demonstrate how an ideal university of global reckoning should be. I realised then that a university should be a place where you enter and feel the goddess of education.

It should be a place that is well laid out. It should be an institution that has good teachers, laboratories, aesthetic structures, equipment and infrastructure. These were what we put in place and got right in ABUAD. Within two years, the NUC described ABUAD as "the pride of the university system in Nigeria" while the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities described our university "as the most successful private university in Nigeria. Also, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) described ABUAD as "a world-class institution of Higher Education".

After 11 years of operation, have you been able to demonstrate what an ideal university system should be?

In entirety, my vision is to ensure that we have quality and functional education in Nigeria. We started by establishing a Talents Development Centre (TDC), which consists of 28 rooms for students to engage in extracurricular activities like singing, welding, painting and barbing among other skills. We also created recreational facilities for students inside that centre. This centre was to help the students to realise their potentials apart from the class works, which are also very important.

You can see that this university is truly a child of circumstance and has become a leader within 11 years. Apart from scoring 100% pass, our graduates had the best results in Law School in 2018. The Overall Best Student was a graduate of ABUAD. We had 12 First Class while our students won 24 out of the available 36 prizes. Even the NUC described our College of Law as the "Best in Africa". The Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE) recommended our template for Engineering Education in Nigeria. Our first set of graduates in the College of Medicine and Health Sciences recorded 100 per cent pass, which was regarded as the best feat ever recorded. So, ABUAD is truly setting the pace and we are gradually getting there.

You set up a multisystem hospital to check medical tourism, but some leaders are still going abroad for medicare. How do you react to this?

As much as it was my vision to develop education, I considered quality healthcare delivery as very imperative to national growth and development. In Afe Babalola University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH), there are beautiful structures, ultramodern medical equipment and highly skilled medical personnel that can attend to the healthcare needs of all Nigerians, regardless of class. Many past Presidents, Nigeria's current Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Governors, Ministers and Captains of Industries have visited the ABUTH facility. They valued what we have there.

Did you know that the Medical Director/Chief Executive Officer, First Cardiology Consultants, Dr Adeyemi Johnson visited Ekiti for the first time because of the multi-system hospital? He is a seasoned interventional cardiologist. He is reputed to be the best cardiologist around. After visiting ABUTH, Dr. Johnson said the university has more modern equipment that outmatched all the hospitals in Lagos put together. He said we had the best equipment in the country. Let me say this for the record. There is no magic in medical science.

A Doctor can only be good if he has access to good equipment. If you check our records, we have succeeded tremendously. We have recorded breakthroughs in brain surgery, eye surgery, laparoscopy, and many others. A girl, who could not see for 14 years of her life, regained her sight here. Many doctors, who were trained in the United States, England and other advanced nations, have come here to perform operations and treat patients. Some were even surprised at the low fees we are charging here. They even said the fees we charge are not even enough to catch a flight to some of these countries where our leaders and rich men traveled to for medical treatment.

Some patients have been brought from abroad to get treatments here in ABUTH. The records are there. Nigerians do not value what they have because of the fear that we have no equipment in Nigeria and that they have to be treated by a white man before they can get well. Time, they say, is a healer of all diseases. I know that with time, some of those who are still traveling abroad will appreciate what we have here and patronise our multi-system hospital

Oxford University recently offered one of ABUAD's graduates, Mary Adeyemo, direct admission to pursue a doctoral programme in Law without LL. M. How did it happen?

I felt excited when I heard about it. I truly felt fulfilled when I heard that she was asked to undertake a doctoral programme in Law without LLM. I said it was a big feat. In Nigeria, having a LLM with PhD grade is required for you to be a doctoral candidate. But when you have a good degree, nothing stops you from being given direct admission to pursue any doctoral programme. In those days, Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan used to do the same thing. But the standard of education has fallen to the extent that you have to possess a Master's Degree before you can be offered admission to pursue your PhD. With this feat, the young lady does not need to pass through the rigour of masters. That will make her academic journey very smooth and rewarding. But the feat is a product of hard work that we encourage here in ABUAD.

You have been running ABUAD for 11 good years or more. Can you explain some of the challenges associated with running a university in Nigeria?

Running a world-class university that can earn respect locally and globally is difficult given some challenges I have been facing in particular. One, there is an environmental challenge. What do I mean by environmental challenge? A university is sited in a community. You need the cooperation of the community and the state, where you are operating. If you were in England, you would not need an Independent Power Plant (IPP). You have it already. All you need to do is to pay your rate based on agreement.

You do not need to sink boreholes or dam a river because the water is there. All you need is to just pay. But all these are not there in Nigeria. You would have to provide these facilities on your own. Two, security is a big challenge. It is becoming more worrisome in Nigeria. In recent times, kidnappers see students as a way of making easy money. This is because no parents will want their children to die in captivity. That accounts for why a university must be well-secured. Three, no matter how novel, progressive, pragmatic and workable your idea and vision are, how to get the right personnel to key into the vision through diligent and effective teaching becomes a critical challenge.

Don't forget that many of these teachers were trained in public universities, which are already used to a layback attitude. Attitude to work in private universities is different from that of the public ones. When we wanted to start the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, we approached the state teaching hospital for partnership. But they said that was not possible. I then went to the Federal Medical Centre, Ido Ekiti, owned by the federal government, where I encountered a lot of problems.

As willing as they were, the medical facility was a mere medical centre that could not secure accreditation for running the College of Medicine and Health Sciences. We had to provide infrastructure to upgrade the FMC to the status of a teaching hospital. Immediately, we started investing in the place. In truth, we spent billions to turn it to a teaching hospital. But about a month after we started the programme, the doctors there began a strike. I pleaded over and over again before they decided to resume. Within a year that we started, they went on strike three times. That was why I started this multi-system hospital here.

(See full interview online - www.thisdaylive.com)

HPN
SHINING THE LIGHT
Heartland Professionals Network

Heartland Professionals Network

ENOUGH OF THIS CARNAGE NDI IMO

For weeks now we have watched helplessly as our dear state is turned into a killing field. Our young men and women have been wantonly cut down in their prime, while scores of police personnel and soldiers have similarly been mowed down ostensibly by those they were supposed to protect. Fathers and mothers have become collateral issues in this blood fest as they are forced into the gory task of burying their young ones.

Property worth tens of millions of Naira, both private and public are destroyed daily, in a state that is struggling to come to terms with the harshest form of underdevelopment. Imo State has become the ground zero of the oddity of unsolved crimes ravaging Ala Igbo, which the authorities have conveniently ascribed to 'Unknown Gunmen'. While our young men both innocent and guilty are killed and suffer additional humiliation of being labelled as unknown dead bodies. How did we arrive at this ignoble juncture? Ndi Imo, enough of this carnage, enough of this senseless waste of lives.

Imo was built piece by piece through the sweat of our illustrious fathers and mothers. Who can easily forget that Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Airport was built through contributions by men and women including the jobless? When our teeming children, hungry for education, were denied spaces in tertiary institutions of learning, we dug deep to establish the multi campus Imo State University. These same children are being cut down in their numbers. How do we behave as though there are no more elders at home?

Our state is known for hospitality. When has it become the norm that our visitors are hunted and cut down like common criminals? The average Igbo man toils for his income. He is not envious or vengeful. Why have we suddenly descended on poor onion and cattle traders from outside Igbo land in this orgy of vengefulness? Have we forgotten that the Igbo man or woman is a master traveler, and that if it comes to this senseless tit for tat, our people can be worst affected?

We feel the anguish of our youth; the lack of inclusiveness and opportunities. But history is certain that not much can be achieved through heedless violence. It is only in our region that the Crocodile was allowed to smile and the Python ordered into a macabre dance, all with disastrous consequences on our communities. Must we play into the hands of those who do not mean well for us?

Heartland Professionals Network bemoans this ugly development in our state. We call on all our youth to sheath their swords and return home. We implore the Ezes, the Clergy, fathers and mothers to take hold of their children. We plead for patience and faith in non-violent agitation. No society develops through the wasting of its young ones.

We equally call on the Federal Government of Nigeria and Imo State authorities to stop this reflexive impulse to extra-judicial murder. International best practices in law enforcement require that the accused should have his day in court. Those found guilty should be held to account and those adjudged innocent should be allowed home. This indiscriminate recourse to AK 47 justice augurs a breach in our humanity. Both the guilty and the innocent are painted in the same brush in a form of collective guilt. The authorities should know that any victory that is won on force of arms and devoid of justice is only postponing another round of agitation.

Finally, we call on the authorities to initiate a move to listen to the clamour by the youth, and indeed to the popular demand for power devolution to the regions, coupled with concerted efforts to demonstrate that government serves the interests of every citizen of Nigeria. 'Shoot at sight' is not a form of dialogue. It only strengthens the hands of those who seek the demise of Nigeria while weakening the hands of patriots among Ndi Igbo who want a better Nigeria. Everyone should realize that any enduring peace must be based on justice, fairness and a meeting of the minds. May peace reign in our land.

Signed

Chima Ibeneche
Chairman
Heartland Professionals Network

Ben Onyenze
Secretary

Tel: +2348132695857 www.heartlandprofessionalsnetwork.com Enquiries: info@heartlandprofessionalsnetwork.com
Plot 5044 New Owerri Layout, Owerri, Imo State

Congratulations

to our Group Executive Director



Nnenna Maryann
Obiejesi
LL.B, BL, LL.M (LSE)

The entire staff and
management of the
Nestoil Group
wish to congratulate our GED
on the award of the Degree of

Doctor of Business
Administration, DBA
(Honoris Causa),

conferred on June 12, 2021
by the University of Nigeria,
Nsukka.

We are all very proud of you
and wish you many more
wins and accolades.

Management & Staff of the
Nestoil Group

DIASPORA

Onyi Nwagbara

A Poorly Equipped Soldier Cannot Be Patriotic

Onyi Nwagbara, a former Visiting Professor of Military Science at the Nigerian Defence Academy and currently Professor of Toxicology at the Nile University Abuja, where he started its Medical School, shares his experience as a US combat Major, his years in Gulf One War, Iraq, Okinawa Japan and Bosnia. Nwagbara, who also taught at the American University Yola after 16 years of professorship at the University of Florida, speaks on the rising state of insecurity in the country and why Nigerian soldiers are fighting with a low morale. **Nduka Nwosu** reports. Excerpts:

Dagvin Anderson Commander of the US Special Operations Command, Africa, just asked the Southern part of the country to stay on alert because terror groups including Al Qaeda and ISIS are establishing a presence in this part of the country. What's your take?

There are intelligent reports regarding the infiltration of ISIS and Al Qaeda in Nigeria. The reports suggest these terrorist groups have established cells in some parts of the Southeast, the Southwest and the South south of the country.

What the Federal Government and the armed forces should do now is to establish control and command centres within its counter-terrorism unit. It should also be willing to share information with such countries as the US that is supplying the Nigerian Intelligence network with relevant information. Unfortunately, Nigeria has very few intelligence analysts who are presently overwhelmed with the activities of terrorist organisations in our midst.

There is need to be vigilant. The local vigilante groups in each community should be actively involved in staying awake to all the issues under discussion with a state coordination centre in each of these Southern states.

What is your take on Nigeria's prevailing state of insecurity?

It is very disheartening. This is a country that I used to know before I went to the US. When I returned as an expatriate between 2008 and 2012 when I was at the American University in Yola, you can leave Yola and go anywhere. All that has changed.

Everybody should be security conscious. We cannot continue like this with this state of insecurity pervading the entire country. Security is everybody's business. If a place is not secure, it cannot attract investors. One of the most important needs of investment is security. The implication is to borrow from the US which places a high premium on men and women of the armed forces who defend and protect the country. That is the spirit of patriotism in every American. That is something that has been inculcated in me that I will cherish all the days of my life.

We keep accusing our men and women in the armed forces that they are not defending the country enough. If you know today that when you go to war and you don't come back and your family would not be taken care of, where then will come the spirit of patriotism to defend the country? I hear all manner of stories that a fallen colleague's widow who comes for her husband's entitlements went into negotiation with officer in-charge on how much of that entitlement should be shared with her with such question as how much is my percentage from this entitlement? This is wrong. It is evil. There is nowhere in the world that such a thing happens.

Nationhood propels patriotism that would want the citizen to die defending the Nigerian green white green flag of nationhood but that spirit of patriotism is not there. This is unlike every citizen of the United States, Republican, Democrat or Independent; it does not matter. Everyone is patriotic; it takes you to a lot of places in life and that's why when Americans go to war in any part of the world, they do their best because they know that they are fighting for a cause. They have taken that oath to defend the sovereignty of the nation. That is the spirit the US Army impacted in me. Any one that doesn't have that even as a four star general cannot deliver. You have to have that spirit of patriotism; until that spirit of patriotism is introduced or re-awakened in us, in the minds of our men and women in uniform, we cannot fight insurgency and other vices tearing our country apart. I cannot trade my US military experience with anything in the world.

Can you give to your country when it has given nothing to you?

The country was not always like this. It had something to give to its citizens. When you draft the Nigerian Police for Peace Keeping assignments, they excel. The Nigerian Police performs exceedingly during international assignments where their entitlements are delivered by the UN Peace Keeping Mission. They deliver when the right equipment to work with is there. Here we are talking about AK47. Russia that manufactured AK47 does not use it any more. It was manufactured in the 1940s and was known as Madison or its equivalent in Biafra. We have to be serious. When I visited India as a Visiting Professor of the Nigerian Defence Academy where I was a professor of military science teaching Regular Course 61, 62 and 63, the cadets I thought were confronted on the issue of gas mask. I asked them: how can you go to battle without your gas mask? I did chemical and biological warfare which I thought at the Defence Academy. Your enemy can decide to use gas,-serene gas and you don't have gas mask to defend yourself. Look at what happened during the Iran and Iraq war where Saddam Hussein gassed the citizens. It happened in Syria.

The situation on ground is that Nigerian soldiers do not have



Nwagbara

gas masks. It is part of your gear as a military person in the US. You need night vision goggles; you can maneuver with it; your movement is not restricted because you can see; it is part of your gear. You have your weapon, you have your armour; you have your night vision goggles, you have your binoculars and you have your gas mask. This is part of you. You have your armoured vest and you are ready to go. Here you see our military men wearing a pair of tennis shoes. How are you going to do that? They call our military and police force rag tag. This type of scenario does not lift the morale, it makes the average person in the force un-patriotic. The first day I arrived at my cadet school at Fort Benning Georgia, we call it the reception, I was given six pairs of Battle Dress Uniforms (BDUs), three for winter, and three for summer. I was given four pairs of boots, 12 pairs of stockings, 10 pairs of under shirts, and 12 pairs of under wears, 12 towels and after this I am expected to use one towel a day. These were the things given to us with a dougha bag and a rucksack where you put all your operational food rations (MREs) and you are good to go. I was at the gulf War fighting for injustice. That's what Americans do. Yes, America is not perfect but I don't think there is any country in the world that compares with them when it comes to human rights. They can fight for human rights; we went to Bosnia because the ethnic minority Moslems were being killed. The first thing happened in the Gulf One war. Saddam Hussein marched across and took over Kuwait. That was unfair. Basically the two wars I found myself fighting were meant to save the Muslims. So it is not about religious affiliation, it is all about saving humanity, love, equity and justice. That's what I believe in my life, which is what an average American believes in. It is not a perfect system because no system is perfect however on a scale of one to 10, I will give the US system 8.5, probably nine. There is racism but when it comes to patriotism, an average American is very patriotic.

The belief is that no one's human rights should be infringed upon. That is why you see US armed Forces all over the world. Look at what is happening now in the Baltics between the NATO and US forces on the one hand and the Russian forces on the other hand. The US military is there to deter Russia from taking over Ukraine. They stand for justice. There is the popular American expression: I gat your back or America gat your back. It is something that every American believes in. So the US Armed Forces-the army, the navy, the marine, the air force, the coast guards get the same training. We believe in being patriotic and that takes you a long way in life.

What's your take on Boko Haram?

The issue of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is unfortunate. In the US they are known as a rag tag army and here is a rag tag army trying to overrun our Nigerian Armed Forces. You cannot go to war unprepared, without the right weaponry. Even in the Bible in the New Testament, we are advised to put on the armour of God and fight powers and principalities. In the Old Testament during the battle between David and Goliath, David was being dressed in the garb of war and he said no. Ideally that was what it was supposed to be. We cannot send our officers and men to the frontline without the accompanying weaponry they need to fight with. I hear such stories as running out of arms and ammunitions. How? There is the story of our men overwhelmed by the superior fire power of Boko Haram. No, no, it must not be so. We are supposed to equip our armed forces. Whether Boko Haram is in Sambisa or in Niger State, all we need are three or four AH-64 Apache helicopters with gunships mounted on them, flying at a low range.

Did you hear Boko Haram's claims of our aircraft brought down with the pilots yet to be seen?

You cannot hear that with a US apache helicopter. I mean what are we talking about? You know where these people are located. They are here. This is an era of technology where drones can go on a mission of aerial reconnaissance and take pictures of where these people are and give you real time where they are located. The US does not send foot soldiers to war; they don't put boots on the ground any more. They stay in the warship and just press buttons. Even in the US buttons get pressed for far reaching consequences. Look at how Osama Bin Laden was taken out. It was a real time operation. The old methods of fighting battles and wars are over. We need to get on with technology and science as they evolve. You can send 10 drones to Sambisa forest and launch rockets. If you lose a drone so be it. How much is a drone? We are simply not serious. We are not serious at all; to me we are not honest to ourselves and that is why we are losing our men and women who have sacrificed to defend our sovereignty. We must equip our men at the frontline with all the weaponry they need to fight the war and defend the sovereignty of this nation.

I left for the US at the age of 17 after secondary education at Williams Memorial Secondary School in Afuguri, Ohuhu Umuahia, Abia State. I graduated in 1981 and I am presently the national president of the Old Students Association. General Ihejirika former Chief of Army Staff is an ex-student of the institution. William Memorial was a great institution built by Dr. Michael Iheonukara Okpara, a great guy and former Premier of Eastern Nigeria. Whatever I know about science started from Williams Memorial.

You left very early for the US, Why?

I wanted to study Medicine. In those days there was just one medical school, the University of Nigeria Medical School or Teaching Hospital (UNTH) at Enugu Campus. The University of Port Harcourt just came up and because it was relatively new and inexperienced, it was not an optionMy elder brother went to the US in 1980. He did not for one day desired to study in Nigeria. So upon graduating from High School in 1977, he did his HSC and shortly after that he left for the US. Then when I wrote the first JAMB exam, I scored 284.

I couldn't get admission to study Medicine. That was how tough it was those days. I wrote the second one and scored about 301. Nsukka placed me on the supplementary list. At the end of the day I didn't get admission. My elder brother was already in the US asked my parents I should come over to the US rather than wait in vain for JAMB. I went to the US with an intention to study Medicine but before you can study Medicine in the US you need to have a first degree. So I went ahead to study Microbiology. It was during the period I did some internship with some hospitals and I was not pleased with what I saw. I said no, I don't want to study Medicine anymore. On my graduation, I went ahead to obtain a Master's degree in Micro. I then joined the US Army and was commissioned in 1988 as a Second Lieutenant. I was deployed overseas and I fought at the First Gulf War. I was in Bosnia and did some joint force training in Belize, the Central America Guatemala; I was in Okinawa Japan. It was a wonderful experience and I cannot trade my US experience for anything in this world. If I have to do it again, I will do it over and over again.

I was commissioned in the US, with the best military establishment in the world. The day I was commissioned, my brother was present. Out of 128 cadets that were admitted to the school, only 94 were commissioned and five of us were blacks. I was posted to the largest military base in the world Fort Hood, San Antonio Texas; from Fort Hood I got overseas deployment. I left the military in 1998 as a Major and moved into the academia. I did my Masters in Microbiology and a PhD in Toxicology from the University of Florida.

It has been a very wonderful experience for 27 years running with 25 years full time. I was at Louisiana before I moved to Florida IM College of Pharmacy where 16 years ago I became a full professor; from there I came back to Nigeria as an expatriate. I taught in one of the universities in the north, the American University.

ENGAGEMENTS

with Chidi Amuta
e-mail: chidi.amuta@gmail.com



Twitter, Diversion and the Next Level

The Buhari administration has just stumbled on a convenient but unexpected political diversion: the Twitter ban. We can keep debating Twitter while an orchestrated project of deepening authoritarianism takes hold. While Twitter rages, the president has said in his latest television interview that he has 'ordered' the police and the army to be more 'ruthless' in dealing with dissidents and to 'shoot at sight' those wielding assault rifles. No arrests. No investigation. No judicial trials. From a democratically elected president, the linguistic shift to garrison theatre commands should send danger signals. But perhaps this was the promised 'next level' in the Buhari agenda.

Still, under the shadow of the Twitter ban controversy also, Mr. Lai Mohammed has sneaked in a regulatory template requiring the entire social media to be licensed to feature in Nigeria. Again, no public debate. No parliamentary deliberation leading to an enabling legislation. Just executive fiat and ministerial directives delivered with the finality of military decrees. These are major steps in the slide towards a mindless autocracy and a culture of unquestioning acquiescence. And they are coming from an administration initially dressed up as a democratic successor regime.

With these developments, Mr. Buhari seems well on the way back to his comfort zone of autocracy. As it is, Nigeria is being timidly enrolled into the ranks of a growing club of populist autocrats and elected illiberal practitioners. Befittingly, Buhari has just been complimented by a famed mascot of that ill-fated tradition: Mr. Donald Trump. The worst president in US history has just congratulated his Nigerian equivalent for accomplishing a Twitter ban he dared not attempt. And predictably, Mr. Lai Mohammed has been quoted as having celebrated Trump's heroic endorsement!

A thoughtless and hurried indefinite suspension of Twitter from the Nigerian internet space has just been executed. It was long foretold and rehearsed. It is perhaps the first step in the actualization of a long hunger for curtailing the footprints of the social media and indeed the freedom of expression represented by the media in general. For an administration in the throes of a concoction of multiple afflictions, the Twitter ban is perhaps the least damage to expect on the freedoms and rights of democracy. Since after the ENDSARS protests and similar other eruptions of public disquiet against the serial missteps of the administration, major officials have expressed a preference for a more quiescent and pliant public space.

This is of course a tragic misreading of the nature and natural disposition of the Nigerian public. Our life blood is a certain robust and compulsive rowdiness in all situations. Nigerians treasure their freedom. We want to say what we feel, to live loudly and drown our countless frustrations while celebrating our few victories in skits, comedy strips and lavish parties. By instinct, we dissent from official viewpoints and received assumptions. That is who we are. The social media has only come in handy to embody and channel our peculiarities as a people.

For this government, however, the Twitter ban is one culmination of a long period of discomfort with the vibrancy of Nigerians and our media. We have in the past six years witnessed a series of timid adversarial actions against the media but none so far as overt and far reaching as the recent exclusion of Twitter. Some nondescript journalists at the periphery have been detained at the instance of overbearing state officials. Some television stations have been fined or penalized for minor infractions such as using cell phone video footage to air news on the ENDSARS protests. Mr. Lai Mohammed, Mr. Buhari's propaganda Czar and his Aso Rock backup squad have found cause to spar with the media on the less than impressive track record of the administration on nearly everything.

Twitter's deletion of a menacing and divisive comment by Mr. Buhari on the Nigerian civil war is at the heart of the current impasse. For Twitter, the Buhari post constituted a violation of its policy against hate speech and incendiary utterances by persons in positions of significant power and influence. In strict enforcement of its policy on these matters, Twitter promptly and routinely took down the Buhari post which in any case was as unpopular with the Nigerian audience as it may have irked other Twitter users all over the world. Mr. Buhari's unguarded outburst has predictably reverberated badly among segments of Nigeria's already charged and badly divided polity.

Taken on its own, the Buhari post was a violation of Twitter's rules but also a credible threat to the national security of the country over which he presides. Twitter was right in taking it down just as it was right in also taking down incendiary posts by Mr. Nnamdi Kanu, the absentee self- appointed Biafra champion and impressario.

Over time, Twitter and the other social media platforms have come to occupy the position of global conduits of freedom of expression. This universal purpose has often come to eclipse the fact that these social media platforms are outgrowths of huge corporations with in- house ethical prescriptions and rules. Those who use these media often forget that the freedom of expression which they avail us all is undergirded by rules and regulations endorsed by their respective boards of directors and proprietors.

Thus, a voracious connoisseur and utilizer of Twitter like America's former president, Mr. Donald Trump, temporarily forgot that even drunken reverie has its rules. Once it became clear that Mr. Trump's use and consumption of the social media had become potentially dangerous to America's identity and national security as a democracy, the social media corporations moved against him. He was excluded by all the platforms. While his other exclusions remain in place, Facebook has just extended its own for a further two years.

Irrespective of the jurisdiction in which they operate, therefore, Twitter and the other social media corporations have a right to insist on a strict observance of their corporate regulations and service rules. They of course have a responsibility to remain sensitive to the local



Lai Mohammed

rules and laws in these jurisdictions without waiving their prerogative of corporate independence and integrity.

It is of course the corresponding prerogative of the Nigerian or any other government to determine what constitutes a violation of its national interests. Between the protection of Twitter's corporate integrity and the presumptive protection of the national interests of Nigeria, a fatal hiatus has occurred. But the conundrum is that the Buhari regime's court messengers have mistaken the Nigerian national interest for the ego of their principal. They seem to have placed a higher premium on the personal ego of Mr. Buhari over and above the democratic entitlement of the Nigerian public to freedom of expression. These same Nigerians who voted for Mr. Buhari in both 2015 and 2019 constitute the definitive sovereignty of Nigeria in matters of democratic entitlements. The pendulum of sovereign superiority always swings in favour of the people. To insist and act otherwise signals a dangerous drift in the direction of dictatorship.

It is therefore surprising that Mr. Buhari and his handlers should expect Twitter to erect a different set of rules for him. There is a possibility that Mr. Buhari's coterie of court messengers may have mistaken the global internet space for Nigeria's increasingly illiberal and constrictive democratic space. By shutting down Twitter in Nigeria, Aso Rock court messengers have invited the additional vitriol that is being heaped on their beleaguered administration. The backlash is an unfortunate addition to Nigeria's already bad reputation around the world.

The displeasure of the Nigerian public has of course reverberated in the free world. With predictable unanimity, the UN, US, EU, UK and Canada have jointly and severally condemned the action of Aso Rock on the Twitter matter and in fact advised a roll back. The Nigerian government has met with emissaries of these power blocs to explain its actions while they in turn have rammed home the sanctity of freedom of expression of Nigerians if indeed Nigeria still wants to be regarded as a responsibly member of the global community and desirable investment destination. How the government in Abuja navigates this risky turn is up to the diplomatic skills of its technocrats.

But the Twitter ban has raised too many other important issues about Nigeria's present dysfunctional state. Twitter, like the rest of the social media, is a carrier of not just the values of openness and freedom of expression. It is above all else a business tool and communication channel. It carries the business communications of millions of Nigerian entrepreneurs and corporate bodies. It carries the micro advertisements of millions of small to large business undertakings. For Nigerian youth, Twitter and the other social media platforms are the vehicles for their startups and digital enterprises which now provide employment and livelihood for millions of them as well as sustenance for more established businesses. Not to talk of the instant communications of all government agencies ranging from defense and security to parastatals and the diplomatic community. The clamp down on Twitter therefore did not seem to take into consideration the vast gamut of collateral casualties has entailed.

In a period of dwindling government revenues and shrinking opportunities, a deliberate government action that leads to such massive financial and economic loss is not only insensitive but also pathetically foolish. It is even an act of economic sabotage committed by the government against itself and its citizens.

In the age of globalization, the massive patronage of the social media by segments of the Nigerian population has helped Nigerian citizens and organizations to become part and parcel of the global architecture of transnational business and culture. Our churches, mosques, banks, digital enterprises, entertainment companies, performing artists etc. are now part of the global network courtesy of the digital revolution facilitated by the various channels and social media platforms. By constraining just Twitter alone, the vital linkage between these Nigerian global corporate citizens and their home base is being threatened by the actions of the clique in Abuja.

Nigeria's diaspora is not just a cultural and demographic force. It remits home an average of $35 billion annually, a quantum of revenue in excess of annual receipts from oil and gas exports. By the casual fiat of an egocentric monarch and his backup escorts, we are threatening this vital national asset with digital exclusion.

Most importantly, Twitter and the other social media platforms have become an active and permanent part of the new ecology of the globalization of freedom and democracy. All over the world, those who seek more freedom in their political space have come to deploy the power of the social media. During the Arab Spring, the youth of Tunisia in 2011, the protesters of the Egyptian revolution and the anti Ghaddafi protesters in Libya massively deployed the power of the social media to fell the long entrenched dictatorships of Hosni Mubarak, Muamar Ghaddafi and Abidine Ben Ali. Also, the Twitter Revolution in Moldovia (2009) and the Iranian election protests ten years ago were similarly powered by widespread deployment of the social media by armies of youth and multitudes of troubled ordinary people.

The two critical forces and value systems that lie at the root of today's human progress are democracy and the free open market. Both are increasingly powered by the new technologies of information flow through the internet and the social media. They are endangered each time a platform of freedom is assaulted or constrained by the forces of authoritarian imposition.

Perhaps unconsciously, the assault on Twitter indecently enrolls Nigeria into the infamous club of nations that are indifferent at best to democratic values. This unfortunate club includes the likes of Turkey, China, Hungary, Vietnam, Iran, Bangladesh, North Korea and Uganda all of whom have varying degrees of restrictions on the social media. These are countries in where those who opt for free expression are regarded and treated as an opposition that must be muzzled, repressed and silenced.

For all the noise that it has generated so far, however, the Nigerian Twitter ban remains an unfortunate deliberate political diversion. It is a diversion by a government that has run out of governance ideas and policy options in the face of overwhelming existential problems. On the scale of the problems confronting Nigeria today, an unjustified swift Twitter ban is the least urgent matter on the table. Yet it has been unleashed with maximum haste and minimum contemplation or even deliberation. Nigerians are openly wishing that their government could deal with banditry, kidnapping, industrial scale abduction of school children, abject poverty and unemployment with nearly half the speed and urgency of the Twitter ban.

Suddenly, an effete machinery of state that has been overwhelmed and outgunned by ramshackle terror gangs found its mojo only in dealing with an intangible app on our cell phones. Yet we are in a place where factional fire fights and incendiary rhetoric by separatist forces has drowned the voice of the government. The state cannot manage to summon a counter narrative to the divisiveness that its own deliberate policies has generated. An economy that is wracked by the collapse of oil and the debilitating disruptions of Covid-19 has left the majority of Nigerians breathless in the chokehold of abject poverty.

The resulting fractured and mashed up society has become a festering cesspool for all manner of criminal endeavours. A national society that once thrived on the basis of its sense of communitarian solidarity and mutual trust has become shredded into enclaves each fenced in by distrust, hate of the other and illusions of isolated self determination.

A national dream once driven by pride in the grandeur of the African dream has become shrunk into shriveled yearnings for miserable little tribal republics. This sorry spectacle is the direct result of Mr. Buhari's project of constrictive nativism and deliberate shrinkage of Nigeria to the size of his ethno-regional fiefdom. The agitations for Biafra, Oduduwa and whatever else now on the menu of national disintegration are direct responses to the exclusionist statecraft of the Daura musketeer.

And yet, there sits in Aso Rock a government that parades an electoral mandate and a banner of democracy. A pathetic and pliant National Assembly sits in ready acquiescence to the most basic reflexes of an authoritarian executive spewing policy options rooted in Medieval conservatism and simplistic village mores.

You must have a nation before you grandstand on what media should thrive and which to exclude. You must have a functioning secure nation before you deploy the instruments of law enforcement and justice to the hounding of opponents or those who download VPN to access Twitter.

Before we make Twitter the issue, let us first address the consolidation of injustice as the directive principle of state policy under Mr. Buhari's Nigeria. Serial grandstanding by regime megaphones cannot compensate for the embarrassing incompetence that has become the trademark of the current administration. There is no point looking for any regime adversaries in our current travails; the enemy is in the house.

Before we allow government resources to be deployed in a foolish search for a Chinese internet firewall as an alternatives to the social media, let us remind our overlords in Abuja that China and even North Korea at least have effective states whose political preference happen to be different from the Western model of democracy and freedom. You cannot foist a restriction on information and communication on a nation whose boisterous diversity defies constriction. Nor can you lock up our bustling town hall of ideas, talents, enterprise and the creativity of 200 million Nigerians.

The nation over which Mr. Buhari presides is already a blood spattered canvass and an anarchic place. To impose an autocracy on top of an anarchy is a reckless excursion into power adventurism. Twitter and the social media provide a free aperture for social and political ventilation for our people. To shut that opening is an open invitation to defiance and angry protest. I would not know whether this eventuality was intended but it is a clear and present hazard.

The Twitter ban and the threat of regulation on the social media are open invitations to the fire next time. The wise thing is for government to quietly withdraw those untidy invitations. And very quickly, too.

NEWS

News Editor: Gboyega Akinsanmi
E-mail: gboyega.akinsanmi@thisdaylive.com,08152359253

AMCON Disposed N40bn Assets to Settle N3.15bn Debt, Companies Allege

- *Ask AMCON to render account of sold assets*
- *Lament wanton destruction of their properties*

Tobi Soniyi

Grant Properties Ltd, Knight Rook Limited, Fibigboye Properties Limited and Havilah Villas have alleged that Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON) sold N40 billion worth of properties belonging to them to settle N3.15 billion debts.

Consequently, the companies asked AMCON, a public institution empowered to take possession, manage, sell, transfer or assign property used as security for eligible bank assets, to render an account for the sale of the properties seized from them.

They made this call in a recent five-page letter signed by the Managing Director, Grant Properties Limited, Dr Olawunmi Olajide-Awosedo and addressed to AMCON's Managing Director, Mr. Ahmed Kuru recently.

Olajide-Awosedo, in the letter, said the companies were convinced that the value of the assets recovered from them was in excess of N40 billion, against a principal debt of N3.15 billion.

He said: "We are requesting AMCON to render a fair and transparent account of the assets taken from us, and discharge us from the debt."

He also requested for a comprehensive statement of the account of the transactions involving properties taken from them.

He said the account would enable the companies to ascertain the value of the assets that have been taken over by AMCON.

He narrated how his father Chief Olajide Awosedo died as a result of the hardship he was subjected to by AMCON and how his widow was evicted while still mourning the death of her husband.

He stated that the responsibility "is ultimately in your hands, as managing director and CEO of AMCON; it is you who must decide if AMCON will continue to pressure us to death, and I beg you to be fair, transparent and compassionate, and bring this unfortunate and tragic experience to an end."

He said that it has been 3 years since AMCON took over their businesses and assets, during which time several assets had been sold.

A copy of the letter obtained by our correspondent read: "At the time (June 2017), we were informed that the total exposure was N8.1 billion, which included the principal and interest accrued on both the Havilah Villas and Victory Park/Knight Rook accounts.

"We were also told that after adding N400 million in fees for the receiver manager, the total sum required to settle the account was N8.5 billion, we were also informed that AMCON could give a waiver of about N1-1.5 billion on this sum, with approval of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

"Without prejudice, we immediately indicated that we were willing to settle the account without the waiver, at N8.5bn these are facts.

"Since then we have been quite alarmed on receipt of documents and processes filed by solicitors to AMCON that the alleged debt has grown to over N33 billion, which is quite frightening because the total principal sum borrowed on both loans was N3.15 billion."

He also expressed concern that AMCON wanted N23 billion for the Knight Rook account, and almost N10 billion for Havilah Villas, saying these are rather bewildering and worrisome claims

He reminded the AMCON managing director that it was the mandate of the organisation to destroy businesses, or make huge profits like banks, since the corporation is being funded from the public purse.

"We were also assured that AMCON's mandate is to assist both banks and indebted companies as much as possible. We were assured by several senior members of AMCON management, including yourself, that N8.5 billion is adequate to settle the debt, yet the figures have been arbitrarily increased.

"If the total principal borrowed was less than N3.2 billion, why does AMCON want to destroy our business in order to recover N33 billion, which is more than 10 times what we borrowed?" Olajide-Awosedo asked.

He pleaded with AMCON to treat his companies fairly, recalling that his father died in the course of trying to settle the debts



SEASON OF MASS DEFECTION…

Kwara State Governor, Mr. AbdulRazaq AbdulRahaman receiving thousands of defectors from other parties at the Government House Banquet Hall, Ilorin,Kwara State

Masari: Nigeria Needs Restructuring, Not Disintegration

Francis Sardauna in Katsina

Katsina State Governor, Alhaji Aminu Masari, has cautioned those calling for the disintegration of Nigeria to have a rethink, describing them as senseless people whose agitations are not healthy for the development of Nigeria.

Masari, a former Speaker of the House of Representatives, added that while the unity of Nigeria was sacrosanct, it was better to insist on the need to restructure the country in all its ramifications rather than clamouring for disintegration.

He made these remarks at a news conference Friday night, admonishing those calling for the division of the country to jettison such ideas and join hands together with other Nigerians to move the country forward.

He said those calling for the division of Nigeria from other parts of the country "have no even sense. If they have sense, their people move around Nigeria more than any other person. They are found in nearly all villages in Nigeria.

"It is not the discussion of their leaders. It is not the discussion of those with sense among them. They are thugs. They have their own people in all villages. We, also, have our own who are living in the forest.

"But I do not think a sensible leader from that part of the country that knows what is doing will call for the division of the country. If the country is divided, where will you go? You do not have a country to go to," he said.

The governor called on both religious and political leaders irrespective of ethnic, religious and tribal affiliations to come together, set aside every selfish interests and primordial sentiments for the unity of the country.

Masari, however, noted that the devolution of power would avert the duplication of federal, state and local governments' efforts in terms of infrastructure development and enhance centralisation of activities in all tiers of government.

The governor said: "We need to make government, especially at the local government and state levels more functional, and this can only be done through proper allocation of resources and responsibilities.

"If the country was devolved realistically, governors will be the chief security officers of their respective states as was done under the First Republic in order to pave the way for them to provide adequate security to the citizenry, which is in dire need in the country," he explained.

He said only fairness and equity, as well as responsible and good leadership "can make Nigeria remain as one indivisible entity. Unless we start to see ourselves as one body, that can only be achieved where there is devolution."

Masari, however, disclosed that he had no intention to contest any political position after the expiration of his second term as governor in 2023, saying he would retire to his farm.

He said: "I have no plan; neither do I have intention of contesting for any election in 2023. First of all, I was in the House of Representatives as speaker so I have no intention of going back to the National Assembly by contesting the senate seat or any other seat.

"I was the deputy national chairman of the All Progressives Congress when it was formed so I am not interested in party office. Katsina has produced presidents for eight years before President Muhammadu Buhari emerged as a civilian president".

We're on a Mission to Defend Nigeria's Unity, PNG Declares

Gboyega Akinsanmi

Pro-Nigeria Group (PNG), a movement of nationalists and patriots, yesterday disclosed that it was on a mission to rescue Nigeria and mobilise leaders of thought across all geo-political zones to defend the unity of the country.

PNG, however, lamented that the nation's democracy was still standing on one leg 22 years after, blaming politicians for looting the nation's commonwealth and disregarding provisions of the 1999 Constitution.

Convener of PNG, Lai Omotola made this remark at the unveiling of the group in Lagos, decrying that 22 years after democracy, politicians had continued to use looted funds to perpetually hold on power in a bid to preserve the loot.

He said: "You will see this as politicians move from opposition to ruling party to escape prosecution. The politicians have decimated our entire institutions from the judiciary to legislature to media to education to healthcare none is working.

"The politicians have blocked separation of powers and have rendered our democracy unworkable. Power is now in the hands of the few by the few and for the few.

"From 1960 to today, Nigeria has been in decline on all indices: the exchange rate, inflation, debt, education, healthcare, price of petrol, insecurity and mortality. We continue on decline."

Omotola said the 1999 Constitution had not worked because politicians continued to breach it, stressing that if politicians could not obey the constitution, any other constitution would be a waste of time.

On the way forward, according to the convener, the first thing to be done is to fight for real separation of power and returning power to the people.

He said there was a need for the government to scrap all State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), lamenting that they had become tools in the hands of all state governors to put local governments in their pockets.

"All elections from ward to presidency should be conducted by INEC. Until we liberate our Local Government, I am sorry, we cannot have a participatory democracy.

He, also, suggested the need "to strengthen the rule of law. The president should allow future Inspector General of police to emerge by succession instead of the highly politicised selection of IG that has diminished the police and we all can see the impact.

"Until the police are reformed along strict professionalism, the issue of rigging on election day and insecurity will persist. Our judiciary should be autonomous to enable rule of law. The fight we should engage in is ensuring the constitution works. Our fight should be in ensuring that democracy works in all ramifications."

Omotola explained the imperative of convening PNG established to promote Nigeria, which has become unpopular due to agitations by diverse interests across the country.

He said as much as they were entitled to their views and expression of interest, it would only be fair for other views of unity to be heard. He added that the silence of the elite over the unity of this country is wicked and evil.

NEWSXTRA

Amaechi: Nigeria Still Trapped in Poverty Despite Buhari's Policies

• Seeks focus on rural majority to tackle poverty • Urges FG to learn from Brazil, China, India

Gboyega Akinsanmi

The Minister of Transportation, Mr. Rotimi Amaechi yesterday lamented that the burden of poverty in Nigeria continued to weigh heavily on the country despite some poverty reduction policies initiated by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari.

Amaechi, a former governor of Rivers State, argued that it was either that the poverty reduction schemes "are not well thought out or the resources committed to them are too meagre to make any significant impact."

He made the assertion while delivering the convocation lecture at the 49th graduation ceremony of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) yesterday.

The minister, in a lecture titled "'Inequality and the Dignity of Man," argued that focus on rural communities would be effective in tackling poverty and inequality in the land.

Amaechi acknowledged the efforts by the Buhari administration to reduce poverty by implementing social welfare and empowerment schemes as well as efforts by previous administrations.

He, however, insisted that more "has to be done and done right by this administration and successive administrations to come."

He observed that the Buhari administration had embarked on a cocktail of measures targeted at reducing desperate poverty among the most vulnerable segments of our populace.

He said: "These include the various Direct Cash Transfer Schemes, micro credit, Trader Money, the School Feeding Programme, the Small to Medium Enterprises credit scheme, the various agricultural credit schemes and anchor borrowers schemes.

"It is hoped that these schemes will over time converge to reduce the magnitude and demographics of the poor in our midst. Previous government efforts have also contributed significantly in reducing poverty over the years.

"These include the Community Banks, Rural Banking and Rural Branch Network, Directorate of Employment, NERFUND, Directorate for Roads and Rural Infrastructure, Mass Transit Programme, Keke NAPEP Programme etc."

Amaechi therefore called for a change in the development policies of the government to affect rural communities as much as it does urban areas, saying there were areas that should be addressed "to overcome frightening inequality and poverty. We must free our policies from an urban focus.

"The poorest urban Nigerian is many times better off than the most well off rural Nigerian. Therefore, we need to emulate the Chinese and Indian examples in focusing on the rural majority if we must end the increasing marginalisation of our rural compatriots.

"Our current land title and tenure systems have continued to consign our rural landowners to peasant holders of acres of farmland without commercial value.

"We need to reform our land title system by removing encumbrances on rural land titles so that rural farmers can use such land to access credit from the banks and credit unions."Inequality has produced an anarchic population as life has become a scramble and a hustle among many. Poverty induced criminality has sent crime statistics through the roof nationwide resulting in the culture of perennial insecurity that now haunts the nation.

"A resource poor treasury has led to considerable decay in the capacity of the state to equip the armed and security forces adequately to contain an upsurge in crime and militant nationalism and regionalism.

"Our hospitals and healthcare delivery system is in desperate disrepair just as our public infrastructure has continued to decay over the years," the minister said.

Citing examples of how other countries successfully fought poverty, Amaechi evaluated the effect of poverty reduction policies in China, India and Brazil, which he said, were once in the socio-economic crises that Nigeria was facing today.

If it could work in those countries, according to the minister, then it can work in Nigeria, despite its very peculiar situation.

He said the achievement of the Chinese in poverty reduction had been equated with a modern day miracle.

The minister explained that the achievement "corresponded with a period of sustained economic growth. It adopted the strategy of focusing on the poorest people in the rural areas. It massively moved them from poor homes in the countryside to apartment blocks in urban areas.

IN DEFENCE OF NIGERIA…

L-R: Member,Nigeria Group, Mr. Perry Biayeibo; Director of Media and Publicity, Mr. Oumarou Sanda; Founder/Convener, Pro Nigeria Group, Mr. Lai Omotola; and Member, Pro Nigeria Nigeria, Mr. Adekunle Akanki, at the unveiling of Pro Nigeria Group in Lagos yesterday ETOPUKUTT

Jonathan Greets Abubakar at 79

Victor Ogunje in Ado Ekiti

Former President Goodluck Jonathan has offered felicitations to ex-Head of State General Abdulsalami Abubakar on the occasion of his 79th birthday, commending him for his efforts and contributions to the peace and unity of the country.

Jonathan stated this in a goodwill message to General Abubakar in which he also highlighted the former Head of State's role in promoting democracy and his passion for service.

In the message, Jonathan said: "I am pleased to join your family and friends to celebrate with you on the occasion of your 79th birthday."

Describing him as an African statesman, Jonathan noted that Abubakar had "contributed to the peace and unity of Nigeria and many other African nations including Liberia, Niger, Chad and Sudan."

He stated further: "Your role in promoting democracy is underscored by your relentless passion for service and sacrifice. Nigerians will continue to honour you for the role you played in our nation's transition from military to civilian administration, which has flourished for over two decades and produced notable leaders.

"On behalf of my family and the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation, I wish you more years of sound health, strength and peace as you celebrate."

Army Hospital Treats over 7,000 Wounded Soldiers

John Shiklam in Kaduna

Acting Chief Medical Director (CMD) of 44 Nigerian Army Reference Hospital, Kaduna, Colonel Stephen Onuchukwu, has disclosed that more than 7,000 officers and soldiers wounded in counterinsurgency operations have been treated in the hospital.

Onuchukwu stated this on Saturday, when President of the Senate, Senator Ahmed Lawan, visited the hospital as part of the activities marking the two years anniversary of the Ninth Senate.

The CMD said the hospital was of international standard, adding that its services are accessible to both the military and civilian populace.

He said most wounded officers and soldiers, especially from the frontlines, were brought to Kaduna for treatment and their medicals were prioritised, while those that required surgery were operated within 24 hours.

Onuchukwu said there had been a kind of cultural shift lately.

"Initially, most of the amputees were no longer useful, but with the model improved services, most of them are still being retained and trained in computer hardware repair, among others, to enable them to fit into new office engagements," he said.

Onuchukwu added, "We have enhanced programmes to help the amputees, that will enable them to work as a non-combatant.

"For now, more than 7,000 of them have passed through the hospital within this period that we have counterinsurgency."

In his remarks, Lawan said the visit was to empathise with the people who had given everything to defend the territorial integrity of the country.

He said it was also "an opportunity for us to see first-hand how we can be more responsive to the needs of our military hospitals because, beyond compassion and empathy, there are responsibilities and obligations as people who represent Nigerians."

The senate president explained, "After the civil war in Nigeria, there was never a time that our military men were involved in warfare as we have now, which means that some of our officers and soldiers will be challenged with wounds that require hospitalisation.

"As a country, we are supposed to provide more resources to cater for the needs of those officers and men wounded in action."

Court Hill Promises Academic Excellence

Founder and CEO, Kid's Court School, Dr Abimbola Ogundere has disclosed plan to open "The Court Hill College" for session starting from September 2021, promising academic excellence.

In a statement yesterday, Ogundere said the college would be committed to developing outstanding young people with the skills, resilience and initiative to flourish in a rapidly changing world where students are prepared for a life of success.

He noted that the college was established in furtherance of academic strides Kid's Court School had recorded in the last 12 years of its operation.

He said the college "is mixing a strong academic focus with a stimulating curriculum and a rich, diverse co-curricular program.

"Equipped with a well-resourced library, fully fitted computing rooms, laboratories, art, design and music studios, multipurpose sports court, swimming pool, outdoor cafe, rooftop and other relaxation areas, collaboration and creativity studio and more, the college is eager to welcome parents, wards and students seeking a holistic high school experience and the best quality education possible," the founder said.

FG Extends Gbadebo-Smith's Term as NISER DG

Kayode Fasua

The federal government has approved the extension of the appointment of Dr. Gbadebo-Smith as the Director-General, Nigerian Institute of Social And Economic Research (NISER), Ibadan. The extension, which takes effect from May 31, came on the heels of his impressive tenure at NISER.

The extension is in accordance with the extant provisions of the latest edition of the 2019 of the conditions of service for federal research and development agencies, institutes and colleges of completion of five years.

Gbadebo-Smith's tenure extension came in spite of various unfounded allegations against him orchestrated by some unions in league with some research professors, who are interested in taking over his seat, investigations revealed.

NISER is a public research institute located in Ibadan. The centre is one of the foremost publicly funded think-tanks in the country and is a parastatal under the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning.

The extension will afford Gbadebo-Smith the opportunity to continue the process of repositioning the institute for relevance in the policy space as a world class Think-Tank.

FG Approves Academy of Medicine Specialties of Nigeria Registration

The federal government has approved the registration of the Academy of Medicine Specialties of Nigeria.

A statement issued by Prof Ogunniyi Adesola said the objectives, among others of the academy, are to promote excellence in Medical Research and Education, the application of research in Medicine and the enhancement of human health and welfare.

The academy is a merit-based one. Members shall be persons qualified to practice Medicine or Dentistry or non-medical practitioners in the related Medical Specialties.

The academy also has honorific membership and it is a policy research organization.

Its members, elected based on their outstanding professional achievements and commitment to service on matters of significance to health.

Election to active membership is both an honor and a commitment to serve in academy affairs.

After thorough deliberations and due diligence, the academy has invited eminent and outstanding scholars who have made landmark contributions in Medicine and Medical Specialties as Foundation Fellows.

NEWSXTRA

Ribadu, Global Leaders Canvass Establishment of Int'l Anti-Graft Court

Tobi Soniyi

Eminent people across the world including former heads of state and government have called for the establishment of an International Anti-Corruption Court to make sure that leaders who steal their countries' wealth do not escape justice.

Coming together under Integrity Initiatives International, these leaders have made a declaration calling for the establishment with immediate effect.

In a declaration they signed, they described themselves as concerned individuals, former officials, business leaders, representatives of civil society and of government, dedicated to promoting human rights, human health, and international peace and security.

They include Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister and former Foreign Minister of Sweden, Moncef Marzouki, former President of Tunisia, Rosen Plevneliev former President of Bulgaria, Juan Manuel Santos, former President of Colombia and Nobel Laureate, Haris Silajdži, former Prime Minister and former Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Danilo Türk, former President of Slovenia

Founding Executive Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of Nigeria, Nuhu Ribadu also signed the declaration.

Other anti-corruption crusaders from the world also signed the declaration.

They said that an International Anti-Corruption Court was necessary "because Grand Corruption – the abuse of public office for private gain by a nation's leaders ("kleptocrats") – thrives in many countries and has devastating consequences."

According to them, kleptocrats corruptly enrich themselves from the trillions of dollars being spent to promote global public health and counter climate change.

They said: "Kleptocrats are robbing their countries of funds needed to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Grand Corruption undermines democracy as kleptocrats use their power to suppress the media and civil society, and subvert honest elections.

"Refugees fleeing failed states led by kleptocrats constitute international crises. Uprisings in opposition to Grand Corruption destabilize many countries and endanger international peace and security."

Another reason they gave for calling for an international court to fight corruption is that kleptocrats are able to evade prosecution in their countries because they control the justice system.

They said: "We know that Grand Corruption is not flourishing because of a lack of laws. The 187 countries that are party to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption ("UNCAC") each have laws criminalizing corrupt conduct. Yet kleptocrats enjoy impunity because they control the administration of justice in the countries that they rule."

These eminent people also argued that because grand corruption had global consequences and often could not be combated by the countries most immediately victimized by kleptocrats, "a new international institution – an International Anti-Corruption Court – is necessary and justified."

They recommend that through its agreed mandate, IACC should have jurisdiction to prosecute violations of existing domestic anti-corruption laws, or a new international counterpart of them, by kleptocrats and their collaborators, if the country the kleptocrat rules is unwilling or unable to prosecute a case itself.

They said: "The IACC should have the authority to prosecute crimes committed by nationals of Member States, and by nationals of other states who commit crimes in the territory of a Member State.

"The IACC should be a court of last resort with the capacity to prosecute and imprison kleptocrats, and thus create opportunities for the democratic process to replace them with honest leaders.

"The IACC should have in civil as well as criminal cases the authority to recover, repatriate, and repurpose illicit assets for the victims of Grand Corruption."

While declaring their support for an International Anti-Corruption Court, they argued that the court "is urgently needed to promote democracy and human rights, protect human life and health, and enhance international peace and security.



DEDICATED TO GOD'S SERVICE…

L-R: Special Adviser on Spiritual Affairs, Light Bearers Society, Revd Ayo Oyadotun; President of the society, Pastor Deji George; Chaplain, Revd John Solubi, His Wife, Mrs. Dorcas Solubi and Mrs. Adebisi Olufon at Mrs. Solubi's installation as the new Assistant Chaplain at the 30th anniversary of the society at Wesley Cathedral Olowogbowo, Lagos ... recently

NUPENG, PENGASSAN Threaten Strike over Chevron Workers' Sack

Emmanuel Addeh in Abuja

The joint executive council of the Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) as well as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), has threatened to embark on an industrial action against Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) without giving further notice.

The body, jointly called NUPENGASSAN, noted in a letter to the company that it had watched with concern the anti-labour posture of the managements of CNL and the labour contract companies providing services to the company

It stressed that the union was particularly perturbed by the arbitrary and unlawful disengagement of three Nigerian workers, Bukola Sola-Adebawo, James Ukachukwu and John Ayeni, allegedly at the behest of CNL management.

According to the joint unions, the inhumane treatment meted out to the affected Nigerian workers is antithetical to all applicable laws of the country as well as other international laws that guide employment and the protection of rights of workers.

The union said: "As a union we are greatly disturbed by the disregard for due process in the termination of the jobs of these Nigerians; and we are uncomfortable watching while workers rights are trampled upon by CNL and her contracting companies," the joint union noted.

NUPENGASSAN said it had issued Chevron a 14-day notice to reinstate the wrongfully terminated Nigerian workers in its letter dated May 20, failing which it said it would take all steps deemed necessary to protect the rights of the affected workers.

According to the joint union, while the notice had expired, CNL and her contract companies had refused to reinstate the workers as demanded.

It further listed refund of the outstanding difference in monetary benefits, due to short payment and illegal deductions from workers' benefit since 2012, as part of the grievances with the oil giant, which has failed to act even after the intervention of the ministry of labour and employment.

The Chevron staff called for the refund of loans and grants illegally deducted from worker's terminal benefits, payment of 2018 vacation not taken and vacation allowance for contract employees.

The aggrieved workers bemoaned management's refusal to give adequate mandate to her labour contract companies negotiating collective bargaining agreements for manpower contract workers and alleged refusal of CNL management to allow contract workers use the staff buses, among others.

Johnson, Budding Novelist, Unveils 'The Extinguisher'

An upcoming writer and novelist, Adetola Johnson, has published her first novel, The Extinguisher, and is already selling on Amazon.

The novel, which was released into the market last month, tells the story of what young undergraduates face in higher institutions of learning.

The story is also about friendship and sadism and centres around a young woman, Funmi, thrust to the forefront of conflicts as she finds herself in a whirlpool of events that would demand her sacrifice all she holds dear.

Johnson said though the book is fictional, it relates to the day to day life of an average Nigerian undergraduate with her own personal experience forming the basis of the story.

"Though a book of fiction, the book was born from my personal experience in the university and an attempt by a young lady to make sense of a bizarre life experience."

Adetola Olaitan Johnson was born over 40 years ago in Offa, Kwara State, where she also had her early education. She later proceeded to the University of Ilorin where she studied Human Physiology and graduated with honours almost 20 years ago.

She also holds a certificate in acting and practises bead and jewellery making. Adetola is happily married with three lovely daughters.

NATFORCE'll Create 270,000 Jobs for Youths, Says Analyst

Kemi Olaitan in Ibadan

A public commentator, Mr. Godwin O Jimba yesterday disclosed that the National Taskforce on the Prohibition of Illegal Importation/ Smuggling of Arms, Ammunition, Light Weapons, Chemical Weapons and Pipeline Vandalism (NATFORCE) would create 270,000 jobs for the youths.

Jimba, therefore, commended Dr. Baba Mohammed for initiating NATFORCE to address the challenge of illegal importation of arms and ammunition, saying the taskforce would remove thousands of youths from the streets and labour market.

He made this remark in a statement he issued yesterday, emphasising that the taskforce "has the capacity to remove at least 270,000 youths from the street and labour market nationwide through employment opportunities."

He, however, lamented that the recent clamping down on the outfit by the National Security Adviser (NSA), Major-General Babagana Monguno (Rtd), appeared confusing.

Although he described the NATFORCE alongside other security outfits as illegal, Jimba said the decision of a court to declare the taskforce legal made the whole episode confusing and disturbing.

He said since the case has been decided by a law court, the best thing to do would have been going back to the court to vacate the verdict before taking any action against the verdict, observing that the step already taken is hasty and unpopular.

Again, Bandits Kidnap Ekiti Farmer

Victor Ogunje in Ado Ekiti

Armed men suspected to be bandits have abducted a farmer, Alhaji Jimoh Olodan at Iyemero Ekiti, in Ikole Local Government Area (LGA) of Ekiti State.

The kidnapping came barely three months after a farmer, Mr. Isaac Agbanigo was abducted in a farmstead in Ikere Ekiti, Ikere LGA.

The incident, according to an eyewitness, Chief Ajayi Ogungbemi, happened at Elegure farm settlement around 11.15pm on Friday. The farmstead is about three kilometres and 15 minutes drive to the community.

Ogungbemi, who is the Babaloja of Iyemero, told journalists yesterday that the gun wielding abductors, numbering 18, invaded the farmstead and whisked away the successful farmer.

He claimed that the kidnappers shot into the air, as they whisked away the farmer to an unknown destination.

He said the gunshots had caused panic, as residents, who had not slept when they came, fled into the bush while those sleeping quickly awoke and took cover outside their residences.

"The manner at which they operated showed that they had a target, who was Alhaji Olodan. The kidnappers upon entering the village went straight to the farmers residence and forced him out. He was actually the target.

"This is not the first time Iyemero would be attacked by these evil men and we are suspecting that they are working in connivance with the Fulani herders operating in our farms.

Chilaka Presents New Book June 17

The Rise, Fall and Liquidation of Africa's Premier Carriers: Nigerian National Shipping Line and Black Star Line by Dr. Edmund Chilaka is set to launch on Thursday June 17 this year at Etal Hotel, 1-15 Ede Street, Off Kofo Abayomi Street, Apapa at 12pm.

The book, which will be reviewed by Prof. David Aworawo, is the culmination of a Ph.D. research on the activities of the first two shipping lines to be floated by the governments of Ghana and Nigeria in 1957 and 1959, respectively.

As noted by the author, scholars, policymakers and investors will find the book insightful and captivating while former employees of the NNSL and BSL, their families and other stakeholders and aficionados will discover much empathy and nostalgia in its pages.

Expected at the unveiling include the chief launchers like the Chairman, Sifax Group, Dr. Taiwo Afolabi; CEO, Sea Transport Group, Alhaji Aminu Umar; Chairman, Comet Group, Chief Musa Danjuma; the Chairman, Integrated Oil & Gas Ltd and Chief Host, Captain E. Iheanacho.

The keynote speakers are: the Executive Secretary, Nigerian Shippers Council, Mr. Hassan Bello; Director-General, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Dr. Bashir Jamoh and the President, Ship Owners Association of Nigeria, Dr. M.K. George.

SUNDAY SPORTS

Edited by: **Duro Ikhazuagbe**
email:Duro.Ikhazuagbe@thisdaylive.com

Tragedy Averted at Euro 2020 as CPR Revives Eriksen

Duro Ikhazuagbe with agency report

Tragedy was averted yesterday at the ongoing Euro 2020 Championship after Denmark star player, Christian Eriksen who collapsed on the pitch during their opening game with Finland in Copenhagen was revived through Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) by medical personnel from both teams.

Fans present at the game and those watching on television around the world were thrown into deep shock as medics battled for close to 15 minutes to resuscitate the 29-year old Inter Milan midfielder.

Group B's opening match was stopped after Eriksen fell to the ground unmarked near the touchline five minutes to the end of the first half, with Danish players in tears as medics tried to revive him.

The previously raucous crowd at the Parken Stadium in the Danish capital fell silent, with Eriksen's teammates forming a ring around him to stop anyone from seeing his on-pitch treatment.

Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and captain Simon Kjaer had to comfort Eriksen's stricken partner Sabrina Kvist Jensen by the side of the pitch.

Eriksen was later stretchered off the field followed by the rest of the Denmark team, while Finland's players also walked off.

After several minutes of anxieties amongst the host players and fans, the Danish Football Federation announced on Twitter that Eriksen had stabilized and receiving attention in the hospital

"Christian Eriksen is awake and is undergoing further tests" at the hospital," the Danish federation said on Twitter.



Denmark players formed ring around Christian Eriksen as medical personnel battled for 15 minutes to resuscitate him after collapsing on the turf... yesterday

European football's governing body UEFA added that a "crisis meeting" had taken place with both teams and match officials over whether to restart the game.

However soon after stadium-wide chants of "Christian" and "Eriksen" from both sets of supporters began to ring out as his status began to filter through to supporters.

They were brought to their feet when stadium announcers said that Eriksen was "stable".

The Group B match in Copenhagen restarted with Finland picking their first three points of the tournament with 1-0 defeat of Denmark.

Finland's players applauded their Danish counterparts as the players returned to the field to resume the match.

Organisers UEFA said it agreed to restart the match "following the request made by players of both teams".

The final five minutes of the first half were played, before a five-minute half-time break and the second half.

Peter Moller of the Danish Football Association told Danmarks Radio: "We have been in contact with him (Eriksen) and the players have spoken to Christian.

He is doing well and they are playing the match for Christian".

Summer Series: Super Falcons Aim for Victory against Portugal

African champions Super Falcons of Nigeria have put behind them the loss to

Jamaica last Thursday and are determined to earn victory against Portugal today in the second of their three-match programme in the Summer Series in the United States of America.

Missing several key players who were held back by either delayed issuance of entry visa or injuries, the Super Falcons lost 0-1 to the Jamaicans on Thursday at the BBVA Stadium in Houston – the same venue where they confront the Portuguese this evening.

Deneisha Blackwood, who plays her professional club game for Houston Dash (the club that uses the BBVA ground), scored in the 54th minute to condemn the Super Falcons to their first defeat in eight games.

The nine-time African champions had won all three matches at the Turkish Women's Cup Tournament in Antalya in February – the first account under American coach Randy Waldrum.

After the clash with the Jamaicans, Bayelsa Queens' midfielder Celine

Ottah (one of 10 home-based professionals in the Falcons' squad), joined up with the contingent at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Houston.

Camp sources have confirmed yesterday that Belarus-based experienced defender Onome Ebi and team captain Asisat Oshoala will hit the team's camp before the clash with Portugal this Sunday, having flown out of their bases in Europe on Saturday.

Cycling: UCI Ranks Nigeria World's No 2 in Junior Time Trial

Olawale Ajimotokan in Abuja

The world cycling body, UCI, has rated Nigeria as the world's second-best nation in Women Junior Time Trial.

The rating was released by the Union Cycliste Internationale in its latest world rankings across all specialties.

Nigeria, with 780 points is placed second behind Egypt which has 990 points while Ukraine is third with 640 points.

Other UCI ranking placed Nigeria as the second best nation in Men Junior Sprint behind South Africa and in third place in the Men Junior 1Km Time behind both South Africa and Egypt.

The country is also ranked sixth in the world in the Women Elite Team Sprint and seventh in the Women Elite Team Pursuit.

The feat was applauded by the Chairman of the Caretaker Committee for Cycling Federation of Nigeria (CFN), Gandomenico Massari, when he addressed the media.



A cyclist

He attributed the latest rankings to the sacrifices and efforts by the teams, the coaches and all Nigerian cycling stakeholders.

Massari boasted that Nigeria would have emerged Africa's top nation if not that it stated to make use of the Velodrome in Abuja only after the National Sports Festival that was held in Abuja in 2018.

"Since then we have adjusted our speed achieving a good result in different types of discipline and everything has since been in shape," Massari said.

The Italian, who is a naturalized Nigerian citizen, said that immediately after they started training at the Velodrome, two girls went to South Africa for the African Championship and returned with seven medals. He added that after some string of successes, the federation was able to organise the first edition of the African Cup in Track in Abuja where the country amassed 51 medals, with nine countries in attendance.

"Eventually we have been participating in championships and in 2020 we participated in the African Championship where got 12 medals and recently in March, we got another 12 medals at the 2021 African Championship.

The ranking is an accumulation of points which even took me by surprise and I struggled to believe it," he confessed.

He said the latest rankings will boost and showcase the potentials of the country's cyclists to enable the it surpass South Africa which is 25 years ahead of Nigeria in cycling.

Electoral Committee Affirms Readiness for AFN Poll in Kebbi

The Chairman of the Electoral Committee for the 2021 Elective Congress of the Athletics Federation of Nigeria (AFN), Prince Jambright B.T Sumanu, has announced that all is set to hold the 2021 elections in Kebbi.

Sumanu said that the election is significant in so many ways, hence the committee cannot afford to let millions of Nigerians home and abroad down.

The Elective Congress is scheduled to hold tomorrow Monday, June 14th.

"All eyes are now on the AFN elections. Everybody is looking up to us for justice. With these reputable members of this committee, we are ready to do our best."

Speaking on the guidelines expected to be met by intending contestants, Prince Jambright B.T Sumanu said that the committee expects a full compliance in line with international standards.

"We expect that interested candidates must come with nomination forms from their zones while also meeting up with World Athletics guidelines as well spelt out in the constitution of the AFN."



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MISSILE

Afe Babalola to the Executive

"If the car of a judge breaks down and he only relies on a president or governor to get it fixed, then it will be difficult for him to pass a judgment that will be against the state" – *Legal luminary, Chief Age Babalola, SAN in an interview with THISDAY.*

SIMON KOLAWOLE

SIMONKOLAWOLELIVE!

simon.kolawole@thisdaylive.com, sms: 0805 500 1961



'True Federalism' and other Fallacies

Public debate in Nigeria, permit me to say, is not as educative as you would find in many civilised societies. The predominant elements here are ethnic and religious emotions, garnished with delicate lies and dangerous half-truths. The first casualties, as always, are facts and logic. There is the "herd instinct" which makes us believe, say and do things like the people in our corner. The groupthink syndrome has stifled common sense and meaningful interlocution. For the fear of "dragging", nobody wants to express an unpopular opinion. If you try to apply reason, you may be shredded. As Professor Wale Adebanwi would say, "It is treasonable to be reasonable in an unreasonable society."

One topic of debate that has raged for ages, and will never stop dominating the airwaves, is the campaign for "true federalism" in Nigeria. I have done extensive research on federations across the world and I must admit that Nigeria is the only country where the term, "true federalism", is in use. I stand to be corrected. While no two federations are exactly alike, I don't know of any other country where people are campaigning for "true federalism". Why? Because there is no such thing. "True federalism" is a complete fallacy, a made-in-Nigeria fantasy. You either run a federal system or not. There is no "true" or "false" federalism. Every federal system has its peculiarities and practices.

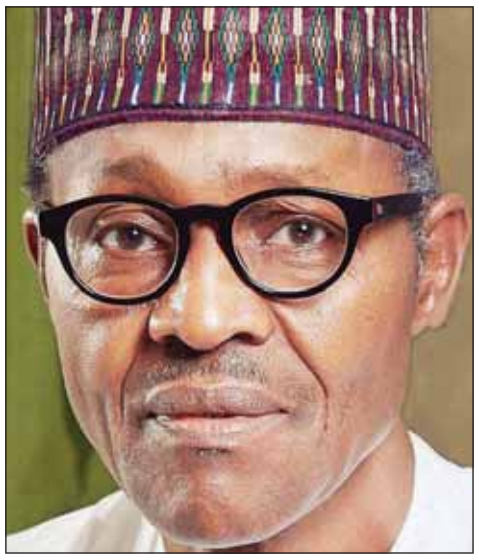
The basic definition of federalism can be captured in one sentence: a political entity in which power is shared between the national and subnational governments. One thing is common to ALL federations: the centre controls defence, monetary policies and foreign relations. How the rest of the political and legislative powers are shared differs from one federation to the other. In Nigeria, the powers that belong to the federal and state governments are defined on three lists: exclusive (federal), concurrent (federal and states) and residual (states). I have not found any two federations where the items on each list are exactly the same. So, what really is this "true federalism"?

In most federations, there are only two levels: the central and the subnational governments. In Nigeria, we have three tiers: the centre (federal), 36 states and 774 local government areas. The LGAs, though, are only third tier in name: they are part of the states. The three-tier system is somewhat peculiar to Nigeria. In the US, as with Germany, Ethiopia and most other federations, there are only two tiers: the national and the subnational. Councils and municipalities are under the states. That does not mean they are practising "false" federalism. In 1988, Brazil introduced a third tier called municipalities, which are independent of the states. The country has 5,570 of them.

Federal vs Unitary Systems

While the campaign for "true federalism" — as misleading as it sounds — has gained so much ground in Nigeria over the years, by far the bigger fallacy is that we can only develop if we practise this imagined system. It is a common argument among the protagonists that unless Nigeria practises "true federalism", the country will remain stuck in underdevelopment. There is no evidence anywhere in the world to back this claim. No matter the indices we deploy, there is no proof that federalism develops or retards the development of any country. If we push this argument too far, we may end up discovering that centralisation of powers, as in the unitary system, works better.

In a unitary system, power resides with the centre. It decides what to delegate or devolve to the administrative units. (This is markedly different from federalism where the states self-govern. In Nigeria, states are constitutionally empowered to legislate on several items: taxation, education, healthcare, environment, and rural development,



Buhari

among others.) You know what? The UN has 193 members and 165 of them run a unitary system. Do the math. That is an overwhelming 85 per cent! In case you are wondering which countries make up the 165, let me list just a few: China, France and the UK. You can google it. Did you notice that these three are Super Powers? You didn't? I did.

Let me take it a bit further. Using the UNDP Human Development Index — which measures the quality of life and standards of living in 189 countries — we could say the world's most prosperous countries in 2019 (reported in 2020) run a unitary, not federal, system. In the Top 20, only seven practise federalism. In fact, in the Top 10, seven are unitary states and only three are federations. If we are to apply a mischievous logic, therefore, we can say that federalism makes countries poor and unitary system makes them prosperous. Of course, that would be absolutely false: federal or unitary system does not develop any country. It is good governance that has always done the trick.

Fiscal Federalism vs Resource Control

There is a campaign for "fiscal federalism" in Nigeria which is mistaken for "resource control". The fiscal federalism theory was propounded in 1959 by Richard Musgrave, a German-American economist. He argued that the federal government should address the inequality in the distribution of wealth among the states in order to achieve economic stability in the entire federation. His key proposition is that the federal government should play the lead role of "redistributing" resources while the states should handle the "allocation" to specific sectors, such as education. This is to have a fiscally balanced federation so that no part is left behind for being poorer than the others.

It is true that in most federations, states own the oil in their territories — but that is not the whole story. In Canada, oil provinces are in control of their resources. But because only very few provinces have oil (Alberta and Saskatchewan), the federal government has an "equalisation fund" from where other provinces get grants for fiscal balancing. Conversely, in Mexico, the federal government is in total charge of all the oil revenue. Mexican states, whether or not they have oil, receive a flat 20 per cent as allocation. Municipalities where oil-production and shipping take place receive an extra 3.17 per cent as compensation for the environmental challenges. Different strokes for different folks.

Australia uses "horizontal fiscal equalisation" to support states with lower capacity to raise revenue. Belgium has the "national solidarity intervention" to beef up the finances of regions where the average per capita yield of personal income tax falls below the national average. In Germany, taxation is exclusively under the federal government, but the parliament passed a "state tax law" in 1920 to ensure that every state gets at least 80 per cent of the average tax revenue accruing to the 16 states. That means if the average tax revenue generated per state is $100 million, no state will get less than $80 million from the federal purse — even if the tax is not derived from its territory.

Why Federalism for Nigeria?

I might have argued that unitary systems are the most common in the world and that they dominate the list of developed countries, but I am by no means suggesting that we should ditch federalism. Federalism is usually practised where there is ethnic and cultural diversity, and Nigeria absolutely qualifies on that count. I want us to continue along that path. Because of the self-governing feature, the states or regions can determine their priorities, policies, traditions and, in most countries, internal security. The wisdom is for the states to maintain independence from the centre — as long as this independence does not undermine the integrity and sovereignty of the federation.

Established in 1789, the US federation is the world's oldest. It is often cited as the perfect example of federalism by Nigerian campaigners. It would appear that when these campaigners say Nigeria needs to practise "true" federalism, they mean the US variant. But this position ignores an all-important fact: the history of state formation. The US is a consensual union: all the states voluntarily agreed to form a federation. All the terms and conditions were agreed upon before they signed the dotted lines. The Nigerian federation, on the other hand, was set up by the British colonial government and Nigerians only started negotiating the union terms thereafter. Big difference.

To be clear, there is a point I would still like to make, lest I be misunderstood (I will still be misunderstood in any case, but I want this on record): I am not saying all is well with the Nigerian federation or that we do not need to tweak the constitution. That has never been, and will never be, my position. We, without any doubt, need to make critical changes to deliver development to the Nigerian people. The centre needs to devolve more responsibilities and revenue to the states because the states are closer to the people. But we can make all these arguments without whipping up ethnic sentiments, without lying to the children that there is something called "true federalism".

I will repeat myself yet again: all countries that have developed did so on the basis of competent and patriotic leadership — not "true federalism", "fiscal federalism", presidentialism, parliamentarianism, regionalism, balkanisation and such like. In Nigeria, we appear to have deliberately erected plenty ethnic, religious and regional barriers in the development discourse so that we do not address the real obstacles to our progress. If we succeed in balkanising Nigeria by playing up these sentiments, even the new nations that will come out of Nigeria will only develop if they have good governance. Trust me, there is no alternative to competent and patriotic leadership.

Let me now summarise my takes on these fallacies. One, there is nothing like "true federalism" as being regularly canvassed in Nigeria; rather, there are variants of federalism and no two federations practise the system exactly the same way. Two, "fiscal federalism" means a fiscally balanced federation where no part is left behind for being poor; it does not mean "resource control" as being popularly canvassed here. Three, countries are not developed by federalism or unitary system — it is the quality of leadership that determines the height a country will attain. I hereby implore those who are willing to learn: read wider and stop being misled by the loudest voices in public discourse.

And Four Other Things...

TAMING TWITTER

As I was saying, Twitter and other social media apps have been hijacked to propagate fake news and hate speech, thereby putting societies at risk. They certainly need moderation and sanitisation — if civilisation is not to be eroded. But I insist: Nigeria is not going about it the right way. In a democracy, there are civil ways of doing things. While I won't question the resolve of the federal government to address threats posed to national security by the misuse of social media, the way to go is get the tech giants to take responsibility for the sanitisation. There are bigger threats to the "corporate existence" of Nigeria, such as insurgency, banditry, kidnappings and arson. Priorities.

NBC BULLIES

When the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) threatened to sanction broadcast stations if they continued to tweet, it turned out to be a big opportunity in the struggle for media freedom in Nigeria. I would have loved members of the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON) to, in unison, defy the NBC cowards. Let NBC go wild and ban all the private stations. That would have been a great landmark in the history of media freedom in Nigeria. And I am damn sure any sanctions imposed by the power-drunk NBC cannot stand in a court because no law would have been broken. What an opportunity to assert press freedom and spit in the face of the NBC bullies. Missed.

END SARS AND FDI

Asked by ARISE TV to comment on declining inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Nigeria, President Buhari took a curious detour by linking it to the End SARS uprising and the ensuing burning and looting. This, he said, discourages investment. Something tells me the president was only looking for the slightest opportunity to fire back at the protesters, whom he accused of trying to bring down his government (#EndBuhari trended along with #EndSARS, and there was a street theory that the UN would remove a president if protests lasted for 30 days). Truth be told, though, the fall in FDI pre-dated the End SARS mayhem. But, well, Buhari fired the shot all the same. Noted.

THE BUHARI PERSONA

Recent TV appearances and pronouncements by President Buhari must have confounded a number of people, particularly those who say he is "Jibril Al Sudani" as well as those Facebook professors who theorise that he has dementia. They are living with the contradictions: in one breath, they've been criticising the "real" Buhari after the interviews and unwittingly admitting that he is not Jibril and does not have dementia; in another breath, they insist he is Jibril or that he has dementia. I would rather stick to one position and be damned than moving the goalpost based on the argument at hand. From the TV interviews, though, I can say this is the same Buhari of pre-2015. Indisputable.

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