

Nigeria Pre-qualified for COVID-19 Vaccines, Not Disqualified, Says WHO

● Country to get 16m doses of AstraZeneca vaccines ● Israeli hospital allegedly finds cure for virus

Deji Elumoye and Onyebuchi Ezigbo in Abuja

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said Nigeria is among countries pre-qualified to access COVID-19 vaccines

through the COVAX facility. WHO said contrary to reports about the exclusion of Nigeria from vaccine deployment, the country was among the nine countries recommended as ready to deploy the Pfizer

vaccine. It also disclosed that all countries on the continent were expected to start accessing the AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccines by the end of February.

The clarification came as

the Association of Medical Laboratory Scientists of Nigeria (AMLSN) on Saturday expressed readiness to begin the development and production of vaccines to tackle coronavirus locally.

Nigeria's reported disqualification from deployment of COVAX Vaccine had sparked public concern, necessitating a statement from WHO to put the record straight.

Addressing a joint press conference by WHO and Primary Healthcare Development Agency Country

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US' Endorsement Clears Road for Okonjo-Iweala as WTO DG... Page 5

THIS DAY

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How Troops Overran Terrorist Camps, Killed 60 Insurgents in North-east

● NEF: Arrest, prosecute criminal herdsman ● CAN advises FG to seek help from US, Israel

Chuks Okocha, Kingsley Nwezeh and Onyebuchi Ezigbo in Abuja

Troops backed by the Air

Task Force of Operation Lafiya Dole, at the weekend, overran some terrorist camps in the North-east, killing over 60 insurgents. Coming after

a recent visit to Borno State by the new service chiefs, the soldiers might have been buoyed by the visit.

The battle with the

insurgents, however, triggered an exodus of refugees from four local government areas of Borno into Yobe State.

But the Northern Elders

Forum (NEF), yesterday, called for the arrest and prosecution of any Fulani herdsman that broke the law. And the Christian Association

of Nigeria (CAN) advised the federal government to seek assistance from the United

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How FBI Warned FG, CBN on Scammers Using Cryptocurrencies to Defraud the West

● Christine Lagarde: Bitcoin facilitates questionable transactions ● Nigeria surged to second highest crypto destination in the world raking \$200 to \$300million a week without underlining economic activity, alarming the CBN ● FG alarmed kidnappers had switched to bitcoin for ransom payments

Tobi Soniyi in Lagos and Chuks Okocha in Abuja

More facts have emerged on why the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) decided to ban cryptocurrency trading in the country.

The apex bank prohibited dealing in cryptocurrencies or facilitating payments for cryptocurrency exchanges last week Friday.

Investigations by THISDAY have revealed that, the federal government and the CBN were warned by the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation, (FBI), on the activities of fraudsters using cryptocurrencies to bringing into the country hundreds of millions of US Dollars illegally obtained from the USA and other Western economies.

This was said to have particularly targeted COVID-19 stimulus packages designed to cushion the impact of lockdown measures on businesses and working families in these countries.

In an interview at a Reuters online event last week Wednesday, President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde said of bitcoin: "It's a highly speculative asset that has led to some reprehensible activity, including money laundering, and any loopholes need to be closed."

"There has to be regulation. This has to be applied and agreed upon at a global level because if there is an escape that will be used; she

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Soyinka: Herders-Farmers Can Degenerate into Civil War... Page 84

TINUBU REVALIDATES HIS APC MEMBERSHIP...

Chairman, APC South-west Zonal Monitoring Team, Membership Revalidation, and Registration Exercise, Senator Lawal Shuaibu; APC National Leader, Bola Ahmed Tinubu; Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu; Osun State Governor, Adegboyega Oyetola, when Tinubu revalidated his membership in Lagos...on Saturday

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US' Endorsement Clears Road for Okonjo-Iweala as WTO DG

● *Buhari: Nigeria'll work closely with America*

Deji Elumoye in Abuja

President Muhammadu Buhari has expressed the readiness of Nigeria to collaborate with the United States of America following its endorsement of Nigeria's Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, as the sole candidate for the office of Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The President, in a release Saturday by his Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Garba Shehu, declared: "Today, we see that the United States stands with Nigeria and Africa with the acceptance of our widely respected citizen, Okonjo-Iweala to lead the WTO."

"We look forward to working very closely with the new U.S administration on this and all issues of common interests especially, in such areas as accelerated economic growth, fight against terrorism and deepening progress on development issues".

The President welcomed the pronouncement of the Office of the United States Trade Representative, signifying withdrawal of the country's objection to the emergence of Okonjo-Iweala as Director General of World Trade Organization, WTO.

He went further: "We certainly welcome the decision of the new U.S administration to remove the last obstacle in the path of Dr. Okonjo-Iweala to becoming the first female and the first person of African descent to lead the organization."

"Nigeria and the entire African continent are happy about this new U.S position, which signifies a shift and an important turnaround in the relations between our continent and the United States under

the Biden administration." The United States government had on Friday given its formal approval to the emergence of Okonjo-Iweala as the next Director General of the World Trade Organization, removing the final obstacle to her bid to be the first woman and the first African to run the Geneva-based trade body.

The endorsement was sequel to the withdrawal of her main challenger, the South Korean Trade Minister, Yoo Myung-hee, from the race.

In a symbolic approval, the United States Trade Representative office in a statement said, "Dr. Okonjo-Iweala brings a wealth of knowledge in economics and

international diplomacy.

"The United States takes note of today's decision by The Republic of Korea's Trade Minister Yoo Myung-hee to withdraw her candidacy for Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)."

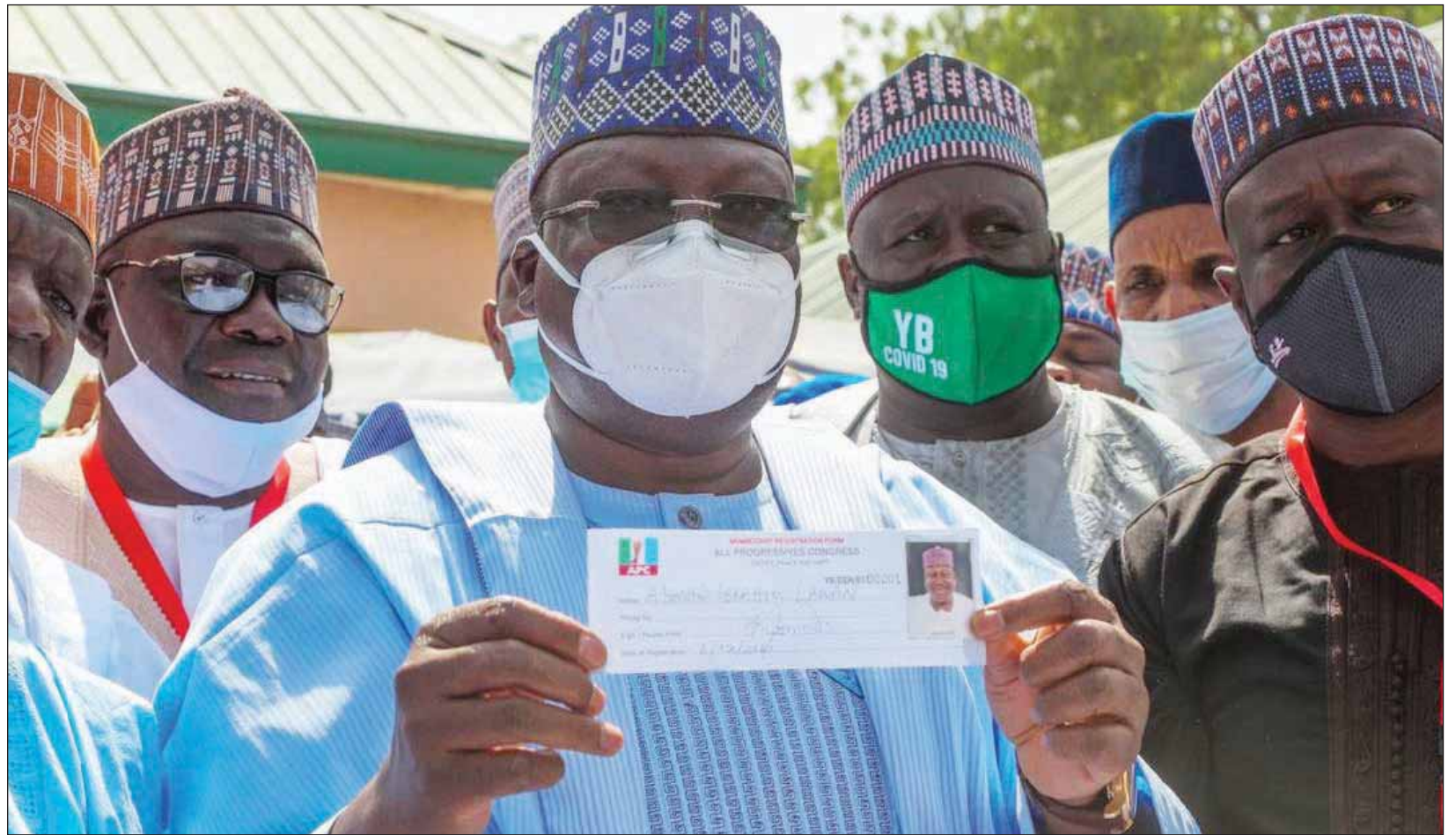
"The Biden-Harris Administration is pleased to express its strong support for

the candidacy of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the next Director General of the WTO.

"Dr. Okonjo-Iweala brings a wealth of knowledge in economics and international diplomacy from her 25 years with the World Bank and two terms as Nigerian Finance Minister. She is widely respected for her effective

leadership and has proven experience managing a large international organisation with a diverse membership.

"US looks forward to working with a new WTO director-general to find paths forward to achieve necessary substantive and procedural reform of the WTO," the statement concluded.



LAWAN REVALIDATED...

Senate President, Ahmad Lawan, displaying his slip after revalidating his membership of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Katuzu Ward of Bade Local Government, Yobe North Senatorial District

HOW FBI WARNED FG, CBN ON SCAMMERS USING CRYPTOCURRENCIES TO DEFRAUD THE WEST

said. According to THISDAY investigation, "FBI had discovered that fraudulent Nigerians, popularly known as *yahoo boys*, took control of large chunks of money released as stimulus in the wake of the devastating effects of the COVID-19, which has put many Americans out of jobs."

In order to avoid detection, these fraudsters had been sending millions of dollars to Nigeria through cryptocurrencies. This made it difficult for the authorities in both Nigeria and the US to trace the illicit monies.

However, before these funds were used to destabilise the Nigerian economy, the CBN had to wield the big stick.

In the last six months, Nigeria is said to have become the second country in the world with the biggest cryptocurrency transactions.

According to highly placed sources within the presidency, "These fraudsters remitted

between \$200 and \$300 million to Nigeria every week, using cryptocurrencies.

"The Central Bank and the federal government were clearly alarmed by this development and had to act fast before irreparable damage is done to the economy." Even more disturbing was that intelligence reports indicated that kidnappers had switched to bitcoin for ransom payments, making it increasingly difficult to trace.

To make matters worse, investigations by FBI showed Nigeria did not have the underlining economic base to justify the massive flow of funds on a weekly basis. To compound the issue, was how the inflows were being routed leaving investigators puzzled and perplexed by the elaborated complicated channels in the digital money world of anonymity.

After the FBI tip-off that these funds being pumped into cryptocurrencies were products of fraud, the

federal government, acting through the CBN, had to ban cryptocurrencies in Nigeria.

A cryptocurrency (or crypto) is a digital unregulated currency that could be used to buy goods and services, but uses an online ledger with strong cryptography to secure online transactions.

Much of the interest in the currency, not backed by any government, is to trade for profit, with speculators at times driving prices skyward.

But the CBN had, at the weekend, directed banks and other financial institutions to immediately close any accounts dealing in cryptocurrency or facilitating payment for cryptocurrency exchange, with immediate effect.

The banking regulatory authorities directed banks to expose any individual and entity running such accounts, warning that failure to adhere to the directives would attract strict sanctions.

The apex bank, in its

circular on the issue, cautioned deposit money banks, (DMBs) non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) and other financial institutions (OFIs) as well as members of the public on the risk associated with transactions in cryptocurrency.

The Director of Banking Supervision, Bello Hassan, and the Director of Payments System Management Department, Musa Jimoh, signed the circular.

"Further to earlier regulatory directives on the subject, the Bank hereby wishes to remind regulated institutions that dealing in cryptocurrencies or facilitating payments for cryptocurrency exchanges is prohibited.

"Accordingly, all DMBs, NBFIs and OFIs are directed to identify persons and/or entities transacting in or operating cryptocurrency exchanges within their systems and ensure that such accounts are closed immediately.

"Please note that breaches of this directive will attract

severe regulatory sanctions. This letter is with immediate effect," it stated.

However, the CBN directive had immediately drawn heavy criticisms from the Nigerian public, with a former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, advising the apex bank to reverse the decision, arguing that the country couldn't close her economy at this time

In a statement personally signed, Atiku said the number one challenge facing Nigeria was youth unemployment, explaining that it was not just a challenge, but also an emergency, because it affected the economy, and exacerbating insecurity in the nation.

Speaking against the backdrop of the decision of the CBN to ban and restrict banks transactions in the cryptocurrencies, Atiku said, "What Nigeria needs now, perhaps more than ever, are jobs and an opening up of our economy especially, after today's report by the National

Bureau of Statistics indicated that foreign capital inflow into Nigeria is at a four year low, having plummeted from \$23.9 billion in 2019, to just \$9.68 billion in 2020."

He said already, the nation had suffered severe economic losses from the border closure, and the effects of the #COVID19 pandemic.

Accordingly, he explained, "This is definitely the wrong time to introduce policies that will restrict the inflow of capital into Nigeria, and I urge that the policy to prohibit the dealing and transaction of cryptocurrencies be revisited.

"It is possible to regulate the sub-sector and prevent any abuse that may be inimical to national security. That may be a better option, than an outright shutdown.

"There is already immense economic pressure on our youths. It must be the job of the government, therefore, to reduce that pressure, rather than adding to it.

HOW TROOPS OVERRAN TERRORIST CAMPS, KILLED 60 INSURGENTS IN NORTH EAST

States and Israel in the fight against insurgency.

Nigerian troops, backed by jets, took control of several camps of ISIS-linked jihadists, with two senior commanders escaping after several other ranking militants were killed, two military sources told AFP.

The troops overran Islamic State's West Africa Province

(ISWAP) camps in an area straddling Yobe and Borno states in the North-east after a month-long military operation, the sources said.

The operations were on-going when President Muhammadu Buhari replaced his four top military commanders after months of pressure over

his government's failure to end the over a decade-long Islamist insurgency in the country.

On Wednesday, soldiers overran Dole camp, the last jihadist stronghold in the so-called "Timbuktu triangle", the two military officers said.

"With the fall of Dole, the

whole area is now under the effective control of Nigerian troops," said one of the officers.

The jihadists have been in control of the area since 2013, when they seized it and established a strong presence especially, in the Talala area, which became the second largest ISWAP

camp outside the group's Lake Chad stronghold.

Last month, troops took over Talala after a fierce battle in which six soldiers were killed by a suicide bomber, who detonated his explosive-laden vehicle among troops, military sources told AFP.

"It was a tough battle," said the second source on

the Dole raid, noting, "The route leading to Dole was mined by the terrorists and troops accessed it on foot, engaging the terrorists in fierce battle with air support."

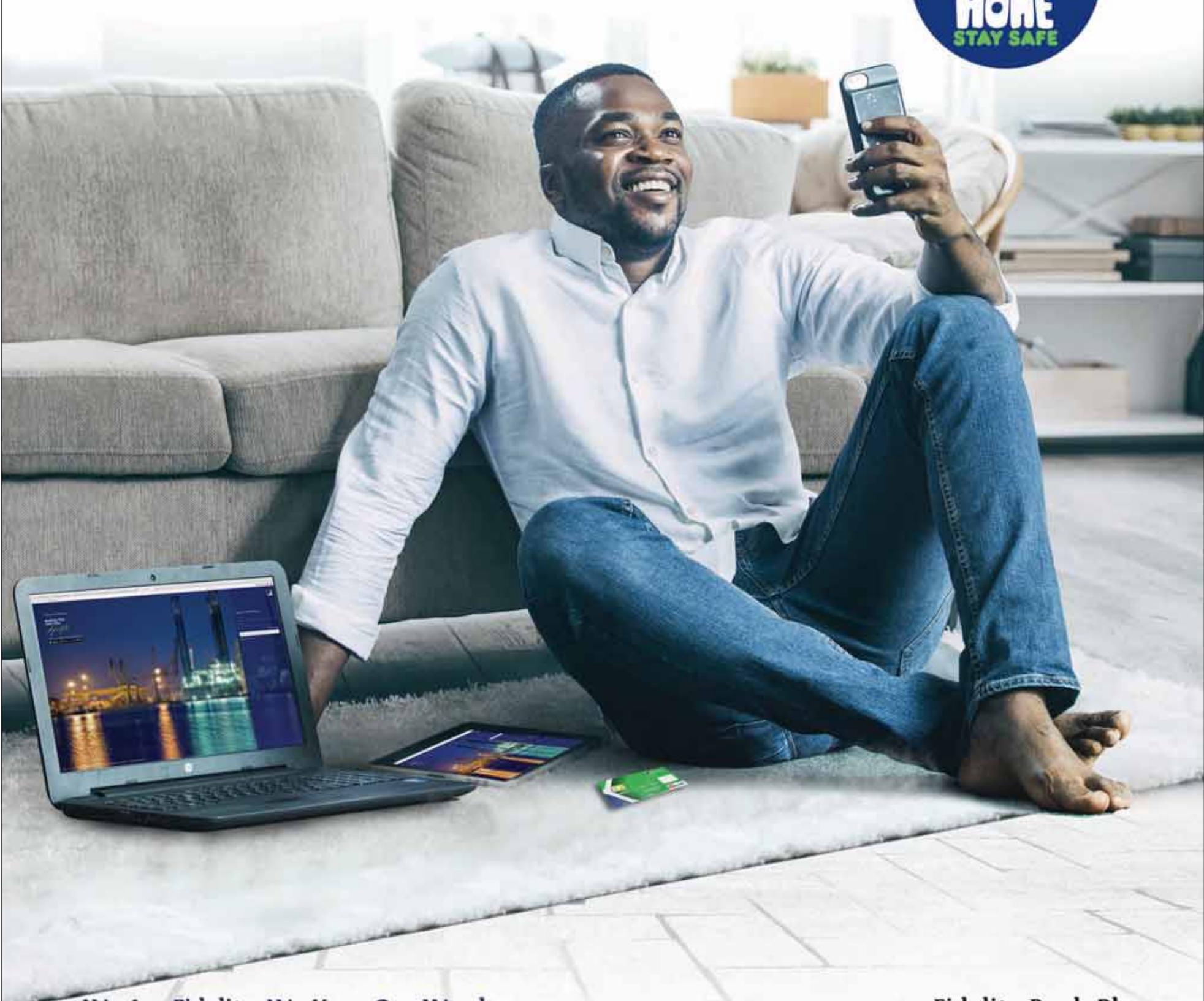
Several hostages were rescued from the camps while dozens of vehicles seized



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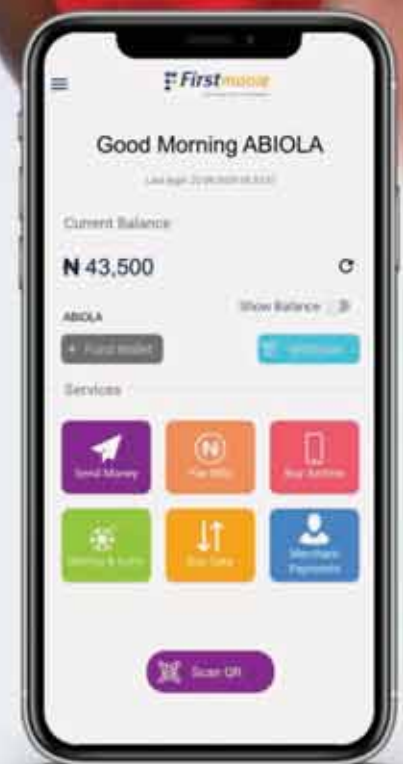
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Presidency: Appointment of Ex-Service Chiefs, Reward for Hard Work

● *Berates PDP for unwarranted attacks on nominees*

Deji Elumoye in Abuja

The Presidency, Saturday, stoutly defended the nomination of immediate past service chiefs as non-career ambassadors by President Muhammadu Buhari, saying it is reward for their hard work and exceptional service to fatherland. In a statement by Senior Special Assistant on Media and Publicity to the President, Garba Shehu, the Presidency berated the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for unwarranted attacks on the nominees since their appointments were announced on Thursday.

Explaining why the president chose the retired service chiefs, whose names have been forwarded to the Senate for confirmation as envoys, Shehu said in the statement, "The president is rewarding hard work and exceptional sacrifice by a set of military leaders, who gave their best to the nation and will be remembered, sooner than later, for their contributions to the security and survival of Nigeria as one nation.

"They should be allowed to move to the next level. This is so that their examples will help to inspire others if given the opportunity to serve and this transition is normal in decent democratic societies."

The statement dismissed criticism of the appointments by PDP, saying, "The newspapers and online media are full of pages of laughable criticisms of the president and former service chiefs by the party, the latest of which was the false claim that they were nominated as ambassadors so as to shield them from trial

by the International Criminal Court (ICC)..."

"How on earth can decent people run down hardworking professionals, who have put in their best to defend their country? How can you run down your country and equate that with normal political dialogue and opposition?"

"What is baffling about this false and baseless assertion is that this is coming, not from Boko Haram terrorists,

who the military kept largely in check and confined to a known section of the country, Sambisa, but from a so-called leading opposition party that fraudulently kept power for 16 years and is nursing the hope of one day returning to office as an elected government.

"What is more, under these corrupt politicians, the insurgency conquered large swathes of territory – 18 local government areas. Pray, if

a political party, in a blind search for power can spurn the interest of the nation, embrace the language of hate campaign against the country's military as enunciated by the terrorists, as the PDP does, what will be left for the Boko Haram to do? PDP is doing Boko Haram's work!

"We live in an evidence-based era for arguments. If the PDP has evidence of rights abuse against the

military in the war against terrorists, wouldn't it be beneficial to the nation that they publish such evidence instead of levying grave accusations without proves? And to ask, in whose interest are they making these accusations that lack any depth?"

"To add, we don't think the ICC, which these childish calls are being made, needs to be lectured on democratic values and human rights by

the PDP. Who are they, and what is their record in office to lecture anyone? Zaki Biam and Odi, where thousands of citizens were on record, the genocide operation comes to mind. Did they report themselves to the ICC?"

"PDP's attacks on the ambassadorial nominations should be seen in the context of the opposition party's track record as a university of liars, whose modus operandi is to propagate lies."



OBI PAYS CONDOLENCE VISIT...

Former PDP Vice Presidential candidate, Peter Obi (middle) flanked by ex-Rangers footballers, children of Peter Nwabueze at the burial of the late ex-footballer

NIGERIA PRE-QUALIFIED FOR COVID-19 VACCINES, NOT DISQUALIFIED, SAYS WHO

Representative of the world health body, Dr. Walter Molumbo, debunked reports that Nigeria and some other countries on the continent had been disqualified from assessing the vaccine due to unpreparedness.

Molumbo said, "WHO has not disqualified any country in Africa from accessing COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX facility, but rather, is supporting all countries to access vaccines as quickly as possible."

Of the 88 million Astra Zeneca doses allocated to African countries for the first phase, Nigeria has received by far the largest allocation, with 16 million doses, Molumbo said.

WHO said the vaccine was under review for Emergency Use Listing, adding that the outcome was expected soon.

Molumbo explained that in addition to the Astra Zeneca doses, there was an initial limited volume of Pfizer vaccine available through COVAX. He said the demand for the initial allocation of 1.2

million Pfizer doses was exceptionally high.

According to him, "COVAX received interest from 72 countries around the world, of which 51 countries were considered by the review committee as 'ready' (Nigeria was among these countries) and 18 countries in total were finally chosen to receive initial Pfizer doses.

"On the Africa continent, as of the 18 January deadline, COVAX received 13 submissions and a multi-agency committee evaluated the proposals of which 9 were recommended as ready to deploy the Pfizer vaccine including Nigeria.

"Unfortunately, it was not feasible to provide each of these 51 countries with Pfizer doses, due to a number of factors including the limited capacity for Pfizer to handle many countries at once. Therefore, spreading the limited doses across all the 51 countries deemed 'ready' could have not achieved the intended public health benefit."

Molumbo further explained that after epidemiological data was taken into account, "The decision was taken to proportionally balance the number of self-financing and AMC Participants, as well as Participants across all 6 WHO regions."

WHO was reported to have announced the commencement of shipment of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to African countries, including Cape Verde, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia. The world body said about 320,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which has already received WHO emergency use, would be deployed to the four countries this month.

Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer of NPHCDA, Dr. Faisal Shuaib, said the clarification by WHO had become necessary to ensure Nigeria was not brought to ridicule.

Shuaib said, "As clearly stated by the WHO Regional Director, there are a number of factors that were

considered in allocating the small quantity of the 320,000 doses of Pfizer vaccine to Covax countries.

"These include the mortality rates from COVID-19, the number of new cases, the trend in the number of cases, the population of countries and the availability of the appropriate Cold Chain equipment."

He said countries, such as South Africa, which received the Pfizer allocation, had a new strain of the COVID-19 virus and the highest mortality rates and was struggling to contain its transmission. Shuaib explained that giving smaller countries such as Cape Verde and Rwanda few doses of the Pfizer vaccine would have a larger public health implication considering their population size.

He stated, "100,000 doses to Nigeria, we have all agreed would have been a drop in the ocean. So, it is a welcome development that we are receiving 16 million doses of the Astrazeneca

vaccine to replace the Pfizer vaccine in the same month of February. The 16 million doses will invariably help us reach more of our population and is suited to our existing cold chain system."

Meanwhile, AMLSN has expressed readiness to begin the development and production of vaccines to tackle coronavirus.

Addressing newsmen at the end of an emergency National Executive Council (NEC) meeting on Saturday in Abuja, National President of AMLSN, Professor James Damen, said members of the group had the capacity to deliver on local vaccines.

While commending the efforts of the federal government in sourcing and strengthening local vaccine production, he advised that incoming foreign vaccines must be subjected to further validation by relevant indigenous bodies to ensure their safety and effectiveness in Nigeria.

Damen stated, "Imported vaccines must be such that

will be easily adaptable in our climate in view of our peculiar weather. The said vaccine(s) must also be subjected to in-country validation procedures to ascertain their safety and effectiveness in line with international best practices.

"NEC wishes to assure Nigerians that as Medical Laboratory Scientists, who are skilled in knowledge and techniques of vaccine(s) production, we are ready to start the development and production of indigenous vaccines against SARS-COV-2 in collaboration with other stakeholders and, indeed, all other infectious diseases. All we need is adequate funding and necessary laboratory infrastructure."

Nigeria Welcomes AU's Coronavirus Response Special Fund

Nigeria has lauded the

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ANAP, Media to Name, Shame COVID-19 Regulations Flouters

Tobi Soniyi

The Anap Foundation COVID-19 Think Tank is collaborating with media houses to name and shame influential people, who openly flout Covid-19 regulations and protocols.

In a statement jointly signed by Atedo Peterside and Abubakar Siddique Mohammed, chairman and vice-chairman respectively, the foundation expressed concerns that many people including those in influential positions were openly disregarding the regulations designed to keep people safe from the infection.

The media houses that have committed to the initiative include Arise Television, Businessday Newspaper, Channels Television, Classic FM, Daily Trust Newspaper, Premium Times, TheCable, The Nation, THISDAY and the Vanguard newspapers.

The media organisations, which had agreed to join the initiative to name and shame those failing to comply with the regulations, would not cover events where organisers and participating refuse to observe the regulations.

The foundation said it welcomed the COVID-19 Health Protection Regulations (2021) aimed at ensuring Nigerians adhere to public health advice around controlling the spread of COVID-19.

"It is detailed and if adhered to, will go a long way towards protecting us from the second wave and the more infectious strains of the virus," it added.

It however expressed regrets that the regulations as good as they were, are being

openly flouted.

It said: "While there is room for mass communication of the regulations – which mainly reiterate the popular, global advice about managing the pandemic (avoiding crowds, physical distancing, washing hands, wearing masks etc.) – we note that duty bearers and people

in influential positions are particularly egregious in their disregard for public safety protocols.

"In furtherance of our objectives to promote behavioural change around managing the pandemic and ensuring effective stakeholder response to COVID-19, the Anap Think Tank announces

our collaboration with the media to launch a 'Name and Shame' Initiative.

"The Name and Shame Initiative will highlight the non-compliance of newsmakers by not covering events or denying media coverage of events, where participants do not comply with the Health Protection

Regulations and spotlighting defaulters in the media."

The foundation also appealed to other media houses to consider signing up to join the Name and Shame Initiative, warning that to avoid another lockdown, all citizens must continue to act clever and take every opportunity to

protect themselves.

"We cannot afford another lockdown, but we can also not afford to act like we are not in the middle of a global pandemic that has already claimed 2 million lives globally. Follow the Regulations. Mask up. Stay Safe. Remain well and alive."



GOV. ABDULRAZAQ MARKS 61ST BIRTHDAY WITH STUDENTS...

Kwara State Governor, AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq (middle), marking his 61st birthday anniversary with students of School of Special Needs, in Ilorin, on Friday

NIGERIA PRE-QUALIFIED FOR COVID-19 VACCINES, NOT DISQUALIFIED, SAYS WHO

efforts of the African Union (AU) to establish a Coronavirus Response Special Fund aimed at tackling the menace of COVID-19 pandemic in the continent. President Muhammadu Buhari gave the commendation at State House, Abuja, during a virtual extraordinary meeting with other African Heads of State. He stressed the need for AU to ensure the proper immunisation of at least 60 per cent of the continent's population.

According to him, AU's establishment of a Coronavirus Response Special Fund with the objective to implement measures to mitigate the socio-economic and humanitarian impact of coronavirus in Africa, including boosting the capacity of the African Centre for Disease Control, is commendable.

Buhari, whose speech was delivered by Foreign Affairs Minister Geoffrey Onyema submitted that in view of the results on the ground, "Africa must be commended even as we begin the implementation of a mitigation strategy. The imperative for the immunisation of 60 per cent of Africans with safe and secure vaccines cannot be overemphasised. Nigeria, therefore, welcomes the decision to establish the coronavirus African Vaccine Acquisition Capacity to accelerate the financing and

procurement of coronavirus vaccines for the continent.

"We continue to appreciate the remarkable progress by the team with respect to securing a provisional 270 million coronavirus vaccines doses for Africa along with Africa Medical Supply platform and other laudable initiatives already in place.

"In my capacity as ECOWAS Champion on Coronavirus, Nigeria has provided logistics support, including the freight in of critical covid-19 medical supplies distributed to other ECOWAS member states.

"The coronavirus pandemic has created additional burden to our public health system and posed a major challenge to the gains made in the socio-economic development and overall wellbeing of our continent. The outbreak of the second wave of the pandemic has not made the situation any better. I commend the African Centre for Disease Control for rising to the occasion by ensuring the implementation of set priorities.

"I also commend other efforts and support extended to the regional economic communities and member states. The leadership provided by the Assembly Bureau, the cooperation of the African Union Commission and regional economic cooperation, including the support from partners have

been exemplary."

On the home front, the president disclosed that at the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria, priority was given to the vulnerable, including women, children, older persons and the unemployed in a bid to provide medical and social assistance to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the disease.

Buhari further stressed that Nigeria was committed to working with other member states in the spirit of regional cooperation and solidarity to promote human health and general wellbeing.

He added, "We will continue to partner with the World Health Organisation (WHO), the African Centre for Disease Control and West African Health Organisation as well as other countries to ensure accelerated development and manufacturing as well as unhindered supply of safe and effective coronavirus vaccines to all Africans."

Israeli Hospital Allegedly Finds Cure for Covid-19, Says All Treated Patients Make Full Recovery

A new coronavirus treatment being developed at Tel Aviv's Ichilov Medical Center has successfully completed phase 1 trials and appears to have helped numerous moderate-to-serious cases of

COVID-19 quickly recover from the disease, the hospital said Friday.

Hailing a "huge breakthrough," the hospital said Prof. Nadir Arber's EXO-CD24 substance had been administered to 30 patients, whose conditions were moderate or worse, and all 30 recovered — 29 of them within three to five days.

The medicine fights the cytokine storm — a potentially lethal immune overreaction to the coronavirus infection that is believed to be responsible for much of the deaths associated with the disease.

It uses exosomes — tiny carrier sacs that shuttle materials between cells — to deliver a protein called CD24 to the lungs, which Arber has spent decades researching. "This protein is located on the surface of cells and has a well known and important role in regulating the immune system," said researcher Shiran Shapira of Arber's lab, adding that the protein helps calm down the immune system and curb the storm.

"The preparation is inhaled once a day for a few minutes, for five days," Arber said, noting, "The preparation is directed straight to the heart of the storm — the lungs — so unlike other formulas... which selectively restrain a certain cytokine, or operate widely but cause

many serious side effects, EXO-CD24 is administered locally, works broadly and without side effects."

The medicine will now move on to further trial phases, but hospital officials were already hailing it as a possible game-changer in fighting serious COVID-19 illness.

Ichilov Director, Roni Gamzu, the former coronavirus czar, said the research "is advanced and sophisticated and may save coronavirus patients. The results of the phase 1 trial are excellent and give us all confidence in the method [Arber] has been researching in his lab for many years. I am proud that at Ichilov, we are... possibly bringing a blue and white remedy to a terrible global pandemic."

Edo Advocate Strict Compliance to Safety Protocols

Edo State Government has urged religious leaders and their followers to complement efforts of the government at curbing the spread of the second wave of COVID-19 by strictly adhering to health and safety guidelines to contain a further spread of the pandemic.

Health Educator, Edo State Ministry of Health, Mrs. Felicia Omakoro gave the charge while briefing journalists in Benin City, the state capital.

She urged religious leaders to ensure that their followers compulsorily and properly use facemasks, wash their hands regularly and observe social distancing in order to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

According to the health educator, "Currently, Edo State Government is ensuring that all structures are put in place to curtail the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) disease.

"We have gone around sensitising stakeholders and the general public on the need for compulsory use of facemasks and sanitizers, among other guidelines against the spread of the virus.

"We have also engaged with Christian and Islamic leaders to reduce their population to thirty per cent and ensure that every member uses facemask," she added.

Omakoro said the state government had trained teachers and health workers and sensitised them on the federal government's directives and guidelines to contain COVID-19.

"Edo Government recently inaugurated some police personnel that are working with the COVID-19 Response Team especially, the Risk Communication Team. They are moving round communities in the state to ensure everyone is wearing a facemask," She noted.

APC Membership Registration Targets 100 million Nigerians, Says Lawan

President of the Senate, Dr. Ahmad Lawan, says the on-going membership registration and revalidation exercise of the All Progressives Congress (APC) is targeted at making over 100 million Nigerians members of the ruling party. Lawan said the exercise was conceived to further democratise the party ahead of the 2023 general election and also reposition APC to win more elective seats at the state and federal levels.

The senate president spoke on Saturday after revalidating his membership of the party at Katuzu ward in Bade Local Government Area, in Yobe North Senatorial District.

He told journalists that the registration and revalidation exercise would afford the youths a critical role in governance, and provide Nigerians at the grassroots the opportunity of being major stakeholders in the nation's decision-making process.

He added that the exercise became imperative in view of the need to weed out

members of the APC, who had defected to other political parties and were still recorded in the party's register and to also afford new or intending members the opportunity to get registered.

Lawan stated, "The youths, who will be the majority of those that would register, will now have very critical role to play in the politics of APC and the democratic process of Nigeria.

"I also want to say that this exercise is essential, because we have names of people, who have decamped to other political parties and yet their names are in the register of APC.

"We cannot continue to carry the names of people who have shifted ground. And, essentially, democracy is about the people to take and make decisions on behalf of themselves.

"This is about taking the party to the grassroots. As Mr. President said in Daura, the party should be built from bottom up.

"The people at the

grassroots should have the party, so that when it is time for them to make decisions on whom they should vote for in congresses, they should take that decision. When it is time for them to decide who should run for any political office, it should be their decision. So, this is further democratising the APC.

"I believe that this exercise is one that the APC should approach very positively. We should not register nothing less than a hundred million Nigerians. And we have every chance and every reason to register more than one hundred million Nigerians in this exercise."

He disclosed that the exercise would continue after the March deadline to enable young Nigerians, who attain the legal age of 18 thereafter, to have an opportunity to become registered members of the ruling party.

Lawan said, "This exercise of registration and revalidation does not terminate at the end of this month or in the first week

of March. This period is only given to provide for a symbolic environment for registration and revalidation.

"The process will continue even after then, because we would have to register many more who will become 18 years of age after this exercise is over."

Appealing to party faithful across the country to shun infighting, the senate president called on leaders of the party at the state level to embrace reconciliation and desist from attempts to thwart the efforts of intending members, who are willing to join the party.

"I want to also appeal to my party men all across the country," he said, adding, "We should not in any way try to stop registration of any Nigerian, who wants to be a member of our party. This party has enough space and room to accommodate everyone. And, the broom is there to ensure that we don't leave any dirt around.

"So, please, there should be no fighting, and where

we have issues in any of our chapters, we should do our best to ensure that we reconcile our people."

Lawan, who commended the Buni-led Caretaker Extraordinary Committee for its feat in reconciling aggrieved members of the ruling party, lauded the most recent effort, which restored unity among APC factions in Zamfara State.

He said, "Talking about reconciliation, let me commend the chairman of the caretaker committee, my governor, Mai Mala Buni, who has done tremendous work of reconciling people, who have fallen apart in our party. He has done so much, and I believe that Nigerians can bear witness.

"Only a week or so ago, the case of Zamfara was addressed before everybody. Today, we have been able to reconcile APC in Zamfara, credit to the caretaker chairman of this party.

"In Yobe, APC is one, and more than 98 per cent are members. I want to see a

situation, where over 98 per cent get their registration or revalidation."

According to him, the exercise "will see the party at the national, state, zonal, and local government levels moving forward to ensure that APC continues to dominate the political space of Nigeria.

"We have elections this year in Anambra, and by the grace of God, APC will win that election. We have gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun – these are states that are APC – and we will continue to keep them.

"But in 2023, by the grace of God, APC should win more National Assembly, gubernatorial seats. APC should continue to dominate the Presidency, and we are not asking for 16 years.

"We want to do things that will make Nigerians to continue to trust the APC; to continue to identify with our government and presidency, because we mean well and will continue to do well for Nigeria."

HOW TROOPS OVERRAN TERRORIST CAMPS, KILLED 60 INSURGENTS IN NORTH EAST

from kidnapped hostages were recovered, the sources said.

Two high profile ISWAP commanders, Modu Sulum and Ameer Modu Borzugo, fled along with some fighters during intense fighting while other commanders were killed, said the second source.

Escaping fighters were believed to have fled to Lake Chad, which straddles Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, where the group maintains camps on the islands dotting the freshwater lake, said the two military officers.

In another front, troops reclaimed five camps from the jihadists in Kidari, Argude, Takwala, Chowalta and Galdekore villages, where the jihadists used suicide bombers to try to stave off troops advance.

"We lost some soldiers and several were injured in the suicide attack but the soldiers managed to subdue the terrorists," said the second source, without giving details of the casualties.

Meanwhile, the Theatre Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole, Major General Faruk Yahaya, urged Nigerian troops to sustain the military offensive against Boko Haram fighters, in the North-east.

Visiting the troops after they killed no fewer than 60 Boko Haram terrorists in a weeklong operation codenamed, Tura Takai Bango, Yahaya made the call during his operational tour of military formations to commend troops fighting in Bama axis, Pulka, thrusting into deep Boko Haram and ISWAP camps and enclaves in Sambisa Forest.

In recent weeks, the troops had crushed terrorists, who attempted to invade Gamboru Ngala and also stormed "Timbuktu Triangle", a notorious enclave of Boko Haram in the heart of Sambisa Forest.

The visit of the commander came on the heels of the visit of the new service chiefs led by the Chief of Defence Staff,

Major General Lucky Irabor. They had visited the theatres of war, military formations and commanders and were briefed on the state of affairs in the general area.

NEF to FG: arrest, prosecute criminal herdsmen

The Northern Elders Forum (NEF) said it was not against the arrest and prosecution of herdsmen that violated the laws of the land or engaged in kidnapping and banditry, saying anyone caught in crime should be treated as a criminal. The group, however, said the arrest and prosecution of errant herdsmen should follow due process.

In an interview with THISDAY, spokesperson of NEF, Dr. Hakeem Baba Ahmed, cautioned against allowing ethnic militias to assume the role of law enforcement agencies, because it might lead to anarchy. Ahmed, who said the increased agitation in the country was evidence of failure in governance, called on well meaning Nigerians to speak against the growing insecurity.

The NEF spokesman stated, "The Fulani man or woman, like every Nigerian, deserves to be protected. They deserve the protection of the state. They deserve the protection of the community. People, who are living peacefully, people, who are living within the law, people who have not broken the law should not be harassed, should not be attacked, should not be intimidated, not just about the Fulani or not, but any Nigerian."

He said any Nigerian, irrespective of tribe or religion, deserved the protection of the state, adding, "We must be free to live anywhere in the country. If the state is unable to protect the Fulani and the community that they're living with and known to them for decades, then, they should

come back home where maybe they will be safer."

Ahmed said, "But we are not asking anybody to leave where he or she is to come home. We are saying Nigerians should be protected wherever they are. Be them Fulani or Effik or Itsekiri, or Igbo or Yoruba, everybody needs to be protected."

He argued that nobody was above the law, stating that the Fulani, like any other Nigerian that commits an offence, should be arrested and prosecuted.

He said, "They should be arrested. We know that there are criminal Fulani elements among the Fulani people just as is the case among other ethnic tribes. We know that in the North, like in any part of the country, there are also the bad eggs.

"Our position is that they should be arrested, tried under the law of the country. The Nigerian state must not allow anybody to get away with criminal activities – whether they are Fulani or Yoruba or Igbo. Nobody should be seen to be above the law and this is important.

"Arrest any Fulani man if he breaks the law. Arrest him but don't tell innocent people that have not been identified with any crime to leave where they are. If they have not broken any law and they have not violated any law, you don't have the right to tell people to leave a place if they are living there lawfully and legally. This is wrong. This is our position."

Ahmed called on patriotic Nigerians to speak up against demonisation of any Nigerian anywhere on account of tribe or religion.

According to him, "The immediate thing is that we want all Nigerians with responsibility to speak up, to come now. We need to assure people that Nigeria is safe for everybody. We need to stop all this terrible rhetoric that is tearing everybody and

community apart. We need assurances that they are safe, whether you are at home or in somebody's home. Nigeria must be protected.

"Second, we need to look at why we have this kind of quarrel now, when we have been living in the past peacefully. This is a country that accommodates all of us and provides for all our needs. Why are we fighting over pieces of land; fighting each other as if we are just strangers.

"We have lived with each other for hundreds of years. Something is wrong, something is wrong with the country. Something is not working well. We need to sit down and look at what is wrong this year. People are saying they don't want a particular tribe of Nigerians living in their country. We have the police. We have the constitution. We have laws, something is wrong.

"What is the problem? We need to know? Is it that the Nigerian state is failing us or we failed to resolve those problems that come out every once in a while? Whether it is between the same ethnic groups or different ethnic groups that have been living in the past, the Nigerian state has the capacity to provide resolution, to enforce the law, to deal with violations of the law.

"Unfortunately, in the last few years, something is wrong or has gone wrong or is it that Nigerians have failed to deal with the people that are taking the laws in their own hands? What you are seeing happening now is the reflection of the failure of the Nigerian state.

"We are assuming powers that are not ours. It is the government that should deal with criminals whether they are Fulani or not. Why are communities now exercising that rights of the state by exercising that power to eject people?"

On whether a sovereign

national conference was the answer to the problems facing Nigeria, Ahmed declared, "I don't know about sovereign conference. What we recommended so many times and we are still recommending is that Nigerians should sit and discuss with or without government's approval to discuss what is wrong with Nigeria.

"We don't need the approval of the federal government to sit down and discuss and right now, I am telling you we are actually reaching out to each other from the North to the East and South, we have a forum where we talk and we are reaching out to elders and leaders, who are responsible to try and bring down the temperature.

"We are in a very dangerous state and we do not need the approval or the consent of the government to discuss what is wrong with Nigeria, but if we can do that with government, that is even better because the government has law behind it, the agencies behind it to assist Nigeria to be a little bit more secure where we live."

CAN Advises FG to Seek Help from US, Israel

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Saturday asked the President Muhammadu Buhari government to seek help from Israel, United States and other countries in the fight against insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and other violent crimes in the country. The apex Christian body said the idea had become necessary because the country appeared overwhelmed by the continuous security challenges.

President of CAN, Dr. Samson Ayokunle, made the call in Abuja during the inauguration of the new national chairman of CAN's Youth Wing (YOWICAN), Belusochukwu Enwere.

Ayokunle said CAN was

seriously worried by the persecution of Christians, who were affected by the security challenges in Nigeria.

The CAN president, who was represented by Assistant General Secretary of the association, Apostle Biodun Sanyaolu, said, "It is very obvious that Nigeria needs assistance. I'm not President Muhammadu Buhari, but I'm sure that he will be worried as well. He should be willing to seek help from anywhere, because insecurity has reached a worrying point where nobody is safe.

"We need help. Let me use the opportunity to tell the president to reach out to Israel, United States and other countries that could be of help to Nigeria. The problem of insecurity is becoming overwhelming.

"The insecurity, banditry, and kidnapping are against the human race. We are seriously worried in CAN, because we are affected by the security challenges in Nigeria."

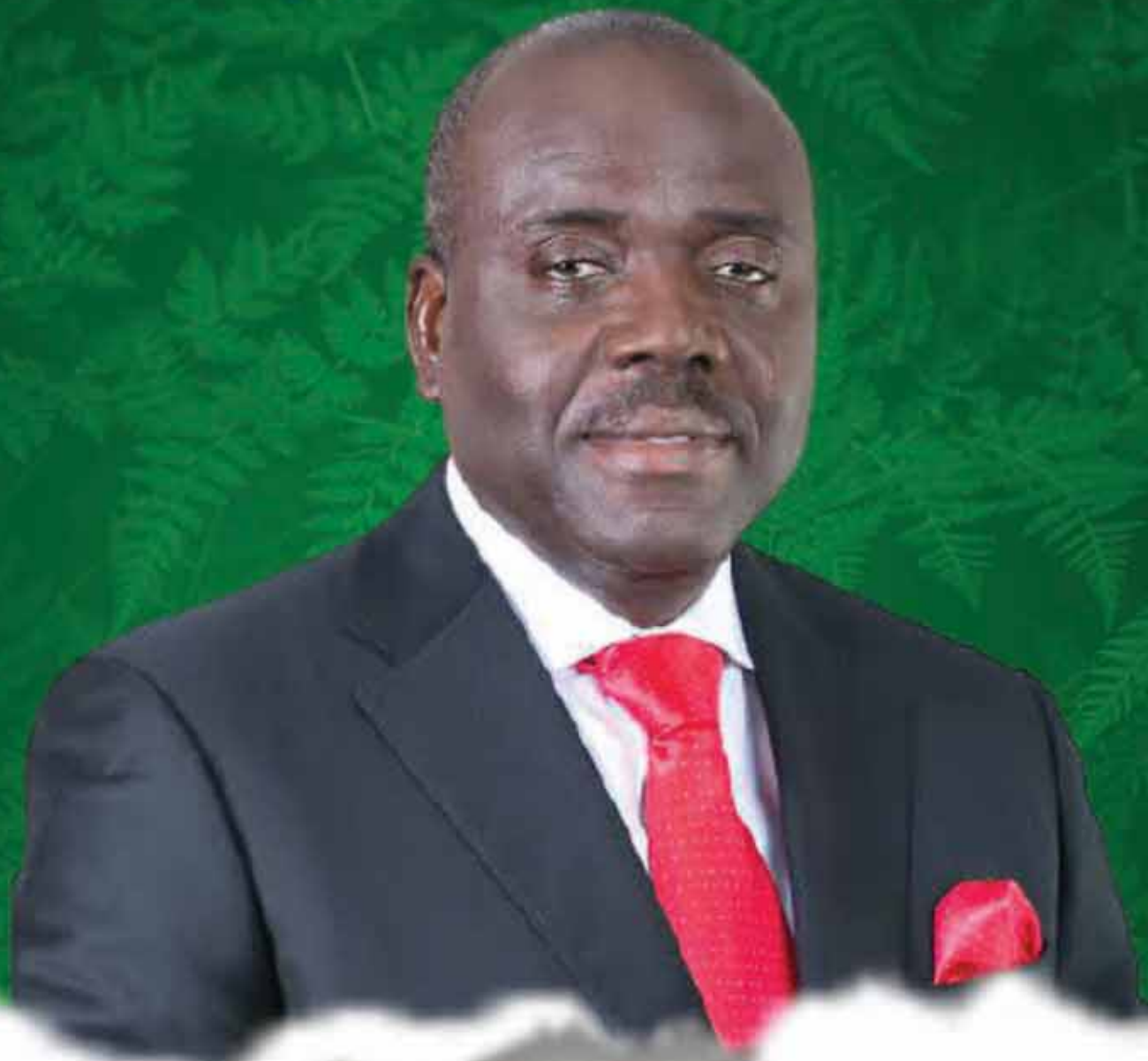
Ayokunle said the CAN leadership had spoken against the security challenges many times and it did appear that it was too overwhelming to the present government.

"We will continue to pray for the government, because there is lack of security everywhere – from Adamawa to Lagos, Sokoto to Enugu – the highway is not safe.

"Even when you're in your house, you're not safe. We are seriously worried. The onus is on the government to protect the people. And the first assignment of the government is to protect everybody, including the government officials, because they too are not safe.

"The governors are not safe. You know what happened in Katsina, the home state of the president. I'm sure the president, too, will be worried as much as we are."

Congratulations



*My friend and brother, **Mr Abdulrazaq Isa**, Chairman/CEO, Waltersmith Petroman Oil Ltd, as you clock 60 today, your philanthropy, expertise and selfless service to humanity gives a lot for us to appreciate the Almighty.*

*You have been specially blessed and favoured, but may the years ahead be your best years yet, in Jesus' mighty name.
Amen*



Signed:
Prince Dapo Abiodun, MFR
Governor, Ogun State.

...Building Our Future Together

EDITORIAL

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STRUCTURING THE RESTRUCTURING DEBATE

Restructuring could have a big impact on the country's future. But it should be done in accordance to the wishes of the people

Against the background of the failure by the federal government to properly manage our diversity and the growing insecurity across the country, there is a unanimous resolution by several ethnic nationalities that Nigeria is overdue for restructuring. While we have always advocated the need to tinker with the current structure for effective governance, the current ethno-religious slant to the campaign, raises several questions. Does

An inclusive government, a shrunken federal dominance, better diversity management, justice for all, devolution and common sense are the urgent imperatives

ingly becoming a recipe for uncertainty, insecurity and instability. We also cannot deny the fact that Nigeria practices a weird form of federalism that is not only antithetical to growth and development, but also suffocating. It is federalism with highly unitary tendencies, where almost all powers are concentrated at the centre as the federating units – the states and local governments - are reduced to mere appendages. We therefore need constitutional adjustments to devolve responsibility from the centre to the periphery while at the same time enhancing separation of powers at state level to curtail the autocratic tendencies of governors.

From the way things are, the counter-veiling mechanisms that ensure some level of accountability at the centre are either non-existent or too weak in these fragmented units and the logical result is that the promise of good governance embedded in the theory of decentralisation is delivered almost always in the breach. Besides, most of the current 36 states

a mere new political structure guarantee a better Nigeria? Can we identify any of our nationalities as either a zone of absolute virtue or vice?

First, we reaffirm our belief that Nigeria needs to restructure so it can work for all citizens. There is a consensus that the present structure of the federation is increas-



are too small and too under-resourced to be economically viable and therefore structurally too weak to deliver human development. Most of these states depend almost entirely on allocations from the Federation Accounts, the bulk of which they expend on salaries and other recurrent expenditures.

However, the current discourse on restructuring is being led by ethnic champions and active politicians with vested interests. It is still mostly an opposition propaganda weapon. When the same people get to power, as we have seen over the years, their rhetoric will change to the detriment of Nigeria. For that reason, they cannot lead this debate. An inclusive government, a shrunken federal dominance, better diversity management, justice for all, devolution and common sense are the urgent imperatives. Incumbent politicians with entrenched interests cannot bring these about. Nor can they dismantle their own gravy train!

At practically all levels, there seems to be a misconception about what governance is all about. A plethora of scandals which dominate media headlines daily show that public funds are now looted in billions without corresponding convictions secured for culprits; scores of people are killed on a daily basis in different parts of the country either by armed gangs or security agencies; the parlous state of infrastructure has become alarming; and most rural areas are yet to experience any meaningful form of development in spite of the annual budgetary allocations for that purpose. Rule of law reigns substantially in rhetoric; healthcare delivery is still poor and educational standard continues to slide.

While we therefore subscribe to the position that restructuring will aid good governance and human development in Nigeria, it is important to reiterate that what is most lacking at this period is good governance. People in power no longer care about the safety and welfare of citizens as well as in the optimal allocation of scarce resources and the effective implementation of policies for service delivery.

With the foregoing, there is an urgent need for critical stakeholders to anchor the restructuring initiative on the wishes of the people, not on the pressure of ethnic and regional bigots. Nigeria is a republic with a social contract between individual citizens and the government, not a union of ethnic groups. We cannot replace a federation of a handful of dysfunctional states with an unwieldy babel of tribal enclaves.

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TANKO GWAMNA

It was the great polymath and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, Benjamin Franklin who, while explaining how a person can make an impression that could last forever, said that one can "either write something worth reading, or do something worth writing [about]." He was also quoted to have once said that "well done is better than well said." Thus, a juxtaposition of both quotes of Benjamin Franklin mentioned above simply implies that as much as one can make lasting impressions either by writing what is worth reading or doing something worth writing about, it is better to opt for the latter given that actions speak louder than words.

And that is why men

of strength act more than they talk. They always act meticulously and with tact - for, they always have a mission to accomplish; a mission not for themselves but for humanity. A mission of positively impacting on the lives of the people so that in the end, the society will be the better for their actions. And the Chairman of Taj Bank, Alhaji Tanko Isiaku Gwamna, who clocked 55 years 6th February, is an example of such men who act more than they talk.

Therefore, celebrating him is not just about the number 55 years; it is also about his accomplishments. Tanko Gwamna has been an entrepreneur since 1987 when he started real estate business before he later expanded his

boundaries to the finance subsector of the economy. And today, his footprints on the construction and financial turfs of the country are very visible. He has walked the path less travelled and in the tripod stand, Tanko Gwamna is the Chairman of both Grandscope Construction Company Limited and Taj Bank Limited.

Under his stewardship, Grandscope Construction Co. Ltd. has grown to become one of the leading construction firms in the country. It is contributing to governments' efforts to close especially the road infrastructural lacuna in Nigeria with its quality services that meet global standards. Likewise, Tanko Gwamna is leading Taj Bank

Limited as it sets to be the prime Non-Interest Financial Institution (NIFI) in Africa. The bank obtained its license from the Central Bank of Nigeria on 3rd July, 2019 and began business operations on 2nd December of the same year. With its headquarters in Abuja, Taj Bank Limited is operating under Islamic Banking Principles. Meanwhile, it is important to note at this instance that both construction and banking require enormous labor. Therefore, as a key actor on Nigeria's economic turf, Tanko Gwamna plays essential roles in providing employment opportunities to many of the nation's teeming unemployed population.

Aside being a construction czar, Tanko Gwamna is also an astute politician. The quinquagenarian is a relevant politician both at home in Gombe State

and elsewhere across Nigeria.

He was a state party official and at several times honorable commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Works and Housing during the Danjuma Goje administration. While in government, the economist served meritoriously and contributed to the development of not only Gombe State in particular but also the country in general.

And with this excellent track record of duty to God and humanity, it is incontrovertible that Tanko Gwamna deserves to be celebrated for his many years of dedicated service to humanity. As he turns 55 years, we pray so fervently that God grants him many more years of blessings, happiness, peace and prosperity.

—Mukhtar Jarmajo, Bauchi



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OPINION

THE MISSING FUNDAMENTALS AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY FOR NIGERIA

Olisa Agbakoba writes President Buhari on regional autonomy and devolution of powers

It is my honour and privilege to present to you, for consideration a proposal on regional autonomy and devolution of powers.

Common fundamentals are policy goals in the political, economic, cultural, religious and social affairs of a nation that often must be similar to achieve political cohesion. These common ideals are, usually taken for granted, but remain central to effective governance and development of nations. The notion of missing fundamentals is at opposite poles and refer to an absence of common political objectives on vital national policy. Kjell Magne Bondevik, once Norwegian Prime Minister, attributed Norway's success to its political homogeneity. That is Norwegians have common national identity that drives their political and economic stability. China, India, Taiwan and Singapore also have common fundamentals.

Nigeria, on the other hand, has no national fundamentals. Diverse religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds severely impair our ability to work together. The challenge is to resolve our diversity in harmony. This needs deliberate policy choices to create unity in diversity. This was the central theme of our old national anthem. Unfortunately, our policy choices have resulted in very divisive dialogue. We cannot agree on a mode of a federal political system. We continue to raise issues around our differences – the dilemma of missing fundamentals. We can only make progress by understanding and embracing our challenges.

The UK Example – Devolution

According to a guest lecturer at a seminar on regional autonomy, the UK provides a perfect example of managing unity in diversity. The UK is made up of at least four ethnic nationalities, the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish. But by managed devolution, the UK has grappled with the challenge of their missing fundamentals. Even with hard work, it still grapples with discontent as the Scots want out of the kingdom!! But by staying with a policy choice of recognizing their subnational ethnicities, the British accommodate.

Nigeria's Mismanaged Diversity Challenge

In Nigeria's case, we have not unfortunately managed the challenge of diversity. Brought together by force of amalgamation in 1914, it was not until 1951 that the first attempt to manage our diversity occurred. There was self-rule in three regions – Northern, Eastern, Western and eventually Mid-West Region. By aggregation of discussion among our founding fathers, they understood the need to manage unity in diversity by devolved political authority. But this all came to a halt with military rule in 1966, with the unification and centralization of our political processes. We are still stuck with a highly centralized Federation.

Nigeria is made up of multi-ethnic nations managed by a central authority. This model has proved unsuccessful. Europe understood that diversity is best managed by regional autonomy. Switzerland has four ethnic groups. Each of them shares the Presidency through four cantons that make up their federating units. According to Prof. George Obiozor, even though Quebec is the only fully French speaking province, yet Canada is bilingual for the sake of Quebec. On the other hand, Yugoslavia mismanaged its diversity and the result is the emergence of six distinct countries; Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. The same fate befell Czechoslovakia, now the nations of Czechs and Slovaks. The same is true of the centralized Russian Federation that has splintered into more than 15 nations. Ethnic nationalism, the basis for successful nation states, finds full expression in the reunion of Communist East and Capitalist West

In order to resolve the challenges of our diversity, it is clear that we must adopt regional autonomy and massively devolve power from centre to the grassroots

Germany. This is a perfect case of similar ethnic group living easily together, but diverse ethnic groups must live in balanced diversity.

Political power resides in Abuja to the almost complete exclusion of the 36 states and 774 local governments. As a result, we are projecting our missing fundamentals. But we can readily and easily resolve this challenge.

Solution- Regional Autonomy

We must return to the notion of devolution of powers and regional autonomy. Regional autonomy resolves our diversity challenge. More important, it allows subsidiarity to deliver public service at the base of the nation. I was intrigued by the extent of devolved power in the western region under self-rule in 1951. According to the author of a lecture on regional autonomy, devolution of powers in western Nigeria was substantial and devolved from the regional government to the provisional, divisional, district and native authority. Public service was taken to the roots of the region. In order to resolve the challenges of our diversity, it is clear that we must adopt regional autonomy and massively devolve power from centre to the grassroots.

The term regional autonomy refers to the governance and administration of a federating unit in the interest of the local people, according to their aspirations. Nigeria has been engaged in the federalism question. It is clear that our diverse nature and large size means that, the political system best suited for Nigeria is a federal system. But the challenge has been what type of federalism. I believe that this must be devolution of powers and regional autonomy.

In my opinion, the process of regional autonomy and devolved powers can be achieved by virtue of an enactment styled, Constitution Alteration (Regional Autonomy and Devolution of Powers) Bill. This is the only way to stabilize Nigeria.

Respectfully Submitted,

—**Dr. Agbakoba SAN, is a human rights activist and former President, Nigerian Bar Association.**

AN OPEN LETTER TO NIGERIAN YOUTHS

Kingsley Ogbonda appeals to the youths to take up the mantle of leadership

Let me start by congratulating you for your actions against the oppressive security outfit - SARS, in 2020. With those protests you dispelled the perception that you are all happy in your boredom. In those moments you gave the world an insight into your abilities, which the world now believes if properly harnessed, can be used to transform Nigeria for good. For the occupiers of power in Nigeria, you reminded them that, to quote from Amanda Gorman's spell bounding poem at President Joe Biden's inauguration – "silent is not peaceful".

Check the age of Amanda Gorman – a mere 22 years old! While at it, also check the ages of those who founded the – "Black Lives Matter" – the movement that is firing the world's imagination on the fight against racism and racial discrimination. Opal Tometi, one of the founders of that movement is your cousin, born in America with deep root in Nigeria.

With this letter, it would have been worth starting with the catalogue of systemic failures in Nigeria, but I will avoid repeating the well-rehearsed failures of leadership in Nigeria. What really would one add to the case for re-ordering Nigeria, that had not been eloquently made by eminently qualified Nigerians and its friends? A few Nigerian commentators have built careers in writing about poor governance and absence of leadership in the country. Their stories occasionally have been corroborated by foreigners like Karl Maier in his book on Nigeria – "this house is fallen", the description of a state in anomie; or the latest intervention by the Financial Times – London, 22nd December 2020 – "Nigeria is at risk of becoming a failed State". According to the Financial Times article – "the definition of a failed state is one where the government is no longer in control".

The prosecution has long closed its case on the need for the re-ordering of Nigeria. If there is still doubt, look no further than at the country's rigged political system and the struggle to find proof of any of the nation's public institutions that are functioning. In the absence of a government, citizens are now filling the void. At the state level the governors are running wild, for which there has been no end in decrying their atrocities. Their egregious financial abuse has compounded the misery and forced citizens into the margins. Nigeria – some say, a metaphor for a country existing in moral vacuum.

The question is, what can be done to rescue the country from drifting aimlessly in our unforgiven world system? I strongly sug-

gest that our national conversations be reframed to – how and what can we do to save or get Nigeria to work for its people? Otherwise, the conversation becomes facile.

Back to what is to be done, I have heard a few argue that revolution is the answer. It is difficult to make a case against that view when those who control the levers of power continue to treat their fellow citizens with contemptuous indifference. For those in favour of a revolution, I understand few things that a revolution would immediately achieve – the swift displacement of corrupt leadership, leaving fear and terror for future political impostors. But, let me persuade you to accept that a better society is possible to achieve through a non-violent revolution – (organised civil disobedience, strikes, peaceful demonstrations, community activism). There is no evidence that we have done enough of these in Nigeria. Also, the gains made from the latter actions are organic and will be more long-lasting, they generate support and enormous goodwill, both locally and internationally.

An example of said goodwill; as the world convulsed on the emerging details of the atrocities of SARS, the Archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual leader of the world-wide Anglican Communion, Justin Welby, wrote an article in 'THISDAY' Newspaper, 26th October 2020, titled 'A Time for Heroes'. It was a friendly and candid invitation for Nigerian heroes to rise and step onto the breach to rescue the country for the common good. I recommend that those who have not read that article do so as it was brilliantly written. In the article, he succinctly summarised Nigeria's problems and offered advice on what the heroes should do, in a non-condescending manner. Unsurprisingly, he was very generous in his reach for the would-be heroes, to attract all willing converts to the course. According to the Archbishop, the heroes could come from all those who play a role in the political and civil leadership, including the youths and the protesters against SARS.

Theoretically, his position is unimpeachable. The problem is, Nigerian political leaders have repeatedly tone deaf to such calls. Evidently, their oath of office was not service to the people but self, and whatever else they believe in.

Unlike Archbishop Welby, I do not think that something good will result from the present political leadership. Certainly not the type of heroes he envisages. Nigerians have known that their political leadership is anti-democratic, self-serving, rent seeking and sadistic, causing and using grinding poverty as an

instrument of control. Therefore, revelling in the submissive shibboleths – "Sir/Madam, I am loyal".

Contrast the Archbishop's recommendation from that of the Financial Times referred above, – "Nigeria needs a generational shift. The broad coalition that found political expression this year in the EndSARS movement against police brutality provides a shard of optimism". I agree with this. It is for that reason that I write as a Nigerian, to appeal for the urgency of our youths to take up the mantle of leadership. As I invite you to become our heroes, I hear the words of the late Chief Anthony Enahoro echoing. Whilst exiled in the USA during Abacha's reign of terror, Chief Enahoro attended one of the NADECO-Abroad and pro-democracy groups' activities in London. As one of those who welcomed him at Heathrow Airport, a friend and I later paid him a visit. Offering words of advice, he admonished that those of us who are younger must work together and show respect to our elders in the group. In summary, he used words to this effect "if any one amongst you can remove Abacha, I will serve under you, if invited. You are not too young to rule, if you have power". My friend and I were astonished but did not display the sign. Outside we questioned, so Chief Enahoro, one of Nigeria's independence struggle heroes, would differ to us if we acquire power?

Nigerian youths do not delay further your quest for power. Power will not be freely offered to you. Your #EndSARS protests must not serve just as a cathartic moment. Your protests, organisation and its spread, the articulation of your message, energy and orderliness in those few days in October 2020, you were on the streets are the ingredients of a viable political movement. You need to transmit those skills shown into a political platform to seek elected offices. You must disrupt the hawks and vultures now circling to re-enact their usual visionless and uninspiring politics in 2023. As it seems that there are few registered "Youth" parties, perhaps they should be coalescing into one visible party. The example of APC's formation should be copied. One of APC's commendable achievements is in helping to break the psychological barrier that Nigerians cannot form a united party capable of challenging an existing dominant one.

—**Ogbonda wrote from London.**

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

LETTERS

EVICTION ORDERS EVERYWHERE WILL MAKE US REFUGEES

It takes just a moment of indignation to destroy; to cast down and cast out. It is easier to destroy than to build. And what is broken sometimes cannot be put together again. Why are we at daggers drawn with one another? Why are we at each other's throat? Why the hate-slinging? In the south, the drumbeats of war are pounding, and in the north, the cavalrymen are assembling. But nobody wins in this family feud.

No doubt, Nigeria is tottering on the precipice. This is perhaps one of the most precarious times in our democratic evolution since 1999. It is as if the emissaries of Hades are encamped in the country. Nobody wants to hear the other; everyone is yelling, seeking to drown out the obverse voice. But if we all at least take a pause and listen, we will see



el-Rufai

everyone is saying something that needs to be heard. No side – be it the north or the south – has made frail arguments on

this freak of the time – eviction orders. Both sides have made well-founded points.

On Tuesday, Hakeem

Baba-Ahmed, spokesman of the Northern Elders Forum (NEF), spoke up in defence of Fulani herders. He asked the president to order “the immediate arrest and prosecution of persons who are attacking the Fulani and setting the country on a very dangerous path,” adding that: “The Fulani will not be ejected from any Nigerian community only on the basis of being Fulani or herding cattle within the limits of laws and regulations.”

On Wednesday, Nasir el-Rufai, governor of Kaduna State, condemned what he described as the “unlawful eviction” of citizens in the south, stating that every Nigerian reserves the right to choose where to reside. This is indisputable. No citizen should be made an alien in his own country. Crime has no ethnic face. The enemy are the ban-

its, and not all herders or the Fulani. The Fulani, themselves, are victims of the enterprise of these freebooters. We cannot win the fight against banditry and kidnapping when we colour the crime in the brushstrokes of ethnicity. Those pillaging towns and slaughtering citizens are not selective of their victims. Their only ethnicity is ransom, and their religion is violence.

But how did we get here?

In January, Rotimi Akeredolu, governor of Ondo State, ordered herders to leave the state's forest reserves. The order was not born out of detestation; it was due to the minatory performances of some criminal herders in the state. Ondo had become the haunt of these devourers. The Olufon of Ifon, a first-class traditional ruler, was killed in the state by bandits. The wife of the chief of staff to the governor was kidnapped and released after ransom was paid. The daughter of Pa Fasoranti, Afenifere leader, was murdered on a road in the state. And there have been countless cases of kidnapping and murder linked to some herders in Ondo. So, Akeredolu's “eviction order” was a desperate reaction to a hopeless situation. If the federal government was alive to its responsibility of securing the country, that order would be needless.

But the eviction order issued to herders in Ondo's forest reserves struck the tinderbox. It set off a ripple of eruptive hostilities against the Fulani. A jangling figure in Oyo, Sunday Igboho, assumed potentate authority, he asked all herders to leave Ibarapa local government area of Oyo, where there have been kidnappings and murders by some herders.

Really, there is now a whiff of animus against the Fulani. There have been coordinate eviction orders to herders in Edo and Bayelsa States. Though the notices cannot stand constitutional interrogation, we must not forget we reached this minacious point because

of government's irresponsibility.

The Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) did a riposte to the statement of the Northern Elders Forum. The group accused northern leaders of hypocrisy – of not speaking out against the criminal operations of some herders in the south.

The southern forum said: “PANDEF implores the northern elders and their surrogates to get off the high-horse. And the sooner, the better, for the country, and all of us. Nigeria belongs to all of us, no section owns the country more than the other; we are equal stakeholders. Where was the Northern Elders Forum when arm-wielding herders were killing, harassing innocent citizens, and raping women in their farms? Northern elders did not realise then that they were setting the country on a dangerous path. Meyitti Allah Cattle Rearing group has been arrogantly conducting themselves like ‘landlords’ of Nigeria, without any demonstration. It is now that southern governors have begun taking appropriate steps to safeguard lives and livelihoods of their people, that northern elders have found their voice in defence of the herders.”

Again, the leaders of both divides have made well-grounded points. It is true that northern leaders, particularly those speaking up now in the defence of their own, did not speak out against the criminality of some herders in the south. But it is wrong that the reaction to that hypocrisy should be the targeting of the Fulani. Two wrongs do not make a right.

At this point, we must deescalate the tension and tone down the caustic rhetoric; beat our swords into ploughshare, spears into pruning hooks, and embrace peace. We must learn to listen to one another. Eviction orders here and there will make us all refugees in our own country. If Nigeria burns, we all burn.

—Fredrick Nwabufo is a writer and journalist.

MARGARET OSOGBUE TO THE RESCUE

Nigeria needs help. We all must accept this, especially from the many intractable issues of insecurity, infrastructural decay and the political anemia of the present dispensation. If we do accept therefore that Nigeria needs help, and urgently too, questions arise concerning who or from where that help cometh. Ordinarily, it would make a lot of sense to expect a plethora of innovative ideas from about four or five categories of individual or organisations – the international community, the political elite – we prefer to exclude our lame duck president who is increasingly getting testy over criticism from the elite, but include those extremely rich governors, ministers, senators, honourable members of the House of Representatives – they who represent the engine house of our democratic epoch.

Among that lot we would definitely expect the middle class cum the big players in the socio-political economy of Nigeria, that is, those who pull the strings and who supposedly rev our economic engine. Then as a matter of fact, we should enlist the religio-political groups who draw millions to their folds with assurances of a heaven after this hell on earth.

An ongoing national event, the National Identity Number (NIN) registration debunks the above supposition however. Following that announcement that Nigerians should meet a February 9 2021 deadline to register for their NIN, many Nigerians responded nationwide. When we got there though, what we found on ground was a national embarrassment. To attend to the millions who showed up, government provided only what seemed like an analogue computer. Officials said

that that one computer cost N1.5million because it needed to be calibrated and apps for its operations installed. To effectively deal with that large number of persons who showed up to get registered, a minimum of 10 computers with corresponding support staff should have made things better run. Yet, a distinguishing feature that made the exercise even more shameful and disconcerting was that instead of letting everyone pass through the hog, several interest groups akin to the ones we described above forced several ‘service points’ – while it was easy for any of the groups we mentioned earlier – politicians, religious and traditional leaders, captains of industry – to just waltz in and get the registration done, others, teeming Nigerians stood in the hot sun daily for as much as seven to eight hours and endured a most humiliating exercise.

Is it out of place to expect these politicians, government appointees, house of assembly members would to at least highlight the plight of Nigerians through their privileged positions? Or to expect that they could have carried out an engagement or intervention to try to find out why there was only one computer provided for an exercise as crucial as the capturing of sensitive data of Nigerians? As a matter of fact, the reason why there was such a teeming crowd of Nigerians left out there in the sun for weeks was because there was just one computer for the exercise.

But did anyone budge? Not really. Most just shrugged at the large numbers huddled under trees at the centre taking a refuge from the blazing sun. They sauntered in, registered and breezed out. That situation – where Nigerians seeking to register for their NIN and suffered under the

sun, standing for hours may not have been different at other NIN registration centres across Nigeria. Those in Benin suffered similar fate. But that was until a Margaret Isioma Osogbue showed up to register for her own NIN at the NIN registration point in Benin City. Sources said that after making inquiries as why so many people were out there in the scorching sun without any cover, she emerged 30 minutes later with a canopy and 70 chairs. Her payment which covered only three days did not accommodate everyone. Our source said that she promised to return to extend payment for the chairs and canopy for as long as the registration exercise would take. From interacting with her, we found out that Mrs Osogbue had been in the habit of taking responsibility and standing in the gap for others for a long time. At the time she paid for those chairs and that canopy, she said she had less than \$200 in her bank account. You don't have to have millions before putting yourself in the position to help other people. Most of the trees we pick fruits from freely were planted by people we don't even know, she said.

But who is Mrs Margaret Osogbue? Is her intervention not a publicity-seeking stunt to prepare her launch into partisan politics for elective position? That seems unlikely.

For most of the 30 years wherein she had lived in Benin City as a lawyer, she has cut a niche for herself as an altruistic personage seeking good for others. After providing the chairs and the canopy, Mrs Osogbue refused to part with her phone number, only unwillingly divulging it to a discreet officer at the Air force Medical Centre just so to be held responsible if the chairs and canopy breached the strict military regimen around the facility. Mrs Osogbue has been

calling friends, acquaintances and family members to help with providing chairs and canopies for the thousands of Nigerians left in the sun at that NIN centre.

In Osogbue's example, themes and memes prevalent in existential entanglements pop up. In Mrs Osogbue's example, we suddenly come to terms with the tragic realization that there is a huge gap between those at that end and the rest of us. Her effort amplifies the emerging trend in local politics that because we have been serially treated shabbily by those we entrusted our destinies, we don't need to wait to be very big, rich and powerful before taking the gauntlet on behalf of a traumatized and harassed citizenry. In Mrs Osogbue's example, we find that until we all get together to take and demand action on some of the areas wherein we have been left stranded by the status quo, exploitation of the less privileged will not cease. We conclude as well that the many political figures that Nigerians voted for to represent them at critical moments as this do not really care. Many too who are asking to be voted to power do not care as well. They are there, or want to be there apparently for their own welfare and to consolidate their own privileges. It is the same experience with many religious leaders and captains of industry who came, saw and did nothing to ameliorate the brutish and harsh condition they saw Nigerians subjected by a rudderless epoch.

At the end, we salute Mrs Margaret Isioma Osogbue as a worthy ambassador of the human race. We pray that in the years ahead that Nigeria will find a position of trust for her to hold on behalf of Nigerians.

—Bob Majiri Oghene Etemiku, deputy executive director, CERLSI.

LACKING CONVICTION OR COURAGE?

Most people if insulted or accused of a false crime will step up and call it out. They could resort to court actions or physical responses as their character and good name should be defended.

However, ex-president Trump, through his legal team, has said that he will

not be appearing at the impeachment proceedings this week.

Is he lacking conviction, courage or character to defend himself?

The sooner the word trump goes back to only being used in card games the better the world will be.

—Dennis Fitzgerald, Melbourne, Australia.

ABDULRAZAQ
OUR TRAILBLAZING ICON
 IS

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**Amina, Zaq, Majeed and I celebrate you,
 our wonderful Father, amazing
 Husband and a perfect Gentleman!**

**Your visionary leadership, of our home
 and in the economic development of
 our nation, is deserving of accolades!**

**I thank Almighty God everyday
 for the 29+ blissful years of marriage
 to you, the Love of my life!**

**And I know that for you, it will always
 be from glory to greater glory!**

**Happy Birthday My Husband and
 My Best Friend Razaq!**

With all my Love,

CHIEF ABDULRAZAQ ISA,
 CHAIRMAN - WALTERSMITH PETROMAN LTD,
 THE WAKLIN- LOKOJA KOGI STATE

KATE

BUSINESS

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Cryptocurrencies

The Unsettling Dust over Cryptocurrency Transactions

Against the backdrop of increasing appetite for digital assets, particularly cryptocurrency, and its economic potentials as well as drawbacks, the financial regulatory bodies must brace up the challenge and work together to evolve a formidable framework to manage players in the segment, writes **James Emejo**

The CBN apparently stirred the hornet's nest when it directed banks and other financial institutions last Friday to immediately close any accounts used to transact in cryptocurrency or facilitate payment for crypto currency exchange.

The pushback, which trailed the directive from stakeholders and members of the public had been swift and also understandably so.

After waiting for several years for a clear regulatory path for the operation of digital currencies in the country - and following the momentum which cryptocurrency had so far gathered

- the latest announcement by the apex bank was least expected by digital assets enthusiasts.

The circular, addressed to banks and signed by the CBN Director, Banking Supervision, Mr. Bello Hassan and Director, Payments System Management Department, Mr. Musa Jimoh, further mandated the financial institutions to expose any individual and entity operating such accounts, warning that failure to adhere to the directives would attract strict sanctions.

The CBN further drew attention of the public to the risks associated with transactions in cryptocurrency.

However, analysts have blamed the regulators including the CBN, Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Nigeria Deposit Insurance

Corporation (NDIC) for their failure to deliberate and forge a framework for the operation of digital currency, which is estimated at over \$500 billion in market size.

Essentially, cryptocurrency (or crypto) is a digital unregulated currency that can be used to buy goods and services, but uses an online ledger with strong cryptography to secure online transactions.

Much of the interest in the currency, not backed by any government, is to trade for profit, with speculators at times driving prices skyward.

While some stakeholders have attributed the seeming lack of traction in cryptocurrency adoption in the country on absence of foresight, both the CBN and NDIC have continued to

raise grave concerns over the patronage of digital currency, at least for the time being.

Both had insisted that at their present state and form, crypto currencies in particular and emerging disruptive technologies as well as others forms of digital financial assets, despite seeming benefits, have the potential to distort economic and monetary stability as well as broaden concerns over money laundering and other corruption related activities.

However, in what could assuage and well as put stakeholders at crossroads about the direction of regulatory authorities towards cryptocurrency adoption, the CBN Governor, Mr. Godwin Emefiele, at a seminar with the theme, "Understanding the

BUSINESS

The Unsettling Dust over Cryptocurrency Transactions

Interface Between Cryptocurrency and Money Laundering in Abuja, in 2018, had indicated that cryptocurrency, though currently unregulated in the country, is neither permitted nor prohibited.

He said: "In spite of the above developments and the global push for regulation, the cryptocurrency market in Nigeria is currently unregulated and relevant stakeholder-agencies are currently under-studying the phenomenon.

"Presently, there is no legal framework for the regulation of cryptocurrencies in Nigeria. Based on existing legislation, the usage of cryptocurrency in Nigeria is neither permitted nor prohibited."

According to him, the global use of cryptocurrency with the associated inherent risks continue to gather momentum, the need for legislative frameworks to address the challenges became imperative.

Emefiele therefore tasked financial institutions to prepare and protect themselves against both direct and indirect vulnerabilities, pointing out that there is need to understand the money laundering/terrorist financing risks as well as the inherent risks associated with virtual currency and attack vectors.

He said: "It is evident that criminals have already adapted their attacks to include vulnerable platforms wherever and when the opportunity manifests itself. Risks associated with the use of virtual currency and exchange would need to be nipped in the bud, if the safety and soundness of the financial system are to be sustained."

Lending his voice to the warning against the adoption of cryptocurrency, Chairman, Presidential Committee Against Corruption, Prof. Itse Sagay, who was also at the seminar, however, pointed out that cryptocurrency yields benefits to those providing the service or trading with it.

He said: "It was like a 'stateless phenomenon' that poses challenges. There is a dark side, which includes the use of cryptocurrency for criminal activities."

Furthermore, in October 2019, the CBN governor, at a national seminar on banking and allied matters for judges themed: "Destructive Technologies in Nigerian Financial System: The Legal Considerations", warned that the failure to effectively address cyber risks could be destabilising as it could result into system wide crisis.

Also, the President, Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), Mr. Uche Olowu, said the global emergence of technology and digital driven initiatives including cryptocurrency, artificial intelligence, block-chain and open banking, which are all aimed at customer incentivisation and efficiency have enlarged the scope of rendering financial services beyond the traditional model as well as creating opportunities for non-bank organisations to offer financial services with less or no regulations.

But he pointed out that the development required more "robust, well prepared, futuristic, competent, efficient legal and regulatory environment to withstand the possible challenges without necessary stifling of creativity and innovation."

Also, in July 2019, the NDIC reiterated its warning to Nigerians to exercise maximum caution in the adoption of cryptocurrencies as their preferred mode of financial transactions.

It pointed out that while various forms of digital currencies currently in operation have their positive and negative attributes, those who patronise them risk losing their savings because the medium is largely unregulated and without the backing or



Godwin Emefiele, CBN Governor



Uche Olowu, CIBN President



Lamido Yuguda, SEC DG



Prof. Itse Sagay SAN

support from the traditional central banks in almost all financial jurisdictions.

Speaking to THISDAY in a recent interview, the erstwhile Managing Director, NDIC, Alhaji Umaru Ibrahim, maintained that regulatory authorities are still building capacity to contain the challenges that may arise from the operation of cryptocurrency through appropriate regulation.

He said: "Now, you talk of cryptocurrency, it's one of the emerging channels or products of storing value. To those who are multimillionaires of cryptocurrency, they believe that they are millionaires: money is in the air, skies, in their phones, but we don't see it."

"We don't smell it and we don't touch it. But my son and daughter believe so much in it and they transact - and in some parts of the world, you can pay for all your services in cryptocurrency and there are some universities where you can pay your fees on cryptocurrency."

Ibrahim said: "But we are not there yet. But all the CBN and NDIC are saying is that look, you are on your own - nobody is saying it is illegal or illegitimate - do whatever you like but it is not recognised by the CBN, and it is not a legal tender and it is not insured by us."

"So if you like, gamble, we will not stop you. That's our understanding in the system so that when the chips are down obviously it has to be regulated."

However, in a development which suggests a seeming lack of coherence in the proposed regulation of crypto currency, as the NDIC and CBN are still lost on how to approach regulation, SEC, which described crypto

asset as "digital representation of value that can be digitally traded and functions as (1) a medium of exchange; and/or (2) a unit of account; and/or (3) a store of value, but does not have legal tender status in any jurisdiction" - has already commenced steps towards categorisation and recognition of digital assets.

Interestingly, the CBN directives on cryptocurrency to banks came amidst reports in January 2020 that the Bank of England had resolved to assess how Britain could adopt a Bitcoin-style digital currency as part of a global group of central banks that have joined together to examine the possible pitfalls of relying on electronic money.

Analysts believed the CBN position was in contradiction of SEC's position on cryptocurrencies and other digital assets, and smacks of harmony in arriving at a framework for regulation.

Experts said the CBN directive could cause cryptocurrency traders to lose billions of naira and provide an opportunity for the Bitcoin merchants to run away with people's money.

Already, SEC has said it would study the latest policy directive by the apex bank carefully.

Analysts, who spoke to THISDAY in separate interviews on the development however, recognised the primary mandate of the CBN and other financial regulatory bodies to safeguard the financial system.

But, they also emphasised the dangers of suppressing cryptocurrency operations in the country, but urged the apex bank to speed up efforts to regulate the segment.

The Managing Director/Chief Executive, Credent Investment Managers Limited, Mr. Ibrahim Shelleng,

said Nigeria had become the largest cryptocurrency market in Africa adding that the momentum built up had been as a result of several restrictive forex policies by the CBN.

According to him, people have used crypto as alternative forms of transferring and receiving funds from offshore. "This has also meant it was possibly being used for illicit purposes such as money laundering or terrorist financing."

"The reaction from CBN, however, comes across as rather oppressive in the midst of the existing dollarisation policy."

Shelleng added: "The ban will not stop cryptocurrency trading as avenues for transaction still remain such as peer to peer (P2P)."

"It was an ill-thought policy and it will not stop anything. CBN were better off trying to put some regulations around the crypto exchanges bank accounts than trying to ban it altogether."

Also addressing the issue, an economist and Managing Director/Chief Executive, Dignity Finance and Investment Limited, Dr. Chijioke Ekechukwu, reiterated the need for cryptocurrency activities to be regulated in the country.

He said, "CBN is a regulatory body for all deposit money banks and other financial institutions. If there are banking transactions in any financial institution in Nigeria that are not passing through the examination of CBN, then there is a problem with that bank and its transactions."

"I expected this kind of circular but I didn't know when it would come. Now it is here."

"Although cryptocurrency market has gained momentum and traction, to the extent it is not regulated, to that extent the risk factors are huge. Though it will affect the flow of transactions in the country, but it needs to be regulated and monitored by CBN."

On his part, President, Capital Market Academics of Nigeria, Prof. Uche Uwaleke, noted that the directive to close cryptocurrency bank accounts may have been necessitated by the non-readiness on the part of the CBN and the SEC with regulations guiding crypto asset trading platforms operations in Nigeria.

He, however, believed that directive by the CBN to banks should be seen in the light of the risk that unregulated cryptocurrency trading could pose to the financial system.

Uwaleke said: "Given the weighty nature of the directive, I want to believe that the CBN must have consulted relevant stakeholders including the Bankers Committee before taking the decision."

"I am inclined to believe that it was well thought through and not a unilateral decision."

According to the former Imo State commissioner of finance, "The fact is that what the CBN could see in a squatting position, many cannot see standing."

"So, I think the directive should be seen in the light of this fact that the CBN may have information which may not be available to the public."

"In my view, the flaw in that circular is that it did not state the reason why the apex bank is taking that course of action. It should have done so especially if it has to do with fraudulent activities and threats to financial system stability."

"I recall that not too long ago at some point, China, widely seen as the home of cryptocurrencies, had to ban trading in Bitcoins."

"I believe this measure is only temporary. Given that cryptos have come to stay, the CBN and the SEC should come up with a regulatory framework for crypto asset trading in Nigeria."

BUSINESS / ENERGY

Making Natural Gas the Future Energy for Nigeria

The AGPC \$260 million deal sealed with the Nigerian Gas Company, recently, may have succeeded in setting the platform that will make natural gas, the future of energy in Nigeria, reports **Chris Paul**

February, the month of love, is that part of the year, when lovers prepare for the 14th day of the month to celebrate their relationship on Valentine's Day. But it would seem the Nigerian oil and gas industry could not wait for that day as two major players in the community began a romance that will bequeath Nigerians with lots of gas for their commercial and domestic use; in the deal that will berth a 300 million standard cubic feet daily (MMscfd) capacity gas plant.

Seplat and the Nigerian Gas Company (NGC) began the month with the fruit of their love affair; ANOH Gas Processing Company (AGPC), successfully raising \$260m in debt to fund the completion of its 300MMscfd capacity ANOH plant; located on OML 53 in Imo State.

An Incorporated Joint Venture (IJV) and owned equally between the two partners, AGPC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

A leading Nigerian independent energy company, Seplat Petroleum Development Company Plc and NGC had previously provided a combined \$420million in equity funding, which made it possible for the project to be fully funded.

Held on February 1, in a signing ceremony, the \$260m funding was provided by a consortium of seven banks: Stanbic IBTC Bank Plc (advisor), United Bank for Africa Plc, Zenith Bank Plc, FirstRand Bank Limited (London Branch) / RMB Nigeria Ltd, The Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd, Union Bank of Nigeria Plc and FCMB Capital Markets Ltd.

According to the official statement from the organisation, the transaction allows for an additional \$60million accordion at the time of completion to fund an equity rebalancing payment, if considered appropriate. Funding commitments of more than \$450million were received by the company, which is a significant oversubscription and a strong sign of confidence in the project.

Chairman of AGPC, Mr. Yusuf Usman, said "This Financing Agreement; for the development of the ANOH Gas Processing Plant will significantly contribute to the realisation of the federal government's initiatives towards increasing natural gas utilisation in the domestic market."

With the equity of US\$420 million already injected by the sponsors of the Project (NNPC and Seplat), Usman said both shareholders reinforce their commitment to expanding gas infrastructure in Nigeria as well as progressing towards making natural gas the future energy for Nigeria."

Also, AGPC Managing Director, Mr. Okechukwu Mba, said: "Successfully closing the \$260million debt facility means that the ANOH project is now fully funded. Once operational, AGPC will be a significant supplier of gas to Nigeria's power sector, supporting local employment and the cleaner generation of power for millions of Nigerian homes and businesses."

Following a cost optimisation programme and inclusive of financing costs and taxes, the AGPC construction cost is expected to be no more than US\$650million; which is significantly lower than the original projected cost of US\$700million.

One of Nigeria's most strategic gas projects, ANOH will help Nigeria to accelerate its transition away from small-scale diesel generators to cleaner, less expensive fuels such as natural gas for power generation. Seplat is a leading provider of natural gas to Nigeria's power sector, supplying around 30per cent of gas used for electricity generation.

Chief Executive Officer of Seplat, Mr. Roger Brown, who took over as Seplat CEO, from



L-R: AGPC Chairman, Yusuf Usman, and AGPC Managing Director, Okechukwu Mba, at the signing ceremony of the US\$260m ANOH Gas Project Financing in Abuja ... recently

Mr. Austin Avuru, on August 1, 2020, said the completion of the funding of ANOH was an important milestone for AGPC. "The ANOH development is one of the government's Seven Critical Gas Development Projects and our involvement provides a clear path towards strengthening Seplat's position as Nigeria's leading indigenous diversified energy producer. It will help us drive, alongside our government partners, Nigeria's transition to cleaner, less expensive power generation. We are extremely proud to partner with the Nigerian Gas Company in this strategically important project, which will create jobs and prosperity in the Nigerian economy," he said.

"Seplat will continue to diversify its business and invest in gas to help Nigeria develop its own natural resources, which in turn will drive more sustainable social and economic growth for a young, rapidly growing population."

Nigeria has abundant reserves of associated and non-associated gas estimated to be more than 187 trillion (standard) cubic feet. Though Nigeria is ranked 7th in terms of proven natural gas reserves in the world, geological experts hold the view that more gas can still be found; potentially up to 600Tcf1.

This is realisable, if oil and gas companies deliberately explore for gas as against finding gas while in search for oil. To facilitate gas gathering, processing and utilisation will require favorable developmental-oriented market conditions and policy framework for the gas sector.

Some of the challenges plaguing the sector, include a lack of a clearly stated, long-term "vision" for the sector and realistic policy goals to promote and facilitate gas use; a lack

of a clear gas sector development strategy and implementation plan, covering both policy directions and integrated investment priorities.

The importance of natural gas to Nigeria's economic and social development cannot be over-emphasised. Gas exploration and utilisation are necessary to curtail environmental challenges associated with gas flares and the use of other traditional fossil fuels. It is also relevant for the expansion of the revenue base of the economy in the light of dwindling oil prices.

For Nigeria to properly harness her gas potentials, the Seplat CEO believe some key issues that need to be addressed, include: a lack of adequate legal, fiscal, regulatory, and contractual frameworks and institutions that are required to accommodate new investment proposals from international investors while protecting Nigeria's interests.

Similarly, a lack of capacity to evaluate, correlate, and prioritise proposals received from the private sector, together with growing reservations about the structure of current fiscal incentives, require some attention, too.

Another issue that need to be addressed is the inadequate or non-existent infrastructure for the commercialisation of gas in the Nigerian domestic market.

It was the desire to effect a change for the good of the gas market that led to Seplat's involvement in gas to drive Nigeria's social and economic growth

Thus, investing in Nigeria's Gas to Power Plans, became a critical imperative for Seplat's involvement in gas development.

This birthed the need to channel further investments into Nigeria's gas sector, in order to increase the utilisation of gas to fuel the

country's agriculture, power, and chemical industries.

This is the gap that ANOH seeks to fill. AGPC planned to a significant supplier of gas to Nigeria's power sector, supporting local employment and the cleaner generation of power for Nigerian homes and businesses. It conservatively estimates that the gas from AGPC will be enough to generate electricity for more than five million people.

ANOH is adjudged to one of Nigeria's most strategic gas projects as it is expected to help the country to accelerate its transition away from small-scale diesel generators to cleaner, less expensive fuels such as natural gas for power generation.

Seplat is already the largest provider of natural gas to Nigeria's power sector, supplying around 30 per cent of gas used for electricity generation.

More investments are being expected to come to the gas sector and ANOH gas is one of the government's Seven Critical Gas Development Projects that will change the gas stratosphere in Nigeria.

Seplat's involvement provides a clear path towards strengthening its position as Nigeria's leading indigenous diversified energy producer. It will continue to diversify its business and make more investments in gas to help Nigeria develop its own natural resources, which in turn will drive more sustainable social and economic growth for a young, and rapidly growing population.

This resolve was why Roger Brown was appointed to continue the growth trajectory of the company started by his predecessor, Austin Avuru, and there will be more strategic partnerships in the gas sphere that will transform the country's energy ecosystem.

BUSINESS/FOCUS

Ahmed Kuru, Proving His Mettle at AMCON

Typical of many government agencies, allegations of mismanagement and impropriety dogged the Assets Management Corporation of Nigeria's previous management boards until the coming of President Muhammadu Buhari with his wide-reaching anti-corruption reforms. One of the earliest appointments he made was that of Ahmed Kuru as the Chief Executive Officer of AMCON. Almost six years after, and a few months into his second term, Kuru's proficiency in fiscal management and boots-on-the-ground approach to debt recovery has helped in no little way to stabilise the Nigerian economy, writes **Lanre Alfred**

Unlike the middling marabout, the miracles of Malam Ahmed Kuru, the Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of the Assets Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON), aren't deceptive in nature rather, each one is an event that creates faith in his abilities as a fiscal guru and turn-around-manager. The AMCON boss is not just an administrative managing director but a seasoned leader.

Administrators are always cheap and easy to find, and even cheaper to keep but leaders are worth their weight in gold. Leaders are risk-takers and they are often in very short supply; those with enduring vision like Kuru are pure gold.

He has evinced that rare ability once again with recent reports that AMCON has reached an advanced stage towards launching a multibillion-naira airline by pooling together its aviation assets. The reports maintain that the new international airline, to be named Nigeria Eagle, may take to the sky with at least 10 planes as early as June.

In a statement by Jude Nwazor, Head of Corporate Communications, AMCON, Kuru said, following its mandate, especially as it relates to the aviation sector of the Nigerian economy, AMCON had approached the aviation authorities in the country seeking a licence for an independent entity where all of its aviation assets would be transferred and efficiently managed in a synergistic manner.

Nwazor stated, "AMCON currently has more than five airlines in its aviation portfolio among other assets that are scattered all over. The proposed new entity, therefore, has nothing to do with the rebranding of any of the airlines within its portfolio as being speculated in several online publications. The objective of AMCON's intervention in the aviation sector is targeted at supporting the sector, given its importance, saving thousands of jobs, making the aviation sector a catalyst for the growth of the Nigerian economy, and recovering the huge debt owed the corporation by these aviation entities."

AMCON took over Arik Air in February 2017 as the airline was said to have been immersed in heavy financial debt that had threatened to permanently ground it. The corporation averred that the airline, which catered for about 55 per cent of the passengers in the country, had been going through difficult times, attributable to its bad corporate governance, erratic operational challenges, inability to pay staff salaries, and heavy debt burden, among other issues. Arik's debt was estimated at over N375 billion, comprising domestic and foreign investors.

Likewise, AMCON took over the management of Aero Contractors in 2016 after dissolving its board and appointed a manager to run its affairs in an interim capacity. AMCON stated that the decision to take over the management of the company was in furtherance of its responsibility of acquiring eligible bank assets and putting them to economic use in a profitable manner. AMCON is both the majority shareholder and creditor of Aero Contractors.

While assuring regulatory authorities, the travelling public, and key stakeholders that the airline would continue to "operate on the solid foundation of safety and security with excellent customer service," the corporation added that its intervention is in the public interest, and to sustain and improve the robust and premium quality service, which Aero was known for.

Aero Contractors and Arik Air joined a long list of airlines that have failed in Nigeria in the past decade owing to what Kuru described as a myriad of unethical business conduct, including greed and financial rascality by their owners. At



Kuru

a roundtable event in 2019, where he delivered a paper themed; 'Aircraft Financing: The Issues & Challenges of Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON)', Kuru blamed the challenges faced by the airline operators on the unpredictable and unstable foreign exchange regime in the country; the non-existent good corporate governance principles; lack of due diligence procedure and other associated risks as well as over-invoicing, among other challenges.

Yet, he said, "Regardless of the mode of transport – the aviation sector has proved to be a catalyst for the economic development of nations. It is the wheel that drives economic activities. The air transport sector facilitates trade, tourism; boosts productivity in the economy; improves efficiency in the supply chain; it is an enabler for investments; can spur innovation, facilitate commerce and provide fast and reliable delivery of cargoes and services."

Mindful of this, the Nigerian Eagle, a brainchild of AMCON, under Kuru, is seen as a bright spark in a mottled sector. Instructively, Nigeria does not have a national carrier. The last attempt at floating one, the Nigeria Air, in 2018, which was intended to replace the defunct Nigeria Airways that ceased operations in 2003, failed as the federal government was unable to attract credible technical partners and investors to support it.

Kuru is not new to birthing novel ideas. Appointed in August 2015 by President Muhammadu Buhari, Kuru's charge was to lead the agency out of the doldrums. Typical of many government agencies, allegations of mismanagement and impropriety dogged AMCON's previous management boards until the coming of Buhari with his wide-reaching anti-corruption reforms.

So far, he has excelled at achieving AMCON's major objective to be a key stabilising and re-vitalising tool established to revive the financial system by efficiently resolving the

the negotiation of settlement and restructuring terms with identified obligors; pursue and enforce debt recovery and collection activities geared towards achieving set targets, and initiate legal actions to further the loan recovery mandates in line with approved guidelines.

Despite the challenges he inherited, Kuru's relentless efforts are paying off and have been identified to have helped to stabilise the economy. He was rewarded with a second term of five years in office by President Buhari, which has been confirmed by the Senate last December.

Perfection is like an iron forge; it imbues its source with rugged grains of brushed steel. In Kuru, it manifests like a rampart of strapping, albeit acquired character. He embodies so much of what makes perfection an onerous yet enviable trait. He is a man who sees something in everything that the rest of us don't. But his genius is not just his ability to see what others cannot but how he applies it. Yes, Kuru is a very savvy visionary. But none of that influences his personal estimation of his competence and self-worth; despite his competency and acclaim, he affects a humble poise.

As AMCON head honcho, he brings clarity of purpose to his work; he is a good listener who comes to the table not with some preset notion of distrust, but an open mind; he asks all the tough questions and tries to find the solutions.

Given that product design, marketing and complex management are no doubt the trifecta of success in banking, he excels at it all in a rare feat, much like scoring a television goal in soccer, time and over again.

His process is simple: Kuru has built a career on combining daring, dexterous, and largely inspirational initiatives with diligent application that incorporates everything from snatches of dependable formulae to the most improbable exploits.

However you choose to see him, the story of Kuru remains the stuff gallant dreams are made of. Unlike many of his peers, his rise to eminence was as much a product of unrelenting will and his astounding ability to pirouette himself from obscurity to the acme of his career by the jockstraps.

Respected in the banking industry as a result-oriented and deft leader with a strong accountability record, Kuru, until his appointment, had served as MD/CEO of the erstwhile Enterprise Bank Limited, one of the bridge banks established by the CBN, from 2011 to 2014. He led the initiative to restore stakeholders' confidence in the bank and successfully returned it to profitability before its acquisition by Heritage Bank in 2014. Kuru brings into AMCON an extensive experience in banking and financial services garnered over 35 years. His work has earned him recognition in the financial sector as an astute banker and a change agent.

He played a strategic role in the successful merger of Habib Bank and Platinum Bank to form one of Nigeria's vibrant banking brands known as Bank PHB, which he nurtured to prominence before it was renamed Keystone Bank Limited after its acquisition by AMCON. Kuru also worked as a Budget Analyst with the Federal Ministry of Finance before he was later appointed the Executive Vice Chairman of Emeritus Capital Limited, a financial services firm that specialises in international business development focusing on sub-Saharan Africa. Kuru holds a Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Master's Degrees in Business Administration from the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria; and also, an alumnus of the Chartered Institute of Bankers, Lagos Business School, and London Business School. He has attended many training and seminars across the globe including the High Impact Leadership at Columbia Business School, New York.

non-performing loan assets of the banks in the Nigerian economy. As of August 2020, Kuru, while appearing before a technical session of the Senate Committee on Banking Insurance and other Financial Institutions, revealed that the total Assets Under Management (AUM) was N136.73 billion and N112.03 billion worth of propriety assets, while noting that there are over 400 obligors of AMCON, which accounts for more than N5.4 trillion. Kuru has ensured that AMCON acquired Non-Performing Loans (NPLS) of various Eligible Financial Institutions (EFIs) in three different phases with the top five EFIs representing 58.18 per cent of all purchased EBAs.

AMCON has a total loan portfolio of over 12,000 loans of various sizes and sectors that were still lingering many years after the corporation was established. Thus, to navigate Nigeria out of recession, a two-time former Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Chief Kanu Godwin Agabi, SAN, called on judges in the country especially the ones that handle cases concerning the AMCON and its debtors to pile pressure on the obligors to repay the huge debts, which he said were capable of revitalising the economy, if recovered.

He also commended the new AMCON act signed into law by President Buhari in August 2019, which has increased the powers of the corporation to recover debts owed to legacy banks.

As part of the corporation's renewed strategy to resolve these loans, AMCON, in 2016, introduced the Assets Management Partners (AMP) scheme to assist its recovery activities, especially in tracing, identification, and location of obligors with the intent to resolve their outstanding indebtedness; and tracing, identification and location of assets of obligors (both pledged and unpledged).

Among other obligor engagements, the AMPs, Kuru said, were empowered to get involved in

BUSINESS/TECHNOLOGY

'Long-range Drones Will Enhance Security, Boost Economic Growth'

Globally, drones are deployed for different purposes, from film-making to agriculture. Propel Aerial Services, led by Mr. Ademola Lawal, is equipped with drones suited for different tasks, including helping to solve Nigeria's security challenges. **Vanessa Obioha** reports

Drone technology is commonly deployed in our everyday lives, from taking selfies to the make-believe world where the small aeroplane-like technology tool helps film directors capture aerial images.

However, there's a lot more drones can do and an indigenous Nigerian company, Propel Aerial Services (PAS), is expanding the utilisation of this technology to other fields such as security, health and environment.

With a vast experience of over 10 years, covering a wide variety of vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) multi-rotor and fixed-wing aircraft, PAS is focused on creating an ecosystem that captures the drone life cycle.

It offers some of the toughest and most durable industrial multi-rotor and fixed-wing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) solutions in the world while training pilots who can carry out long-range operations over a long-range area.

Long-range drones, according to Lawal, is where the future of drone technology lies. His reasons include the various ways the long-range drones can be utilised in different fields, particularly security, a major conundrum for the Nigerian government.

For the certified drone pilot, the long-range drones can effectively curb kidnappings and secure borders.

Already, the company has entered partnership with an arm of the Nigerian military, to explore how to locally manufacture the flying surveillance tool, and train operators.

"We've partnered with them, so that we have the capacity, the backing of this civilian arm of the Air Force that can carry out drone operations, and then merge with our trained pilots and our heavy-duty equipment, such that we can then support the efforts of the government; whether it be state government or federal government in securing these borders," Lawal said during an interview on Arise News.

PAS long-range drones can travel long distances, covering 1000 kilometres in an hour or two.

"If you're talking about the length of the border



Lawal

to be about 1000 to 2000 kilometres, these drones can fly long-range and can deliver results. They can fly in the daytime, they can fly at night, so they will give you any type of information that you require.

"Usually, we deploy these drones in heavy-duty challenged areas where we know that we are able to impact, and then deliver the results that people are really looking for," expounded Lawal.

In fact, he assured that his company's drones can effectively curtail kidnappings in three months.

"The advent of drones is a blessing because when you don't have a good road network, the only way you can rise above that is to actually use drones. So having drones actually eliminates the need for having patrol cars.

"The police and other forces complain about the lack of patrol vehicles to reach certain areas. With drones, you can immediately go above these areas, collect the information that you need and then you can erase and repeat that process over and over again.

"I can tell you for a fact that if any state was to deploy our services, I assure you that we can definitely curb out kidnapping within three months because the drones can completely cover an area.

"What this means is that there will be no dark areas or hiding places in any state. Our drones can fly over any area, be it populated or covered areas."

But with a populated area like Lagos which also has busy airspace, getting drones to cover

all areas might be challenging. However, Lawal pointed out that the state can be segmented into different sections and grids which can be infused into a broader scale.

"You are able to effectively collect information, centralise this information, and then push it out in a way where you can respond, you know, on a national scale."

The way Lawal sees it, using drone technology to rid the country of crime, inadvertently improves economic activities.

"It means that businesses can thrive, investors can come into the state, we can directly provide security for the investors that are invested in the state and the GDP of the state goes up," he stated.

Powerlines, Oil & Gas, Agriculture

Apart from the long-range drones, Lawal revealed that the company has inspection drones which can be applied in various ways.

He explained it this way: "Drones can be applied in many ways. You have the surveillance aspect where the drone actually flies and services an area, or you can have it doing a particular type of inspection.

"So sometimes you can have them doing something like powerline inspection. For instance, the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) can have trained inspectors, who can inspect power lines.

"We can have drones that are manufactured locally to help curb issues of prison break. We can train people like the Civil Defence, and then we can manufacture locally based on the need."

He added that the company had developed two models which will likely be launched in March.

"We've been testing this equipment. We have about 90 hours of tests on our equipment so far, and we will be bringing it to the market shortly."

The drones can also be applied in the oil and gas industry for mapping and precision inspection.

In agriculture, it helps farmers to constantly monitor crop and livestock conditions by air using the precision drones that are fitted with multiple sensors.

This optimises fertilisation, irrigation, mapping, and increases productivity and profitability based on real-time field information and advanced analytics.

RETTI Launches Online Courses on Solar

Investment in the solar sector hit a peak of \$330 billion in 2015. This was expected as climate change impacts continue to ravage communities due to the use of fossil fuels for electricity. This adds to the increase of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide to the atmosphere enhancing the dangerous climate change.

Solar power for electricity use has proven to be a sustainable and cleaner form of electricity because it comes from an abundant and natural resource which is the sun.

On the other side, 600 million people in Africa have no access to electricity. Out of this, Nigeria has the largest number of people globally without access to electricity at 93 million people.

This has led to global attention in Africa subsequently leading to increased investment to develop solar powered plants for electricity.

However, this increased investment has led to a new problem. There aren't enough trained local content or people skilled in solar energy design, installation, marketing who will work with the companies that have received these investment opportunities.

To fill the gap currently existent in the capacity building arm of the renewable energy sector, a company based in Lagos, Nigeria the Renewable Energy Technology Training institute (RETTI)

have been working since 2018 to train, groom and mentor new engineers and entrepreneurs for the solar sector. So far they have trained 650 young people who have gone on to become solar PV designers, installers, marketing and sales agents, repair and maintenance professionals and have created their own businesses or working with solar companies.

To help their solution reach a larger number of Nigerians they have just launched an online course platform (<https://courses.retti.com.ng/>) which has provided access to target courses for different niches in the Solar industry. The new courses include but not limited to: How to Design and Size your solar system; How to Install Solar Panels on the Rooftop; How to Start a Profitable Solar Business; How to Maintain and Troubleshoot your Solar Installation; Solar PV Economics, Entrepreneurship, Marketing and Sales and Solar System Safety and Protection.

Course Features

- All courses are detailed, takes one through a step-by-step process and guide to ensure easy comprehension.

- All courses are video courses and very hands-on therefore enabling the participants retain the knowledge that has been passed across.

- Participants can easily log in anytime to access

the course. The self-paced course allows the participants to pause or rewind and get back to the video anytime they have an enquiry.

- It is a lifetime resource helping the participants to become a professional in the renewable energy industry.

- At the end of each course participant receives a certificate which they could use to get a job in a solar company or to work as an intern.

- Participant is able to start their solar business with knowledge gained from the course and with after training support provided by the institute.

RETTI did not stop there. It has created a very robust alumni association where they work with each graduate to see that they establish in the sector. Through their Growth Support Plan (GSP) initiative they continually upskill graduates of the course with more information and knowledge as they strive to become a solar professional.

When they start their businesses or begin jobs in solar companies, participants encounter outside and everyday real challenges. The GSP initiatives help them overcome the problems they experience by sharing solutions and updated skills development training all at no extra cost.

Founder and CEO of RETTI, Ms. Glory Oguegbu, says "our goal is really to support

each participant get established in the industry. This is our major goal. We don't just want to train, we also want to be a part of their success story. We train them and then work with them step by step to ensure that they reach their goal either to get a job in a solar company or to start their own solar business. For either of their desire we help them articulate their goals, support them as they develop their business plans, share resources for business development with them, opportunities for funding, job interview preparations and provide solutions to specific trainings for areas where they need help," she said

"In this way we have supported 105 members of our alumni start their own viable renewable energy businesses and working with solar companies. Collectively, they have installed up to 205 KVA solar electricity to more than 1750 homes and businesses hoping to offset up to 970,000 tons of carbon dioxide," she concluded.

RETTI has also recently announced that participants who take a course from now till February 28th get it at 50 per cent discounted fee including getting access to a free 22 page e-book on Batteries for Solar; Types and How to Choose. Visit this link to get started now: <https://courses.retti.com.ng/>.

BUSINESS OUTSIDER

Building a Sustainable Business

Tunji Adegbite

Starting a business is becoming a common alternative for many people. This drive for business ownership / entrepreneurship is noble, especially as SMEs constitute one of the backbones of economies globally and are pivotal to economic development, job creation, and poverty reduction. According to the World Bank, SMEs contribute up to 40 per cent of GDP in emerging economies. In Nigeria, they account for about 50 per cent of GDP and 80 per cent of employment, according to the NBS.

However, starting a business does not on its own guarantee success or the longevity of the venture. Industry experts estimate that Nigerian SMEs have a failure rate of up to 80 per cent within the first 5 years of operation due to a combination of internal and external factors, among which are poor management expertise, dearth of skilled labor, lack of preparation & inadequate market analysis, limited access to finance, poor accounting and book-keeping, minimal or no quality control, poor customer relations and inadequate infrastructure (power, roads, and supportive policies).

A number of these factors can be grouped into three interconnected categories: People, Customers, and Systems. These factors directly impact the future of any business and must operate seamlessly for a business to truly be a successful enterprise.

People

People are one of the most important assets of any company and form an essential part of the day-to-day running of a successful business operation. Hiring and retaining the right people are some of the main tools for building a lasting and profitable business. Businesses must define their values and determine what type of culture they want to build. Cultural fit combined with skill and knowledge fit should then be the basis upon which team members are recruited.

After hiring, training and continuous development are the next priority. To ensure efficient operations, business owners need to invest in regular technical training, provide them with timely, constructive feedback while supporting them when they miss the mark. Studies have demonstrated that investment in staff is directly proportional to increased revenue. This investment also builds staff loyalty and contributes towards the retention of quality staff.

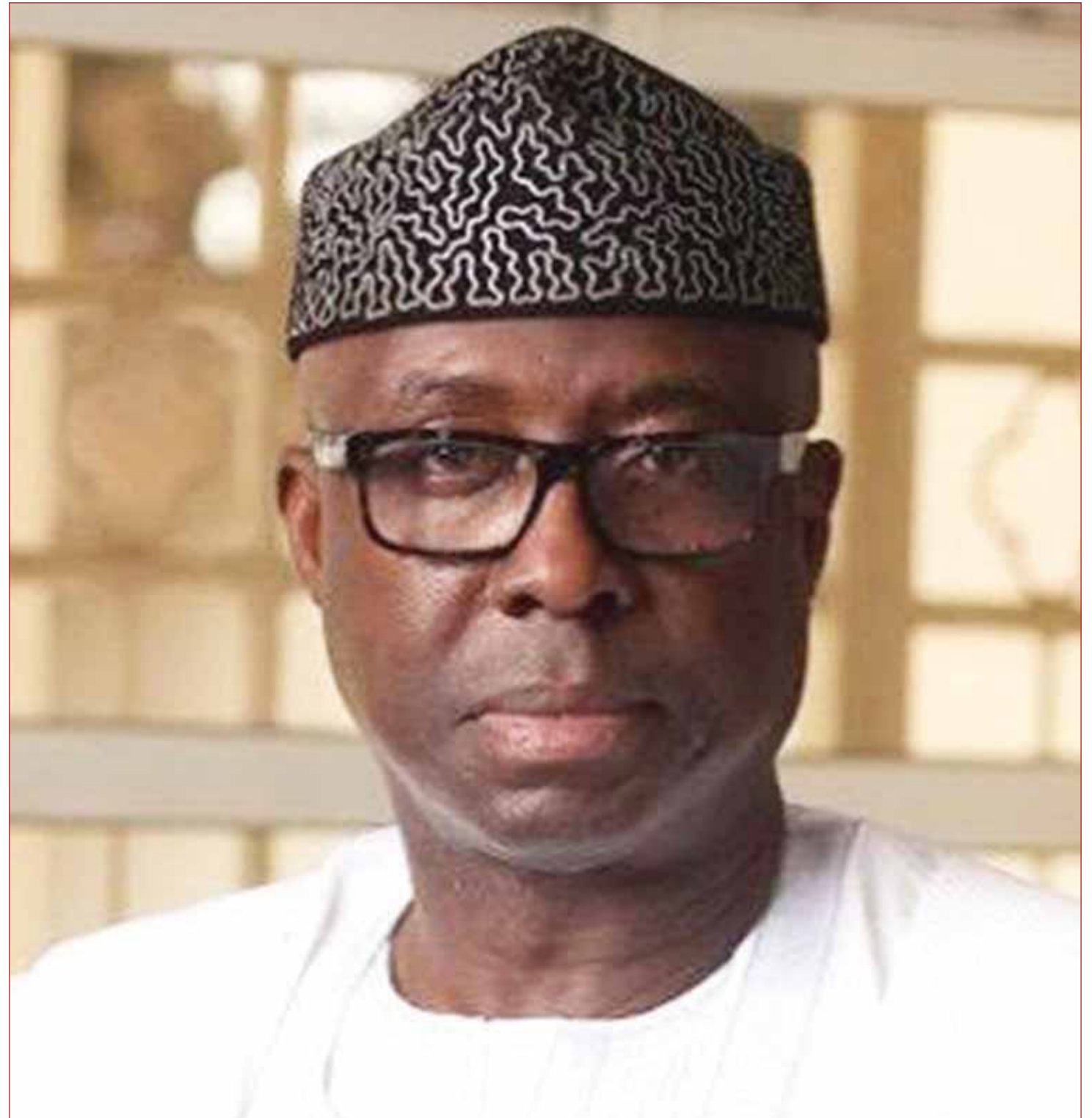
Training should not just be focused on individual operational functions but also team development. Cohesive teams enable businesses to make the most of each team member's strengths, minimize the impacts of their weaknesses, adapt more quickly to ever-changing market conditions, and implement business operations seamlessly.

Although the common saying in management practice is 'people do not quit their jobs; they quit their manager', recent studies have shown that this is only one factor in employee retention.

A positive culture and environment of learning, teamwork, remuneration, and growth opportunities are other important factors. Ultimately, a business that focuses on its people is on the right path to success.

Customer

'Customer is king' and no business can survive without customers irrespective of what sector the business plays in. Prioritizing customer experiences involves understanding and anticipating their needs in other to



Adebayo

deliver exceptional customer service every time. This is important to retaining customers, building loyalty, and increasing profits.

In this digital era, consumers have an overwhelming number of options to choose from both local and international for every need perceivable, and often a positive customer experience is a distinguishing factor. Global companies like Amazon have captured market share by developing their business around a customer-centric strategy. Increasingly, customer experience influences purchasing decisions, and businesses that focus on improving their customer experience have better revenues than their competition.

Customer loyalty is fragile, and a single negative experience not handled properly may be enough to entirely blacklist a business in a customer's mind.

Unsatisfied customers are also more likely to go a step further to de-market a business to others within their network or leave a negative review. In contrast, positive customer experiences add up to build a desirable perception of a business, quality of service or goods purchased, secure lasting customer loyalty, and positive word of mouth referrals.

Some of the easiest and most important ways of improving sales

are increasing customer loyalty and referrals. A study conducted by Bain & Company showed that a 5 per cent increase in customer retention can increase profitability by 75 per cent. Other studies have also demonstrated that the cost of retaining an existing customer is less than acquiring a new one. The value of a business prioritizing delightful customer experiences cannot be overstated.

Systems and Processes

Organisations need a methodical process of solving or automating a repeated business task effortlessly. This should be a clearly defined and written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that outlines how specific tasks are carried out in a business.

Let's consider the example of a retail business. At its leanest, day-to-day operations require a cashier, a merchandiser to stock the shelves and assist customers, a manager, and security personnel. If the merchandiser suddenly had to take a few days off, without systems in place, the rest of the team would struggle to find items in the store, restock the shelves as often as required or before an absence is brought to their notice by a customer.

This would result in a substantial disruption of business until the merchandiser returns or a makeshift

system is put in place.

This example is a simplified look at systems. In practice, there are more elements at play in a business requiring systems such as marketing, sales, fulfillment, and administrative systems. Efficient systems are one critical differentiating factor between lasting businesses and those that will likely fail.

Most small businesses revolve around their owners and do not grow to function beyond being micromanaged. Successful lasting business requires systems, without which one is simply running a hustle, where the owner is the business.

In developing systems and outlining process, it is important to address the following:

- What is the task?
- Who is going to carry out the task?
- How are they going to do it?
- When & where are they going to do it?

Although challenging, efforts directed towards these essential areas lead to business growth. The future belongs to SMEs that master them.

•Adegbite, founder of Naspire, is a thought leader in Strategy and Supply Chain. He can be reached via tunji@naspire.com

BUSINESS/E-BUSINESS

NIMC's Funding Dilemma

The National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) has reached a critical level of its operation where external funding is inevitable, but it appears the federal government is either unwilling to fund NIMC's operation or does not understand the importance of national identity system, writes **Emma Okonji**

Recent statement by the Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, Dr. Isa Ibrahim Pantami, through his official twitter handle, @DrIsaPantami, is a clear indication that the federal government is not interested in funding NIMC at a time that the commission needed funding the most. According to the minister, "My strategic mission for NIMC is to ensure the commission is self-reliant and generates the money it needs for smooth operation without having to depend on the federal government for budgetary allocation."

The statement has rather divided many stakeholders who are asking questions about the possibility of NIMC to be self-reliant. How?, they asked, while wondering if the minister wants NIMC to introduce operational charges for its services or commercialise its only product, which is the critical national identity data.

NIMC was set up by the federal government, with the mandates to operate and regulate matters of national identity in Nigeria with services covering National Identification Number (NIN) enrolment and issuance, National e-ID card issuance, identity verification as well as data harmonisation and authentication.

Since inception, NIMC has been struggling to fund itself, even though part of its mandates is to ensure free enrolment exercise, free issuance of NIN slips and free issuance of electronic plastic cards as national identity.

At first NIMC was under the direct supervision of the presidency, yet it was not getting the necessary financial support from its direct supervisor, a situation that slowed down NIMC's operations in all its branches nationwide.

Last year, President Muhammadu Buhari, however, approved the transfer of NIMC to the direct supervision of the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, which Pantami oversees. Although the transfer came as a surprise to many industry stakeholders, some were however hoping that NIMC may get better attention in relation to funding, when being directly supervised by Pantami, but his recent comment in his official twitter handle that he expected NIMC to be self-reliant, shattered their hopes.

From August 2014, when the then President Jonathan Goodluck launched the National ID card scheme, NIMC enrolled and issued the plastic national identity cards free of charge up until 2015 when it eventually stopped issuance of National Identity ID cards for lack of funds to sustain it and it immediately resorted to only the issuance of NIN slips after enrolment. However, after 2015, those who desperately needed the plastic national identity card were asked to pay for the processing fees, which cost between N1,500 and N2,500. That was the point at which NIMC's body language proved to Nigerians that it actually lacked the necessary funding to service Nigerians well, yet the government did not consider the funding of NIMC necessary and the commission continued in its financially deplorable state, that eventually slowed down NIN enrolment processes across NIMC's branches nationwide.

Reactions

Industry stakeholders have continued to react to last week's tweet by Pantami, when he commented that he expected NIMC to be self-reliant and should be able to generate the money it needed for a smooth operation without having to depend on the federal government for budgetary allocation.

Stakeholders have been raising questions as to how the strategic mission of the minister, in relation to funding could be achieved when in the first place, NIMC does not charge for services rendered and does not have operators under it that could pay Annual Operating Levy (AOL) to NIMC. The question they are asking the minister is whether his strategic mission for NIMC in terms of self-reliance is achievable.



Pantami



Aziz

Of all the agencies currently under the supervision of the Minister of Communications and Digital Economy, such as NIMC, Galaxy Backbone, Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), Nigerian Communications Satellite Limited (NigComSat), National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST), only NCC and NITDA could be said to be self-reliant, reason being that NCC collects AOL from telecoms operators, while NITDA gets certain percentage of remittances from all registered Information Technology (IT) companies annually. Aside those two agencies, no other agencies under the direct supervision of the minister, gets steady income from operators or industry players, including NIMC, yet government wants NIMC to perform magic and be self-reliant to serve Nigerians better.

President, National Association of Telecoms Subscribers (NATCOM), Chief Deolu Ogunbanjo, is of the view that government must fund NIMC adequately, if government wants NIMC to perform creditably. "NIMC is a federal government agency, and should be well funded by the federal government, except government wants NIMC to rely on foreign donors, which may spell doom for the nation. Such foreign donors would have vested interest in our national identity data, especially when they are releasing funds for the project, which is supposed to be a national project that is devoid of any foreign interests," Ogunbanjo said.

Chairman, Association of Licensed Telecoms Companies of Nigeria (ALTON), Mr. Gbenga Adebayo, has warned that the federal government must tread with caution in the area of funding of NIMC, in order not to compromise national security. According to him, "I do not know how NIMC, as an agency of government that has no commercial product to sell, will be able to become self-reliant and be able to sustain itself without budgetary allocation from the federal government. What I know is that all over the world, NIN registration and national identity project are the sole responsibility of government."

"Based on this, government should be careful not to commercialise the identity management system of the country. NIMC should not be allowed to exchange reliable and critical data of Nigerians with foreign partners in the name of sponsorships since government wants NIMC to be self-reliant and the only product that NIMC has is identity data. Citizens data are critical just as national security and data all over the world, is like gold and raw material to companies who know the value of data."

Adebayo further said, "Citizens' data can attract very high commercial value and NIMC should be guided not to fall into the temptation of exchanging identity data because it wants to be self-reliant, to the extent of generating its funds that will make

it less dependent on government. Technology companies and advertisers all over the world are looking for data and will be ready to release money to get data, which is the only product of NIMC at the moment."

Agitations

Last month, precisely January 6, NIMC workers' union called for strike action and asked all its members to down tool, in protest of poor welfare package and for lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) to work with that will prevent them COVID-19 infection, while attending to Nigerians during registration NIN registration process. NIMC workers embarked on a nationwide strike, in demand for a better welfare package. The staff shut down operations and suspended enrolment of NIN in all their branch offices nationwide.

The NIMC unit of the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN), directed members to embark on the strike, after its congress.

In a communique released at the end of the congress and signed by the Union's Secretary, Mr. Victor Odia, and representative of ASCSN NIMC unit, Mr. Michael Asekokhai, the workers said the strike action became necessary to address issues of poor welfare package, lack of tools and risk of exposure to coronavirus during enrolment.

"The meeting was convened to discuss the state of the exposure of staff members to COVID-19, the salary structure, its representation in the annual appropriation, the irregularities in the conduct of promotions, and the personal protection and safety in light of the COVID-19 pandemic," part of the communique read.

The workers also demanded for a review of the 'lopsided and irregular' promotion done in 2017 and 2020, implementation of the approved salary structure and its appropriation in the 2021 annual budget as well as adequate provision of work tools for civic data enrolment.

They were also demanding for the provision of adequate monthly operational stipends, work tools necessary for the process of enrolment of civic data. The work tools also include power and connectivity (airtime and data connectivity), enrolment systems and peripherals, stationeries and consumables such as NIN slips, enrolment forms, and A4 papers.

The union asked all NIMC staff to suspend all enrolment activities with immediate effect pending when their demands were met.

Intervention and Promise

Disturbed by the strike action, the minister quickly met with the union and promised to meet their demands and asked them to return to work.

NIMC, in a statement shortly after the minister met

the union, said "NIMC wishes to assure members of the general public that glitches experienced in the enrolment process were being resolved and normal enrolment would resume shortly. We apologise for any inconvenience caused and wish to assure you of our continued excellent service."

The workers, however, gave the minister two weeks to meet their demands and warned that after two weeks, they would resume the strike action, if their demand were not met.

Three weeks down the line, the minister is giving a different signal, indicating that government is not prepared to fund NIMC, which Pantami said, should be self-reliant without depending on government for any budgetary allocation.

Funding

Nigerians, including NIMC staff members have expressed their concerns over the adequate funding of NIMC operations. They are of the view that NIMC must be properly funded in order to offer the best of national identity management services to Nigerians.

The Director General of NIMC, Mr. Aliyu Aziz, who also recognised the need for adequate funding, had in 2019, during the 6th General Assembly of the Northern Traditional Rulers Council (NTRC), which held at the Arewa House, Kaduna, had stressed that national identity management required the political will of government and adequate funding to succeed. According to Aziz, Nigeria's national identity programme will not succeed unless there is strong political commitment on the part of government backed by adequate funding. "Like any government reform, political will and strong leadership are required to implement the national identity project."

In his paper titled: "Importance of National Identity to Nation Building," the director general was of the view that without strong political leadership and commitment, financial resources and stakeholder collaboration, the national identity programme would not be successful and sustained.

He, therefore, called on the traditional rulers for support and give their fatherly advice, while informing the gathering that all modern economic services were done digitally and rely on good identification to promote economic growth and opportunities.

"For Nigeria to enhance governance, help its people rise out of poverty, restore growth and participate in the digital economy, we need a unique digital identification platform that is linked to functional identity registries for accessing services," he stated.

While explaining the importance of national identity to Nigeria's existence and growth, he said: "There is a strong correlation between inclusive identification and nation building and this is central in effective delivery of important services to the people."

According to him, a robust digital identity for Nigeria would lead to access to finance, gender equality and empowerment, access to basic health and educational services as well as child protection. Other benefits include migration and labour market opportunities, reduction in the cost of governance, better government service delivery and improvement in the enforcement of law and order thereby leading to improved security.

While bemoaning some of the challenges NIMC was facing in executing the national identity project to include poor funding, inadequate mobilisation, among others, Aziz appealed to the royal fathers to help with awareness and mobilisation as well as assisting their subjects with source documents to enable them enroll for NIN.

He reminded them of some of the government or social services for which the NIN must be presented and verified, to include application and issuance of passport, opening of bank accounts, purchase of insurance policies, all land related transactions, payment of taxes, admission into schools, voter registration, pension transactions and all relevant government services.

Chairman, Association of Licensed Telecoms Operators of Nigeria (ALTON), Mr. Gbenga Adebayo, who spoke to THISDAY about funding, called on the federal government to fund NIMC and also do well to meet its demands for better work conditions and adequate working tools.

Adebayo called on government to honour the request of NIMC staff as stated by the workers' union. According to him, the need to honour the demands of the workers was necessary in order to keep the workers in their duty posts and avoid another strike action.

He said if federal government should handle the issues raised by the workers with levity and allow them to resume the strike action as threatened by the workers, it would likely truncate the on-going NIN enrolment exercise, which he said, would cause a great setback in telecoms development and erode its achievements in the past years.

BUSINESS PERSONALITY

GREG OGBEIFUN

Nigeria's Tax Regime Hindering Shipping Industry Growth

With a career spanning over 50 years, shipping mogul and Chairman/CEO of Starzs Investments Company Limited, Engr. Greg Utomwen Ogbeifun, knows the length and breadth of the Nigerian maritime industry. Ogbeifun, who turns 70 years today started like any other entrepreneur in Nigeria, but has today built a multi-million dollar shipping empire. His business establishments have provided employment to over 1,000 Nigerians. The billionaire-shipping magnate is a qualified Marine Engineer with First Class (Combined) Certificate of Competency, a member of the British Society of Marine Consultants and Ship Surveyors, the American Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, the Institute of Directors as well as the Pioneer President of the Shipowners Association of Nigeria (SOAN). He also sits as a member of the Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC). He is the Chairman of the Technical Committee to build the Benin City River Port in Edo State. Ogbeifun's in-depth professional experience and clarity of vision has made leaders in the maritime industry and even the federal government seek his counsel severally and he has served in different Shipping and Maritime related Ministerial and Presidential committees. He speaks with **Eromosele Abiodun** about his company's succession plan, his life and career as well as his legacy projects as he addresses pertinent issues in the maritime and oil and gas sectors

Arrival to the World

I was born in Benin City in the then Western Region on February 11th, 1951. My parents were living in Aba at the time. My father was working in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and was posted to Aba. In those days, if you were in the federal service, you were posted to any part of the country to work and that is why he was in Aba at the time. When my mother was ready to give birth to me, my father then sent her home to Benin. However, after I was born, my mother took me back to Aba. So originally and presently and in the future I am from Benin, I am a Benin man and my late parents hailed from that famous town.

Early Years

Well, the symbolic thing I remember when I was growing up in Aba and about Nigeria at the time is that Nigeria was so united and devoid of ethnic and religious sentiments such that you would not know that we were not Ibos or from that part of the country. My siblings and I didn't know much about Benin because we didn't live there. All we knew was that we were Nigerians and everybody related with one another as one. I remember that it was such a beautiful experience growing up in the Eastern part of Nigeria, that is, until the civil war broke out in 1966. At the start of the war, the then Military Governor of the Eastern States asked all the non-easterners to leave the East. This was our first encounter with ethnic division and it was when we had the rudest shock as a family to know that we didn't really belong. For the first time, we began to feel that we were truly not one as Nigerians.

Embracing Humble Beginning

I am not from a middle-class family because my father was not educated. He was a carpenter in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. That was his profession. It was a very humble beginning for me in life. At a very early age I realized that I needed to get out of that near poverty situation. And that helped me stay focused on anything I did in terms of my education, my behaviour and my character as a child and as a young adult. As said earlier, my father was a carpenter in the Federal Civil Service where he served in the Woodworks Section. Having said that, by the grace of God and because of his character, diligence and proficiency in his job over time, he rose to become an Assistant

Technical Officer until he retired in Benin in the 70's. My parents had 12 children; 6 boys and 6 girls. They had one set of twins but one passed away. Out of their 12 children, my parents lost 2 girls, leaving them with 6 boys and 4 girls. My father passed away over a decade ago at the age of 98 years while my mother passed away at the age of 100 years in 2019.

Turning 70

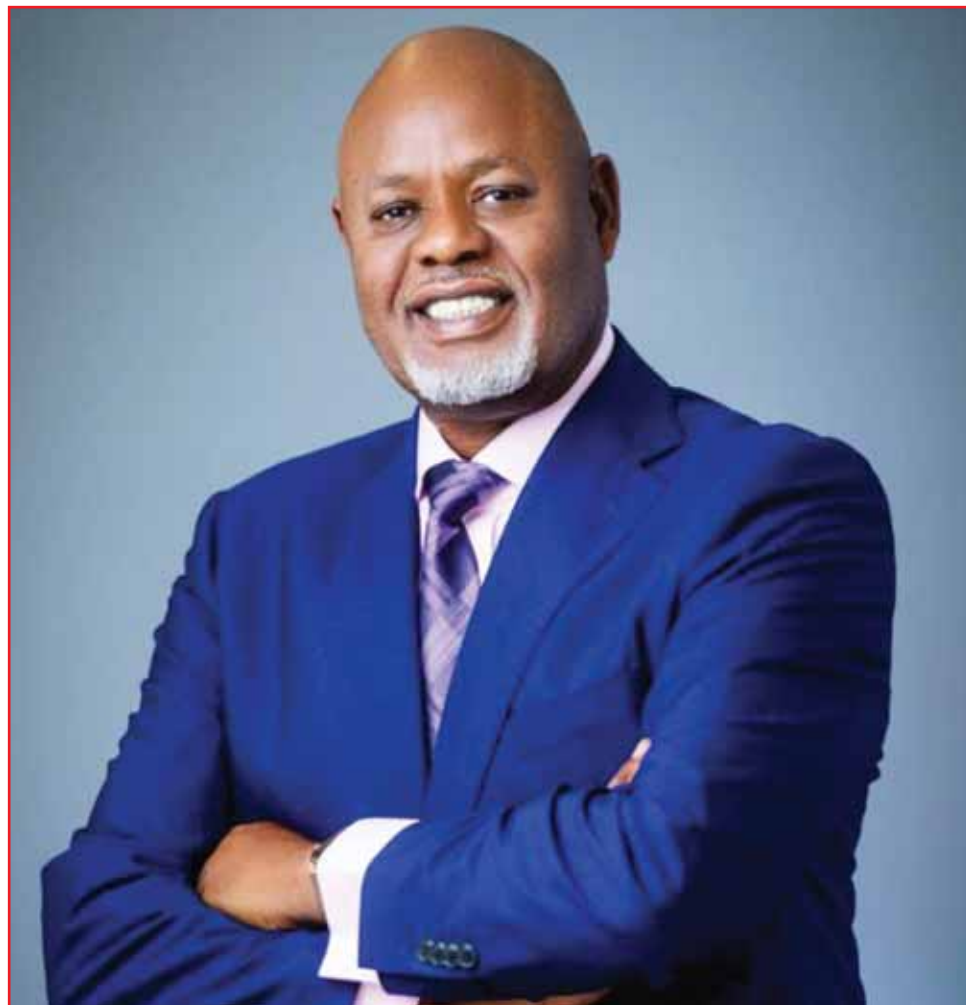
I feel very grateful to God for preserving my life to see the 11th of February 2021 when I turn 70. I am grateful to God for his faithfulness in my life, more importantly I am in sound health, and I mean sound health. This means a lot at a time in our nation where life expectancy is low and when you are lucky to be alive at this age. I am very healthy, I don't have any iota of sickness in my body, no iota of blood pressure, no diabetes, nothing. So that is the first thing I am grateful to God for. The second thing is the great opportunity I have had over time to give back to my industry from what I do as a marine engineer. I am an entrepreneur; it has helped me to touch lives, to impact lives. And right now, all I am doing is finding a way to leave a legacy behind for the younger generation to benefit from.

Fire of Intellectualism

I started my early education at age of 3 in Aba. It was an era where you had to carry your slate on your head with your chalk in your hand. Then you would cry about going to school because you didn't want to go, and your parents would beat you and insist that you go to school. It was a nomadic kind of education because I had my primary school in a couple of schools. I eventually finished at St. Patrick Primary School Ekulu in 1964. I later gained admission to Edo College, Benin City in 1965 and that was where I did my secondary school and Higher Secondary (HSC). In 1971, I got a scholarship from Shell BP to go to Europe to study Marine Engineering. I didn't go to a conventional university. It was a specialized training where we were trained as professionals. The program was structured for both theory and practical. We would spend some time in college then we would go to sea on a ship for some time, then you would go back to college again.

Shell Scholarship & Career Path

That is a very good question. Let me start by



Ogbeifun

correcting the impression again. Marine Engineering was popular in the country even at that time. Don't forget that Nigeria had a flourishing national shipping line and these ships were handled by engineers. I was a science student but I knew that I didn't want to be a conventional engineer. I didn't know what I wanted to be until I saw an advert in the newspaper. I always read newspapers. My father used to buy newspapers for his pool business and

I would pick up and read the newspapers after he had cut out the pool section. Back then, there was a Nigerian publication called the Nigerian Outlook, which always advertised for scholarships and things like that. In those days, almost every day there was one scholarship or the other in the papers. So that was how I came across an advert by Shell BP that they were recruiting to train young Nigerians in Marine Engineering and Navigation. However,

BUSINESS PERSONALITY

At 70, I'm Satisfied with Contribution to Maritime Industry

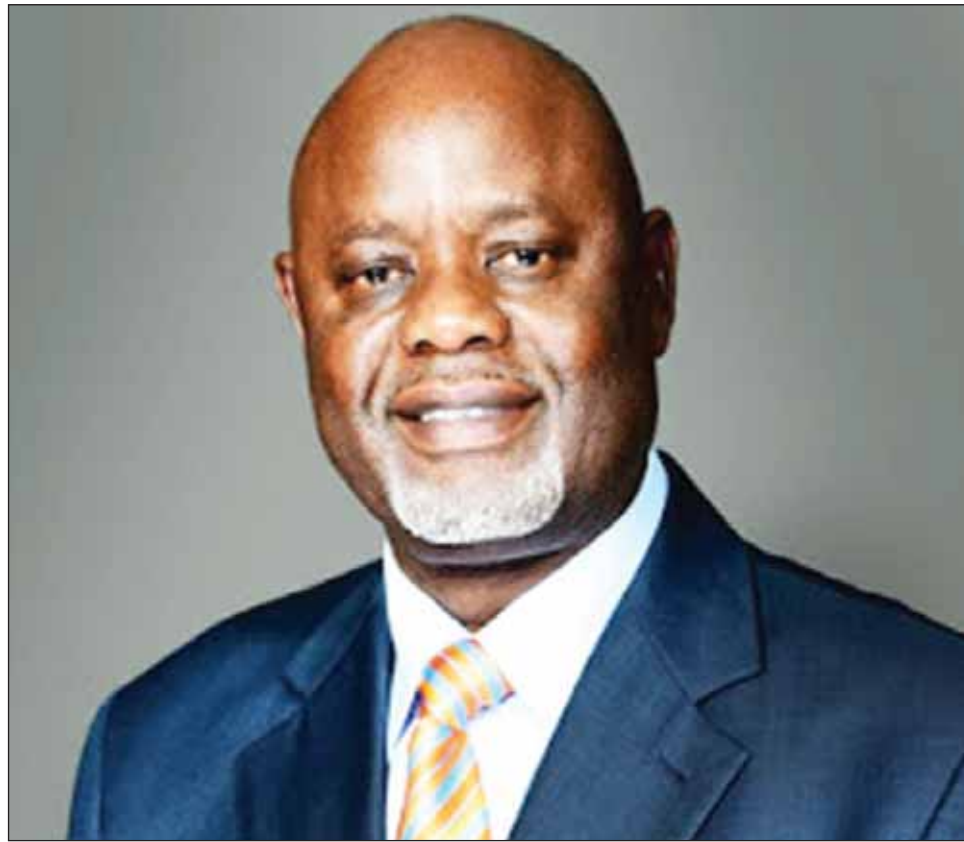
Marine Engineering caught my attention and I applied. It was destiny and providence because out of about 4,000 applicants who applied in 1971 only four of us were selected. Two to study Marine Engineering and two to study Navigation. Even though we were literally assigned to the courses but in my own case, I believe it was destiny because at the final panel interview, where they allocated which course people were to do, they told me that 'in your own case we see you are interested in Marine Engineering.' They (the Shell Panel) had noticed that I had also received a federal government scholarship to do Marine Engineering in the Guildford University in the UK. Here I am in the middle of two UK scholarships: One to study a degree in Marine Engineering and the second one to do professional Marine Engineering. To have an insight into what the Shell BP scholarship entailed, I started going to the British Council to read about Marine Engineering. I went further and made enquiries and found out Shell had operations in Warri and that there were some Marine Engineers there. So curiously I decided to go to Warri to go and look for any of the Marine Engineers who could speak to me about the difference between the Shell scholarship and the federal government's scholarship. So the moment they told me that Shell from day one would put me on salary, I accepted it. Considering my background, knowing how my parents were struggling to pay the fees of my siblings, I just decided to embrace the Shell offer in 1972 and I travelled to England for training.

Grace of God & Destiny

Well, I must say that first of all you used the word luck, but I will say instead the grace of God and destiny. Now, I believe that every time a child is born, God already has set out a path for him/her. Sometimes out of our own will we deviate from that path because all sorts of things happen! But my parents were not believers or what it is known today as 'born again'. They were Christians though. So, I would not say it was because of plenty vibrant spiritual prayers or anything like that, not at all. I believe that it was the grace of God. God had already destined that I would be who I am today. And so I will continue to walk in line with his will. But going back to your question... being diligent is very important because that is what attracts more favour to you. Honesty and integrity in your work must be intact no matter the circumstance or the situation. So, if you add the aforementioned to your skill, you will definitely soar high. But regrettably what I see these days is that diligence is lacking in a lot of our young people. Integrity is nowhere to be found and honour is gone. I am coming, knowing that they are actually going. In fact, that has become our life style. That has translated most times in the things we do to the extent that when people tell you this is white, you better start looking for black. So, this is not helping the young generation who will need all the support and assistance that they can get to survive in these very harsh economic realities that we find ourselves as a nation. Therefore, the few opportunities that are available, the few who have honor, integrity, and diligence in what they are doing are inevitably also making it even in these difficult times. In addition, till today, these remain my watch words, they remain the watch words that I can give to my children. Those three things are very key and when you do that, you are walking in line with the will of God and God will definitely help you.

Life Lesson

I have four companies, the very first one is Starz Investments Company limited. That is the very first I company I started on the 1st of July 1986 and that is the Company that has grown to own and operate 12 ships today. And that is the Company I have just retired from and my daughter Iroghama has stepped in as the Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer. I own about 96% of that company. In 1996, I established Starz Marine and Engineering Limited, which is the ship-repair company. So Starz marine is the ship dockyard company known as the Starz shipyard in Onne. So those two companies are two different legal entities. Now, Starz marine, which is the ship repair company, started operations in the year 2000, that is about 21 years ago. And I do not wholly own that company, I have other investors but I am the pioneer and the highest shareholder but I have other investors there. I also have Eaglewatch Security Limited that provides private security guards within Rivers and Edo State and we have almost 600 guards. And I did that as a means of creating jobs for young people. It is a means of taking young people off the streets, putting them in uniforms, training them to protect life and property. This is a contribution I am making. Now, my latest company, which is Diverse Engineering Supply Limited is my personal birthday present. On February 11th when I turn



Ogbefun

70, I will be dedicating an Autocare Center of international standard which I have just built in Benin. It is going to be a workshop for maintenance of high end and middle end cars. For me it is like a hobby that will again create jobs, and of course provide quality services. It is a state-of-the-art center which will be properly commissioned after the pandemic, because then I will be able to invite a lot of stakeholders to come and tour the facility.

Loyal and Dedicated Staff

My loyal and dedicated staff, there are staff members, who have been with me for more than 20 years in Starz Investment. Everybody in that company is family and whatever that company has become just like all my other companies, I attribute it to all these people present, and past who have gone through the system and helped to build it up.

Change of Baton

Let me correct that impression. Iroghama coming into the company as Managing Director/CEO of Starz Investments Company Limited is not an automatic succession. Consultants who contracted from London about six years ago to come and look at my business, restructure it to outlive me brought her in. Iro was already running her own business here in Lagos. So, the consultants from London recommended in their reports that they wanted her in the management of the company. I was surprised because two of my children are marine professionals. One of my sons, Osasu, is a Professional Marine Engineer and another one, Efosa, is a trained Naval Architect currently working in Canada. And my mind then was that the Marine Engineer will probably take over Starz Investments Company Limited. They insisted that they wanted my daughter to be involved. It was a case of getting me to be convinced because Iro had and still has her own vision and dream. But when they recommended that she should come in as a Chief Operating Officer I said no, that she had to come in as an Executive Director. I also mandated that we would give her one-year of induction after which we would evaluate if she was capable of the responsibilities. I then passed the matter to the Board to handle because in all the companies I have always made sure that I had a Board that is stronger than me. That was how Iro became part of the team. But guess what, in six months, Iro was leading all of us, I mean practically all of us. She had built bridges between us and clients that we were struggling with. She changed things around and brought in modern technology. Subsequently, after two Board Meetings and Management Reports, which she presented, the Board said why are we wasting our time that they wanted to confirm her as COO so she could have the authority to do more of what she was doing. That was how Iro became the COO five years ago. It was based on the Board's recommendation. Obviously, over time she has grown the company, at the time she came in we only had three ships, now we have 12 ships.

Belief in Competence

I am very concerned about that because I have

seen so many family businesses that did not outlive the owner. My business is definitely not structured on the family. Any family member, who deserves to work in the businesses will come in. But even though the businesses are not family businesses, the family owns the businesses. But the family does not have to run the business. I think I need to drive this on because a lot of us entrepreneurs make that mistake. Your children don't have to run your business. So, let the business be run well by professionals rather than saying my child automatically takes over. I need to clarify this.

Milestones to Conquer and Legacy to Outlive Him

As long as we live there will always be ideas to accomplish, you may call them milestones to conquer. I can wake up in the middle of the night develop any idea that God put in my heart. In terms of milestones I will tell you three major things. Number one we are expanding Starz Marine and Engineering Limited Shipyard from a capacity of 500 tons floating dock to a capacity of 7500 tons capacity with ability to dock ships up to 100 meters long and ability to dock between 6 and 10 ships and repair them simultaneously. More importantly, we are incorporating new ship building capacity for ships up to 70 meters long. Now for me this is the biggest thing God will help me actualize in my life time. The next phase we are going into we are signing a contract agreement with the consortium of Transaction Advisers based in Canada and in Holland, who are going to take over this expansion project. They will develop the feasibility from now up to commissioning. And this will take about twenty-four to thirty months by the grace of God. That project, there will be none like it in the Gulf of Guinea, even in the entire West Africa. And that project will turn around the fortune of the Nigerian Maritime Industry. Because most companies operating in this country were going outside. With that project established, virtually all those ships will be built in this country. As at now, between 80% and 85% of ships operating in Nigeria, are leaving this country to go for repair opportunities outside this country. With that project established that will no longer happen in this country. Instead ships outside this country will be coming to Nigeria for repairs. Now this is not about Starz, this is about the Nigerian Maritime Industry and this is about our Nigerian economy. And this is about job creation for the teeming youths. So that is the major thing I am putting right now and I need prayer, I need encouragement from Nigerians. Now the second one, you may be aware that my state governor, His Excellency, Governor Obaseki appointed me to be the Chairman of the Committee to build the port which is now called Benin River port in Edo State. So that in itself is a major project we are also working on. It is already ongoing and if I am able to actualize that, that is another huge legacy by the grace of God, that I will be leaving for my home state and for the future generation.

And then of course more recently is my automobile workshop, which is more of a hobby for me. I want to establish a workshop that is of international standard. What do I mean by that?

The processes are going to be totally ICT driven. Another key driver is the training of the people and the skill I want to give to them. It is important to note that there is a Technical training College in this town (Benin) which I want to link to the workshop so that they can use the workshop as their training center for the industrial training of the children in that school. All the three projects are legacy projects.

Family Inspiration

The name of the floating dock is actually a combination of the name of my ex-wife "Christie" and "Barbara" the wife of a very dear friend John Lester who was instrumental to the establishment of the shipyard. This story is told in detail in my autobiography. Family inspiration, yes, in every marriage I share in details everything I do in my life. And my spouse or my partners have been very supportive, either with their prayers or making the home for me to be able to actualise my programmes and dreams. I can say that they have always been supportive. Even with the children, there might be some occasions, which one does not expect it to be but that is not enough to completely undermine the contributions that my families have made to the success I enjoy today.

Favourite Past Time

Number one is my relationship with God, I try to spend as much time as I can with God, by fellowshipping, I must remember to study the word and pray. Number two, is dancing and third one is touching lives by making opportunities today for the young people. Every day, I get numerous phone calls, text messages, WhatsApp messages, emails of young people who are struggling or looking for a lifeline to become relevant in life. So, I spend a lot of time doing what I can, listening to them, it is not all about money. Sometimes these young people just need counsel, they just need advice, they just need somebody to just give them a listening ear. And then you find out after all of that, that all they need is just a little bit of financial support. I receive a lot of that, unfortunately we do not have a system that makes that opportunity for a lot of young people, not in our schools. My hobby is work. I can sit on my computer for 24 hours and I enjoy myself.

Good Governance, Good Leadership

The answer is very simple and I will bare my mind. If anything is going wrong in the Starz group of companies, who takes the blame? So as far as the country is concerned anything that is going wrong, the head is to take responsibility for it. The President of the country takes responsibility for it, irrespective of who is actually responsible. Until the head rises up to the occasion, to say whatever is happening I take responsibility, What can I do? We are going nowhere. As long as the head is indifferent, we are going nowhere. Because the authority, power, God has vested it on the head. Look at what is happening in America now, the head in the last administration was responsible for all the things that have happened in America. There is a new administration there now, he is already reeling out things to change the destiny of the people down to the man on the streets. So, we don't go too far. The appointments you make, the people you put in sensitive positions, the accountability that you don't check and you leave like that, you are destroying the Nation. We can't run away from it. So, until we get it right from the top, until we get our process of choosing our leadership right, until we put the right people in the right positions, we will continue to wallow in the wilderness. I was watching Okoya's 81st birthday on television, I admired that man. He was saying the same thing, that we should give opportunity to the youths. Create opportunities for the youths, support the youths, encourage the youths. It is not what you say by mouth. In his own case you can see the multitude of people his life has affected. In my own case today, at least I empower and I employ over a 1000 people. So, if there are 100 of such people who are not selfish, who are not spending the billions they have on private jets, and the limousine they have, who are more interested in giving access to the less privileged that come near them and impact them. If we have all these people who are so privileged doing a little here, 500 here or 1000 there, life will become meaningful. Let us do our own little bit. Yes, it is difficult, it is challenging, if I remove my shirt and you see the scars on my back, you will read my book and you will find that I didn't drop from heaven. I paid my dues, and so I have every reason to be selfish. But I said no because we are in transit. If you don't do something good or leave it better than you met it, then you have failed in your sojourn.

See concluding part on www.thisdaylive.com

Sunday, February 7, 2021

FY:2020 Capital Importation Report: Foreign Investment Dips to a 3-year Low

FY:2020 Capital Importation Report: Foreign Investment Dips to a 3-year Low

For FY:2020, total capital importation contracted by 59.7% y/y to \$9.7bn from \$23.9bn in 2019. The disaggregated full year data shows that Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) was the largest source of capital import at \$5.1bn in FY:2020. Notwithstanding, FPI declined 68.6% y/y to reach the weakest level since 2017. We attribute the weakness in FPI inflows to the bleak external conditions and Nigeria's currency crisis which reduced investors' participation. Also, capital import from Other Investments declined 47.5% y/y to \$3.5bn from \$6.7bn, weakened by the 49.2% y/y contraction in capital import from Loans. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows was the only bright spot as it increased 10.1% y/y, though still below 2014 level. We believe FDI weakness reflects the volatile macroeconomic environment and weak medium to long-term economic prospects. Going

forward, we expect foreign investment to remain weak due to the weak prospects of an improvement in the external environment and the currency challenges.

For Q4:2020, total capital imported into Nigeria dropped 71.9% y/y and 26.8% q/q to \$1.0bn, same level as recorded in Q2:2016. The q/q decline was across all the key components of the total imported capital excluding Other Investments which rose 22.5% q/q to \$783.3m (-52.9% y/y). FPI recorded the worst contraction on record, down 91.4% q/q and 98.1% y/y to \$35.2m. FDI was down 39.4% q/q and 2.3% y/y, with equity flows accounting for 99.0%. The decline in capital importation is mainly attributed to the heightened risks brought by the COVID-19 which resulted in weak sentiment in emerging markets and foreign capital outflows.

Similar to the case in 2016, the introduction of capital controls amid FX illiquidity has left foreign investors stuck in the market and made Nigeria less attractive as an investment desti-

nation. The wide premium between exchange rates at the parallel market and the I&E window also suggests a mispricing of the currency, which makes investors and businesses reluctant to bring in capital.

Global Equities Market: Renewed Optimism Anchored on Increased Vaccine Distribution

At the end of the week, the number of COVID-19 cases rose 3.0% to 104.2 million while total death toll increased by 3.7% to 2.3 million globally. The US (26.2 million), India (10.8 million) and Brazil (9.3 million) remain the major epicenter of the virus. However, there is renewed optimism in the global economy due to an increase in vaccine distribution. According to Bloomberg tracker, over 119 million doses have been administered across 67 countries with the US leading with 36.7 million doses, 11.2 doses administered for every 100 people. Meanwhile, the US \$1.9tn pandemic relief package received the support of the house leaders and the Senate after a meeting with the president on Friday.

The developed markets under our coverage recorded a positive performance as all indices closed northward. The US S&P 500 and NASDAQ indices rose 4.7% and 5.4% w/w respectively following progress in vaccine distribution and optimism regarding relief package. In the Euro Area, UK's FTSE All-Share, France's CAC 40 and Germany's XETRA DAX indices gained 1.9%, 4.9% and 4.7% w/w respectively following a gradual administration of vaccines. Likewise, Hong Kong's Hang Seng and Japan's Nikkei 225 indices rose 3.6% and 4.0% w/w respectively to close the week.

Similar to developed markets, markets across the BRICS region posted a bullish performance as all indices closed in the green. India's BSE Sens led gainers, advancing 9.6% w/w due to enthusiasm about economic recovery. Trailing, Brazil's Ibovespa and Russia's RTS rose 4.7% and 4.4% w/w respectively. Likewise, South Africa's FTSE/JSE All Share index rose 3.1% w/w following the early procurement of vaccines. Lastly, China's Shanghai Composite index closed

THISDAY AFRINVEST 40 INDEX

Fundamental Performance Metrics for THISDAY AFRINVEST 40 Index

Ticker	Current Price	Previous Price Change	Current Weighting	Price Change YTD	Price Change Index to Date	ROE	ROA	P/E	P/BV	Dividend Yield	Earnings Yield
THISDAY AFRINVEST 40	1,867.94	0.02%		27.3%	86.8%	19.7%	3.8%	5.3x	0.5x	5.1%	7.7%
1 Airtel Africa PLC	930.00	0.0%	32.3%	9.2%	9.2%	7.9%	2.8%			1.3%	
2 BUA Cement Plc	79.00	0.0%	10.8%	2.1%	2.1%			37.9x	7.2x	2.3%	2.6%
3 Guaranty Trust Bank PLC	36.00	9.1%	9.8%	11.3%	11.3%	27.9%	4.7%	5.2x	1.4x	8.2%	19.2%
4 Zenith Bank PLC	26.00	-2.8%	6.7%	4.8%	4.8%	22.8%	3.1%	3.8x	0.8x	10.6%	26.6%
5 Dangote Cement PLC	230.00	0.0%	5.3%	-6.1%	-6.1%	30.8%	14.6%	15.4x	4.9x	7.0%	6.5%
6 MTN Nigeria Communications PLC	180.00	-0.6%	4.9%	5.9%	5.9%	189.4%	11.9%	18.6x	31.2x	3.8%	5.4%
7 Nestle Nigeria PLC	1,450.00	0.0%	3.6%	-3.7%	-3.7%	83.0%	20.5%	28.2x	27.5x	4.8%	3.5%
8 Lafarge Africa PLC	26.65	-3.6%	4.0%	26.6%	26.6%	6.5%	4.6%	18.5x	1.2x	3.7%	5.4%
9 Access Bank PLC	8.55	-3.9%	2.7%	1.2%	1.2%	16.8%	1.5%	2.8x	0.4x	7.6%	36.1%
10 United Bank for Africa PLC	8.45	-3.4%	2.5%	-2.3%	-2.3%	13.9%	1.3%	3.6x	0.5x	11.4%	27.9%
11 FBN Holdings Plc	7.25	-1.4%	2.3%	1.4%	1.4%	11.2%	1.1%	4.0x	0.3x	5.2%	24.7%
12 Nigerian Breweries PLC	61.00	0.0%	2.1%	8.9%	8.9%	6.6%	2.5%	45.2x	3.0x	3.0%	2.2%
13 Stanbic IBTC Holdings PLC	45.00	0.0%	1.9%	2.2%	2.2%	24.3%	3.7%	6.0x	1.3x	5.3%	16.7%
14 International Breweries PLC	6.20	-3.1%	1.5%	4.2%	4.2%				1.1x		-28.0%
15 Flour Mills of Nigeria PLC	31.45	-1.7%	1.2%	21.0%	21.0%				0.8x	4.5%	
16 SEPLAT Petroleum Development C	495.00	0.0%	1.2%	23.0%	23.0%	-0.3%	-0.2%		0.4x	7.4%	-2.8%
17 11 PLC	228.00	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	16.4%	7.6%	12.4x	1.9x	3.8%	8.1%
18 Okomu Oil Palm PLC	93.00	0.0%	0.8%	2.2%	2.2%	24.6%	16.0%	11.3x	2.6x		8.9%
19 Fidelity Bank PLC	2.50	-4.2%	0.7%	-0.8%	-0.8%	10.5%	1.1%	2.7x	0.3x	7.9%	36.7%
20 Ecobank Transnational Inc	6.00	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	46.4x	0.3x		2.2%
21 Dangote Sugar Refinery PLC	20.00	-4.8%	0.6%	13.6%	13.6%	30.8%	15.6%	7.1x	2.0x	5.5%	14.1%
22 FCMB Group Plc	3.20	-8.6%	0.5%	-3.9%	-3.9%	10.3%	1.2%	3.0x	0.1x	4.3%	32.9%
23 Sterling Bank PLC	1.85	-1.1%	0.3%	-9.3%	-9.3%	9.2%	0.9%	4.6x	0.4x	1.6%	21.9%
24 NASCON Allied Industries PLC	16.20	0.0%	0.4%	11.7%	11.7%	18.4%	5.8%	10.6x	3.5x	2.5%	9.5%
25 Transnational Corp of Nigeria	1.00	0.0%	0.4%	11.1%	11.1%	-3.5%	-0.8%		0.6x	1.0%	-5.8%
26 Presco PLC	75.00	0.0%	0.3%	5.7%	5.7%	18.5%	7.7%	10.7x	2.4x	2.7%	9.4%
27 Unilever Nigeria PLC	14.60	0.0%	0.2%	5.0%	5.0%	-2.4%	-1.6%		1.3x		-1.9%
28 PZ Cussons Nigeria PLC	5.65	0.0%	0.2%	6.6%	6.6%	-12.2%	-5.6%		0.7x	1.8%	-156.4%
29 United Capital PLC	5.74	-0.3%	0.2%	21.9%	21.9%	85.7%	8.7%	2.2x	1.7x	8.8%	45.7%
30 Guinness Nigeria PLC	19.00	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	-17.8%	-9.0%		0.6x		-34.1%
31 Custodian and Allied Insurance	6.00	0.0%	0.2%	2.6%	2.6%	13.9%	4.8%	5.6x	0.8x	7.5%	17.9%
32 AllCO Insurance PLC	1.21	-5.5%	0.2%	7.1%	7.1%	21.4%	3.3%	2.7x	0.5x		36.8%
33 Total Nigeria PLC	142.00	-0.7%	0.2%	9.2%	9.2%			21.5x		4.7%	4.7%
34 Julius Berger Nigeria PLC	19.70	0.0%	0.1%	10.7%	10.7%	3.2%	0.4%	7.3x	0.7x	8.5%	13.6%
35 Wema Bank PLC	0.69	-1.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	0.5%	4.0x	0.5x	5.8%	24.9%
36 Union Bank of Nigeria PLC		0.0%	0.0%		-100.0%			6.8x		4.3%	14.7%
37 Oando PLC	2.98	-0.7%	0.1%	-19.5%	-19.5%	14.5%	2.6%	1.3x	0.2x		77.9%
38 Notore Chemical Industries Ltd	62.50	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	-29.7%	-8.5%		1.8x		-18.4%
39 Beta Glass PLC	55.40	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	10.3%	7.2%	7.8x	0.8x	3.1%	12.8%
40 Transcorp Hotels Plc	3.25	-9.7%	0.0%	-9.7%	-9.7%					2.2%	-28.4%



higher by 0.4%.

In the African region, performance was mixed as 3 of the 6 indices under our coverage closed in the red. The Nigeria All-Share index led laggards, down 1.7% w/w. Similarly, Kenya's NSE 20 and Mauritius' SEMDEX indices lost 0.8% and 0.3% w/w respectively. Conversely, Ghana's Composite index led gainers, up 1.4% w/w following a \$1.2bn trade deal with UK worth. Likewise, Morocco's Casablanca MASI and Egypt's EGX 30 indices rose 0.7% and 0.2% w/w respectively.

Performance across the Asian and Middle East markets under our coverage was mixed albeit positively skewed as 3 of 5 indices closed northward. Turkey's BIST 100 index gained the most, up 4.0% w/w. Similarly, Thailand's SET and UAE's ADX General indices rose 2.0% and 0.4% w/w respectively. On the flip side, Saudi Arabia's Tadawul All Share and Qatar's DSM 220 indices fell 2.1% and 1.1% w/w respectively.

Domestic Equities Market: The Bears Had It All... ASI down 1.7% w/w

The equities market reversed last week's bullish momentum with sell-offs dominating trades all week. As a result, the All-Share index fell 1.7% w/w to 41,709.09 points. Market capitalisation fell by \$368.0bn to \$21.8tn while YTD return declined to 3.6%. Activity level improved as average volume and value traded rose 7.4% and 6.4% to 551.9m units and \$5.9bn respectively. The most traded stocks by volume were **UBN** (313.1m units), **FBNH** (219.6m units) and **TRANSCORP** (199.7m units) while **GUARANTY** (\$6.1bn), **ZENITH** (\$3.5bn) and **UBN** (\$1.8bn) led by value.

Performance across sectors was lacklustre as all indices under our coverage declined w/w. The Insurance index lost the most, down 6.0% w/w due to price declines in **LINKASSURE** (-33.3%) and **AIICO** (-13.6%). Similarly, the Consumer Goods and Banking indices recorded losses of 3.2% and 2.3% w/w respectively due to sell-offs in **NNFM** (-10.6%), **FLOURMILL** (-9.4%), **FIDELITY** (-8.1%), and **ACCESS** (-8.1%). The Industrial Goods and AFR-ICT indices also declined 2.1% and 0.3% w/w respectively as **DANGCEM** (-2.5%), **WAPCO** (-11.2%), and **CHAMS** (-7.7%) ticked lower. Lastly, sell-offs in **OANDO** (-9.1%) drove the Oil & Gas index lower by

0.2%.

Investor sentiment as measured by market breadth (advance/decline ratio) weakened to 0.2x from 1.4x last week as 17 stocks gained against the 59 that declined. **ETERNA** (+10.6%), **NCR** (+9.9%) and **MULTIVERSE** (+9.1%) led the top gainers while **LINKASSURE** (-33.3%), **AIICO** (-13.6%) and **JBERGER** (-13.0%) led the decliners. We expect trading sessions to be a mix of bargain hunting and sustained profit-taking activities. The direction of yields in the fixed income market would also influence trades especially given the increase in marginal rates at the OMO auction this week.

Foreign Exchange Market: Oil Prices Improve as OPEC+ Maintains Production Cut

Oil prices inched higher by 8.2% w/w to \$59.55/bbl this week, the highest since February 2020 as OPEC+ maintained its stance on production cuts at its February meeting. On the domestic front, the external reserves declined marginally by 0.9% w/w to \$36.2bn (01/02/2021) as the FG repaid the maturing Eurobond instrument.

The domestic currency traded flat at the CBN spot market and the parallel market at \$379/\$1.00 and \$480/\$1.00 respectively. At the Investors' & Exporters' (I&E) Window, naira depreciated \$2.04 to \$394.17/\$1.00. Activity

level in I&E Window declined by 20.4% to \$224.5m from \$281.9m recorded in the previous week.

The total value of open contracts of the naira at the FMDQ Securities Exchange (SE) FX Futures Contract Market increased 2.1% (\$150.1m) to \$7.3bn. The FEB 2022 instrument (contract price: \$452.82) received the highest subscription of \$6.4m which took total value to \$13.9m. On the other hand, the MARCH 2021 instrument (contract price: \$418.15) recorded the least subscription worth \$2.0m with a total value of \$1.7bn. We expect the exchange rates to remain range-bound at the various markets in the coming week.

Money Market: Secondary T-bills Market Records a Weak Performance

OBB and OVN rates opened the week at 10.0% and 10.3% respectively from last week's close of 10.5% and 11.0% despite a decline in system liquidity to \$107.0bn. On Tuesday, OBB and OVN rates lowered to 9.5% and 9.7% respectively as system liquidity rose to \$214.0bn following inflows from OMO maturities worth \$147.6bn. By the close of the week, OBB and OVN rates printed at 17.5% and 18.0% respectively as system liquidity settled at \$504.2bn.

The CBN conducted OMO sales worth \$71.7bn on Thursday, \$28.3bn lower

than amount on offer. Demand was strong across broad with bid-to-cover ratios of 1.7x, 1.1x and 1.0x for the 89, 180 and 364-day instruments respectively. Surprisingly, we saw an increase in stop rates to 7.0%, 8.5% and 10.1% (vs 1.5%, 4.3% and 5.7% in the previous auction) for the 89-day, 180-day and 362-day instruments respectively.

In the secondary T-bills market, performance was weak as average yield climbed 29bps w/w to 1.2%. Yield on the 91 and 182-day instruments was flat w/w while the 364-day instrument saw sell-offs as yield rose 87bps w/w. In the coming week, we expect maturities worth \$213.9bn and \$169.8bn from the OMO and T-bills markets. As such, we expect liquidity mop-up.

Bond Market: Bullish Outing across Bond Markets

The domestic bond market ended the week positive as average yield declined 5bps w/w to 8.0%. Yield declined on all trading sessions save on Friday (up 9bps). Across tenors, the short-term bond saw sell-offs as yield rose 5bps while the medium and long-term bonds saw strong demand following an 11bps and 6bps drop in yield w/w respectively.

In the SSA Eurobonds market, there was a bullish outing resulting in a 51bps decline in average yield w/w to 8.3%. The Kenyan 2028 and Nigerian 2023 instruments saw the most demand as yield fell 37bps and 30bps w/w respectively. On the flip side, the yield on the Ghanaian and Zambian 2022 instruments rose 285bps and 105bps w/w respectively.

Across the African Corporate Eurobonds market under our coverage, there was an uptick in performance as average yield dipped 8bps w/w to 4.0%. The UBA 2022 instrument saw high demand which pushed yield lower by 32bps w/w. Conversely, there were sell-offs in ECOBANK 2024 and SEPLAT 2023 instruments as yields climbed 22bps and 18bps w/w respectively. In the coming week, we expect to see a sustained bullish outing in the bond markets as investors seek higher yield.

Top 10 Outperforming Stocks for the Week

Ticker	Closing Price	Previous Week's Close	W-o-W Return	MTD Return	YTD Return	P/E Ratio	P/BV Ratio	P/S Ratio
1 ETERNA	5.75	5.2	10.6%	10.6%	12.7%	55.2x	0.6x	0.1x
2 NCR	3.43	3.12	9.9%	9.9%	75.0%	2.3x		0.1x
3 MULTIVER	0.24	0.22	9.1%	9.1%	20.0%		2.9x	
4 UNITYBNK	0.73	0.67	9.0%	9.0%	14.1%	2.5x		0.2x
5 MRSOIL	13.4	12.3	8.9%	8.9%	-2.5%		0.2x	0.1x
6 UNILEVER	14.6	13.5	8.1%	8.1%	5.0%		1.3x	1.4x
7 ETRAN	2.5	2.33	7.3%	7.3%	7.3%			0.5x
8 JOHNHOLT	0.5	0.47	6.4%	6.4%	-2.0%		0.1x	0.1x
9 WAPIC	0.57	0.54	5.6%	5.6%	42.5%	22.3x	0.6x	0.8x
10 MAYBAKER	4.9	4.65	5.4%	5.4%	39.6%	9.1x	1.4x	1.0x

Top 10 Underperforming Stocks for the Week

Ticker	Closing Price	Previous Week's Close	W-o-W Return	MTD Return	YTD Return	P/E Ratio	P/BV Ratio	P/S Ratio
1 LINKASSU	0.6	0.9	-33.3%	-33.3%	15.4%	3.1x		
2 AIICO	1.21	1.4	-13.6%	-13.6%	7.1%	2.7x	0.5x	0.2x
3 JBERGER	19.7	22.65	-13.0%	-13.0%	10.7%	7.3x	0.7x	0.1x
4 REGALINS	0.3	0.34	-11.8%	-11.8%	36.4%	3.1x	0.3x	0.4x
5 MBENEFIT	0.38	0.43	-11.6%	-11.6%	40.7%	1.4x	0.2x	0.2x
6 WAPCO	26.65	30	-11.2%	-11.2%	26.6%	18.5x	1.2x	1.9x
7 CHAMPION	2.77	3.11	-10.9%	-10.9%	222.1%		2.7x	3.1x
8 UACPROP	0.75	0.84	-10.7%	-10.7%	-5.1%		1.0x	3.4x
9 NNFM	8.65	9.68	-10.6%	-10.6%	28.3%	4.7x	0.6x	0.1x
10 VITAFOAM	9	10.05	-10.4%	-10.4%	15.4%	3.0x	1.2x	0.4x

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Union Diagnostics & Clinical Services Posts N637m Loss in 2020

Goddy Egene

Union Diagnostics and Clinical

Services Plc has reported a loss of N637 million for the year ended December 31, 2020, as against a profit of N62.199 million in 2019. The company, which is

on the verge of exiting the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE), recorded a revenue of N1.402 billion in 2020, up from N1.349 billion. Finance cost jumped from N4.949 million to N126 million, while it ended with N637 million loss.

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 will 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 04-Feb-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.



DAILY PRICE LIST FOR MUTUAL FUNDS, REITS and ETFs

MUTUAL FUNDS / UNIT TRUSTS			
AFRINVEST ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD aaml@afriinvest.com			
Web: www.afriinvest.com; Tel: +234 818 885 6757			
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	1.07	1.09	19.15%
ACAP Income Funds	0.63	0.63	-13.46%
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	100.00	100.00	0.31%
AIICO Balanced Fund	3.56	3.71	0.03%
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	0.54%
Anchoria Equity Fund	137.32	138.13	2.61%
Anchoria Fixed Income Fund	1.20	1.20	-10.83%
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	18.96	19.53	4.52%
ARM Discovery Balanced Fund	400.67	412.75	0.08%
ARM Ethical Fund	35.61	36.68	5.64%
ARM Eurobond Fund (\$)	1.22	1.23	0.30%
ARM Fixed Income Fund	1.08	1.08	-3.72%
ARM Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	0.36%
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	132.58	133.51	5.08%
AXA Mansard Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	1.30%
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	2.09	2.09	-33.62%
Capital Express Balanced Fund(Formerly: Union Trustees Mixed Fund)	2.27	2.32	12.84%
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	1.92%
Paramount Equity Fund	16.87	17.19	5.51%
Women's Investment Fund	137.35	138.96	3.22%
CORDROS ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED assetmgteam@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	1.25%
Cordros Milestone Fund 2023	133.68	134.58	
Cordros Milestone Fund 2028	N/A	N/A	
Cordros Dollar Fund (\$)	108.55	108.55	
CORONATION ASSET 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	1.44%
Coronation Balanced Fund	1.19	1.21	-0.62%
Coronation Fixed Income Fund	1.56	1.56	-1.62%
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	1.04%
EDC Nigeria Money Market Fund Class B	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00	1.07%
EDC Nigeria Fixed Income Fund	1,185.95	1,187.60	-1.23%
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	1,358.64	1,358.65	-2.91%
FBN Balanced Fund	189.31	190.73	0.87%
FBN Halal Fund	110.76	110.76	-0.69%
FBN Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	1.01%
FBN Nigeria Eurobond (USD) Fund - Institutional	123.57	123.57	1.63%
FBN Nigeria Eurobond (USD) Fund - Retail	123.71	123.71	1.62%
FBN Smart Beta Equity Fund	156.66	158.78	3.62%
FCMB ASSET MANAGEMENT LIMITED fcbamhelpdesk@fcbm.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 Growth Fund	3,906.43	3,954.84	3.97%
Coral Income Fund	3,323.30	3,323.30	1.75%
FSDH Treasury Bills Fund	100.00	100.00	2.99%
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	100.00	100.00	0.60%
Nigeria Entertainment Fund	129.07	129.60	20.02%

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	0.19%
Vantage Balanced Fund	2.83	2.90	-1.92%
Vantage Guaranteed Income Fund	1.00	1.00	4.50%
Kedari Investment Fund (KIF)	155.78	156.30	0.26%
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	1.46	1.48	1.38%
Lotus Halal Fixed Income Fund	1,131.74	1,131.74	0.79%
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	N/A	N/A	N/A
Meristem Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
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	1.67	1.70	8.21%
PACAM Fixed Income Fund	12.19	12.31	8.64%
PACAM Money Market Fund	10.00	10.00	1.50%
PACAM Equity Fund	1.69	1.71	
PACAM EuroBond Fund	108.84	111.38	
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	135.88	138.93	12.85%
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	0.65%
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	2,521.35	2,532.80	1.18%
Stanbic IBTC Bond Fund	210.33	210.33	0.36%
Stanbic IBTC Ethical Fund	0.88	0.89	2.54%
Stanbic IBTC Guaranteed Investment Fund	273.87	273.95	0.43%
Stanbic IBTC Iman Fund	154.92	156.64	1.42%
Stanbic IBTC Money Market Fund	100.00	100.00	0.28%
Stanbic IBTC Nigerian Equity Fund	7,674.15	7,756.30	0.56%
Stanbic IBTC Dollar Fund (USD)	1.23	1.23	0.51%
Stanbic IBTC Shariah Fixed Income Fund	111.46	111.46	0.34%
UNITED CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT LTD www.unitedcapitalplcgroup.com; Tel: +234 803 306 2887			
Fund Name	Bid Price	Offer Price	Yield / T-Rtn
United Capital Balanced Fund	1.43	1.46	4.74%
United Capital Bond Fund	1.90	1.90	0.57%
United Capital Equity Fund	0.91	0.94	5.35%
United Capital Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	1.63%
United Capital Eurobond Fund	117.72	117.72	0.54%
United Capital Wealth for Women Fund	1.10	1.12	1.53%
United Capital Sukuk Fund	1.02	1.02	1.80%
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	12.56	12.69	5.93%
Zenith Ethical Fund	13.90	14.02	13.77%
Zenith Income Fund	24.13	24.13	0.67%
Zenith Money Market Fund	1.00	1.00	1.94%
REITS			
Fund Name	NAV Per Share	Yield / T-Rtn	
SFS Skye Shelter Fund	121.32	0.48%	
Union Homes REIT	52.52	0.23%	
EXCHANGE TRADED FUNDS			
Fund Name	Bid Price	Offer Price	Yield / T-Rtn
Lotus Halal Equity Exchange Traded Fund	13.41	13.51	1.47%
SIAML Pension ETF 40	126.93	126.93	4.26%
Stanbic IBTC ETF 30 Fund	100.88	102.78	1.53%
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	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vetiva Consumer Goods Exchange Traded Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vetiva Griffin 30 Exchange Traded Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vetiva Money Market Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vetiva Industrial Goods Exchange Traded Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
Vetiva S&P Nigeria Sovereign Bond Exchange Traded Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A
INFRASTRUCTURE FUND			
Fund Name	NAV Per Share	Yield / T-Rtn	
Chapel Hill Denham Nigeria Infrastructure Debt Fund	108.05	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.

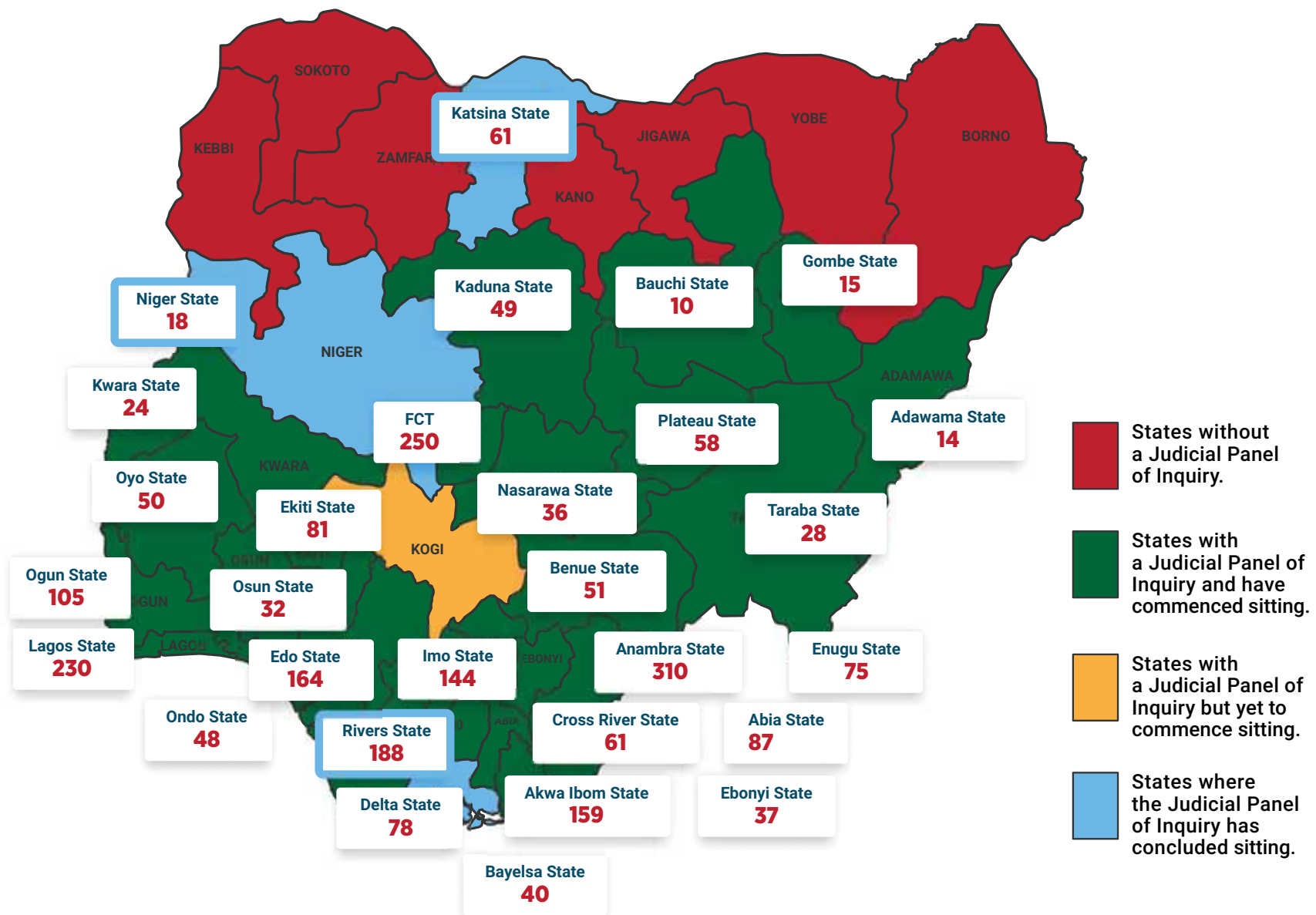
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Petitions Submitted at the #EndSARS Judicial Panels of Inquiry

as of January 30, 2021



Yiaga Africa and EiE Nigeria note and recommend the following:

■ Non-Establishment of Panels and Refusal to Commence Sittings:

The refusal to constitute Judicial Panels of Inquiry in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara States indicate a pattern of response that underlines the Nigerian government’s unwillingness to engage in meaningful security sector reform. We note the commencement of sitting at the Oyo State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, which began on January 26th, 2021, two months after its Inauguration. We recommend that the Panel does all in its power to efficiently carry out its duties, regardless of the time lapse. We also note that while the Judicial Panel of Inquiry was set up in Kogi State - the panel has not commenced sittings. Yiaga Africa and EiE recommend that the citizens with cases of police brutality in these states should continue to seek justice through the court system as well as petitions to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). We remain committed to supporting the rights of citizens to receive justice for human rights violations against them and their families.

■ Inconsistent Panel Sittings affect Completion of Panel’s Assignment:

As the Judicial Panels of Inquiry that have been set up in 29 States and the FCT sit and/or collect petitions, Yiaga Africa and Enough is Enough (EiE) Nigeria note the inconsistency in the sitting of the Panels in some states including Adamawa, Cross River, Gombe, Nasarawa and Taraba States largely due to ‘unforeseen circumstances’ among other reasons. We recommend that the Panels provide timely information to the petitioners, media, observers, civil society groups and security agencies in the event of the Panels inability to sit on its set dates. In the same vein, Yiaga Africa and EiE Nigeria note the silence of the panels in Abia State and the FCT. Anambra State panel cited logistics issues as the reason for a halt in panel sittings, but Abia State and the FCT have not stated the reason for the discontinued sitting of the panels. We recommend that Panels should remain consistent in their sittings, and be more open to the media in order to ensure transparent processes and timely completion of their duties.

■ Compensation for Victims of Police Brutality:

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) recently distributed ₦160 million to the families of the officers who were killed during last year’s nationwide protest against the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), of the Nigeria Police Force tagged #EndSARS. While we await the recommendations of the Panels, it is curious to note that compensation has been provided for families of police officers without recourse to the Panels while the families of victims of police brutality have to go through a long & difficult process to access justice. We recommend that the recommendations of the Panel for compensation for victims and their families should be paid immediately following the submission of the Panels reports.



#5for5 #EndSARS #EndPoliceBrutality

Data Source: Yiaga Africa

www.eienigeria.org

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www.yiaga.org



PERSPECTIVE/POLITY

Kofi Annan: I Remember Yesterday

Kingsley Moghalu

Searching for something on my mobile phone, I came across this photograph. It sent me into memory lane.

With a sense of loss I remember my mentor, friend and boss of all time, the great Kofi Annan, Nobel Laureate, former Secretary-General of the United Nations. Here we were after a very warm one-hour meeting at his office at the Kofi Annan Foundation in Geneva in January 2018, a few weeks before I announced my candidacy in Nigeria's 2019 presidential election. He strongly encouraged me to run for president, saying Africa needed a new generation of leaders.

We joked about how ageless he was, as I reminded him he hadn't changed one bit from our days. ...In the mid-1990s when he was my direct boss as Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and I was the Political Affairs Officer in the Africa Division handling conflict resolution and the rebuilding of failed states in then war-torn Rwanda, Angola and Somalia.

Kofi mentored me and had a soft spot for me as a rising young African UN officer in those days. He and I also happened to be residential neighbors on Roosevelt Island in New York. We often rode the tram together from the island over the river to 59th Street, and would hit the pavement on foot to our office at UN Headquarters (he hated driving and much preferred to walk - this was before he was elected Secretary-General and protocol required he had to be chauffeured!) We his staff all called him by his first name Kofi as he preferred but, again, when he became the Secretary-General, protocol forced us to adapt to "Mr. Secretary-General".

When rumors began to swirl that he was a strong possibility to replace the Egyptian Boutros-Boutros Ghali as SG, he seemed an unlikely candidate to the less informed. He was not a typical African politician or a Minister of Foreign Affairs as was the typical profile (in other words he did not have the diplomatic equivalent of "grassroots structure" but was more of a technocrat.) But I knew he was certain to win, for several reasons, not least of which was that times were changing, UN reform,



Annan and Moghalu

in which Annan as SG was later to offer me a significant role with an appointment as a member of the High Level Redesign Panel on the UN Internal Justice System in 2006, was the talk of the day. There was a yearning in some global powerful quarters for more of technocratic successor to reform the organization and solve practical problems than a strong politician like Boutros - Boutros Ghali.

The imperial "BBG" as the reigning Secretary-General was referred to, and who wanted a second term Washington increasingly seemed determined to veto, was quick to deliver a preemptive strike that was clearly intended to weaken Annan's chances. Boutros-Ghali attempted to "exile" Kofi

with an appointment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the Former Yugoslavia.

As often happens in life, what was intended for other reasons became a huge opportunity. First, the western powers prevailed on BBG to limit Annan's absence on this assignment to four months to ensure he returned to UNHQ in New York soon. But the assignment actually gave Annan massive hands-on international diplomatic exposure in a theatre of war in the Balkans, reputed to be "the graveyard of diplomats". He excelled. Operating in the close sight of the European nations and impressing them with his skills, Annan's potential candidacy became a fait accompli.

Immediately Annan arrived in Zagreb, Croatia, he sent a message that he wanted yours truly to be sent down from New York to Zagreb as his Special Assistant. I was thrilled and honored! But there was just one problem: my wife was pregnant with our first child and was very close to delivery. We did not have any help at home as such hired help was too expensive.

Forced to choose between this request and my wife, I chose my responsibility to my wife. I sent Annan a note thanking him for his kind invitation and what a privilege it was for me. But I was in a bind with my personal situation. He replied that he wasn't aware of my wife's pregnancy and if he had been, he would not have asked. I should stay and tend to my wife at a time like this, he said.

Years later when, after my assignment in Geneva at The Global Fund and later resigning from the UN to start my own risk management consulting firm in the same city, I was appointed Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, my cell phone rang one day at work. "Dr. Moghalu? The female European voice inquired. "Yes" I replied. "Please hold on for Mr. Kofi Annan from Geneva" she said (he had by now completed two terms as UN head and retired to Geneva, where he established the headquarters of the Kofi Annan Foundation.) "Congratulations, Kingsley", he told me, and offered some advice as I could feel his typical smile and twinkling eyes even over the phone.

Naturally, I wasn't going to do something as "heavy" as running to be elected President of Nigeria without consulting my boss, mentor and friend. On this day as we talked intimately in Geneva, he was as fit as a fiddle. A few months later, he was gone, aged 80.

Nostalgia overwhelms as I write. Adieu, Kofi Annan. A great world leader, a great African, a great son of Ghana. My boss of all bosses. I learnt much from you.

—Kingsley Moghalu is a former Deputy Governor of Nigeria and is the United Nations Development Program's Independent High Level Expert on Post-Covid Development Finance for Africa.

The Obaros: Court Exonerates UK-based Couple Falsely Accused of Corruption

Epa Stevens

A High Court sitting in the Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria, has cleared a UK renowned medical doctor, Dr. Reuben Olu Obaro, and his wife, Ayodele, of corruption charges, falsely levelled against them by the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). In a recent 33-page ruling on the 'No-Case Submission' submission, Justice A.O.

Ebong dismissed all the charges against the couple stating that the case was 'frivolous' and "unfair to the defendants, that a charge of this nature, unfounded in all ramifications, should have been brought against them."

ICPC had, in an eight-count charge, accused the prominent radiologist and his wife, a practising nurse in the UK, of misappropriating part of the funds provided as a seed grant by SURE-P to support the setting up of a specialist stroke management hospital in Nigeria. Like all major grants, contracts, and transactions that were awarded prior to the current political administration, the couple's project also became a subject of suspicion. Right from the beginning, questions abounded as to the real motive behind ICPC's investigation when the couple had just hit the ground running with this gigantic project - first of its kind in Nigeria.

ICPC however, commenced a two-year investigation followed by a full-blown trial, which dragged on for another two years. During the trial, indications began to emerge that the prosecution had withheld important information from the court to nail the couple at all cost. For instance, the ICPC Prosecutor had gone to extreme length to conceal the couple's personal significant financial commitment to the project by doctoring the bank statements presented as evidence. It was later established that the grant advanced had been used solely for the project, in addition to personal funds provided by the couple. Also, evidence unravelled during the trial indicates that neither the CEO (Dr Obaro), nor the COO (Mrs Obaro) had drawn any salaries from the project.

However, upon examining all the evidence and listening to all the witnesses against the defendants, Justice Ebong dismissed the case in totality, declaring that, "Having scaled through all the eight (8) counts of the charge, the three defendants are hereby discharged and acquitted."



Dr. Reuben Obaro and his wife, Ayodele

Dubbed the Stephen James Stroke Centre of Excellence, the awarded seed grant was to complement personal funds of the promoters for the development of a world-class specialist hospital for treating stroke patients and managing the rising incidence of stroke in the country and thereby reducing the number of persons travelling outside Nigeria to seek medical help. The project was designed to be built by funding from personal contributions, investors and both domestic and foreign loans with technical support well established abroad.

In setting up the project, the couple had leveraged on their extensive connections with overseas technical partners. According to Stroke Action Nigeria, stroke continues to affect about 200,000 people annually in the country. The successful setup of the stroke centre would not only have provided critical healthcare to thousands of stroke patients but would have also provided numerous jobs for Nigerians. Also, the centre would have contributed immensely to local capacity building by training personnel to manage the disease in Nigeria.

In his closing remarks during the judgement, which was delivered on the 21st of October 2020, the honourable justice reprimanded the prosecution for the potential damage this kind of frivolous trials have on the country and its citizens. "It is common knowledge that at various times the Federal Government has made efforts to rebuild the negative image of our nation in the international arena. This sort of dubious and frivolous attack on the character and reputation of citizens as exemplified in this trial, cannot aid that effort," said Justice Ebong, "I believe it is high time for our investigation and prosecuting agencies to have a rethink on how they go about exercising their mandates. They should refrain from exercising their powers in a manner that inflicts on the citizens, what could only be described as malicious damage."

The court also ordered that the land documents and funds arbitrarily seized from the couple by the ICPC during the investigation, should be returned. However, as at the time of writing this report, the prosecuting agency has not obeyed that order.

Reacting to the judgement, lead defence counsel, J.N. Ekwuonwu (SAN), expressed his delight that the innocent couple has finally been exonerated and vindicated after being subjected to two years of sheer horror. According to him, "this ruling shows that justice is still being served in Nigeria. I congratulate Dr Obaro and his hardworking wife, who were planning to support the healthcare system in Nigeria with a laudable initiative, but instead had a harrowing two years defending themselves against frivolous and baseless charges. Hopefully, their travails will not discourage other well-meaning Nigerians in the Diaspora, that have plans to help develop the nation."

Together, the couple run MACT-BRIDGE THE GAP, a family funded charity registered with the Charity Commission, UK. Through their charity, Dr and Mrs Obaro have run medical missions across Nigeria, sent medical equipment to medical facilities, books and computers to schools and awarded scholarships as well as supported orphanages over the years. Sources have it that the couple is presently part of a volunteer group building a multi-million-naira Hospital project in Dr Obaro's hometown- Aiyetoro-Gbede, Kogi State that will not only benefit his people but the whole of Kogi State.

—J.N. Ekwuonwu, SAN & Co., Plot 822 Durumi District, FCT- Abuja. Email: ekeomajames@gmail.com

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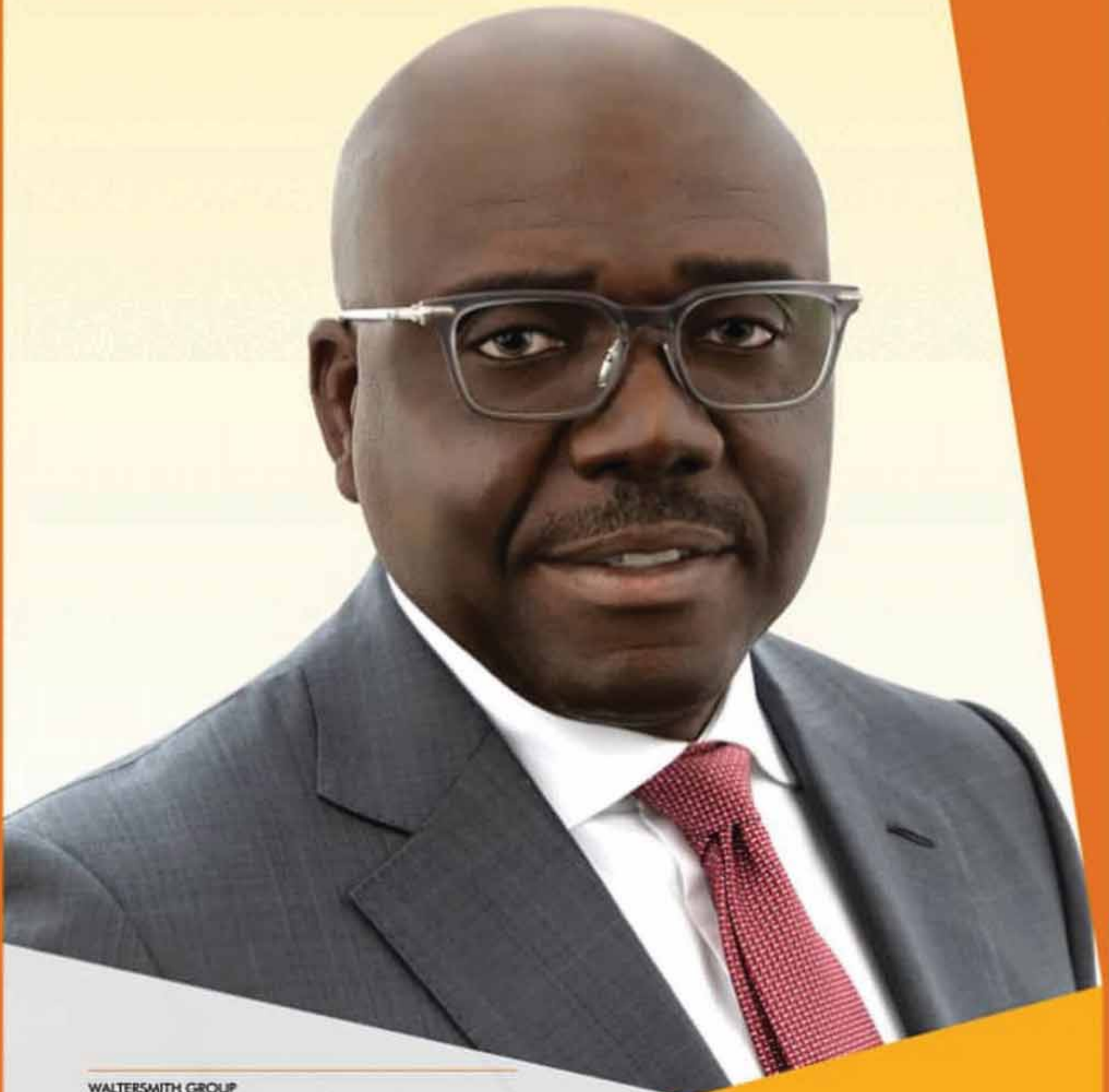
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GLITTERATI

A THIS DAY WEEKLY PULL-OUT

07.2.2021

TITILOLA ADEDEJI

Pushing
Ahead with
Passion,
Patience and
Possibilities



She is smart, intelligent, and beautiful. Her sharp and robust outlook to everything and anything attests to a young lady imbued with confidence and intelligence. Titilola Adedeji, General Manager of Amber Energy Drink, is a dynamic business growth expert with over 10 years' experience, but her approach to business as an entrepreneur is remarkable and exceptional as she constantly works with the mindset of a shrewd businesswoman. Young and forward-looking, **Funke Olaode** unveils

ASSISTANT EDITOR OLUFUNKE OLAODE/funkola2000@gmail.com

COVER

TITILOLA ADEDEJI

A Visionary Amazon with an Entrepreneurial Spirit



Adedeji

Her office looks simple and there is nothing extraordinary about the occupant. Looking smart but unassuming in a cream jumpsuit with matching jewellery, it was her birthday. Her numerous staff arranged a surprise birthday moment for a boss in whom they are well-pleased. Speechless, she managed to say: "I was actually surprised, very surprised because I didn't expect it. In fact, I was going to sneak into my office. And then all of them did so many nice things. So, I am very thankful."

Titilola, as she is fondly called, is a dynamic business growth expert with over 10 years' experience in negotiations, building successful business models, manufacturing, international procurement, and providing exceptional customer experiences. In addition, she loves to build businesses, build people and experience beautiful places.

Visionary, daring, and focused, prior to her foray into the corporate world, Titilola had experimented with her intellectual ability in different dimensions or better put had demonstrated her leadership qualities. At 16, she became the headteacher of a school. As shocking as it may sound, Titilola always exudes an enduring sense of modesty.

"It's nice to hear people say it but for me, I don't take the praises or let it get to me. I was headteacher. I had to be the headteacher. So, I couldn't afford to be a 16-year-old. I had to be Miss Lola and I just dealt with it."

Today, the Amazon has since quit the classroom to conquer new terrains. She wears many caps as founder and CEO, Tielle Global Limited, Curllla Enterprise Limited, and general manager, Amber Energy Drinks, but that was after acquiring various degrees and certificates from universities that cut across continents. Her flame of intellectualism was first ignited at

Canterbury Christ Church University, the United Kingdom where she read Events Management, University of Cape Coast, Ghana where she earned another degree in Business Management Studies, Queens College, Yaba, Lagos, for her secondary education. She believed in self-development which is her watchword as she continues to follow her passion and heart.

For her professional education, she studied Leadership Essentials from IMD, Switzerland, and Disruptive Strategy from Harvard Business School. Outside academics, she also earned two certificates in vocational education in make-up application from Elite Pro, Spain, and Introduction to Cosmetology from Beauty Base, London, United Kingdom. But in all of this, the Adedejis wanted their daughter to be a lawyer.

"My parents wanted me to be a maritime lawyer. But today, I am a corporate woman doing my own thing. I remember when my parents drummed it into my head that I was going to be a maritime lawyer. And that was when I rebelled. That's how I studied event management and cosmetology in England. My late father, Dr. Michael Abiodun Adedeji, was a man that understood individuality. So, he would look at his kids and advised what he liked them to study. But because I rebelled in England, he decided to send me to Ghana to do a second degree."

Titilola added, "I'm thankful for those experiences because I was able to meet different types of people. It helps you understand how people think, away from what you think you know. As you go along, and you're able to mix in different walks of life, or with different people from different backgrounds, you're able to understand there's life beyond your bubble. Going to Ghana just made me sit up because I didn't want to do a second degree in the first place, I already had a first degree."

"But then I decided, okay, just focus. I was able to focus and get through that degree as well. It also helped me understand that there is a wide gap in every country. For instance, the school in England is different from the way school was in Ghana. Because I went to one of the best schools in Ghana, and so the quality of education, I feel like I was blessed to be able to experience all of that."

With her comfortable life, Titilola is not ready to lay back as she keeps pushing herself, the drive she says she got from her late dad.

"I think I got that drive from my dad: even if he might say, you know, you got it on your own. But I remember when I was 16, I said to my dad, I don't want any of your money and my mom was livid. But I figured he had a good background as well but he was unfortunate because his dad passed on earlier. So, he was pushed to make something of himself and that fascinated me. I decided, okay, I want to do something for myself away from dad's money. So yes, that's what keeps pushing me."

Last June, Titilola entered the Nigerian market with a bang with the introduction of Amber Energy Drink. Her vision is simple: to become a household name in Nigeria's energy drink market and Africa while her mission statement is to build a brilliant Pan-African brand that inspires greatness, energises, and creates every happy moment.

"Amber is like, my baby," she enthused. "I would say it's a passion project and also a child I am nurturing."

Did she conceive the idea?

"It is was jointly conceived by myself as the CEO. It was also his baby but then I had the idea. I loved it. It became almost like a passion project. It's one that helps us harness the beauty in Nigeria. We don't believe so much in ourselves. But we believe in imported things. Whatever it is, even if it is rubbish, as long as it is imported, it is fine. The idea was to let you see the potential of Nigeria in the quality of what we produce strictly for Nigerians by Nigerians. Amber is special. It is packed with vitamins and minerals that help nourishes your body as it vitalizes your body and it is non-alcoholic.

That's the base of Amber and that's what gives us the confidence that Amber is here to stay."

Hard work, honesty, profitability, and accountability are some of the impetus Titilola brings to the table as the general manager of the newly established energy drink. With the establishment of Amber in an already saturated market, Titilola and her team dared the established products.

"Some of the key things I say to myself is that impossible is nothing. Nothing is impossible and I am very fearless. I feel like if you focus on your profit, you will drive out the noise. Most times, everything is noise. If you don't know your focus, you fall into the noise. We just decided to focus on what it is we wanted to do. It's paying off. We are doing very well. Amber is a legacy drink so it's here for a long time, it is a lifetime."

Within the spate of seven months, Amber is already making a mark, touching lives through various corporate social responsibility by establishing Amber Empowerment Scheme with a view to improving the standard of living of Nigerians, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. What informed the decision and how far has she gone?

"One thing I will say, again and again, is, a rich man is not rich unless everyone around him is rich. The idea is to ensure that as many Nigerians as you can help, to get to their potential, we will. How? I mean, getting the business is a very lucrative business, and you will make a lot of profit. But also, at the beginning of the programme, we spend time with you, talking to you about how you can make this work and that kind of open your mind. So far, we've reached out to over 4,000 people, and we've been empowering them as we go along. We empower them in batches. But note that this is going to be a long-term project. It is going to be here for a long time," she explained.

The target audience are people who lost their jobs; people who are upwardly mobile but cannot afford to start a business. They can be graduates and non-graduates but they must have a passion and a drive. Speaking further on another exciting programme tagged, Ride with Amber, she stated, "That was so exciting. When we launched, we realized that there is a lot of hardship, especially because the pandemic has stopped a lot of people from working. And the basic need, like getting on a bus to work was a challenge for a lot of people."

"What Amber did was that we tell you to buy a can of Amber, and then we'll pay for your ride home. What we were able to do was get people to nourish their body after work. This is a passion for me. I have a passion for people. Away from what I do, I love people and I love empowering people. That's basically my passion. So whatever businesses I have or setup is always geared towards empowering people and providing a need for people."

Titilola believes as a woman one can break the glass ceiling if one can discover herself. She gives some tips.

"I feel women need to first understand who they are and in whatever position you find yourself you must always be humble. The thing with a lot of people is that they let the praises get to them, and they become what they are not. If you are able to just adjust and make sure that you don't let the praises or the abuses or whatever it is get to you, you'll be level headed. Then, make sure you don't short-change yourself."

"There's no need for it. God created you because he wanted you to shine. Make sure you find your feet where they ought to be and be very prayerful. I am very prayerful and I love God. Then, do what you're supposed to do and be focused. Yes, I am a woman who can realise her potential. Women are making waves globally. Only recently, history was made in the United States of America when a woman was sworn in as vice president. It has never happened before in that country. A few key things I'll always say is that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Right? As long as you are fearless, you can achieve everything. Also be prepared by equipping yourself, by developing yourself. Again, the God factor. He's very important. So, for me, I feel like I can do everything and anything because I have my confidence in God. So that has helped me my career trajectory," she stated.

GLITZ FOCUS

Lagos Motor Boat Club: The Unending Saga

At the heart of the crisis that has engulfed the Lagos Motor Boat Club are the suspension of Jide Coker who was vying to be a trustee of the club; the unilateral deletion of his name by one of the oldest members, Trustee Francis Awogboro; the suspension of Senator Tokunbo Ogunbanjo and the contentious roles of frontline members like Yinka Akinkugbe, Ladi Ajose-Adeogun, Demola Akinrele, Eyimofe Atake, and a host of others. In this article, **LANRE ALFRED** examines the grievances, involvement, or otherwise of each figure, and the way forward.

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK

More facts have emerged on the actual causes of the crisis engulfing the elitist Lagos Motor Boat Club, at the heart of which is the suspension of Jide Coker, a committee member, from contesting in the last election to be a Trustee. Members of the board of trustees who are called trustees are viewed as the club's patriarchs and its symbols of order, discipline, and authority.

In a letter to the secretary of the club dated January 11, and titled, State of Affairs in the Club, Ladi Ajose-Adeogun, an ex-commodore, who showed interest in being a Trustee, lampooned Demola Akinrele, SAN's letter titled 'Comedy of Errors', stating that rather than respond constructively as should be expected of a long-standing member and a past Commodore to boot, "(He) chose to use his article to assassinate the characters of several members including myself."

He added that he had decided not to join issues with Akinrele as it would not be productive but requested that "the Committee call him to order and have him tender his apologies whilst withdrawing his comments/allegations against me."

The Heart of the Matter

Tracing the origin of the crisis, Ajose-Adeogun recalled that he, alongside Akinrele, Dr. Dapo Majekodunmi, an ex commodore, Femi Fowora, and Folabi Balogun had a meeting at the residence of Trustee Francis Awogboro. It was there that he claimed that Akinrele tabled the matter of Coker and expressed his wish that he should not be allowed to contest because he (Akinrele) considered Coker 'transactional' in his role as a committee member.

Ajose-Adeogun stated, "I disagreed and said no-one can lawfully prevent a financial member from contesting and that the solution should be to present an alternative candidate to run against him and let the members decide by ballot. Trustee Awogboro agreed with Mr. Akinrele and was so vehement in his position that he said he would tear down the board if he found Mr. Coker's name on it!"

"Disturbed by the Trustee's position, I sought (an) audience with him two days later to revisit his stance on this issue. I managed to convince him to let the parties sort out their differences themselves and that his role should be that of mediator if reconciliation could not be achieved."

Ajose-Adeogun added that four days later (i.e the day after the nomination board was put up), he was informed that the Trustee had, indeed, struck out the names of Coker and appended his signature to it. "This was surprising not least because he had given an assurance that he would not do that. I also believed that such an action could be misconstrued," he said.

According to him, everything that has happened thereafter is a



Awogboro



Atake



Akinkugbe



Ogunbanjo

consequence of that action and that not addressing it frontally would not make peace reign in the club, adding,

"It is important to note that every member has an equal stake in the affairs of the club and no one should believe they have a special right of

entitlement."

Akinkugbe's Intervention

In a memo, 'Lagos Motor Boat Club – The Issues at Hand: My Intervention,' Yinka Akinkugbe, an ex committee member, dispelled the notion that his intervention had anything to do with individuals in the club because "it is a club of friends and although this has now been brought into question by recent events; for me, it is simply about the rules that govern the club."

He threw up a myriad of posers one of which is that: "If a club member has been nominated to run in a club election by bona fide eligible members and his name has been registered for that purpose on the election board, does any other Ordinary Member, Trustee or member of Management have the right to strike his name from the board without any further inquiry?"

He went added, "In the event that any Ordinary Member, Trustee or Member of management strikes out the name of an intending participant in a club election from the board publicly provided for that purpose, has the person whose name has been struck out committed an offence under club rules?"

Not done, Akinkugbe said, "Have the individuals who nominated him committed an offence? If not, has the person who has struck his name from the election board committed an offence?" In his opinion, the questions go to the heart of the rights and responsibilities of ordinary members of the club, trustees, and management and are so grave that not addressing them has severely damaged the club and nothing can repair the damage until the questions are answered.

"Any attempt to sweep these issues under the carpet would make the carpet so lumpy no one would walk comfortably on it in the future," he declared.

Akinkugbe described Coker as an ordinary member of the club who, in a club election in 2019, was elected to serve on the committee of the club.

He pointed out, "His performance in that role and attendance to meetings and the responsibilities of his office were diligently carried out. He was not, in any case, found wanting and no disciplinary measures were taken against him."

Consequently, he fingered a group he said was spearheaded by former Commodores Akinrele, Balogun, and Fowora for concluding that Coker was not worthy of the office. As former Commodores, Akinkugbe said that they carry a great responsibility and their views are important.

He absolved himself of any role in the anti-Coker campaign saying, "I am not a party to their discussions so I am not aware and have not been able to discover why their personal animosity to Jide Coker resulted in their quiet conversations with Trustee Prince Francis Awogboro, which in turn resulted in a verbal instruction to the Commodore, Dapo Majekodunmi, that Jide Coker should be told not to run in the election. If indeed the trustee was not the one who issued this instruction, it would make the events that followed even more bizarre. What we can be sure of is that club members decided to

GLITZ FOCUS

Lagos Motor Boat Club: The Unending Saga



Akinrele



Ajose-Adeogun



Ani-Mumuney



Coker

nominate Jide Coker amongst others and put his name on the board."

Akinkungbe added, "What followed is that our revered Trustee Awogboro on discovering that Jide Coker had been nominated; travelled to the club and proceeded to strike out Jide Coker's name as well as the names of Dr. Lanre Towry Coker and Senator Toks Ogunbanjo, Jide Coker's proposer and seconder and he also appended his signature to the striking out to ensure it carried the authority of his position as Trustee. What prompted his annoyance is unknown to me but he was specific in his actions and did not extend it to any other nominee."

Thereafter, Coker was summoned by the committee for daring to contest despite having been warned not to and subsequently expelled.

Akinkungbe said before his expulsion, Coker had never been summoned for any offence, and he did not nominate himself. Two members who had every right to do so, Dr. Lanre Towry Coker, a long-standing member of the club, and Senator Tokunbo Ogunbanjo, a former secretary of the club, nominated him. The two of them were questioned by the club for defying Trustee Awogboro's directive. It was

at the AGM of the club that things escalated.

Akinkungbe stated that Ogunbanjo's statement at the AGM, which was "delivered in silence to the club was met by a loud and unfortunate riposte by Atake."

Ogunbanjo's statement was reported to have disparaged Awogboro and Akinkungbe recalled that the former apologised there and later via a formal letter. But the old man, clearly dissatisfied with Senator Ogunbanjo's apology, wrote a petition to the Committee, insisting that he had been offended and that Ogunbanjo should be held to account.

Subsequently, Akinkungbe said, "The committee summoned Senator Ogunbanjo and chose to suspend him indefinitely (a strange punishment unknown to any club that I know of) apparently dissatisfied with his explanation of his actions at the AGM. This was despite the fact that the Committee should, in revisiting that incident, have taken into account the disruptive behaviour of Atake SAN far in excess of any statement made by Senator Ogunbanjo."

He went on to accuse Atake of acting in a manner that threatened to

disrupt proceedings at the AGM. Many would recall that Atake, in a lengthy memo to Akinkungbe had criminated his intervention, via a letter, as being "full of lies on the facts, pertinacious and perverse in its reasoning and lack of judgment. It was unreservedly ill-advised to write that letter and circulate it to a group of people that do not now include Boat Club members only."

Atake further accused him of belonging to a group in the club that is driven from behind-the-scenes by Ajose-Adeogun because "Ladi has not the guts to rear his head, but he is the elephant in the room. He is the obnoxious and sinful genius who steered things from behind leading to the most unfortunate, calamitous, awkward, and adverse events that we find ourselves in at the Lagos Motor Boat Club."

Interestingly, Ajose-Adeogun did not dignify Atake with a response in his letter. But Akinkungbe would not let Atake off without a strong rebuke, saying that his 'show of shame' is available on a video recording of the AGM and perhaps should have resulted in disciplinary measures against him and possible expulsion given the measures the committee had taken in previous incidents. "One presumes they took

these steps in defence of the Trustee (Awogboro) and acting on his petition regardless of any part the Trustee's actions played in precipitating this event," he added.

Ogunbanjo Responds

Responding to the petition against him by the club via a December 1st, 2020, letter, Senator Ogunbanjo stated that at no time in his speech did he insult or disparage the office of the trustee or the petitioner (Awogboro).

"Nowhere in my speech were there allegations other than my 'mention' of a petition presented by myself and Dr. Towry-Coker and I referred to rule 42b which states that 'no member shall cross out any name or deface the nomination board. Again, I proceeded to read a letter from the Secretary of the Club (and which same is on record) which stated '.....nomination was crossed out by Trustee Prince Awogboro.' Surely, this cannot even with the wildest imagination be said to be 'undermining the club and bring it into disrepute' if I quote a letter from the secretary to me personally.

Ogunbanjo said that though he expected responses from the commodore to whom he directed his entire statements, it was Atake that proceeded to use words which he claimed that he never uttered like a thug, vandal, hooligan, etc.

"In fact, it would be safe to say he, indeed, exacerbated the situation, where he acted as if he were counsel to the Trustee. I never brought up the issue of our petition, Mr. Atake asked me to read it out! Using that, he proceeded to twist the words and allude abuse on my part."

He noted that at the close of the meeting, he apologised to the trustee immediately and wrote to him as a follow up to his initial apology as a mark of his respect for him.

The Way Forward

Akinkungbe confessed that he does not know how the crisis will pan out eventually, but, "I am sure that until we reverse the first illegal action to stop Jide Coker from running in a club election and arm what the rules state, 'that any member of two years standing can run in a club election'; we cannot progress happily. What happens after a necessary reversal, whether reinstatement of membership for Jide Coker and lifting the strange indefinite suspension of Senator Ogunbanjo without blemishes is for the club to decide.

"The trustee, after doing the right thing, might suffer some embarrassment for misunderstanding and misuse of his authority and causing club members trepidation, great pain, and anguish; (it is) a small price to pay for the club and the members to recover some equilibrium. It is, however, unlikely to result in camaraderie at the bar for a long time unless someone rings the bell when it's all over."

To find a resolution to these matters, Ajose-Adeogun suggested the formation of a reconciliation committee comprising parties not immediately related to any of the issues and who would be able to assess the situation critically and dispassionately and proffer long-lasting solutions, thereby, returning the LMBC to the congenial and friendly environment that members had long enjoyed and cherished.

On his part, Senator Ogunbanjo reminded the committee and all members that he values his rights as a member of the club as enshrined in the club's rules and by-laws and which he said he affirmed on joining in 1987.

"I aver that that document is what guides us and guards us in the same manner as all Memorandum and Articles, Constitutions and guiding documents (which of course are all subject to constant improvements). They are the ultimate source of authority which I enjoin us all to uphold," he stated.

DCP Ibrahim Tarfa: An Officer and a Gentleman

Ikechukwu Amaechi

The last time we met, he was hale and hearty. That was at the official inauguration of the NPF Pensions House, Abuja by President Muhammadu Buhari on October 20, 2020. We exchanged pleasantries. DCP Ibrahim Tarfa was happy, as always, to see me. Subsequently, as the year gradually ended, we exchanged Christmas and New Year greetings and I was looking forward to seeing him again anytime I travel to Abuja in the New Year.

Then, on January 16, I got a text from Mr. Chukwuma Ohaka, the Business Development Manager of NPF Pensions Limited. It was an obituary. Guess whose death was being announced? DCP Ibrahim Tarfa. I got the text at 4.07 pm, six hours after he had been buried. He was only 57 years.

Nobody has been able to explain what really happened. The grief is overwhelming. You needed to make Tarfa's acquaintance to appreciate why.

I didn't quite understand what it meant when uniformed men use the phrase, an officer and a gentleman, to describe one of their own until I met Tarfa, a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) at a public function in Lagos.

The management of Nigeria Police Force Pensions Limited was in Lagos on its annual pre-retirement seminar to sensitise, educate and adequately prepare officers on the verge of retirement on what life is on the other side of the divide.

DCP Tarfa, a director of NPF Pensions Limited and the liaison between the police and their pension fund administrator (PFA) in his capacity as CP Pensions was part of the team that came from Abuja and the first to talk. That was on Monday February 3, 2020.

His message was pointed and firm, even as he spoke softly. He told the retirees to shed their lethargic garment and take the issue of pension serious because that makes the difference in life after retirement.

"A time will come when we will leave the comfort of our uniforms and offices for retirement, yet a lot of us don't take retirement very serious," he said.

"Many policemen tend not to give a thought to life after retirement when they are still in service. There is no preparation for the day which will surely come after either 35 years in service or on attainment of 60 years of age. The consequence is that life after retirement becomes a drudgery at best, or at worst a death sentence."

But he insisted that retirement does not mean an end to active life. "Some people have found more meaning in life after retirement than when they were in active service," he said,



Tarfa

taking them on a guided tour of their rights, entitlements and obligations before and after retirement.

By the time he finished, gloomy faces apprehensive of life after retirement brightened up. Armed with information and power, they were ready, better equipped to face tomorrow.

When he sat down, I enquired who he was and a member of the NPF Pensions team simply replied: He is Mr. Pension of the Nigerian Police.

We instantly became friends. Meeting DCP Tarfa for the first time, you will go away with the feeling that you have known him all your life. Humble, self-effacing and unassuming, he will be the first to greet even those unworthy to untie the strap of his sandal.

DCP Tarfa was as an officer, a leader of men, who led by showing in himself such qualities as he desired to bring out in those under him. He was a gentleman par excellence, an epitome of virtue, honour, patriotism and subordination.

His selflessness was beyond compare. As the Deputy Commissioner of Police appointed director on October 27, 2017, to represent the Police Pension Office on the Board of NPF Pensions, Tarfa dedicated the last three years of his life to police welfare.

Staff of NPF Pensions unanimously acclaim that he added

value to the PFA. Always eager to serve and help those in difficult situations, Tarfa had the uncanny ability to relate well with both the low and mighty.

As a management staff put it, "DCP Tarfa was very passionate for police welfare and was always ready to serve."

He was reputed to have helped significantly in untying the accrued rights knot and was at the forefront in the resolution of the nominal rolls saga. He not only made sure that senior police officers did not have any pension issues, being, as it were, at their beck and call, widows and next of kin of fallen officers had his back.

In DCP Tarfa's death, police lost a treasure and the country lost one of its best. He was an intellectual in uniform.

As at the time he died, he was a PhD research fellow at the Nigeria Defence Academy (NDA), Kaduna, where he also holds a Master of Science degree in Defence and Strategy. He also had a Masters degree in Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Before he enlisted into the Nigerian Police Force in 1990, he had a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology and Anthropology from the University of Maiduguri.

Commissioned Cadet ASP in 1990, Tarfa became a DCP in 2017 having attended the junior command, intermediate and CSP-ACP promotion courses at the Police Staff College, Jos; high level management course at the United Nations Centre for Excellence at Vicenza, Italy and the corporate governance course (Kellogg), U.S.

His knowledge of the North was encyclopedic. Though a Bura by tribe – one of the little known minority ethnic nationalities in Hawul LGA of Borno State – Tarfa lived, died and was buried in Kaduna State. He worked in the Katsina, Taraba, Nasarawa Police Commands in various capacities as DPO, Area Commander and Police College Kaduna before coming to the Force Headquarters, Abuja where he was on the Inspector General of Police's management team and served as the CP Pension in the Department of Finance and Administration, Force Headquarters.

When I needed to have a better understanding of the real issues in the North East, I consulted him. His analysis always contextualized the issues. It was always devoid of any sentiments because as he would always say, "I am involved." He was a most detribalised Nigerian. At 57, DCP Tarfa still had so much to offer the police and his country, Nigeria. In his death, the police lost a gem. Nigeria lost a treasured asset. May his soul rest in peace even as his memory remains a blessing not only to those who knew him but the country he loved and served with an unequalled passion.

Ikechukwu Amaechi, Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief, TheNiche on Sunday newspaper

METRO

Father Laments Disappearance of 16-year-old Daughter

Rebecca Ejifoma

Mr. Augustus Ikhine is distressed, pained, and emotionally drained. His sorrow began on February 2 following the strange disappearance of his 16 years old daughter, Omozusi Phoebe Ikhine.

It was his fourth experience of such terrible ordeal.

The teenager had taken to teaching while waiting to write the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination for entry into the higher institution. On that fateful morning, Phoebe was said to have left for the school where she taught within their neighbourhood at Unity Estate, Egbeda, in the Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State, dressed in rugged jean trousers. She, however, left the school about 9am after the school head instructed her to go home and change to a more decent clothe.

According to the father, Phoebe did not go home; she chose to hang out with friends until 4pm, when she picked up her little sister from school, dropped her at home, and then went out on a bike.

Mr. Ikhine said, though Phoebe was found the next day by her mother, she eloped again after she was brought home. This time, she left her cell phone behind, keeping everyone in the dark about her whereabouts. Since then, no member of the family has seen Phoebe. She only called her mother with a private number on Thursday morning and said, "How are you, mum," and ended the call.

The distraught Ikhine narrated his ordeal about his daughter, "She just left secondary school at 16. For her not to be bored at home, we

got her a teaching job at a primary school not far from the estate, Unity Estate, Egbeda, Lagos, so that she could always have a place to go while she prepared for JAMB, since she missed her admission at UNIBEN.

"I didn't know how she dressed, but it was later in the day when I went to the school to tell the proprietress we hadn't seen her since she left for school in the morning that the lady said my daughter left school immediately after assembly.

"According to the proprietress, Phoebe was wearing a rugged jean, and she told her to quickly return home, change into another jean trousers then come back. She left the school about 9am and never returned.

"My younger daughter school is not far from where she teaches; it's within the same vicinity of our home. She went to her sister's school to pick her up, which she always did, then dropped her at home. She left her alone at home, got on a bike within the estate and left. My 13-year-old son bumped into her while returning home from school. He said when he asked her where she was going, she said she's going to buy something nearby.

"When we didn't see her that night, I returned to the school to ask the proprietress if she came to school that morning, but the answer was negative. I sent her series of messages, called her; she didn't pick calls or reply text messages.

"By 4pm on Wednesday while we tried to look for her, the mother saw her somewhere – I'm sure she intentionally wanted the mother to see her. She brought her back home. While the mother was in the room trying to bathe, she eloped again, this time she left her phone on the dining table. Till now we haven't seen her."

Mr. Ikhine said many of Phoebe's friends they spoke to confirmed they saw her that Tuesday

morning. "They were together until 4pm, when she left to pick her sister from school," they said. "She only came back and said she was going somewhere else."

But did Phoebe show any sign of grievances before the unfolding of the ugly incidents?

Mr. Ikhine stated, "She has never said anything like that. I have been acting like a father. Maybe we spoil her or maybe we were too hard on her. I really don't let them roam the streets. But if they want to go out they have the opportunity. I go as far as giving her and her younger brother money to go to any eatery around; if you don't want to sit down, buy things and return to the house, I always told them, just to give them that freedom. We also go together on outings or to visit relations/friends as a family."

The father said it was her daughter's wont to hang out with friends for about two hours after closing time at school before coming home. "I kept telling her, when you close from school, come home. If you want to see your friends, bring them to the house so that when we don't see you, we know whom to ask," he said.

"At times, I leave money with her to invite her friends to the house, and tell her to buy them drinks; you people should just have fun in the house. She has never complained."

On whether he checked her phone for possible clues on her whereabouts, the father said, "I took her out of Facebook over a year ago when I discovered a whole lot of nonsense was happening. I saw that the Facebook was crazy. She used a different name to open the account with a friend's phone number. There was no Facebook app on the phone but she was using Google Chrome. We didn't know. She wasn't our friend on Facebook. We only found out after I seized her phone for misbehaving."

"All we said was if she wanted to be on Facebook, include her mother and I as friends.



Omozusi Phoebe Ikhine

I replaced her Android phone with a Nokia phone.

"When she was in SS3 and needed to correspond on some things, I gave her another phone to access the Internet because of her JAMB and her UNIBEN admission. We were running all of that. "I've tried to beg her, warn her, discipline her if it was too serious, especially with some of those late night chats. It didn't stop her truanries."

Mr. Ikhine added, "There was a period she left the house for a girl's house, then to a boy's house; they were age mates. We arrested him, but we sorted things out.

"This time around, when I reported it, the police said they could only make a formal complaint after 48 hours."

But Ikhine remains optimistic that her daughter would come home unscathed.

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

Abike Dabiri-Erewa Mourns Late Mother



Dabiri-Erewa

To quote Lagos State Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, on the same matter, "No doubt the death of a loved one is usually painful as it is irreparable, but we must always take solace in God if the deceased had lived a good life."

Doubtless, while the passing of Alhaja Sadiat Erogbogbo is painful, her daughter, Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa is consoled by the fact that she lived long and lived well.

Many people of renown, including President Muhammadu Buhari and Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, have sent condolence messages to the Chairman/CEO of Nigeria Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM). Her late mother, Alhaja Sadiat Ashafa Erogbogbo, passed away at the ripe old age of 90, half a step into her 91st birthday.

Much of the brilliance and diligence of Dabiri-Erewa is credited to her mother, Alhaja Erogbogbo. Known to many as 'Kind Teacher,' Alhaja was a well-rounded figure who impacted the lives of many now-prominent Nigerians with her classroom career and her accomplishments in business.

Although she was born in Kano and educated in Lagos, Alhaja Erogbogbo built a solid reputation over Lagos. So popular was she with saints and scoffers and kings and paupers that she inadvertently became the figure of a true matron, especially in Ikorodu, Lagos.

Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa and her siblings are likely the best investments of Alhaja Erogbogbo. There's no debating the degree to which Dabiri-Erewa alone has advanced Nigeria's cause, especially for her citizens in foreign lands. It is to Dabiri-Erewa's credit that many lives have been saved, many dignities restored, and foreign nations think twice before looking at Nigerians the wrong way.

Alhaja Erogbogbo raised her children to obey and cheer the law. She exemplified this herself when she dodged out of having a lavish and well-deserved Birthday party in June 2020. Because of social distancing regulations against the spread of the Covid-19 virus, Alhaja Erogbogbo opted to hear congratulatory salutations from a distance. A true Nigerian Matriarch indeed.

Alhaja Sadiat Erogbogbo lived long and lived well, and eyes are now on her children, especially Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, to do the same.

Mixed feelings as Ex-Shell MD, Mutiu Sunmonu, Remarries

Against contrary opinions from family and friends, the former MD of Shell companies in Nigeria, Mutiu Sunmonu has married the one his heart wants, one Ekaette, an old Shell colleague. The nuptial event, it seems, is the crack that tore down the dam of support that Sunmonu has built over the years.

Love conquers all, they say—but the family and friends of Mutiu Sunmonu are allegedly on his neck for his choice of marital partners barely four years after his wife passed. Old ginger is spicier, they say—but Sunmonu's new wife is 56 years old, and reportedly unwanted by her new family. All in all, none of the adages hold for the new lady of House Sunmonu.

It has been a rowdy four years for Mutiu Sunmonu and his children. The death of his wife, Funke, tore a deep scar across their hearts. Because she had lost her battle with cancer, the remaining Sunmonus found themselves fending off overexcited sympathisers, some of whom were only interested in taking the late Funke's place.



Sunmonu

Mutiu Sunmonu has been destined for another, the 56-year-old former Shell coworker. According to reports, the latter helped Sunmonu bear the grief of his wife's demise, and has been his friend ever since. However, for reasons still unclear, the children of Mutiu Sunmonu are reportedly completely against the union.

This opposition came to a head at the lovebirds' wedding in Abuja: only a few notable folks (like Pastor Tunde Bakare and his wife) were present—but not Sunmonu's children, friends, or old colleagues. Insiders have reported that the union's objection stems from the children's refusal to have another woman stomp their mother's memory.

On the other hand, Mutiu Sunmonu's friends reportedly excused themselves from the wedding because of their regard for the late Funke Sunmonu. It is now apparent that the deceased's shadow continues to hover over the family, although the former Shell boss is doing his best to move on.

Overall, love might conquer all, or something else might prevail: only time will tell. Either way, someone will get hurt.

If Every Silver-spoon Kid Can Be Like DJ Cuppy...

As Lord Chesterfield explained, a person's good breeding is the best security against other people's ill manners. This is the meat of the issue between Nigerian disc jockey and producer, Florence Ifeoluwa Otedola (better known as DJ Cuppy), and the coterie of Internet users that identify as her friends, fans and faultfinders.

The particulars of her recent spat with 'Zanku (Legwork)' singer, Zlatan Ibile (real name Omoniyi Temidayo Raphael), exposed a bit about Cuppy's matter-of-fact personality.

Social media found out Zlatan's cold-shoulder attitude towards DJ Cuppy from DJ Cuppy herself.

According to Cuppy's tweet, Zlatan had suddenly blocked her on all his social media platforms, seemingly for no reason. Furthermore, they had made good music together (the hit song, Gelato), and seemed on the cusp of a friendship. "What went wrong?" asked Cuppy.

Responding to Cuppy's queries, Zlatan

said he didn't know any 'DJ Cuppy' and asked if such a person is an artist. Because Zlatan had essentially taken things up a notch with this response, the issue was blown out of proportion.

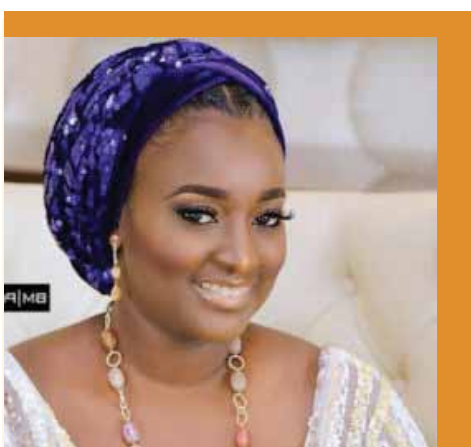
While most social media influencers and well-known figures of the Nigerian music industry admired Cuppy for opening up, others had less flattering things to say about her move. Similarly, while many of these A-list folks advised Cuppy and Zlatan to settle their obvious feud, others were more than happy to have it blown up.

From the very start, Cuppy was bent on reconciliation, which is true to her warm and open personality. Even when unsavoury remarks were made regarding her father, billionaire philanthropist, Femi Otedola, Cuppy did not lose her cool. Even when it was alleged that she cheated Zlatan and owed him some money, the good lady only threatened to sue her detractors rather than payback in their coin.



DJ Cuppy

Ultimately, good breeding rises to the top. Her refusal to get down, roll around the mud, and tangle with her critics has established her reputation as a well-bred person, equally dignified and humble. Cuppy is an outlier among silver-spoon kids.



Babangida

Social media is twitching with excitement over the latest development from Mohammed Babangida's camp (son of former Head of State, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida) and Rahma Indimi (daughter of Maiduguri-based billionaire and oil magnate, Mohammed Indimi). The former clocked 48 a few days ago, and so folks were wondering if something gossip-worthy would

Rahma Indimi Celebrates Estranged Husband, Mohamed Babangida, at 48

go down. And indeed it did!

Rahma Indimi was one of the many notable personalities that wished Mohammed Babangida a happy 48th birthday. However, Indimi stood out among the crowd of well-wishers because of her history with Babangida, and her unique salutation congratulatory message: "Happy birthday to my one and only baby daddy."

Of course, anybody who knows anything about anything understands that Mohammed Babangida is not just a 'baby daddy' for Rahma, regardless of whether he is the 'one and only.' These guys had a (married) life together, with lovely children to boot.

Rahma and Mohammed hitched the nuptial wagon sometime in 2002. It was a perfect union: a fine and young pair from respectable households. And the narrative was the same for over a decade.

However, news of Rahma and

Mohammed's separation flitted into public ears in 2016, and a new phase of their relationship was unveiled to all and sundry.

The most difficult part of Rahma and Mohammed's separation was the four children from their union: who would get whom? Then, Mohammed got married to another lady and won the suit for his children's custody with Rahma.

Many complicated stories later, Rahma announced that she had reconciled with Mohammed and stayed separate, unmarried to each other, but happy partners in parenting their four kids. Rahma is staying true to her words of no malice against her former husband.

A lesser woman would ignore her ex-husband's birthday, or skewer an innocent pigeon (all credits to the film industry)—but not Rahma Mohammed: she genuinely wishes Mohammed Babangida all the best!

Will Ayo Fayose Support Segun Oni?

Ever the State of intrigue and confounding political transactions, Ekiti State has entered blog headlines again, with the emergence of former Governor, Segun Oni, as one of the gubernatorial candidates for 2022. Now that Ayodele Fayose may prove to be a strong ally, what is to come?

Of course, time will tell whether or not Fayose will hitch his wagon to Oni's attempt to return to the Ekiti State gubernatorial seat; but where's the fun in that? Associations, allegiances, and loyalties change in the blink of an eye, not to mention political camaraderies.

Regardless, ever since Oni advertised his ambition, folks have been wondering.

For newcomers to the world of Ekiti State politics, Segun Oni was Governor between 2007 and 2010, failing to complete a full tenure before he was driven out of office by Kayode Fayemi, the man who eventually took the seat. Ayo Fayose came after Fayemi, making him (Fayose) the gubernatorial grandson of Segun Oni.

The relationship between Oni and Fayose is anything but simple. There was a time when they

were sworn enemies, wanting nothing more than to 'castigate, embarrass or undermine' each other, which is interestingly the very thing that Fayose has warned party members against doing to Oni. Why? Because their feud is in the past.

Recall that Segun Oni left the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to join the All Progressives Congress (APC). Recently, Oni announced his intention to return to PDP. Fayose, understandably, was one of the first to condemn such moves, reportedly referring to people like Oni as paperweights, with little understanding of care for what politics represents.

HIGHLIFE

Erelu Abiola Dosunmu Floats Lounge



Dosunmu

As the Chinese insist, old ginger is still the spiciest ginger. This is a claim that the Erelu Kuti of Lagos has validated, Abiola Dosunmu, who—true to her words—is as enterprising now as she used to be when she was young. Her latest venture, a new lounge styled ‘The Culture Table’ is the subject of gossip and gists all over Lagos.

The Culture Table was officially opened on January 29, 2020. Friends and fans of the Erelu Dosunmu were convened at Tiamiyu Savage Street, Victoria Island, Lagos. The event was bubbling with unbridled cheers and admiration being the order of the day.

The Culture Table advances Erelu Dosunmu’s dream of halting—and gradually reversing—the overextending influence of alien ways of life and conduct, the result of which is the ongoing erosion of African culture and values. The Erelu Kuti hinted as much when she got talebearers to sing the praises of African culture, and distribute invitations for the unveiling of her Talala Arts and Culture Afriquer Centre on

Victoria Island, Lagos.

Those intimately familiar with Erelu Abiola Dosunmu know that she is all about being original: African to her bones, clothed in nothing but the fabrics and styles of her people, and promoting her native codes of living and ethics.

It was for this enchanting personality that renowned jùjú legend, King Sunny Adé wrote, sang ‘Biibire Kose Fowora’—which loosely translates to ‘Pedigrees and good breeding cannot be purchased with money.’ For her enchanting personality, she was appointed the Erelu Kuti of Lagos, an adviser to Kings and close confidant of nobles.

With Erelu Abiola Dosunmu, life is all about an honest appreciation of culture and heritage. That is why her spark of genius and innovation remains bright and beautiful, even though she is half a step into 74 years. How fortunate for those around Ikorodu, Lagos, who will enjoy the first fruits of Erelu Abiola Dosunmu’s Lounge and centre for African cultures.

In Western climes, the old are gathered together inside accommodations referred to as retirement homes. There is a similar pattern with retired political figures or public servants in Nigeria—except that the locations of such ‘retirement homes’ remain a mystery until they choose to emerge.

It looks as if Babatunde Fowler, the former Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), is settling into his retirement home, the anonymous cocoon that past Nigerian public figures flit into whenever they are replaced, exposed, or vacationing.

For Fowler, the first motivation (replacement) is valid. Considering that there hasn’t been any news of his comeback to some other high-ranking office (as is the custom), it would seem that Fowler is truly settling into inconspicuousness.

Former FIRS Boss, Babatunde Fowler, Recoils into His Cocoon

2020 recorded so few noteworthy mentions of Fowler. The only time the accomplished taxman was particularly featured on headlines was when he was invited for close-quarters questioning by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). This was likely the first time since Fowler endured the anti-graft agency’s interrogations since he left the apex FIRS seat.

According to reports, even that meeting had little to do with his time as FIRS boss. On the other hand, EFCC officials were allegedly more interested in his time as CEO/Executive Chairman of the Lagos State Board of Internal Revenue (between 2005 and 2014). There was supposedly a 5 billion

inquiry that Fowler was privy to, and therefore significantly assisted the EFCC in clearing the air. And then back to his invisible spaceship Fowler went.

Some folks maintain that it was nobody’s fault but Fowler’s own that he had to leave his position for his successor, Mohammed Nami—after all, it was he who somehow fell short of his superiors’ expectations. Nevertheless, it is commendable that he isn’t out causing trouble. A lesser man would defame those he perceives as adversarial every opportunity he gets.

But Babatunde Fowler is no mean man and no noisemaker.

At Last, NSE Boss, Oscar Onyema, Marries

Strike off the name of Oscar Onyema, CEO of the Nigerian Stock Exchange, from Single Nigerian Bachelors. Onyema floored the jaws of Nigerians that assumed that he would remain an eternal bachelor, one of those Eligibles with unfathomable standards: he hitched the wagon of his fiancée, Annette, to his own, and they have gotten on the ‘happily ever after’ highway.

On January 30, 2021, Oscar Onyema got married to his betrothed, the beautiful Annette. With families and friends on both sides, the lovers pledged a lifetime of devotion to each other and caved in the fantasies of many men and ladies who would have given an arm and a thigh to replace either.

Fifty-two and brimming with new life, Onyema’s satisfied smile throughout the private ceremony indicates that he is more than pleased with his new status. It used



Onyema and Annette

to be that it was Onyema’s charm and legendary brilliance that attracted the ladies to him; now the glow of a happily married man has joined in—to the exasperation of

his many secret female admirers.

Onyema is the blessing of three lifetimes, as Annette is likely to confirm. The CEO of the Nigerian Stock Exchange since 2011, formerly Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer of the American Stock Exchange, and presently the Chairman of Central Securities Clearing System (CSCS), Onyema has all his financial bases covered.

Furthermore, the man is royalty, a scion of the traditional ruler of Ogwu-Ikpele in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, His Royal Majesty, Eze Valentine Benjamin Chukwuma (VBC) Onyema III. The renowned laid-back aristocratic lifestyle of the royal line is very apparent in Oscar Onyema’s interactions.

Little wonder Oscar Onyema is a living legend for many young people. Of course, his professional life is something to shout about, not to mention his seemingly unrelenting bachelorhood.

Gabriel Ogbechi’s Many Battles



Ogbechi

It is clear now that Gabriel Ogbechi, founder and MD of Rainoil Limited, cannot leave things to chance, but must take up arms against his sea of many troubles. The risks of failure range from public censure to the collapse of everything he painstakingly built from the ground up over the years.

Gabriel Ogbechi has been a regular subject of news and enquiries for some time now. Unfortunately, his new string of popularity stems from the allegations made against him by a former lawmaker, Prince Ned Nwoko. Curiously, even as a new page, is opened for 2021, Nwoko’s accusations continue to persist and are even growing stronger.

According to Ned Nwoko, Gabriel Ogbechi is the mastermind behind plots to assassinate him. However, it was originally imagined that the feud between Ogbechi and Nwoko stemmed from an old communal crisis at their hometown, Idumuje-Ugboko, Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State. However, it might be deeper than this.

Nwoko initially reported to the Nigerian Police, explaining that one Wale Jana, an inmate at Kuje Prison, had informed him that he (Jana) heard two fellow inmates plotting his (Nwoko’s)

assassination. This Jana had then heard that the brains behind the plot are a member of the Idumuje-Ugboko community, is in the oil and gas business, and owns a filling station. Nwoko said he made enquiries and found that only Gabriel Ogbechi fits this description, and therefore accused Ogbechi of plotting to end him.

There are reports that Ogbechi has been invited to the Abuja Police Command to answer Nwoko’s accusation questions. Ogbechi even held a Press Conference to deny everything, explaining that his hands are clean and that Nwoko is only out to defame him.

The latest development in the Ogbechi-Nwoko case suggests that there is much more to their feud than meets the eye. Reportedly, the informant is no longer Wale Jana, but one Ossy Boise. Furthermore, Nwoko has alleged that Ogbechi arranged to have Boise killed, to shut him (Boise) up and save himself. And more, and more.

All in all, Gabriel Ogbechi is not having a good time at all; not with so many damaging allegations piled up against him.

Where’s Paddy Adenuga?



Adenuga

Where is Paddy Adenuga? This is the question on the lips of many Nigerians who cannot put the finger on the last time the true-to-scale son of billionaire Globacom boss, Otunba Mike Adenuga. It would appear that Paddy has gone from being as visible as Nebuchadnezzar’s statue to being The Invisible Man of English writer, H. G. Wells.

First things first: Paddy Adenuga is every bit his father—brilliant, relentlessly charming, and popular with the media. However, while Adenuga Senior is irredeemably private and camera-shy, you can take a quick click with Paddy, and he wouldn’t blink. Essentially, although each has their charm, Paddy is seen as the cooler Adenuga.

Recently, however, Paddy has been conspicuously absent from everything. It used to be that he was the more social—alongside his sister, Bella Disu née Adenuga—in their very private family. Now, either Paddy has opted to walk in his father’s introverted shoes, or he is taking an extended break from prying eyes.

Graduating from the prestigious Marine Military Academy (MMA) in Texas, USA, at age 13, it was obvious that Paddy was just as brilliant as his father. Afterward, he studied Business Administration at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Graduating at the age of 18, the chances of joining his father’s conglomerate couldn’t be any higher. He did and began to do exploits.

It wasn’t so long ago that Paddy Adenuga revealed that he had almost acquired one of the biggest oil companies globally, Chevron Netherlands, at the age of 29—and without his father’s aid or supervision. His well-written account of the adventure broke the Internet and indicated that Paddy was very much like his father: a daring visionary with a crowbar for a spine.

Now 36, Paddy Adenuga continues to blaze a colourful trail in his business endeavours. Until his sudden disappearing act, Paddy and his sister, Bella Disu, gradually became the face of the Mike Adenuga Group.

Maybe Paddy Adenuga is vacationing somewhere, planning out 2021 with his characteristic near-prescient intellect. In any case, folks want to know where he is.

LOUD WHISPERS

with JOSEPH EDGAR (09095325791)

Those 'Concocted Tales' about the President

I don't know if it is only me that saw the various news reports. They were shouting that some people will start to yab our president calling him all sorts of names and accusing him of all sorts. The report quoted his aides that these people will start using blogs and other news outlets to call our president nepotistic, cow Fulani and all that kind thing. They asked us to be wary o and be on the lookout for these reports. That they will be promoted by the president's enemies and those who do not understand exactly what the president is doing for us and the sacrifices he is making so that we

can all live a better life.

Please, on behalf of all of us in Shomolu let me tell Mr. President that we will not believe the stories when they come out. We will remain resolute in our belief that we are having the best of times. The insecurity has been technically decapitated and that the economy is out of recession and that for the first time, an Akwa Ibom man would be appointed to head the army, police and NNPC. I do not know why our people are always so unappreciative and ungrateful. Why for the life of me would they even think of believing these fables? Me, I am just looking at them, I swear Mr.

Adesina and Mr. Garba that as long as I live, I will never believe any of such stories. In fact, I will not even read that kind of trash. Such stories are meant for dissidents and conspiracy theorists to be waddling in with their joblessness.

For the rest of us, we are in Eldorado and if not that we are strong constitutionalists, we would have started clamouring for a third term for our lord. Mr. President, relax, nothing dey happen. Kai, did I hear one fool just whisper, 'guilty are afraid'? Can you imagine? Please, ignore sir. We are for you. We cannot believe. Do we really have a choice?



Buhari

GENERAL BURATAI - NOT ENTIRELY TRUE

You see as you have retired now, I can tell you some home truths. You really did not try, so that your statement that you left the Nigerian Army better than you saw it almost choked me in the toilet. Sir, you see for some days now, I have not been able to stool and I started checking the symptoms for COVID-19 to see if constipation dey on the list. So, Duchess say, I should try oranges and drink a lot of water which I did. All of a sudden the 'runs' came and I rushed to the loo with my favourite newspaper - guess which? I saw this your statement and did not know when I poo on the floor and all over my pants. I say see this Buratai man o, see as this man want disgrace me. Why he no just do like Trump go back to him village if Boko Haram never finish am quietly instead to come make this kind statement making me poo on my pants?

Now these my little daughters - Chantal and Zara who are getting tired of cleaning my room will now come and see that daddy has pooped on the floor. Do they even know Buratai for me to come and say it was his fault? This level of self-denial is toxic, it can kill as it almost killed me. How for the life of me would you make that kind statement when we are seeing things that are happening in the Army and also in the theatre of war? Make I leave you bro, to enjoy your retirement as an ambassador. That time don pass, let us face the new

people and support them with prayer with the hope that at the end of their tour of duty, they can stand boldly and make this statement without me having to poo on my pants. Kai.

BETWEEN IGBOHO AND OONI - NOT MY BUSINESS

You know I have been complaining here every time that people will be pushing me to be looking for trouble. That is how my friend and brother Olumide Odunayo will be calling me and be saying Duke, this Igboho, won't you put mouth. I say I have talked last week. He say you did not talk well abeg. What do you really think of the man? I say, Olumide you are mad o. I should come and yab man wey put tortoise for chest dey waka. Abi you did not see his shoulders pad when he went to drive Fulani people somewhere in Oyo State. So, I should go and yab that one and then he will now come and do me what we use to see in all those old Fadeyi Oloro movies. He will now bring out his cow horn, remove his shirt and stand with brown pant and be saying Edgar, omo Sampson lati Akwa Ibom, mo ni ko ma fo so ke and me on top of Duchess will suddenly jump up and be shouting a gbe ro. Not me o. Federal government has said no more congregation of people more than 50, so Redeemed camp don close, nowhere will I run for deliverance.

That is how he now came again and said, the man has called Seyi Makinde, Tinubu and Ooni Fulani slaves, that what will I do. I say I will slap you o, what is it. Is it not the same Command Secondary School me and you go. You even beat me for English Language, go write your own na. You see juju people fighting, you

now want me to carry my big head enter. That is how someone call me bastard and I slap the person and police catch me and my mama wey I dey defend her honour start to ask me in front of police if na me dem call bastard. If the man call him elders bastard, how does that concern me? The elders you think they don't know how to respond? I never talk finish; the man has apologized and change mouth. You see how I for enter am and when they settle and Igboho decide to deal with me, who will save me? Chief Igboho you are doing a good job. Well done, but just take it easy small. There is something like constituted authority. Kindly partner them so that we will resolve whatever is the matter peacefully. Egbon mi, ma bi nu. If you want to reach me, let me know I will send you Olumide phone number reach am na your fan. Me, I dey Mende dey wait for afang to cook finish. Thank you.

YAHAYA BELLO - I DARE YOU

Me I sha like this bobo: he has what we used to call in Shomolu - Ogboju. He no dey fear o especially on this matter of Covid. His head is still in a big hole. Termites and abutata are biting his buttocks but he is still shouting that there is no COVID-19. Me I used to be his disciple before o, but with this second wave and the 34 percent jump in mortality and the efficiency of the spread of the infection, I have disowned him o. The man's assertion is dangerous and almost evil in its naivety. For anybody at this time to be saying that there is no COVID-19 or whatever it is that he has been saying can best be described as delirious. So, it was not surprising when the authorities named his state a very

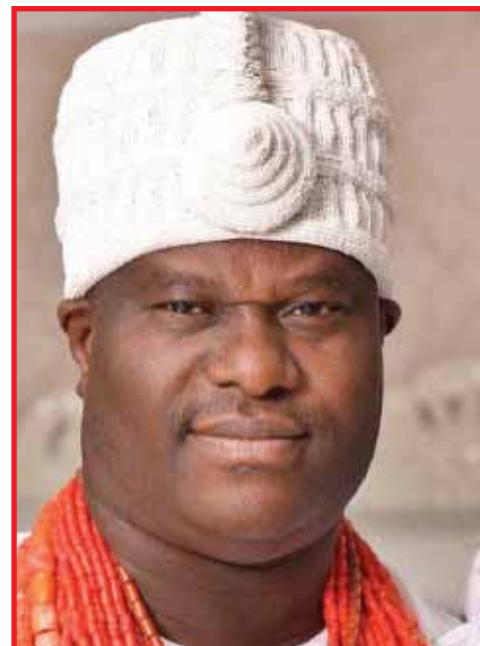
dangerous one because of the lack of seriousness in battling the virus. Me I agree totally. He has now responded by threatening to go to court and I am really praying that this is not one of the many showy comedic moves but a real threat. Let's go to court and get this resolved once and for all. Meanwhile, the curve is climbing, people are being infected and sadly people are dying. We need help.

DR. FAISAL SHUAIB'S UPSIDE-DOWN LOGIC

A lot of people will not know this oga. Even me I did not know him until I read his response to Bill Gates. Bill Gates, the man they say has castrated all of us and removed the ovaries of our wives came out to say that it didn't make any logical sense for us to spend the kind of money we are hearing on a vaccine for covid that instead we should use the money to strengthen our weak medical infrastructure. My position exactly. I have been shouting since that with less than 25,000 active cases nationwide, our inability to provide hospital beds in a country of 200m then no be covid be the problem, we are the problem. That is how this lord come out to counter Bill Gates. He no even do him homework o, I am sure they just called him when he was eating and say, oya go reply. Himself just jump up and open mouth. He say that the vaccine will in the long run strengthen our medical infrastructure because it will enhance distribution capacity and also because



Buratai



Ooni



Bello



Shuaib

LOUD WHISPERS

we will also employ fresh hands to assist and as a result, we should go ahead to spend over N400m on vaccine as against a national health budget of about the same cost. This is what we call the 'oh my God' moment. Did he just say that? I leave him to his great grandchildren when they read this thing 100 years from now and see how dem ancestor behave at a time that common sense needed to be on show. I just tire.

FRANCIS ILENIKHENA - AN UNCOMMON GOOD SAMARITAN

I just felt like celebrating this my guy today. In this COVID-19 era, some people are showing their true colours o. Like me, once you cough only once I will not even wait for the second one before I take my exit. I will impose travel ban on you once you have walked on the same street and possibly expose yourself. But this story touched me, it made me weep and showed me that there is still hope for this country. Francis is an investment banker who was called from church to come and assist in conveying his neighbour to hospital who had suddenly taken ill. Francis who lives in Abuja quickly dashed home, carried the man and put in his car and drove to the first hospital. They said, 'Don't bring him out of the car, let's check and see. They later said, this looks like COVID-19. Francis didn't hear, he was just interested in saving his friend's life. They said, no bed that he should try Gwagwalada, na for Abuja o. He ran there, they reconfirmed say na COVID-19 and still no bed. They say rush him to National Hospital or Isolation Centre. Same story. At the final place, he now pretended to be a big man from Aso Rock speaking authoritatively and all and bed suddenly appeared effectively ending at midnight a crazed journey that started 7pm. So, for all of those hours, Francis had logged on his shoulders a dying man with COVID-19 not caring about the risk to his health, his family and the rest simply egged on by the need to save this person's life. It was after it all, he went home to announce to his family and that of the sick man that it was covid. The man's family all tested positive but miraculously, Francis and his household tested negative. God was at work. The man did not die though he is still in the hospital and we believe that the God that started this will perfect it. I want us to stand up wherever we are as you read this and stretch a hand of fellowship to FRANCIS ILENIKHENA, he is a true Nigerian. Well done, bro.

PETER OBI - ONITSHA TRADER WANTS TO GO TO INDIA

I missed the interview. I no dey watch TV again, but the news was everywhere. Peter Obi, former governor and vice-presidential candidate had broken the table. He is always doing this. He scatter everything o. He say how can we buy vaccine with N400b when total health budget is about the same thing. Exactly what Bill Gates said. But the one that interest me was when he drilled down the pricing of vaccine. Nigeria is proposing \$8 per wetin dem call am while Obi says he can deliver at about \$3. There is no way, God will not punish some people in this country o assuming Obi does not go and do what his brothers used to do with their own alternative vaccine that they will use otapiapia and do.

NOW LISTEN, OBI SAY IF FEDERAL

Government cannot get the right pricing, they should send him o. kia, Onitsha trader don go India go price market o. I can imagine Obi with his thick Igbo accent and black pouch under his armpit talking to the Indian scientist - how much is dozen price? What is the best



Ilenikhena

you will give me? Na wholesale price o because of my gain. The India man will just be looking at Obi, he will then add the clincher, if you agree my price, I will place order to cover not only Nigeria but the whole of the black world but you must sell at \$2.50 so I can out my gain of 50 cents. Mbok, Obi, although this no be spare part market, you still make some sense. Well done, bro.



Sani

DNA - THE NEW PANDEMIC

Since Nigerians discovered that with agbo and ginger, they can beat COVID-19, they have moved on to more deadly pandemic. Now it is DNA. The way people are failing this test, it is making the COVID-19 one begin to look like child's play. The Delta State judge came and said that his first three children are not his. That his first wife had opened her legs to strangers or (God forbid)

to the whole Council of Elders in their village. Since then, we have been hearing all sorts of stories. In fact, I have learnt from authoritative sources in the medical community that 50 percent of firstborns will not pass DNA in Nigeria. I be firstborn o. I dey look my late papa picture since morning.

Another angle is that of my friend Cecy who says that during the civil war, that women had to sleep around to feed their families, save their husbands' lives and the rest. She continued that even till today, in the villages nobody cares who owns the child since things are happening in the bushes. If our Nigerian women continue like this, I may be forced to ask the UN to label them a terrorist group. Me I don't really mind adultery as long as no be Duchess, any other person can do it but the wahala is giving another man another man's child. That is so sad. That is why I have advised all of my friends to not ask. No do the test. Let your ignorance be bliss. Your child is your child even though he resemble your maiguard or the meat seller for Oyingbo market. Let God be the judge as for you, just be the father to your children. All of them. You see, when the foreign porn site announced that Nigerian women were their highest customers, they were protesting, they you see say science no dey lie. Kai.

DR. IBE KACHIKWU'S ERUDITE DISSECTION OF NIGERIA'S PETROLEUM INDUSTRY

By the time you read this, the erudite scholar would have completed his book launch with the President as Special Guest. I have asked to be given the opportunity to review the works and he has agreed. You see, why I like him is the way he reacted to an unsavoury attack I once launched on him on this page. You see, some people when I yab them, they will be calling me in the midnight and say oya come and fight. Others will say oh boy why you dey yab me like this, but he was different, he called and asked for my address so he will send the books I had called 'Jehovah witness track' for me to read and review.

I took him up on his challenge and he sent me four of the books. My people when I saw the books, I call my guy, Sam Aiboni, lawyer and oil and gas activist to come read, me I no get power. I be no too understand the English. Sam finished reading the books and no gree return them till today, last I went to his office na so he keep the books proudly for him shelf like say he buy am. The one I kept and read was such an enormous work on the legal structure governing petroleum law. Although it is not my field as the only law in that sector that I really care about understanding is the one that keeps the price of fuel stable and the one that allows my people in Eket where Mobil is located to get employment and compensation for oil spill. Well done, sir and more power to your elbow. Please secretly send me the books cos I know that once Aiboni see am now, he go come again. Kai.

SHEHU SANI - PLEASE DON'T KILL ME

This afro-carrying ex-senator will soon kill me with laughter. The man say no tribe dey fight for Comptroller General of Fire Brigade. Kai, this is a classic and na true. Everybody is interested in Customs, Immigration, NNPC, NPA and the rest. Those ones are the premiership of appointments but we have never heard of any struggle for Fire Brigade. Please let them even sha give us in Akwa Ibom, we will manage that one. We no dey even get any consideration in that kind thing. Please Chief Buhari, the next opportunity for that appointment if it falls within your tenure, kindly consider us. We won't mind. Thank you.

AISHA YESUFU - SHOWING THE WAY TO GO

So last night, I walked up to Duchess and said, please stop listening to this Pastor Odukoya - that is the South African wife of my pastor, Pastor Odukoya. All these female pastors are not helping my case, I want you to have a new mentor and she is Aisha Yesufu. Duchess looked up at me with her big eyes and said why. I showed her the BBC clip where Aisha was saying that she used to give her husband any style he want o, that what else is she doing. Duchess anytime will be using me to negotiate IMF conditions. Anytime I want, she will say - ehnn Ini you have not replaced the fridge in the BQ, Ini my mother's anniversary is next month, Ini I am owing Folake next door, I took four shoes. After meeting all the requirements, she will say, 'Ini go and bath and bath well, wash behind your ears, Ini let the children sleep first, Chantal might walk in. when I say oya come on top and face the wall.

She will scream, 'God forgive you. Where did you learn all of this? It is not Christian-like. Shame will be catching me and I will say sorry. Then the one that used to pain me the most is she will call by 5pm and say, I am starting fasting by 6pm if you can't come now that is it for the next 90 days. How will I rush from Ikoyi to Shomolu in traffic and still get home before curfew? You see how these pastors let me call them names abeg, I have suffered enough - the greatest culprit na Pastor Mrs. Odukoya, her husband Pastor Odukoya, GO of Redeemed, Baba Shiloh and recently one Baba Apostolic in Ibadan. That one is on YouTube o. They are the ones affecting my sex life. So, you see why Aisha must move in very quickly and dislodge these people before I start to experience power failure o. At 51, I no get time again o and someone will come and be rationing it. I will cheat o.



Yesufu

SOCIETY WATCH

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Eweje

David Wej Boss, Adedayo Eweje, Expands Coast

At the beginning of his career as a fashion designer, one of his dreams was to rule the world of fashion.

By Providence, Adedayo Eweje can be said to be living his dream, as he is set to open the first foreign flagship store of his fashion brand, David Wej, in Oxford Street, London, United Kingdom.

Speaking on the planned offshore store, Eweje, Creative Director, David Wej, disclosed that the brand's unique appeal is that it will offer affordable ready-to-wear kaftans, agbada, and other traditional outfits online and in-store in addition to the bespoke suits, shirts, and other accessories that the company has been known for since it began business 13 years ago.

He said: "From this location, we will be serving our customers in the United Kingdom, Europe, United States, and Canada pending our presence at these locations. Our store will be on 38 Great Portland Street off Oxford Street W1W 8QY London.

"We deliberately chose a location around Oxford Street to make a bold statement about our focus and ambition. Oxford Street and environs are the prime destinations for shoppers all over the world, and we believe it is the best place that we can effectively tell the Lagos and Nigerian fashion story."

When Abuja Real Estate Top Player, Andy Elerewe, Buried Mom

In life, one of her oft-repeated prayers was to be survived by children who would give her a befitting burial whenever she breathed her last.

Therefore, it was not surprising that when Emilola Elerewe passed on at 61, her children, including the famous property developer and boss of AIBEN Investment, Abuja, Andy Elerewe unanimously resolved to give her a befitting burial.

During the burial ceremonies, which commenced on January 29, 2021, with a service of songs and wake at River Valley Estate, Lagos, her husband, elder Timothy Elerewe, and her children invited friends and loved ones from across the country, while they played their last respects to the matriarch of the family.

At the lying-in-state, it was an emotional moment, held on January 30, 2021, before her remains were interred at the Omega Funeral Homes, Ojuda, Ikeja, Lagos.

However, the ceremonies ended with a thanksgiving service on January 31, 2021, at Merciful Global Prayer Ministry, Lagos.

Why Oil Magnate Folorunsho Alakija Lost Forbes' Rating

Billionaire oil magnate, Folorunsho Alakija, has been in the warm embrace of fortune and grace for years. Alakija, who is the Chairman, FAMFA Group, is also rated among the richest in Africa.

Not a few were pleasantly surprised when she appeared in Forbes magazine where she was adjudged the richest black woman in the world in 2012. The spontaneous reactions that trailed the revelation by Forbes were occasioned by the fact that the net worth of the Lagos State-born woman of substance had skyrocketed to \$3.2 billion, thereby making her \$500m richer than Oprah Winfrey. With the staggering \$3.2 billion, she was also ranked the fourth-richest black person globally, coming after fellow Nigerians, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, and Dr. Mike Adenuga.

Surprisingly, Alakija and Angola-born Isabel dos Santos, two women billionaires

from Africa, failed to make the 2021 list of Forbes Africa's Richest People.

The two women featured prominently on the 2020 list of Africa's richest, were knocked from their perch on this year's Africa's Richest People because they were below the \$1 billion mark.

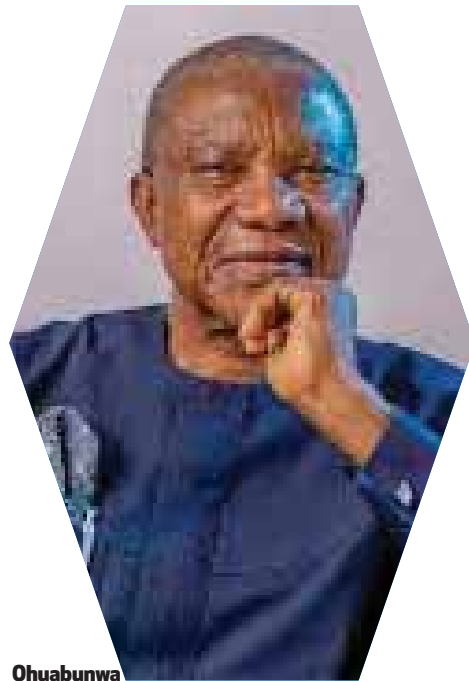
While dos Santos was yanked off due to a series of court decisions freezing her assets in Angola and Portugal, Alakija reportedly dropped below the \$1 billion mark due to the global crash in oil price.

It was also gathered that the Ikorodu, Lagos-born oil baroness and fashion icon lost her space from the esteemed list because she has no other viable investment aside from oil and gas.

Her other notable venture in the digital printing and real estate sectors, according to investigations, have not been yielding returns strong enough to be tracked by the international financial journal.



Alakija



Ohuabunwa

Mazi Sam Ohuabunwa, a former Chairman, Nigeria Economic Summit Group (NESG), is a pharmacist, author, entrepreneur and corporate guru all rolled into one.

But that may not be all about the 70-year-old former Chairman of Pfizer.

Recently, Ohuabunwa publicly showed all his other side, hitherto unreported when he declared that he is also a politician.

Corporate Guru Mazi Sam Ohuabunwa's Tall Ambition

The renowned columnist and president of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria has expressed his interest in the country's number one job.

Last week, the author of 'Wired to Lead,' in a statement, disclosed that his decision to run for president was borne out of the desire to pull the country from the precipice.

He said, "My dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, and Friends, kindly permit me to use this medium to formally inform you that I have, by the leading of our God, decided to offer myself to contest for the office of the President of Nigeria at the next election. "I do so cognisant of the enormous work and sacrifice it will entail. "But I am persuaded that our nation cannot be allowed to continue to drift, becoming the poverty capital of the world, a killing field where life has become short and brutish. We can no longer continue to watch as we continue to decline in global economic competitiveness and in most human development indices. We can no longer see our youths remain unemployed and many being forced into crimes and immoral living."

He also cited alleged discriminations against some sections of the country, especially the South-East, in the allocation of positions and resources, a development he roundly condemned.

Ohuabunwa also reiterated his oft-repeated stance for true federalism, even as

he stated that the country requires a new crop of political leadership to create a new Nigeria.

"The federating units in our federation have been emasculated as we run an inverted Federation, where the centre is donating powers to the States/Regions, instead of the reverse. Over 70 per cent of our national revenue is now spent on recurrent expenditure with peanuts for real development. No real development can happen in Nigeria until we set the States/Regions free to truly compete, as was the case in the First Republic. Many states are not independent; many are controlled by Abuja.

"Therefore, we are fully persuaded and convinced that a new crop of political leadership, with competence, character and courage must emerge to lead Nigeria out of economic doldrums and social disequilibrium. We need to create a new Nigeria that will be a First World country and which will work for all Nigerians driving away poverty, corruption, injustice and insecurity."

He further stated that he had, over the years, put in his best in trying to effect a positive change in the country, noting that the fact that these seemed not to achieve the aims had inspired his decision to contest.

Business Man, Music Label Boss Lucky Igbokwe Acquires Leading Premium Streaming Service KeduTV LLC

KeduTV LLC is the latest leading premium streaming service offering Digital Media Smart Devices, LiveTV, Video-on-Demand for Afrobeat Music, Lifestyle and Entertainment TV worldwide.

"Kedu" means, "Hello" or in some cases "How are you?" in the Igbo language of the eastern part of Nigeria.

The KeduTV Channel and Kbox are currently owned and operated by KeduTV LLC and is the only service that give viewers instant access to current movies, music and shows from every Africa country. It has also acquired the rights to air major African entertainment award shows.

Lucky M. Igbokwe (aka Don Lulu) acquired the streaming service for \$1.1M and branded it to one of No. 1 Afro TV station in the United States of America, it is fast growing in other parts of the world and on a par with other streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu and HBO Max.

The businessman, philanthropist and music label boss who is not new to entertainment sector, has harnessed, grown and exported many talents from Nigeria to the United States of America.

As a KeduTV Channel subscriber, you'll be able to stream your favourite content from the comfort of your very own couch to the confines of public transportation using any one of the supported devices; Samsung Smart TVs, KBox, LG Smart TVs, Roku Player, iOS and Android Applications. These devices feature the KeduTV Channel streaming platform that is easily downloadable.

The KBox is a KeduTV LLC supported product that can be used on any analog TV



Igbokwe

enabling it as a Smart Streaming Television. This device allows customers to download other streaming applications like KeduTV Channel, Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, HBO, Iroko TV, Channels News, YouTube, and Android Based-Games currently available in Nigeria and the United States.

With a company slogan of "We are Bridging Borders", the aim is to bring

boarders together by entertaining and educating the world about Africa's lifestyle using technology.

Experience Africa's rich culture, unique infrastructure rapidly growing development to the world. The movie industries of African will take center stage and be put on the same pedestal as Hollywood.

Don Lulu is a man of many parts, having shown his prowess and competence in entertainment, real estate, philanthropy and rural development, he has no doubt exhibited the Nigerian and indeed Africanspirit of resilience. He has no doubt proven that doggedness, persistence, consistency and hard work pays in Nigeria's un-conducive and tough business environment.

Don Lulu is the Chief Executive Officer of 2Flame Entertainment, Lucion Towers Construction company, the Don Lulu Foundation and Green Peace Nigeria.

As a foremost definitive voice in the entertainment industry, through his entertainment company signed some of Nigeria's fast-rising and top artistes, including Morachi, Medley and Yeka (winner of Season 1 of Nigerian Idol) to its recording label.

He has also organized widely acclaimed concerts that featured popular superstars in the entertainment industry, which in many ways injected life into the tourism and cultural landscape of the state.

As a stakeholder in the affairs of his state and Nigeria, he has used his influence to galvanize the youths and advance the issues affecting them.

ARTS & REVIEW

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MORENIKE AJAYI AND THE ART OF FINDING HER TRUE VOICE

Cover continued on Page 68

ARTS & REVIEW \ ART-LOGUE

MORENIKE AJAYI AND THE ART OF FINDING HER TRUE VOICE

Through continually experimenting with new things, Canada-based Nigerian artist Morenike Ajayi has evolved a unique style that makes her art easily stand out, she tells **Okechukwu Uwaezuoke**

Surely, a pavement is the last place anyone would expect to find these two sofas! Indeed, the rationale behind their juxtaposition in front of a luxuriant pine tree, just outside what looks like a semi-detached building, with a mostly redbrick façade, is hard to figure out. But then, two strikingly similarly-clad figures—sporting black hooded sweatshirts and sweatpants—add their quota to this visual non sequitur. One of them, showing a profile view and striking a conversational pose with two slightly spread-out arms, rests a foot on one of the sofas, which is cream-coloured. The other is simply reclining in a semi-sitting position on the next sofa, which has a greenish colour, and is facing the opposite direction.

Curiously, these figures (they could be either male or female) look like mirror images of each other. Could they be Photoshopped images of one person? Actually, they are. And this was what happened: Morenike Ajayi had stumbled upon these two sofas on a pavement and had herself photographed twice by a friend... This was somewhere in Toronto's East End and, apparently, sometime in the autumn as the dry leaves around the base of the pine tree indicate. Then, with her Photoshop skills, she successfully conjured a doppelganger effect after merging elements of the two photographs.

This photograph is just one of the 219 current posts on the Canada-based and Nigerian-born artist's Instagram account.

In another digitally-manipulated image, titled 4th Dimension, two grey-suited men (with their backs turned towards the viewer) are standing barefooted at a beach looking towards the sea, from out of which looms a tableau depicting abstract patterns. Each of the two men is carrying four pink-coloured jerry cans, whose colour—while contrasting with the blue colour of the sea and the green colour of a distant shoreline—complements that of the beach and the horizon.

"I enjoy painting and illustrating," Ajayi confesses. "But my medium is digital illustration across multiple programs, Photoshop, Lightroom, Blender and After Effects. The first time I tried bringing a picture to life from Lightroom to Photoshop and animating the motions in After Effects to a song, I knew the possibility was endless."

Indeed, it is in the visual arts that the 2020 York University, Toronto (Canada) graduate, who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in information technology after previously studying mechanical engineering and business technology management at Ryerson University, finds her true voice.

Her career's turning-point period in 2014, she recalls, was "a self-discovery phase" in her life. Back then, she would produce works, which she would keep them to herself, thinking that no one would like them. "Eventually, I showed [them to] some friends and family [members], they loved the art and urged me to share them, [saying] that I was doing something different," she says.

It all started years ago in the oil-rich Delta State city Warri, where she first opened her baby eyes to the world. As an employee of Shell Petroleum Development Company, her dad was entitled to an official accommodation at the Shell Estate. But, after leaving Shell for another multinational company Schlumberger, he had to give up his Shell's official residence and acquired a large property elsewhere in the city.



Ajayi at work in her studio

Talking about that property, memories of the large compound her family later moved into float back into her consciousness. She still vividly recalls that the compound had two football fields, several dogs and puppies, a tree house, a fish pond and trees bearing every imaginable fruit. Hence, it was a straight contest between nature and Cartoon Network on pay television for her childlike mind.

By the time her family relocated to Lagos in 2006, she was already a Junior Secondary School 2 student. "Then, my focus shifted to fine arts and Supa Strikas comics, which I used to buy at the fast-food restaurant, Mr. Bigg's. I was trying to understand how drawings could be given so much life to tell a story."

Ajayi would take things up a notch in 2011 when she borrowed a Canon T3i camera from a friend. She got so used to shooting with it that she became reluctant to return it to the owner. Perhaps, the good thing was that she bought her own camera shortly after she eventually did.

Meanwhile, her peculiar style began to evolve as she continued to work on her skills. "My style, I'd say, came about by experimenting and trying new things. I wanted my pictures to stand out from everyone else's no matter how long it took me. Essentially, I turned my apartment into a studio, in which I created a backdrop... and I looked at this backdrop as a blank canvas. I started with plain white, then started changing the colours. Now, I'm able to create worlds."

Shortly before her first exhibition, she sold one of her now-cherished artworks for \$1000. The proceeds of this sale went a long way in funding her very first exhibition, a solo show (albeit in collaboration with three other artists working in different media) titled Synth343, which held from Tuesday, August 29 to Friday, September 1 in 2017

in Toronto. She has since held other exhibitions in Abuja and Lagos.

As for commissioned works she had done so far, the artist, who considers Jean-Michel Basquiat, Leonardo da Vinci and the Nigerian Lemi Gharokwu as her role models, confesses that they would be hard to count. Working with her camera has, in any case, led her into a world of adventure, which opened her to different experiences in both Canada and Nigeria.

In Nigeria, she recalls being challenged by a loosely-organised youth gang while trying to shoot a music video on a pedestrian bridge in the Lekki area of Lagos in December 2018. Accompanied by two other people, she had alighted from a car, thinking that some random people walking past on the bridge wouldn't hurt her shooting. That was when this gang of youths clustered around them, demanding that they pay to get their permission to do anything here.

Two years earlier, while assisting on a shoot at the Oriental Hotel in the Oniru area of Lagos, they were told by the manager who had spotted their cameras that they would have to pay an outrageous fee of N500,000 to be allowed to shoot with professional cameras. This forced them to use their iPhones instead.

Another similar experience was in January 2019, on her way to Tarkwa Bay, a beach resort near Lagos harbour, which is popular with swimmers and water-sports enthusiasts. She had her camera ready to take pictures as usual, but as soon as the car she was in with her friends pulled up in the jetty's parking lot, the man in charge told them that recording was not allowed there and made her turn off her camera. "I guess he didn't want his parking lot business to be public knowledge," she adds.

Meanwhile, it has been a different experience in Canada. "Pedestrians would apologise for getting into your picture, wait for you to finish before they pass and are curious to know what you're working on and what your photograph is for."

In Regent Park, a Toronto downtown neighbourhood, where she has been living for the past 10 years, a typical day finds everyone on the move. A nearby athletic park, which consists mostly of a running track, a soccer pitch, a basketball court, an ice hockey rink as well as spaces for dog-walking or buying groceries, serves the neighbourhood.

Here, she finds enough grist for her creative mill. "I see the world as this blank canvas that I need to paint, inspired by my friends and my everyday life. Times when I'm mentally exhausted, I find hope and inspiration in the pain. Good music inspires me, I'm always plugged in listening and it drives me. The goal is to translate my interpretation of what I'm hearing and feeling to my screen on Photoshop."

EXHIBITION

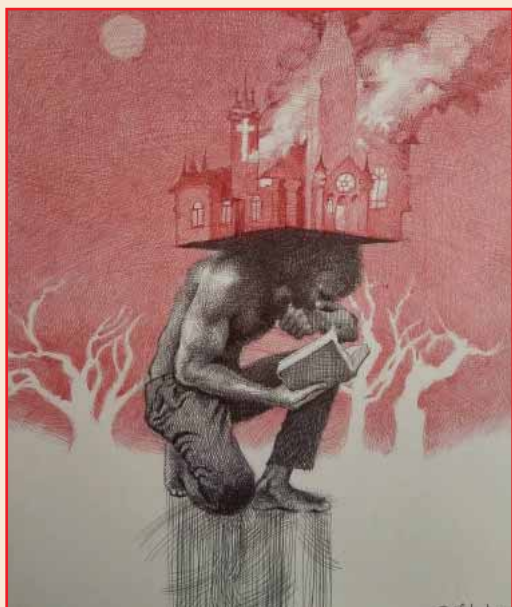
Ugonabo's Dreams Like Esoteric Chants...

C. Krydz Ikwemesi

This exhibition of painting and drawing by Stanley Ugonabo, titled Dreams, is the first to be hosted by Sankofa Centre for Art and Creative Education, Enugu, since its inception in 2017. It is also Ugonabo's maiden exhibition

following his graduation from University of Nigeria in 2019. It is a mixed bag of styles, techniques, visions and emotions. As an emerging young talent, Ugonabo is keenly in search of a voice, as can be seen in these works, but at the same time, it may not be long before he finds it, as he exhibits supreme confidence in his handling of form and configuration of evocative power of content. This he does in full recognition of art's capacity as an "intelligent, thought provoking activity", as he pushes his techniques and styles to the limits of possibilities.

Even his concept and vision are subject



A work by the artist

to a broad stretch of the imagination, as he plays with common and divergent elements that straddle both realist and surrealist idioms. To a great extent, forms as well as contents are enriched by the artist's striving for superlative draughtsmanship and his ability to domesticate both form and colour in a way that yields thought-provoking imagery couched in profound and alluring metaphors.

As implied in the theme of the present collection, the artist offers us selected glimpses into this very fertile and restless mind to behold his visions, his dreams in their cleverly concretised, forms. In contemplating the works, we easily share in Ugonabo's hierophantic experience. We are pleasantly hit by the works like some esoteric, mystical chants. They are not our everyday chant. But we do not care. They appeal to our emotion as they do to our reason and philosophy; but we are also held in empathetic captivity by the works' hidden centralising meanings which are hinged on issues of being, existence and mundane challenges

Perhaps one major strength of the collec-

tion is the commanding presence of the human figure which betrays Ugonabo's burgeoning Renaissance Spirit. To this extent, man, for him, is not merely "the measure of all things", but an epitome of creation's highest and noblest beauty, as declared by the polyvalent Renaissance artist, Alberti: To you is given a body more beautiful than other animals! But unlike the great men of the Renaissance, he takes the human figure to another level, the level of the surreal and the mystical where things and experience attain a higher meaning and signification. By this token Ugonabo is dressed not only in the garb of a powerful artist but also wears the crown of a philosophical and imaginative thinker.

As we present him here at Sankofa, we hope that this maiden exhibition will lunch him to new frontiers and higher achievement and that he will sooner or later find his compass and place in the ever shifting art fields in Nigeria and elsewhere.

• This exhibition opens on Tuesday, February 16 and ends on Monday, March 8
—Professor Ikwemesi is the Director, Sankofa Centre for Art and Creative Education, Enugu

IN THE ARENA

The Danger of Self-Help

With spiraling national insecurity stretching security agencies' capabilities, is self-help, an evolving group defence strategy often operating on the borderlines of law the way forward? **Louis Achi** asks

The social contract and its inherent political legitimacy are expressed in the foundational documents of most nations and international bodies.

Section 33 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended), Article 3 of the Universal

Declaration on Human Rights, Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights capture these non-negotiable foundational imperatives: the right to life, liberty and security.

Likewise, Section 14 (2b) of the extant Nigerian Constitution states that, the welfare and security of the citizens shall be the primary purpose of government.

But today, in Nigeria, a state of insecurity reigns. Massacres, wanton kidnaps, brazen banditry, population displacements, bloody Boko Haram insurgency, rogue herdsmen depredations, cult killings, communal clashes and more are almost daily fare.

It could be recalled that in 2015, according to an Aljazeera report, in Kalabge Village, about 250 kilometers from Maiduguri, Borno State capital, one of the village chiefs Abdulwaheed, declared that they would begin to take matters into their own hands in form of self-defence, because the Nigerian security agencies were not doing enough to stem Boko Haram attacks in their community.

Significantly, in response to the surge in violence, the military also has encouraged the formation of the vigilante group in North Eastern part of the country in support of the peacekeeping operations and for the man-hunt of Boko Haram members in the region i.e. Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

In effect, the military appreciated the use of self-help defence groups as an aid to military operations in the region.

Six years later from the Kalabge Village scenario in Borno State, more self-help security structures beyond the comparatively more recognisable state and regional platforms appear to be the new normal.

The recent quit notice boldly served on the Fulani community in Igangan, Oyo State, by Sunday Igboho, clearly a non-state actor, signals the scope of the slide in the meaning of what modern statehood represents. Ordinarily, no private individual ought to wield such powers in a modern nation-state. But then, these are not ordinary times.

However, with the spiraling kidnap for money, wanton killings, rapes, population displacements, rogue herdsmen's depredation and worse – tokenistic to zero state response – with often credible allegations of complicity, something was bound to give as justice seemed very far.

When Igangan people cried out to Igboho, a "youth leader" for help, he responded quickly, led from the front and ordered the Fulani to quit.

Now, the long-suffering folks have more faith in Igboho than the dithering Nigerian state. Igboho's mounting folk hero status is despite the fact that Amotekun – a



President Buhari..Time's running out

quasi-regional Southwest security network has set sail.

In the Southeast, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), another touted regional platform conceived by Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the proscribed Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) has entered the fray.

Although, the region's governors quickly moved to counter it by setting up a more formal security platform, ESN's creation also speaks to the imperative of providing human security where the state has apparently failed woefully.

Recently, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) called on governors of the Southeast to support the Eastern Security Network (ESN) like their Southwest counterparts embraced the Operation Amotekun.

National Coordinator of OPC and the Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yoruba Land, Gani Adams, said the new security initiatives would help in stamping out criminality especially, the dangerous wave of armed herdsmen, banditry, kidnapping and other vices, threatening the regions.

In a related statement by the Publicity Secretary of OPC, Yinka Oguntimehin, OPC also endorsed Amotekun security initiative, holding that with the level of commitment exhibited so far in Oyo and Osun States, Amotekun would soon rid the region of bad elements, including killer herdsmen and kidnapers.

In other parts of the country, self-help groups ostensibly set up to address security gaps are sprouting

like mushrooms. This, not helped by the fact that today, Nigeria is experiencing considerable socio-economic stress (a second recession and a second wave of COVID-19 are on), the scenarios not helped by new coronavirus variants entering the fray, the mounting debt trap, the new nationalism sweeping Europe and North America and global trade volatilities.

But taking in the big picture, if self-help groups on one hand and vigilantes on the other are going to continue in protecting their turfs from invaders with questionable agenda and counter-insurgency operations in a way that's fruitful and sustainable, they clearly must operate within the law and established rules of engagements.

Their activities must be properly regulated and coordinated through legal and institutional procedures to prevent impunity, other excesses and worse – creeping 'Somalisation.'

The government can institute policy and institutional mechanisms that absorbs the groups into decentralised community policing systems, existing paramilitary structures or institutionalise them into a national reserve force dedicated to emergency mobilisation.

In the absence or incapability of the state to ensure protection of its citizens, the foregoing measures would optimise the gains made and help manage abuses inherent in self-help groups and vigilante operations.

POLITICAL NOTES



Igboho

Before Sunday Igboho Goes Rogue

The self-styled warrior and activist, Sunday Adeyemo popularly known as Sunday Igboho, who is championing the Yoruba cause and stealthily taking laws into his hands gave a pinch of the monster he could become soon if not cultured and whipped in line, last week.

Angry that the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, did not 'beat up' President Muhammadu Buhari or 'take him to the cleaners', when the king visited the latter over the marauding Fulani herdsmen, called the monarch all sorts of unprintable names as well as other notable Yoruba elders.

Although he later apologised and his apology accepted by the Oba, his vituperation exposed how impulsive he could be – both in

actions and utterances. And that's dangerous from someone leading a sensitive ethnic agenda. His thoughtlessness, compounded by lack of education and poor exposure, is a time bomb.

For anyone, who has listened, albeit objectively, to the account of the exiled Seriki Fulani of Igangan, Alhaji Abdulkadri Saliu – a man who speaks a near-flawless Yoruba – it's hard to make sense of Igboho's action against the old man, even though the Fulani menace has clearly overflown the threshold of extreme tolerance by all measures! While Igboho's freedom fight might be presently popular, because of the seeming absence of leadership – overall – it cannot pass a veritable option addressing the matter, because it bears even worse consequences. Therefore, before he goes rogue on account of fighting the cause of his people and putting everyone in this foreseeable danger, he should be cautioned and curtailed, while the government must stoutly step in to deliver leadership.

BRIEFINGNOTES

The North and Her Bandits

Leaders in the north must jettison the wrist-slap approach if they genuinely intend to arrest the growing insecurity in their domain, writes **Shola Oyeyipo**

If truth must be told, the perplexing insecurity situation in the northern part of Nigeria will remain a nagging problem for a very long time without a change of attitude and sincere commitment to routing the elements behind terrorism and banditry on the parts of security agencies, national leadership and leaders in the region.

This is because unlike during the era of militancy in the Niger Delta region, when the identities of those militants were public knowledge and not concealed, northerners seem to have taken possession of the insecurity by trying to handle the perpetrators as some of their own and by so doing, the region has become a net-distributor of bandits to other parts of Nigeria and in fact, Africa.

Such scenarios are often seen in western zombie movies, where some peoples' loved ones caught the flesh eater virus, and rather than do away with them, they attempt to show them love and they end up being eaten by the menacing 'zombie'.

Likewise, as long as northern leaders are not ready to give up those behind the daily killings, they will continue to live with the horror and, the kind of tension presently in Southern Nigeria would persist and might escalate into more dangerous dimensions.

This assertion is hinged on some recent occurrences in the Nigerian body politics. First, a former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, recently insinuated that President Muhammadu Buhari seemed to be 'sleeping,' that he was not doing enough to curb banditry in the north, including his home state and that the president did not seem to be his usual self anymore.

Obasanjo, who spoke in an interview with academic and historian, Toyin Falola, said President Buhari should wake up from his slumber and fight the banditry ravaging his backyard and that it was time for him to start thinking of leaving an enduring legacy as president.

"I thought I knew President Buhari, because he worked with me. But I used to ask people that is it that I have not read him well or read him adequately or is it that he has changed from the Buhari that I used to know? I am not subscribing to the people who say we have a new Buhari from Sudan and all that nonsense," Obasanjo stated.

Recently, the newly appointed Chief of Defence Staff, Maj. Gen. Lucky Irabor led the Chief of Army Staff, Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Attahiru; Chief of Air Staff, Air Vice Marshal Isiaka Amao; and the Chief of Naval Staff, Rear Admiral Awwal Gambo, to Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, which has been worst hit by insurgency in Nigeria.

The move had signaled hope that there were some new sheriffs in town, who might be doing things differently. Yet, a counter move event by a renowned Islamic cleric, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, who met with the bandits, showed an unbelievable level of unseriousness on the part of the north in ending insecurity in the region.

During Irabor's visit to Borno, the Theatre Commander, Operation Lafiya Dole, Maj. Gen. Farouq Yahaya, who received him updated him on their efforts to end insurgency, also, the Borno State Governor, Prof. Babagana Zulum,



Sheikh Gumi and bandits

implored the military top brats to work with their counterparts in Cameroon, Niger and Chad so as to fish out the Boko Haram terrorist.

He, however, made one very vital point that they needed better ties between the military and civilian so that they could get credible intelligence, which he reckoned was important to the success in the fight against insurgency.

While Sheikh Gumi's media aide, Salisu Hassan told newsmen that his boss' 'diplomacy shuttle' to the bandits' hideout in Shinkafi local government, Zamfara State, where he was said to have met with about 500 of them was aimed at stopping their criminal acts. But it put to question, everything that the Nigerian security agencies are purportedly doing to rid the country of criminality.

Some major facts that emerged from the recent events are that Nigerians want President Buhari to do more than he is currently doing to end insecurity in the country. The military and other sister agencies are playing to the gallery that they are doing everything needed to end insurgency.

Yet, some northern leaders really know these bandits, they know their names, where they live and are pampering them and begging them to stop! Such absurdity is beyond comprehension!

Noble as the intention of the renowned preacher, which was to spread the message of Islam and peace to the Fulani herdsmen and rid the country of kidnappings and banditry, might be, it showed an unacceptable level of complacency on the part of the Nigerian security forces, conspiracy on the part of leaders in the north and lack of readiness to genuinely address the problem on the part of President Muhammadu Buhari.

This is because the killers are known to them and yet, the trigger-happy military that would rather shoot at peaceful protesters, would look away while bandits were having meetings and taking pictures.

Not only that, Makkai and Tubali forests in Shinkafi LGA were freely named as territories under the control of armed Fulani herdsmen, the names of the bandits top commander were given as Kachalla Turji and Kachalla Muhammadu Bello.

They made various assertions such as they are not afraid of death, that the Nigerian and Zamfara State governments reneged on promises made to them; that they were being underestimated and that was how Boko Haram came about.

Bello was quoted to have said: "Let the killings of our loved ones by security agents without due process of the law stop, as well as cattle rustling that denied most of us legitimate means of livelihood."

The shocks expressed by three twitter users, when the news of the clergy's visit to the bandit broke aptly captured how a lot of other Nigerians will be looking at the development.

Sunkanmi, for instance, asked why the security outfits in Nigeria will be acting as if they don't know where the bandits are hiding, saying "Sheik Gumi has met with the bandits twice in 3 weeks. Our dear @HQNigerianArmy, @NigAirForce, @PoliceNG, DSS and presidency, do not know the whereabouts of the bandits to take them out but Sunday Igboho is their major problem."

Premier of Nigeria said: "Sheik A. Gumi met with bandits, if a southern pastor meets with bandit, will the presidency and northern Muslims still be saying the same thing? It is our duty to report all crimes to security agency. Why will Sheikh Gumi not report but visit the hideout? Still waiting for DSS action."

Obiora lamented that, "They bullshit the laws and make a mess of the security agency," asking "What else?"

There is no gainsaying that Boko Haram has turned the North East to a war zone while, states like Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna and Kastina are now homes to bandits, marauders, kidnappers, rapists and arrays of hoodlums. Experts have traced the situation to corruption and the refusal of northern political elites to educate the young generation, which makes them readily available as participants in the fast-growing banditry industry of the north.

The choice of whether or not peace and normalcy return to the north lies with leaders and people in the region. There must be concerted effort towards ridding the affected areas of the perpetrators. But as long as the people attempt to shield and cover them up, the killers will continue to have field days.

NOTES FOR FILE

Politics of 2nd Niger Bridge

Last Friday, the Imo State Governor, Hope Uzodinma, led some Southeast leaders, including the new leadership of the Ohanaeze Ndigbo to inspect the ongoing Second Niger Bridge that's nearing completion.

In attendance were the Minister of Science and Technology, Ogbonnaya Onu; the Minister of State for Solid Minerals, Uche Ogar; the Minister of State for Education, Hon. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba; the President of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Ambassador George Obiozor; and Senator Andy Uba, among others.

However, for the discerning, the idea of the inspection was not mooted in vacuum. Remember the Anambra State governorship election has been slated for later this year? Thus, Uzodinma and a few others might have spotted a smart campaign tool and they did not hide that fact.

Apart from being an immutable campaign tool, the progress report on the bridge appears to have also quieted critics of the All Progressives Congress-led government in the Southeast, while making the current Ohanaeze leadership become more diplomatic and conciliatory in her disposition ahead of the 2023 elections.

Well, the truth is, if there are a few positive things to be recorded against the name of President Muhammadu Buhari amid the overwhelming commotion, definitely, the Second Niger Bridge has a conspicuous spot.

Yes, its completion date has been slated for 2022; it certainly would be a game changer, when the time is right. Above all, the Minister of Works and Housing, Mr. Babatunde Fashola, who is at the centre of it all, takes a lot of credit for effectiveness and efficiency in the progressing work.



Governor Uzodinma inspecting 2nd Niger Bridge

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

KAYODE FAYEMI



Fayemi...there's no tension between Tinubu and I

For Now, I'm Committed to Finishing Well

Ahead of his 56th birthday this Tuesday, February 9th, Ekiti State Governor and Chairman, Nigeria Governors' Forum, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, addressed some topical national and regional concerns. Contrary to swirling talks about his presidential bid, he said the 2023 presidential election would eventually sort itself out. But, for now, he's only committed to finishing well as Ekiti State governor. He spoke to **Victor Ogunje**. Excerpts:

When you came on board as Ekiti State governor, you did so with a five Pillar policy thrust. How well have you been able to prosecute these?

Well, when I came, I was very clear about what I intended to do that could make tremendous impact in the lives of our people, I mean the average Ekiti person. Consequently, I had to narrow down my first term eight point agenda to five-pillars of Improving Governance, Agriculture and Rural Development, Infrastructure and Industrial Development, Knowledge Economy and Social Investment all geared towards making poverty history and creating wealth for Ekiti people. Creating wealth has always been the challenge here.

I have been here for two years and three months and in that period, and I believe dispassionate observers can see what I have been able to do to improve the economy of this State. Though the job remains an unfinished business and it will never be done, we make bold to say that those things we promised are being addressed sequentially and simultaneously. In terms of specific accomplishments I think we can say we have done considerably well. We have gone reasonably far. In my New Year speech, I tried to run through all what we have done in those thematic areas.

In the area of governance, Ekiti people are now happy, unlike before, that salaries are regularly paid as and when due. You know I used to say that payment of salaries is not what we should celebrate, because people have worked and they deserve their wages. But as one worker told me, against the backdrop of the backlog of salaries owed by the previous administration, regular payment of salaries is a big deal because they can now plan, determine, predict and organise their personal economy better and urged that I stop trivialising this major accomplishment.

What about the reengineering of the civil service? Has the policy gained traction?

Yes, that also has helped in such a way that we have been able to return professionalism to the civil service and public service in general by recruiting within a period of two years, 2,400 civil servants, the bulk of whom belong to the teaching service. The rest are in the health sector and core civil service. We have also ensured promotion for those in the civil service and clearing backlog of promotion of our workers.

In addition to that, we succeeded in producing the first female Head of Service in the history of this state. We also restored our erstwhile policy of competitive examination and interviews for those who want to become Permanent Secretary or Head of

Service. We ensured that everything that we do is governed by process, procedures and extant rules. If you check Ekiti website today, you will see the financial records of this State, the audit reports, contracts awarded and amounts they were awarded for, financial records of the state, the budget of the State including the one I just signed December 23rd, 2020.

You will even get the performance of our budgets, including the most recent one. Budget 2020 had 92% performance. We have insisted on transparency in all that we do and have subjected ourselves to the strictures of SFTAS and Open Government Partnership. We have a clear record of what we have done in the Agriculture sector, which has emphasised the need for public private partnership between our commercial operators and our local farmers.

We brought the Promasidor Company, manufacturers of Cowbell to resuscitate the moribund Ikun Dairy Farm. That's why when many, who don't know what is going on criticise governments on the farmers-herders conundrum, I invite them to come to Ikun. Ikun was one of the rural ranches started by the Awolowo government in 1956 but which was abandoned in the last 30 years.

Governor Oni made an unsuccessful effort to revive it but

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SUNDAY INTERVIEW

• IN DUE TIME, 2023 WILL SORT ITSELF OUT •

this is the first time this is being done sustainably. We formed a company with Promasidor owning majority shareholding so as to avoid a situation in future when a new government comes and prove problematic. In another few months, we will be producing milk there commercially.

You all know the rice belt at Erinfun, Ado Ekiti, which we are doing with JMK Rice, Stallion Rice and Dangote processing mills, the Special Agriculture Processing Zone in Iyemero, Ipao-Irele axis and if you go to Okemesi, we just commissioned a snail village in – Egbeja village – another private initiative and we are doing all these without neglecting our local farmers particularly, our youth in commercial agriculture – a programme that started in my first term.

We have about 2,000 people that had benefited from the state's Micro credit scheme and about N1.5 billion had gone into Small and Medium Scale Enterprises since I came on board for the second term. We have also ensured that we develop our rural areas, because it is critical to our agriculture sector. We have our Rural Access to Agriculture and Markets Programme (RAAMP), which deals with the construction of about 1,000 kilometers of rural roads for easy transportation of agriculture products to the cities and market places, that is, connecting the rural farms to the feeder roads and to the markets.

Fundamentally, what we want to do is create wealth and you can't create wealth, when you are dealing with an economy that is majorly a civil service oriented. You have to create opportunities for people to use their skills and create their own businesses.

The knowledge economy is very dear and Key to Ekiti. What impacts have you made in this sector?

In the knowledge economy, we have restored our old policy, which is free education that was cancelled by the immediate past government in public primary and secondary schools. We have begun to see major increase in school enrolment. Primary school enrolment has gone up by at least 40,000 pupils between 2018 when 2020. In the secondary schools, enrolment has gone up by about 25,000.

You have to wonder where were these pupils before we came on board and the answer to that is the lack of opportunities that stare us all in the face. It will shock you to know that all the four model secondary schools built recently by our administration have been filled up. We now have to build at least three more to address the shortfall based on demands. This intervention in the knowledge economy is really working.

So, we are planning to build one more in Ado Ekiti, another one in the South, in Ikere Ekiti, to make up for demands and pressure that are being mounted on the existing schools and another one in Ekiti North, most likely in Ikole. Equally, we have activated our policy of returning schools to their original owners, Christ's School being the first.

The Catholics, the Methodists and the Ansarudeens have now asked for their schools too. In the Tertiary sector, we have upgraded the College of Education to the Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, in fulfilment of our campaign promise to Ikere community.

We have also secured accreditation for the newly established College of Agriculture and Technology in Isan Ekiti, which is to produce mid-level career employment in the agricultural sector. We have the Ekiti State University, College of Health Technology, Jjero Ekiti and many others.

In the area of infrastructure, if you observe very well, you will see that we are laying fibre-optic cables all over the state, because we realised that what can give Ekiti an edge and bring us out of being a dependent civil service state is technology as contained in our economic strategy. We have entered into partnership with MTN for the laying of the Fibre optic cabling to guarantee broadband access that will create a regional loop extended to all the Tertiary institutions in the state: Ekiti State University, Federal University, Oye, Bamidele Olumilua University and the Afe Babalola University, Federal Polytechnic in Ado Ekiti and the College of Agriculture and Technology, Isan.

That is the value addition we brought and that we think we can bring to the table to make Ekiti a destination of choice for businesses, where you can stay, play and live to do your businesses and prosper.

In the social investment sector, we are helping the weak and the vulnerable out of their position of poverty and giving them leverage and relevance. Under this, the health sector takes the lead in that area. The primary health centres are being strengthened. Fifty of them will be renovated and equipped within the next six months. We are also planning to renovate and equip all our secondary facilities. This, we intend to do to make healthcare delivery available to our people. In addition, we are strengthening the Ekiti State Health Insurance Scheme, which we launched last year to guarantee universal access. Our health budget has grown exponentially as a result of this mission.

We are also paying attention to our tertiary hospital, improving on infrastructure and provision of equipment. This is a Covid-19 pandemic Era and you've seen how we have managed the situation. In fact, Ekiti has done well in the management of the pandemic. With this new strain of pandemic and the virulence, we need to increase vigilance and ensure that our people observe all protocols to halt the spread of the disease.

The next move now is making the vaccines available to our people. And we are looking at alternative way of procuring our own vaccine in addition to what the federal government is able to make available to us.

In the area of infrastructure, you are all here and you know what we have been able to do in that regard. Ekiti is a state with limited resources but with unlimited resourcefulness. We have giant ideas and we are resolute about our vision of taking Ekiti



from a backwater State to the forefront of a modern, civilized society.

On water, as of today, we have rehabilitated three dams: Egbe, Ureje and the Ero Dams. We are now about to commence the rehabilitation of Itapaji Dam and the State is also partnering the federal government to rehabilitate the Ogbese Dam in the Southern part that had been abandoned by the federal Ministry of water resources.

Early in the new year, I ran to Mr. President for a special intervention for the completion of the Ogbese multipurpose dam, which is for irrigation, can supply water to the people of the south with the Egbe dam that is being turned around and also generate electricity with its 5 megawatts capacity, which he graciously approved.

In the Northern region, the Itapaji dam is going to be more for irrigation to improve agriculture in that axis, I mean ensuring farming all year round. In the area of electricity, we are also working hard to ensure improved power supply to Ekiti. We are partnering and signing MoUs with private investors. Roads are coming up gradually. We have six roads that traverse the three senatorial districts under construction. We have the Agbado-Ode-Omuo road, two, the road to the tourism belt, Aramoko-Erinjijan-Ikogosi road, we have Ilupeju-Ijan-Igbemo road, which is 80 per cent complete. We have the Oye-Ayede-Ikun; we have the first phase of the by-pass – Ado-Iyin-Aramoko-Itawure road.

We are signing an Independent Power Project next week with FenChurch, which will focus on providing electricity for public institutions. We have a lot of building projects, the Oja Oba market, which had been commissioned. We will also commission our neighbourhood markets in all the local governments in the course of the next month. We are also working on solar power as an alternative renewable energy platform working with the Rural Electrification Agency. Our knowledge zone and the cargo airport are also continuing apace. We just got a grant of \$250,000 from the AfDB for the development of the master plan of Ekiti Knowledge Zone.

On the airport, we are evaluating the bids for the construction of the runway, cargo sheds and the terminal, and the perimeter fencing had been done. We are also working out the compensation for those whose land has been taken in overriding public interest. I believe the winner of the main bid will move to site latest by March and I am confident that it will be completed before the expiration of my tenure. We have strengthened the public works corporation to be able to rehabilitate some of the township roads our people are complaining about.

You just said that you upgraded the College of Education to a university and established a College of Agriculture and Technology. Don't you think this may add to the financial burden of government?

You could recall that it was my government that consolidated the University of Science and Technology, Ifaki, the University of Ado Ekiti and The University of Education, Ikere Ekiti (TUNEDIK) during my first term in office. Let me say this, the Oni government had returned the licence of TUNEDIK to the National Universities Commission before I came in 2010 due to irreconcilable differences with the community. It was my merger of the three universities that gave rise to the establishment of the Ekiti State University. Since then, the Federal University had been established in Oye and Ikole, taking care of the interest of Ekiti North.

However, there has been a serious agitation from the South about the need for a University to cater to the growing population of students in the South. Already, the College of Education

has been an affiliate of University of Nigeria, Nsukka awarding Nsukka degrees in the last decade or more. This has inevitably reduced the population of students pursuing NCE and increased the population of degree students. Given this reality, one could justify the upgrading of the college.

However, I made myself clear that the government won't increase subvention to the university for now, and I am particularly happy that we have a resourceful management and the governing council, who have been working hard to ensure that things work out in this regard.

I am glad to note too that the community has been living up to its promise to ensure that the university is funded through public-private partnership. I'm told the community is contributing about N500 million to fund the university. So given the above, granting the request for the upgrading of College of Education, Ikere is understandable.

About the College of Agriculture and Technology, there has been a serious gap in the development of human capital in the Agriculture sector in the state. Even in government, we have a dearth of extension workers to help our farmers. These are the people who used to train farmers in modern farming techniques in the olden days and we have to return to that era whilst enabling our farmers become Agripreneurs.

I believe this College will help in training middle cadre technologists that will be of help to our many commercial agricultural businesses in the state. So, it is going to be a win-win situation for the state if we make use of the institutions very well. It will put education and agriculture as the unique selling points of Ekiti people.

Are you not worried that the Nigerian Governors' Forum is divided on the issue of Covid-19 Pandemic?

Not at all! We are not in any way divided. We have 35 governors on one side. Only one of us had a divergent opinion and that is the beauty of democracy. But a situation whereby our people are dying, and the whole world is worried and people still doubt the existence of the disease is unfortunate.

Let me tell the public that my very dependable and reliable ally, a member of the Ekiti State House of Assembly, Hon Juwa Adegbuyi just died of complications linked to Covid-19. Everyday in the last three weeks, I lost at least one person personally known to me to Covid-19. So, it is very unfortunate to say that the pandemic doesn't exist. As democracy demands, we can hold our views, but as leaders, the welfare of our people should be paramount to us.

We shouldn't take anything that has to do with welfare and wellbeing of the people with levity. For whatever reason, we shouldn't mislead our people and if we do, we must hold ourselves vicariously responsible if they become careless on account of believe us as thought leaders and influential opinion moulders. Some are even saying the vaccines are out to eliminate Africans. It is just unfortunate. We will continue to appeal to the people that hold this view so that they won't blame themselves for whatever calamity befalls them.

I can assure you that every governor is conscious of the seriousness of this pandemic and we are working assiduously to curtail the spread, but every single death we recorded brings sorrow to all of us. But for those, who have contrary opinion, we will continue to appeal to them. My duty as the head of the Governors' Forum is to convey the totality of our agreement to the President and I can tell you without any shadow of doubt that we don't follow opinions, we follow science.

The reason things have been better for us in Ekiti is, because

• LET ME SAY EXPRESSLY, APC WILL WIN THE PRESIDENCY IN 2023 •

we were strict, probably even more than Lagos, Abuja and other states. I want to tell our people that we must follow science on this issue of Covid-19. Let me say this, I experienced it and I knew what it means and I will never wish what I experienced with Covid-19 on my enemy. At least 10 of my colleagues have also experienced it.

The 2023 election has started generating ripples in Southwest APC with those loyal to you and Asiwaju Bola Tinubu fighting on the social media. Where do you stand and how do you douse the raging tension?

Asiwaju Bola Tinubu and I have no reason or business to have any altercation on any issue, not least on 2023 election as you put it. Politics, to me, is not played on the social media. It is not a twitter game or a social media business. There is no basis for any altercation. I have not told anybody that I will be running and Asiwaju has not told anybody that he will be running. This is just a storm in the teacup. Some people are just creating this crisis for themselves even when they have not been sent by anyone.

I am sure that the future will sort itself out. APC is one big political family and I don't think it will be right to start fighting over ambition or engaging in character assassination. This kind of politics or war of attrition will not help us in APC either in Nigeria or in the Southwest. It is not helpful to the development of democracy, not helpful to our zone, and our race. My own belief is that things will sort themselves out in the future.

So, there's really no tension to douse. 2023 is at least two years away. I'm sure you know what they say about a week being a long time in politics. My primary interest now is to finish well in Ekiti and complete my legacy projects in the process of restoring the values of Ekiti people and reclaiming the land back to sanity. Every other thing is speculative.

The 2022 governorship election in Ekiti is around the corner. Are you confident of retaining the state for APC despite the crisis in your party and in view of this widespread impression that APC has not fared well at the federal?

You remember what people said in 2019 that APC would lose presidency and this same president won. In 2018, they said the same thing in Ekiti and we emerged victorious. We are politicians and we can say anything to discredit a government in power in order to manufacture consent and popularity where none exist. When I came back in 2018, I told the people that I will make a tremendous impact in their lives and it is on that record that whomever that would succeed me will run.

One thing I know that made me won the 2018 election was that, there was no community that I got to where I could not

point to two, three or four projects that I did in my first term. When the time comes, it is my record that the candidate of my party will run on. Two, where is the crisis in APC. What we have are agitations by those, who have their views about me and about the party.

What we have are tendencies within a vibrant political party and any party that is truly democratic must have that. I am very confident without a shadow of doubt that we will have enough to sell to our people. Campaign is a market place; we will all go out and talk to Ekiti kete on why the candidate of APC should be voted for, because we are going to run on a record.

What of the impression that the APC at the centre has failed the nation?

Like I said earlier, they said more than that in 2019 and we won. The APC has not done badly at the federal level. We have not in any way disappointed and the records are there for everyone to see. Is it the second Niger Bridge, the Lagos-Ibadan road, Abuja-Kaduna road, Ibadan-Lagos rail line, Abuja-Kaduna rail line and so on? Even the dualisation of Ado-Akure road has been awarded and the project will begin soon.

The federal government is doing a lot of projects all over the nation. However, has APC met all the expectations of the citizens? Absolutely not! We still have a lot to do in the two and a half years left. But let me say it expressly, the APC will win the 2023 presidency but if you're in doubt, let us all wait and see.

What modality are you putting in place to ensure that the APC has a hitch-free membership registration in Ekiti?

This APC membership registration is an open and transparent exercise and it is the right of every member to revalidate his or her membership and the right of new members to come on board. I also think it provides the opportunity for those who had been agitating from the outside to come in and deepen their engagement with the party. The process is straightforward and I believe the Registration Committee will explain this when they come to Ekiti. All of us will be part of this process and we even want others, who are not part of us to come and join our party. A week ago, the former state secretary of the PDP defected to APC in his ward in Iyin Ekiti. So, all members have the legitimate right to register without hindrance. The constitution of APC mandates the party to update its register every six months, but this is the first time to my knowledge that we are doing this since 2015.

You will be 56 on Tuesday, February 9. Looking back to your childhood, would you say you were over-pampered being the last child?



I was not in any way over pampered, but I grew up around women with my mother and four sisters, who all contributed to who I'm today. There's quite a considerable gap between my siblings and I, because my parents lost two daughters before I was born. My eldest sister is 70 this year, that's a fourteen-year gap and my immediate elder sister is 62 next months. That's a six-year gap.

I was quite close to my mother and by the time all my sisters had left home, I was her journeyman, driver and shop attendant, running errands for her in her store. But my mother was hot. She never spared the rod – and that rod could be the hot soup spoon or her pounding yam pestle. I learnt how to escape from what would be seen today as child abuse and thankfully, my sisters provided me with space every time I felt bored at home or at odds with my parents. I also grew up to enjoy my own company and I was a very studious child but not really a pampered child.

Ahmed: What We're Witnessing Is Failure of Nigerian State

In this short interview, Hakeem Baba Ahmed, spokesperson of the Northern Elders Forum, spoke to **Chuks Okocha** on the alleged demonisation of the Fulani in other parts of the country. Excerpt...

Have you any regrets on a recent statement issued by NEF and do you believe that what the group did was the right approach under the circumstances?

First of all, you need to be more specific. The press statement said Fulani man or woman like every Nigerian deserves to be protected. They deserve the protection of the state. They deserve the protection of the community. People who are living peacefully, who are living within the law, people, who have not broken the law should not be harassed, should not be attacked and should not be intimidated. It's not just about the Fulani, but any Nigerian.

We must be free to live anywhere in the country. If the state is unable to protect the Fulani and the community that they're living with who have known them for decades cannot protect them when they are in danger, then, they should come back home, where maybe they will be safer.

But we are not asking anybody to leave where he is to come home; we are saying Nigerians should be protected whether they are Fulani or Effik or itsehiri or Igbo or Yoruba – everybody needs to be protected.

But are you not worried about the criminal elements among the Fulani that are causing havoc in the country?

They should be arrested. We know that there are criminal Fulani among the Fulani as in the case among other ethnic tribes. We know that in the North in the past as now, like in any part of the country, we knew that there are also the bad eggs and our position is that they should be arrested, tried under the law of the country.

The Nigerian state must not allow anybody to get away with criminal activities whether they are Fulani or Yoruba or Igbo. Nobody should be seen to be above the law and this is important. Arrest any Fulani man if he breaks the law; arrest him but don't tell innocent people that you have not identified with the crime to leave where they are, if they have not broken any law and they have not violated any guideline. You don't have the right to tell people to leave a place if they are living there lawfully and legally. This is wrong.



Ahmed...Nigeria is in a dangerous state

Under the circumstances of growing insecurity in the country, will you call for a national conference, where most of these issues about the insecurity in the country should be discussed?

The immediate thing is that we want all Nigerians with responsibility to speak up; to come now. We need to assure people that Nigeria is safe for everybody. We need to stop all this terrible rhetoric that is tearing everybody and community apart. We need assurances that they are safe – whether you are at home or in somebody's home. Nigeria must be protected.

Second is to look at why we have this kind of quarrel now when we have been living in the past peacefully. This is a country that accommodates all of us and provides for all our needs. Why are we fighting over pieces of land; fighting each other as if we are just strangers? We have lived with each other for hundreds of years.

This is wrong! So, something is wrong with country. Something is not working well. We need to sit down and look at what is wrong in the year 2021. People are saying they

don't want a particular tribe of Nigerians living in their country. We have the police; we have the constitution; we have laws. Something is wrong

Yes the Fulani, the Igbo, the Yoruba and the Hausa have been living together for ages, what in your reckoning is wrong now?

What is the problem? We need to know. Is it that the Nigerian state is failing us or we failed to resolve those problems that come out every once in a while? Whether it is between the same ethnic groups or different ethnic groups that have been living in the past, the Nigerian States has the capacity to do provide resolution; to enforce the law to deal with violations of the law.

Unfortunately, in the last few years, something is wrong or has gone wrong or is it that Nigerians have failed to deal with people that are taking the laws in their own hands? What you are seeing happening now is the reflection of the failure of the Nigerian State.

We are assuming powers that are not ours. It is the government that should deal with criminals – whether they are Fulani or not. Why are communities now exercising that rights of the state by exercising that powers to eject people?

Will it be appropriate for the government to call for a sovereign meeting to discuss the issues that are now causing the insecurities in the country?

I don't know about sovereign conference. What we recommended so many times and we are still recommending is that Nigerians should sit and discuss with or without government approval to discuss what is wrong with Nigeria. We don't need the approval of the federal government to sit down and discuss and right now, I am telling you we are actually reaching out to each other from the North from the East from the South.

We have a forum, where we talk and we are reaching out to elders and leaders, who are responsible to try and bring down the temperature. We are in a very dangerous state and we do not need the approval or the consent of the government to discuss what is wrong with Nigeria. But if we can do that with government, it is even better, because the government has law behind it; the agencies behind it to assist Nigeria to be a little bit more secure where we live.

TRIBUTE

Tony Momoh: In Him We Had a True Nigerian

Raheem Akingbolu

Prince Tony Momoh, a former Minister of Information, who died on Monday, February 1, 2021, lived a life of a true Nigerian. Till he breathed his last, Momoh demonstrated through actions and association that one Nigeria was possible. Perhaps if the Edo State born former newspaper Editor was here with the likes of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, his philosophical works would have made huge influence on the society.

Whether as a Journalist, Lawyer, Politician, Administrator and community leader, Momoh, lived a life of a philosopher, teacher and pathfinder. As a nonconformist, thinker with deep hindsight and foresight, Momoh had, on many occasions, used his radical views to save his people and provided direction on national issues. Of course, his closest friends while alive were always quick to explain that the late minister read wide and so always think wide.

In settling for friends, Momoh sure looked beyond his nose and extended his dragnets to all parts of the country. As if there is a law that recommends geographical spread of friends, Prince Tony Momoh had friends in almost all the ethnic nations of Nigeria.

Looking back at his political and social life, it is now clear that the former newspaper man sacrificed a lot for Nigerian to be one. When he had enough people to pick from in his Edo State, he went to the North and South to settle for friends. This was also the trend of his political association, which for a long time made him pitched tent with many Nigerian leaders and elder statesmen, including the current President Muhamma du Buhari

Till last Monday, Momoh kept answering questions and explaining the mystery surrounding his birth, his polygamous background, his faith and his lucky number -13, which was regarded as a contrary view to the position of the Astrologists that the number 13 is synonymous with bad luck and misfortune.

From Palace to Classroom...

He attended Government School Auchu from 1949 to 1954 and Anglican School Okpe in 1954. Momoh was Pupil Teacher at the Anglican School, Auchu from January to December 1955 and Headmaster at the Anglican School, Ubuneke, Ivbiaro, Owan Local Government from January 1958 to December 1959.

He went to the Provincial Teachers Training College, Abudu, Edo State and Government Teachers College, Abraka in Western Region (1960-1961).

Later, while working at the Daily Times or on sabbatical, he attended the University of Nigeria, Nsukka from September 1964 to October 1966 where he earned a degree in Mass communication, and then the University of Lagos where he studied Law.

He attended the Nigerian Law School, Lagos from October 1974 to May 1975, and was called to the bar in June 1975.

Inside the newsroom...

Momoh started his journalism career as a sub-editor at the Daily Times in October 1962, rising steadily through the ranks to become Editor and deputy general manager from June 1976 to May 1980.

Momoh had a reputation for standing firm in the face of intimidation and he was known for fighting for press freedom. Joseph Wayas, former senate president, once invited him to appear before the chamber over an "uncomplimentary" and "contemptuous" publication, asking him to disclose his source of information. Momoh sued the senate at the Lagos high court over what he described as an attempt to infringe on press freedom in the country.

In the legal battle that ensued, Momoh argued that a journalist has the constitutional obligation to hold the government accountable at all times. The court held that an individual had the right to refuse to disclose their source of information.

In its ruling, an appellate court, however, stated that the 1979 constitution did not shield a journalist from disclosing his source of information.

His birth, his faith and the controversies

Prince Momoh was born on 27 April 1939 as the 165th child of King Momoh I of Auchu. The king had 257 children and the ex-minister was the third of the four children that his mother, a junior wife amidst 48 queens, had for the king. In an interview, the deceased recounted that every six months, his father's wives would take a traditional oath not to do anything to undermine their husband, children, or one another.

In 1955, Momoh converted from Islam to Christianity. He was named Suleiman at birth, but changed to Tony — taking after the personality he admired, Anthony Enahoro, one of Nigeria's foremost anti-colonial and pro-democracy activists.

Commenting on his faith, he once said: "When I



Prince Momoh

was being sworn in as minister of information and culture, I said I wouldn't swear by the Bible or the Quran and I said, 'So help me God'. When I stepped out, journalists asked me, 'They said you are an atheist.' I said I was not an atheist. They asked why I did not swear by the Bible or the Quran but only said 'So help me God.' I said, 'I am a Christian and a Muslim when they are not quarreling, and neither when they are.'"

Momoh attended the Government School Auchu, a school founded by his father in 1922. He later moved to Anglican School Okpe, where he served as a pupil-teacher. He also served as headmaster of the Anglican School, Ubuneke, Ivbiaro, Owan local government area of the state. Momoh attended the Provincial Teachers Training College, Abudu, Edo state and Government Teachers College, Abraka, Delta state. He proceeded to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), University of Lagos and the Nigerian Law school. He possesses degrees in mass communication and law.

His Politics and the Flipside...

Later in his career, Momoh was appointed by Ibrahim Babangida, then military president, as minister of information and culture from September 1986 until 1990. Earlier in 1983, as the editor of Newswatch, Dele Giwa, was detained for a week by police for publishing what they called "classified material". On 17 October 1986, Giwa was accused by Colonel A.K. Togun of the State Security Services (SSS) of anti-government activities including attempting to import arms to foment insurrection. On 19 October 1986, Giwa was killed by a parcel bomb. At first, Momoh pledged that there would be a government

probe of the incident. He soon backed down, saying "a special probe would serve no useful purpose. In 1996, he (Momoh) became a director of Newswatch

In 1987 at a seminar in Lagos, Momoh had enthusiastically stated that radio, television and newspapers should be seen as tools "for the promotion of national unity and integration".

In what looked like a follow up to an agenda setting statement, Momoh again said in 1988 that the government was trying to find radio sets that could only receive approved broadcasts from the federal and state radio stations. This was "as a means of ensuring that information about the country was adequately disseminated".

Aside serving in Babangida's administration, Momoh also served in various capacities in the last two decades. In 1999, he was director of the Alex Ekwueme presidential campaign organization. The deceased served as the chairman, media and publicity, of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP). Also, he was chairman of the political committee of the Muhammadu Buhari Organisation and national chairman of the defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), one of the parties that merged to form the All Progressives Congress (APC).

During a campaign rally in 2015, Momoh was reported to have said Buhari was capable of tackling headlong the myriad of problems confronting the country, saying the people should stone him if his candidate does not perform after two years.

"At the end of the day if Buhari doesn't perform, stone us because he is going to perform," he was reported to have said.

Three years later, Momoh said Buhari had done well and delivered on his campaign promises despite the challenges he met upon assumption of office.

Tending Legislature's Unfinished Businesses

On Tuesday, the National Assembly will resume from its Christmas vacation to attend to pressing national issues, including the outstanding bills, writes **Udora Orizu**

The two chambers of the National Assembly, which have been on Christmas break since December 22, 2020, will resume plenary on Tuesday, February 9 for the commencement of the 2021 legislative calendar.

The lawmakers, who were initially billed to resume plenary on Tuesday, January 26th postponed their resumption by two weeks to enable federal lawmakers belonging to the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) participate in the revalidation of their membership of the party with effect from January 25, 2021.

Upon resumption, the Ninth Assembly members are expected to continue their legislative duties and tend to crucial bills, which they have promised to prioritise in their legislative agenda.

The Scourge of Insecurity

Worsening insecurity in the country has been the crux of discussion on the floor of the Senate and the House, resulting in several security-related motions and bills being passed by the lawmakers.

As President Muhammadu Buhari finally heeded the parliament's call to replace the Service Chiefs, the lawmakers, in kick-starting the 2021 legislative year, will pass security-related motions and Bills, which will help the new security chiefs to tackle insurgency, banditry and kidnapping that are still rampant in many parts of the country.

Reviewing the Constitution

This year, the review of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) will be a major focus of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Although nothing much has been achieved by the Senate and House committees on the review of the constitution headed by Deputy President of the Senate, Senator Ovie Omo-Agege and Deputy Speaker, Hon. Idris Wase, since it was constituted last year, the committees are expected to move fast in the new year if the June, 2021 target set by the committees to amend the constitution will be realisable.

The Senate had last August called for memoranda from the general public for the review of the 1999 constitution. In a statement, the upper chamber called on "the general public, Executive and Judicial bodies, Civil Society Organizations, professional bodies and other interest groups to submit memoranda or proposals for further alteration(s) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) towards promoting good governance and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom".

The statement further clarified that the memoranda being expected should focus on any of the following 13 thematic areas: Gender equality for women and girls; Federal structure and power devolution; Local government and its autonomy; Public revenue, fiscal federation and revenue allocation; Nigerian Police and Nigerian security architecture as well as comprehensive judicial reforms.

Others are: Electoral reforms; Socio-economic and cultural rights as contained in Chapter 2 of the Constitution; Strengthening the Independence of oversight institutions and agencies created by the constitution or pursuant to an act of the National Assembly; Residency and indigene provisions; Immunity; National Assembly and state creation.

The Pending Crucial Bills

There are several important Bills pending before the National Assembly. But a few are very crucial and will require quick legislative intervention, which the Ninth leadership had promised. Some of these legislations have the tendency of propelling the country into greatness if passed and implemented.

1. Petroleum Industry Bill

Nigerians are expectant to know what next with the long awaited Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), as it currently seems another PIB jinx is brewing. This followed altercation and discordant views between members of the National Assembly, oil producing communities, organised labour and various interests groups at the public hearings on the bill.



Senate President Ahmed Lawan, President Muhammadu Buhari and Speaker Femi Gbajabamila

Both the Senate and House of Representatives had last month held public hearings on the proposed legislation during which host communities, organised labour and civil society organisations opposed some provisions in the legislation, which consequently led to a rejection of the Bill.

At the hearing in the House, members of the host communities engaged in a physical altercation. The fight broke out when the Host Communities of Nigeria Producing Oil and Gas (HOSTCOM) was called to the podium to make presentation by the Chairman of the Ad-hoc Committee on PIB, Hon. Mohammed Monguno, but there was disagreement among them leading to a fisticuffs until security operatives intervened. Lawmakers and other participants scamped to safety, and reconvened after the dust settled.

The Committee Chairman soon announced after they reconvened that the panel would visit various communities in the coast region to properly engage them.

Also, the Senate President, Dr. Ahmad Lawan, while playing host to a delegation of Oil Producers Trade Section (OPTS) in his office after the public hearing, made case for the host communities, saying the welfare of the communities should be paramount in PIB provisions.

On his part, the House spokesman, Hon. Benjamin Kalu, in a statement issued the next day, while condemning the scuffle, which broke out between the host communities said, the House remained on track to pass the PIB by April 2021, mindful that the legislation would reinvigorate the petroleum industry and promote economic growth in the host communities and the nation at large.

Electoral Act Amendment Bill

Last year, the House as promised, reintroduced the Electoral Act Amendment Bill that President Muhammadu Buhari declined assent to during the Eighth Assembly.

In the Eighth Assembly, 12 Bills seeking to amend the provisions of the Electoral Act 2010 and the Electoral (amendment) Act 2015 sponsored by members were passed. The National Assembly passed the Electoral Act (amendment) Bill 2018 and forwarded same to the President for his assent pursuant to section 58 (4) of the 1999 Constitution amended, but the President declined assent due to some lacuna or drafting issues in some of the clauses of the Bill and advised that those observations be addressed.

At the plenary on November 24, 2020, the House passed for second reading, the Electoral Act Amendment Bill, 2020.

The Chairman, House Committee on Electoral Matters, and the Bill's sponsor, Hon. Aisha Dukku stressed the need to reintroduce the Bill in order to ensure important amendments that would improve the country's electoral process.

Police Reform Bill

In the past year, Nigerians witnessed many security challenges – from Boko Haram insurgency, killings of unarmed citizens by trigger-happy security agents, to torture and senseless execution of innocent citizens by operatives of the now defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigeria Police Force.

This gave rise to the #EndSARS protest, and consequently the birth of the Police Reform Bill, which seeks to reform the Nigeria Police Force and hold erring officials accountable for their actions. The legislation titled Police Service Commission Reform Bill was passed for second reading on December 15, 2020.

Hon. Yusuf Gagdi and Hon. Henry Nwawuba sponsor the Bill, earlier presented to stakeholders on November 18 for inputs.

Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Femi Gbajabamila had at the unveiling of the Bill to the stakeholders last year, said Nigeria Police could not be effective, when the mechanisms for accountability and discipline are too weak to identify, remove and prosecute rogue officers.

He assured that the House would carry out a comprehensive reform of the Nigeria Police from recruitment to training and welfare of officers.

Diaspora Voting Bill

Ahead of 2023 general election, it seems the quest by Nigerians in Diaspora to take part in electoral process might become a reality as the House of Representatives, on December 16, 2020, passed for second reading, a Bill seeking to alter the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to enable them participate in elections.

The legislation seeks to amend Section 77 Subsection (2) of the Principal Act and is being sponsored by the Chairperson, House Committee on Diaspora Affairs, Hon. Tolulope Akande-Sadipe, and 15 other lawmakers.

Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill

Before suspending plenary for two weeks, the House on March 24, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, gave speedy passage to the Emergency Economic Stimulus Bill.

The bill, which seeks to ease the burden of importation and financial burden, thereby fostering easier

access and reduction in the price, as well as provide a new tax regime for corporate bodies, with rebates to encourage companies in the country to maintain their payroll status for the immediate term, was sponsored by Gbajabamila. But nothing has since been heard of the Bill.

Fiscal Responsibility Act (Amendment) Bill

Also at the red chamber, legislators are mulling to pull Nigeria out of what it described as the mismanagement through amendments to the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007.

The proposed legislation, titled "A Bill for an Act to provide for prudent management of the Nation's Resources, ensure long term Macro-Economic stability of the National Economy, secure greater accountability and transparency in Fiscal operations within the Medium Term Fiscal Policy Framework and the establishment of the Fiscal Responsibility Commission to ensure the promotion and enforcement of the Nation's Economic objectives; and for related matters," has been passed for second reading at the Senate.

It's expected to be given priority once the lawmakers resume.

Supplementary Budget for COVID-19 Vaccines

A THISDAY investigation had revealed that the federal government was working on a supplementary budget for the procurement of COVID-19 Vaccines that would be presented to the National Assembly soon.

The National Assembly is said to have set April deadline for the consideration and approval of the budget, when submitted by the executive.

Speaking to THISDAY last week, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Primary Healthcare and Communicable Diseases, Senator Chukwuka Utazi, said the issue of the supplementary budget had become apparent since enough funds were not provided in the 2021 budget for the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines.

Utazi said he was hopeful that before Easter, the Bill would be in the National Assembly for legislative processes and passage into law.

The Many Probes

Furthermore, Nigerians are still waiting to know the outcome of several probes embarked upon last year by some committees of the House. Particularly, the Chinese loan probe and probe of alleged financial malfeasance by the former Interim Management Committee (IMC) of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), which generated so many controversies.

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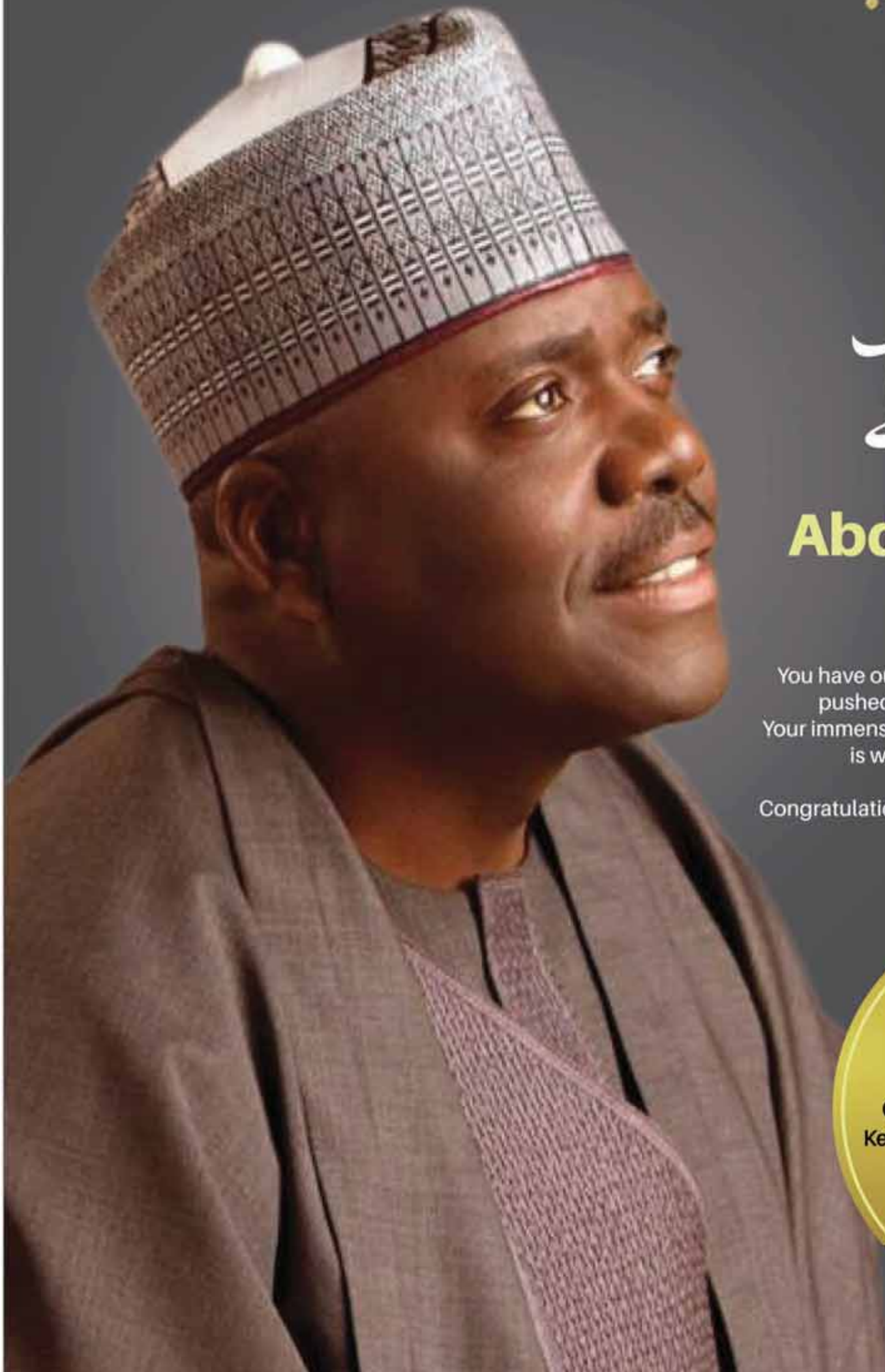
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THE ALTERNATIVE

with Reno Omokri



Buhari and Biden

Biden Has Done More for Nigeria Than Buhari

Hiden Has Done More For Nigeria Than Buhari. In less than two weeks, America's new President, Joe Biden, has appointed more qualified Southern Nigerians to senior positions in his government than President Buhari has in the last six months.

Biden kicked off the spree of appointments by appointing 39-year-old wunderkind, Adewale Adeyemo, to the cabinet-level of Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. This is the highest level appointment of any Nigerian in the world. Adeyemo now has influence over more funds than the Nigerian President. Alas, if he were to have been based in Nigeria, perhaps Buhari would have made him his PA on photography like he did the Igbo race!

Biden has also appointed Osaremen Okolo, another Nigerian American, as his health policy adviser on COVID-19 response.

Not done, President Biden, appointed Funmi Olorunnipa Badejo as his White House Counsel. She now becomes the hand that moves the hand that moves America. Can you beat that?

And just when we thought he had used the hat-trick to dazzle Nigerians into falling in love with him, he pulled another rabbit out of his generous hat. He named yet another Nigerian, Enoch Titilayo Ebong, the acting director of the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA).

Wow! Just wow!

It is almost certain that none of the Nigerians appointed by Joe Biden would have found their way into President Buhari's cabinet. How could they? They are neither Fulani enough, nor Northern enough, nor Muslim enough. Buhari's nepotism makes Equatorial Guinea's started Teodoro Obiang Nguema look like a learner.

Buhari could learn a thing or two from Joe Biden. I mean, never in our democratic history have we had a situation where the heads of the three arms of government, Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary are Northern Muslim Males. This is a zero-sum game taken to the extreme!

Why are the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, Ministry of Defence, Army, Navy, Police, NSA, DSS, NIA, DMI, DIA, NPS, NCS, NIS, and EFCC all Northern Muslim men? This is against the Federal Character Act. And yet, Buhari's presidency complains at their abysmal corruption perception ranking by Transparency International? Of course, Transparency International is aware that nepotism is also corruption.

Buhari's nepotism as a military ruler in Nigeria led to the unique situation where both he and his Vice President (Chief of Staff Supreme Military Headquarters) were Northern Muslim males of Fulani heritage (Idiagbon was part Fulani). That regime was so nepotistic that they kicked-started Nigeria's first brain drain in 1984, and today, Buhari has not changed, or learned anything since then!

His nepotism has so divided Nigeria that I wonder if we can ever recover from the curse of Buhari as a nation. Even his wife cannot stand him. She checked out, like Andrew, to Dubai. Buhari has created Nnamdi Kanu in the East and Sunday Igboho in the West. This government came to steal, kill and destroy.

Because of the Gestapo-like control of the media that the Buhari government has put in place, many Nigerians do not yet know the destructive impact that his nepotism has inflicted on Nigeria. But think about this. Boko Haram kills Nigerians, and Buhari rehabilitates them. Yet, he wants to arrest Sunday Igboho that is protecting Nigerians!

Another example of the devastation that Buhari's nepotism has wreaked in Nigeria is in our finances. The current minister of finances lacks both the academic and professional qualifications to function in that office adequately. And what has been the consequence?

Nigeria's foreign debt increased from \$7 billion in 2015 to \$32 billion in 2020, with little to show for it. Buhari has borrowed more than Abacha, Abdulsalami, Obasanjo, Yar'adua and Jonathan, combined. Where has the money gone? Much of it into private pockets.

I mean, what is Nigeria's business with constructing roads in Niger and building railways to their cities when we have not done that in Nigeria? And to cap it all, these constructions are being paid for by loans that Nigeria will repay.

I will counsel those Nigerians in President Biden's cabinet to speak into the ears of their boss, because if they do not act and act soon, they may not have a home to return to after they must have been done serving the United States Government.

Nigeria cannot survive another two and a half years of Buhari's misrule. We are a resilient people, but we are still human, and that is why people like Sunday Igboho and Nnamdi Kanu are rising to fill the void in leadership that has been created in Nigeria.

Besides Buhari's nepotism and misrule, there are too many non-state actors with arms in Nigeria. On Tuesday, February 2, 2021, respected Islamic scholar, Sheikh Ahmad Abubakar Gumi went to

Katsina on a peace mission. Whilst there, he met an estimated 500 armed bandits. He appealed to them to tow the path of peace, and I commend him.

But imagine that. 500 heavily armed men. And they are outlaws. They are non-state actors. And this is just one state. And yet, Buhari has mounted more roadblocks per square mile in the Southeast of Nigeria, than exists in war-torn Syria. And this is a region of Nigeria that does not have even a fraction of these armed bandits.

How is it just that these armed bandits have not been declared to be terrorists, but the Indigenous People of Biafra, who are not as much a threat to life and security as these herdsmen and bandits are? The answer is because they share an ethnic and religious affinity with Buhari, while IPOB does not.

The men of Nigeria's armed forces who should be saving the lives of innocent Nigerians being tormented by these bandits and herdsmen in the Northwest are instead sent by Buhari to dominate and terrorise Southern Nigerians.

And why is Buhari doing this? Let us allow Buhari to speak for himself.

Speaking at the United States Institute of Peace on July 22, 2015, in response to a question on whether he intended to treat those who did not vote for him fairly, the newly-elected Buhari said:

"I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot, in all honesty, be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5%."

That Freudian slip is the philosophy behind the extreme nepotism that has driven Buhari's actions in government since May 29, 2015.

A Little on Nasir El-Rufai

El-Rufai did not call for the arrest of killer herdsmen. El-Rufai even admitted paying money to killer herdsmen.

El-Rufai did not talk when Miyetti Allah claimed they own Nigeria.

But when Sunday Igboho protects Nigerians, El-Rufai calls for his arrest!

The same El-Rufai that demolished a hotel on charges of holding an alleged sex party is now blasting governors that are moving against killer herdsmen? The same man who admitted paying killer herdsmen is now calling for leniency for herdsmen? An intolerant creature accusing others of intolerance. Rotimi Akeredolu is a thousand times better than you!

Tufiakwa!

ENGAGEMENTS

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SERVICE CHIEFS:

Hail the Chiefs! But Mind the Gaps...

The last few days have been full of somewhat excited public responses to the belated change of military service chiefs by President Buhari. That a routine exercise which came three years late should attract such significant public notice further underlines the now familiar inertness of this presidency. But at least the president has 'done something' by acting on a matter of long standing public concern! It may be a delayed response to prolonged public pressure. It could also be a reaction to the increasing dysfunction of the sacked service chiefs themselves. In a nation where the most elementary reflexes at the altar of power are dressed in political garb, some political factions and even state governors have since profusely thanked the president for the gallant feat of moving the furniture at the apex of our military hierarchy. It has hardly occurred to observers that the president has merely done what he is paid to do!

The president's postscript on the change of the former chiefs leaves an untidy trail. In a move unmatched by any previous administration, the presidency has announced the nomination of the immediate past service chiefs for ambassadorial positions even before they got to their homes. The hint is perhaps that the president may have had difficulty firing the chiefs some of whom had become rather politically entrenched to a disturbing extent. There seems to be a trade off of these ambassadorial nominations for the service fiefdoms. Whichever is the case, these nominations are too hasty, untidy and further deepen the wide perception of a fickle presidency.

More pointedly, it is a telling sign of the perilous times in which we live that the nation has come to place so much hope in the revolving turnstile of military service chiefs. Some otherwise sensible people actually believe that a change of generals at the helm of the military pecking order can dig us out of the present hole of abysmal insecurity.

A ravaging spate of violent insecurity has besieged the nation. The omnipresence of violence has become a constant feature of our new normal. The mood of public helplessness is so pervasive and overwhelming that people have incrementally lost confidence in the ability of the political leadership to guarantee basic safety of lives and property. Unconsciously, public confidence in matters of public security has shifted from the political leadership to the leaders of war. From a civil democracy presumably at peace, we have glided into a nervous society in a state of undeclared war. Naturally, a nation in a mindset of war idolizes people with greater ability for violence. Generals, ancient hunter warriors, sectional warlords, bandit leaders, even small time neighbourhood thugs and cult mobsters rise to towering prominence. On our new scale of heroism, talkative politicians do not, unfortunately, count for much even though we are adjudged a democracy!

As it turns out, the ritual of periodic elections do not by any means wholly define a democracy. The prevalence of violent insecurity in a society breaches one of the fundamental requirements of democracy: freedom. And of all freedoms, there is none more basic and priced than freedom from the fear of unplanned death or disabling trauma.

Of the democratic states of the world, we can now distinguish between two classes. First are those states in which prevalent peace can be taken for granted. Incidents of insecurity- the occasional bomb at a railway station, a stabbing episode, a school shooting etc- are only occasional emergencies and disruptions which are quickly brought under control by law enforcement so that normal social life can continue. The advanced democracies of the West and South East Asia (most of Europe, the US, Japan, Singapore, South Korea etc), and the consolidated semi authoritarian states (China, and Russia) belong in this category.

The second category of states are those where permanent insecurity has created a permanent sense of war. In these countries, nasty history, bad religion and chronic inequality have created climates of perennial factional clashes, sectarian terrorism and perpetual protest. In a place like Iraq, the task of nation building has been bedeviled by factional fights between Sunnis and Shiites with the Kurds as partisan onlookers. In places like Somalia and Afghanistan, fundamentalist theocratic pressure is in conflict with the secular essence of the nation state. In yet other places like Venezuela, hunger protests by throngs of unemployed and the desperately poor sends waves of angry mobs into the streets regularly and thus unleashes insecurity in the form of arson, looting and vandalism.

In these places, the nation becomes a virtual permanent garrison. Military fiat and constitutionality compete for primacy. Combat troops in battle fatigue become a regular sight in towns and villages. In the places where the police is the law enforcer of choice, policemen on duty trying to control hostile mobs are not exactly friends of freedoms and rights. In all these places, the architecture of social life is a permanent ruin. But these countries still hold periodic 'democratic' elections to choose their leaders but have become presumptive military garrison states. Lebanon, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Iraq, parts of Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia belong in this league.

The amazing curiosity of present day Nigeria is that it is neither a peaceful democracy nor a full-blown 'democratic' garrison state. But we have had military contingents on perma-



Buhari

nent internal security duties in nearly all of our 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory for the better part of the last decade. This is not to say that democracies do not occasionally need the guarantee of the force of arms to defend themselves even from their own factions. The assault and invasion of the US Capitol by Donald Trump inspired extremist mobs on 6th January this year necessitated that contingents of the US National Guard be drafted to secure the Capitol as the venue of the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th president of the US. An estimated 30,000 troops flooded Washington DC for the purpose and quickly withdrew once the mission was accomplished.

The choice of the National Guard as against pure theatre combatants was dictated by the low intensity estimate of the domestic terrorist threat. The Guard is an intermediate force, less ferocious than straight combatants but with a greater bite than the civil police. Nigeria's attempt to establish a National Guard as an intermediating force in the early 1990s under president Babangida was frightened off by professional political shouting squads.

Ordinarily, a change in the leadership of the armed forces should bring in a fresh breath in the effectiveness of our military. The many fronts of our internal security headache makes this change even more welcome. Here is a checklist of our current security nightmares: The Boko Haram insurgency, bandit impunity, brazen kidnapping, armed robbery, mob violence, inter communal warfare, sporadic urban cult clashes and more. It is therefore only natural for a frightened public to expect that a new set of generals at the helm of authorized violence should re-energize the effort to reclaim the peace. Unlike a number of elite commentators, however, I am not quite excited or optimistic that the appointment of the new service chiefs will significantly improve the state of our internal security any time soon.

First, the ineffectuality of our security apparatus in dealing with current security challenges is beyond the cosmetic shifting of four military officers. It is rooted in a certain institutional decay within our military establishment. This is of course part of the general systemic decay of our public institutions.

It is hardly believable that the same Nigerian military which fought and ended our civil war in less than three years has spent over a decade trying to contain an armed sectarian insurgency by a bunch of untrained, ill-equipped and unorganized terrorists. Biafra should have been a harder nut to crack. At least it had an armed force of trained officers, a command and control structure, a recognizable hierarchy and was an adversary with a clear territorial and political purpose. Therefore, compared to Boko Haram, Biafra was a more concerted and structured adversary.

The Nigerian armed forces that prevailed over Biafra is the same one that helped to end civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone and has participated creditably in several UN operations in Sudan, Lebanon and the Congo. But today, that tried and tested war machine is a sad disorderly ghost of its original self. Our entire military apparatus has for more than a decade been marooned in a disorderly chase after Boko Haram which is merely an opportunistic band of roving vandals, riding around in rickety pick up vans and armed with discarded rocket propelled grenades and old generation AK47s, thanks to recent conflicts in North Africa and the near Middle East.

Clearly then, something has gone fatally wrong with our armed forces in recent years. Arguably, the virus of corruption and accountability deficit that has become the hallmark of our new political culture has invaded the leadership of our defense and security forces. To rise to the apex of any of the armed forces now is to be assured of a retirement in opulence and incredible

wealth. Instructively, nearly every post-regime investigation of high level corruption in the country since 1999 has featured service chiefs and senior military officers as defendants. These are cases involving the open stealing and or misappropriation of frightening amounts of public funds. Not long ago, a division commander associated with the security operations in the northern parts of the country was found guilty of stealing cash to the tune of nearly half a billion Naira. As we write this, the EFCC is in the process of selling off high value assets belonging to a former service chief! Specific security operations have been bedeviled by allegations of shameful malfeasance. Some commanders have been accused of pocketing service men's allowances. Others have been charged with racketeering in dubious arms purchases.

As it were, a nefarious underground economy oiled by dubious arms contracts, security vote racketeering and even outright collusion with insurgents and terrorist organizations has reportedly since developed. The long duration of security operations may not have so much to do with the invincibility of the adversary. These long drawn operations and endless counter insurgency wars may have become a function of keeping the gravy train of security related corruption on track. As it were, insecurity may have become an industry of its own, albeit one that is kept alive by the greed of senior military officers and their sponsoring civilian cohorts. I am not so sure that these institutional infirmities will suddenly disappear simply because Mr. Buhari has just appointed a new set of service chiefs with medal infested new uniforms.

Over and above institutional decay, there is a more fundamental limitation of doctrine, orientation and a sluggish pace of equipment and operational modernization. Like other areas of our modern experience, the world of warfare has undergone a sea change. Technological advances now make it possible for a limited number of men armed with the relevant knowledge and gear to secure vast areas of territory remotely. Various types of unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, overhead satellite and night vision cameras etc. now make it easy to mount 24/7 electronic surveillance of hostile movements and activities over a vast terrain.

From all available evidence, our forces are still mostly trapped in the antiquity of warfare, the realm of manual chases after insurgents and terrorists. We are still sending men with assault rifles and machine guns mounted on pick up vans in hot pursuit of barefoot terrorists across vast stretches. We are still likely to go after lone wolf guerillas embedded with local populations with sluggish armored convoys. Our counter insurgency effort is still heavily weighted in favour of conventional forces as against the urgent necessity for a predominantly special forces operation. Indiscriminate air assaults against constantly mobile targets on the ground can only lead to massive collateral casualties which only heighten the charges of human rights abuses constantly leveled against the Nigerian military by international rights organizations.

In all of this, there is an overarching and more fundamental question. Many agree that Nigeria's current wave of insecurity poses an existential threat to our young democracy. How do you secure a democracy from vicious internal adversaries? Or, better still, how do you consolidate a democracy when society is assailed from every direction by myriad internal divisions and security challenges?

Clearly, our internal security challenges fall into two broad categories. First, there are quasi military threats that derive from outright armed challenges to the sovereignty of the federal government. What we are witnessing is an increasingly militant contestation of the authority of the federal sovereign by armed factions and tribes under the guise of sectarianism or sectional interests. Insurgent uprisings like Boko Haram, Banditry in the north and piracy in the oil and gas zones of the Niger Delta fall within this category. These threats affront our national cohesion, threaten territorial control and degrade our sovereign integrity. They therefore demand low to medium intensity military engagements and speedy neutralization. The enemy combatants behind these insurgent threats are neither external foes nor common domestic criminals. They are factions of misguided citizens, they could enlist external influences but directly enable and embolden domestic criminality.

On the other hand, we have criminal infractions like transactional kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling, murder and cultism which demand police crime intelligence and control action. These remain the province of police action. Unfortunately, not much effort has been committed to preparing the police force for the giant responsibility of defending a large democracy such as ours. Throughout the period of military rule and up to the return of civilian rule in 1999, not much progress has been made in the effort to prepare the Nigeria police for the task of protecting and securing democracy in our complex and diverse polity.

It is instructive that the tenure of the Inspector General of Police expired almost at the same time that the president was changing the service chiefs. Instead of replacing the IGP, Mr. Buhari has opted to keep the incumbent illegally in office through a curious three month tenure extension. Yet it is the police leadership that should have deserved urgency in view of the centrality of the police to securing a democracy.

“Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un”
 (“Verily we belong to Allah, and truly to Him shall we return”)

Our Enigmatic Patriarch Has Taken A Bow

ALHAJI SHARAFDEEN OLORUNNISOLA IBRAHEEM SNR.

BSC MSc MNIPM

(September 5th 1942 - February 4th, 2021)

With the deep regret, pain, sadness and profound sorrow we the Ibraheem family of Idimu Alimosho LGA of Lagos State announce the passing to Aljannah of one of the most illustrious and accomplished Awori sons, Community and Religious leader **ALHAJI SHEIK SHARAFDEEN OOLORUNISHOLA IBRAHEEM Snr.** Which sad event took place on the 4th of February, 2021, he has since been buried according to Islamic injunctions and rites.

Veni Vidi Vici
 - “You came you saw you conquered”

He is survived by:

Wives:

- Alhaja Sherifat Aina Ibraheem
- Alhaja Shukura Ayo Ibraheem

Children:

- Lukemon & Nkem Ibraheem
- Abé & Amina Ibraheem
- Jamal Ibraheem
- Sharafdeen & Leora Ibraheem
- Kaokab Ibraheem
- Semirah Ibraheem
- Lutfy & Khafila Ibraheem
- Amir & Tomi Ibraheem
- Satar & Suliyah Ibraheem
- Jabar & Tutu Ibraheem
- Morzuq & Tope Ibraheem
- Salma Ibraheem

Grandchildren:

- Aidah & Ashraf Ibraheem
- Nadine, Nabila & Nasir Ibraheem
- Adira Ibraheem
- Raseel & Raha Ibraheem
- Lutfyah & Farhan Ibraheem

- Amal & Yasir Ibraheem
- Faraj & Amira Oyedeji
- Sultan Ibraheem
- Jabira, Jalal & Jadwa
- Muyyasar & Maisha Ibraheem

Siblings:

- Alhaji Musa Ibraheem
- Alhaja Mujeeba Ibraheem Oseni
- Alhaji Lateef Ibraheem
- Sadu Ibraheem
- Sitira Ibraheem
- Surura Ibraheem
- Quadri Ibraheem
- Sefu Ibraheem
- Fadilu Ibraheem
- Shukura Ibraheem

Luke & Abé Ibraheem

On behalf of the entire Ibraheem Family



Forever

in our

Hearts

Chief (Dr) Joe Aisien
OGBEBOR (JP)

(D'Efeisoghoba of Benin Kingdom)

It's been two years since your great exit...yet it has not gotten easier.

You remain our loving father, grandfather, uncle, friend, boss and Emperor (as many called you). We still talk about you everyday-lauding at your jokes and the things you would say.

You are forever in our hearts. We will never forget the lessons you taught or the wisdom you so openly shared with us.

Pain doesn't begin to describe how much we miss you, but we are comforted by memories that we will always hold dear

We love you!

Signed:

The
 Aisien Ogbemor's Children &
 Grandchildren

INTERNATIONAL

Accredited Ambassadors and Protection of the National Interest: The Case of Nigeria's Former Service Chiefs

On Thursday, February 4, 2021 President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) nominated the immediate past Service Chiefs as Ambassadors-designate and forwarded their names to the Senate for possible consideration and approval as provided for in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution as amended. The Service Chiefs are Gabriel Abayomi Olonishakin, former Chief of Defence Staff (CDS); Tukur Buratai, former Chief of Army Staff (COAS); Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas, former Chief of Naval Staff (CNS); and Sadique Abubakar, former Chief of Air Staff (CAS). The four Service Chiefs were relieved of their appointments on Tuesday, January 26, 2021 and replaced with Major General Leo Irabor as CDS, Major General I. Atfahiru as COAS, Rear Admiral A. Z. Gambo as CNS, and AVM.I.O. Alao as CAS. As reportedly tweeted by presidential aide, Bashir Ahmad, 'President Muhammadu Buhari has forwarded the names of the immediate past Service Chiefs to the Senate as non-career Ambassadors-Designate.'

Two points are noteworthy in this statement: the notion of a non-career ambassador and the concept of an ambassador-designate. Non-career ambassador as a notion is ambiguous: it gives the impression that the nominees are still in the professional public service or in the professional civil service, whereas they have not only illegally stayed beyond their statutory time of retirement, but have also been officially removed from public office. Thus 'non-career' as a notion only has a non-official or private connotation.

Indeed, who is a career ambassador? Ambassadorship is a responsibility and not a profession. It is not what explains it as a career *per se*. A Career Ambassador is the Principal Representative in any diplomatic mission. His office is the crescendo in the continuum of diplomatic representation. It refers to someone who takes the business of diplomacy as a profession. In general diplomatic practice, it refers to Foreign Service Officers who join the Foreign Service to begin a career as a Third Secretary, if a fresh graduate, and then rise through the ranks: Second Secretary, First Secretary, Counsellor, Senior Counsellor, Minister Counsellor, Minister, and to Deputy Chief of Mission and Chief of Mission who are generally people with ambassadorial ranking. A Deputy Chief of Mission can be an ambassador by career status, but not necessarily accredited to the host country as Ambassador, High Commissioner or High Representative. It is only the Chief of Mission, accredited to the host country as the Principal Representative of his country, that is considered the official representative. Consequently, a non-career ambassador is necessarily a political ambassador who is nominated on the basis of the whims and caprices of Mr. President.

On the second point of observation, an ambassador-designate, simply implies that, even though there may not be much of a problem in securing for him a senatorial approval in Nigeria, such a senatorial approval is still subject to the acceptance of the would-be host States to which the former Service Chiefs would be accredited. For various reasons, ambassadors-designate can be considered non-grata. It is only when a sending State is assured of the acceptability of an ambassador-designate that Letters of Credence (one of recall of current ambassador and the other introducing the new ambassador) are prepared.

Issues and Challenges

Considering that all nomination and presentation processes will be normal, what are the likely issues and challenges to be faced by the Service Chiefs as Ambassadors *Plénipotentiaires* and *Extraordinaires* and, particularly, in the context of protection of Nigeria's national interest? There are three main issues, with their challenges, that are raised at the domestic, international, and mission levels. First, as regards the domestic level, the nomination of the former Service Chiefs as Ambassadors-designate has raised suspicions as to why they were nominated within ten days after their removal from office on Tuesday, January 26, 2021. Put differently, PMB had consistently refused to do away with the Service Chiefs in the face of their inability to shame the Boko Haram insurgency. When he eventually removed them, the Nigerian public appears to have been cut unawares about their impending re-appointment as ambassadors-designate.

In other words, how do we explain their re-appointment? Dr. Reuben Abati, during the anchoring of his *ThisDay Live Show* of last



**VIE
INTERNATIONALE**

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Buhari

week Sunday, January 31, 2021, asked the discussants whether the Service Chiefs were fired, whether they retired or they resigned, etc. Answers provided by the panelists were speculative. With their nomination as Ambassadors-designate, there is no disputing the fact that their removal is far from being a 'fire', forced or voluntary resignation. The removal is apparently very strategic in design, objective, and expected outcome. The strategic removal brings us to the issue involved at the international level.

Ambassadors are required to serve in foreign countries, even though ambassadors *in situ* are also appointed by virtue of their diplomatic attainments and ranking in the system and are required to stay at home and carry out diplomatic supervision of national interests abroad. Since the Presidency is talking about ambassadors-designate, it necessarily implies that the Service Chiefs will be accredited abroad. Ambassadors-in-situ do not need any Senatorial approval to be so appointed.

The issue in serving abroad for the Service Chiefs is first at the level of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which had alleged that there had been violations of humanitarian rights and crimes against humanity under their watch when they were still in active service. The Chief of Army Staff was specifically accused of extra-judicial killing of hundreds of Shiites in Zaria in 2015, several innocent Nigerians during the EndSARS protests in Lagos, and many others in Oyiibo, Rivers State.

The ICC has been called upon to arrest and prosecute the Service Chiefs. In an attempt to prevent any arrest, prosecution and other embarrassments, PMB, decided to appoint them as plenipotentiary ambassadors, allegedly so that they can be protected under the rules of diplomatic protection provided for under Article 29 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, according to which 'the person of a diplomatic agent shall be inviolable. He shall not be liable to any form of arrest or detention. The receiving State shall treat him with due respect and shall take all appropriate step to prevent any attack on his person, freedom or dignity.' In fact, Article 30 of the same Diplomatic Convention says further that 'the private residence of a diplomatic agent shall enjoy the same inviolability and protection as the premises of the mission.' This

simply means that the diplomatic protection and immunity from arrest and prosecution is total regardless of whether the offence committed is civil or criminal.

What is noteworthy in the case of Nigeria's Service Chiefs is that whatever offences they might have been accused of were committed before their appointment either as ambassadors-designate or as ambassadors plenipotentiary and extraordinary, and should therefore be differentiated from the offences likely to be committed by the Service Chiefs in the foreseeable future. The implication of this is that, for as long as the Service Chiefs are retained by their Government as diplomatic agents, the alleged extra-judicial killings by them cannot but remain in the cooler. Neither the ICC nor the host countries of the Service Chiefs can threaten them with any form of arrest.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, immunity from arrest and prosecution, applies, *stricto sensu*, only to offences committed on behalf of the sending State. It is only for actions taken in official capacity and does not include private engagements. The challenge here is that when a diplomatic agent, still in service, engages in activities considered to be incompatible with his or her diplomatic status, it may be difficult to prosecute such an agent because the line between what constitutes official and private activity is very thin.

And most importantly, at the third level of Nigeria's diplomatic missions abroad, which are theoretically considered as extraterritorial or an extension of Nigeria's mainland territory, and therefore, on the basis of the rule of sovereign equality, it is governed not by the municipal law of the host country, the issues and challenges vary according to the status of each mission. Each mission has its peculiar, well-defined goals to be pursued, called Mission Charter. Each mission also falls under a particular categorisation: A, B, C, on the basis of their importance, etc.

In fact, there are what the Foreign Service Officers describe as hardship posts and which a diplomatist, Ambassador L.O. Oladejo Oyelakin, has explained as a post in which 'an officer may not enjoy modern amenities but, instead, is exposed to perpetual failure of infrastructure like water, light and lack of good roads.' And more important, in the eyes of Ambassador Oyelakin, in this category of hardship posts 'are Missions situated in countries of circumscribed social interaction and or lacking in educational facilities (e.g. countries where there are no English-speaking schools), economically depressed areas, extreme climatic condition and countries experiencing civil war or state disorder' (vide his *The Nigerian Diplomatic Practice*, NIIA, 2014, p. 259).

In spite of this clarification, which of Nigeria's Mission is not a hardship post in light of poor funding and irregular or delayed payments and Nigerian government's very poor understanding of challenges of contemporary international politics? Can the Service Chiefs living in luxury in Nigeria with various privileges and immunities, as well as retirement benefits, and now newly-turned ambassadors really live an ambassadorial, disciplined life-style abroad?

Service Chiefs and National Interest

The belief that the former Service Chiefs, now considered as ambassadors-designate, can escape investigation and prosecution is doubtful, especially in light of some critical factors. For instance, the application of a waiver of immunity can become a desideratum, and therefore, cannot be ruled out. PMB might have adopted the strategy of ambassadorial appointment as a technique of possible diplomatic protection, but any successor of his can waive the immunity of anyone, inclusive of that of the Service Chiefs, in the event of a *force majeure* in which the national interest is majorly at stake or when there is a request for extradition.

In this regard, it is generally considered that immunity from jurisdiction of courts does not imply that diplomatic agents enjoying immunity are superior or above the municipal law of their host country. As explained by Michael Akehurst, for example, 'the obligations of municipal law remain binding on him (diplomatic agent), but are unenforceable. Consequently, both sovereign and diplomatic immunity can be waived. The effect is to change an unenforceable obligation to an enforceable one. The immunity is conferred in the interests of the State, and can be waived only by the State. A State may waive the immunity of one of its diplomats against the diplomat's wish.'

Put differently, if one of the objectives of appointing the Service Chiefs as ambassadors is to secure for them an eventual immunity from criminal prosecution, it must be argued that the Buhari administration has strategically miscalculated politically and legally. Politically, the larger international community is very hostile to any form of engagement in acts of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, etc. It is for this main reason that the principle of International Responsibility to Protect (IR2P) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in order to checkmate national leaders who refuse or who aid and abet the prohibited crimes aforementioned.

Legally speaking, the strategy of acquiring an ambassadorial status does not in itself erase the allegations or offences which can still be prosecuted under a different political environment. In fact, there are different types of immunities and particularly more relevant here is the Act of State Doctrine. There is Sovereign Immunity, which, on the basis of independence and equality of States, does not allow anyone or State to exercise jurisdiction over another State.

It is useful to remind that there is no absolute respect for the principles of sovereign immunity and diplomatic immunity in international relations. They are limited, regardless of whichever kind, by the exercise of brute power in the service of the national interest. One recent example is the United States drone strike and killing of Iranian Major General Qasem Soleimani on January 3, 2020 near the Baghdad International Airport in Iraq. Major General Soleiman was reportedly going to meet with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Adil Abdul-Mahdi in Baghdad. He was a government agent and, therefore under the functional protection of the Iraqi authorities. However, the drone strike only acted on instruction without any due regard for the rule of inviolability or immunity. In truth, the weak countries often complain while the strong always act. Consequently, a great caution must be exercised in determining where to accredit the Service Chiefs. With PMB's mania of political governance in Nigeria, the country's diplomats may, sooner or later, be subjected to inclement international terrorist campaigns. The mounting opposition at home is a pointer

NEWS

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With \$60 Per Barrel, FG in Dilemma over Deregulation

• *Fear of social disturbances stalls new pump price* • *FG now subsidising PMS without budgetary provision*

Gboyega Akinsanmi

As Brent Crude traded at \$59.34 per barrel at the international oil market on Friday, the federal government is in a dilemma to increase the pump prices of premium motor spirit (PMS) or subsidise the product

without budgetary provision, THISDAY checks have revealed.

However, according to our findings, the federal government cannot announce a new pump price in line with its deregulation policy due to perceived opposition by the organised labour; public disapproval such

a decision will attract nationwide and social disturbances that may result from it.

The leadership of Petroleum Products Marketing Company (PPMC), an arm of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), made this proposal during recent meetings with

Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) and Major Oil Marketers Association of Nigeria (MOMAN).

Traded at \$53.13 per barrel when the oil market opened on January 5, crude oil prices have been on a steady upward

trajectory, closing at about \$59.34, a development that stoked debate among leading petroleum economists and global investment banks including Goldman Sachs Group.

The upsurge is consistent with the forecast of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), putting the average crude price at \$41.29 per barrel in 2020 and projecting about \$50.03 per barrel in 2021 before falling back to \$48.82 per barrel in 2022.

Unlike IMF's forecast, Goldman Sachs, a leading global investment bank, predicted that the price of Brent Crude could rise to \$65 per barrel by summer 2021, which it claimed would be driven by output cuts in Saudi Arabia and the implications of power shift in the United States.

The price upsurge and relatively steady production output have positively impacted Nigeria's external reserves, rising sharply to \$36.304 million, as shown in the data of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on January 14.

On Friday, however, the price upsurge triggered a widening variance between the landing cost of PMS currently standing at about N185 and the subsidising pump price, now trading from N159 at NNPC filling stations to N162.50 at non-NNPC filling stations across the federation.

Multiple sources at PPMC's meetings with IPMAN and MOMAN privately revealed

that the federal government had been considering an upward review of fuel pump price amid the widening difference arising from the price of crude oil at the international market.

One of the sources at the meetings said that the federal government "is under pressure to review the current pump price because it no longer represents the realities at the international oil market."

"From loading to discharging ports only, the landing costs of PMS range from N180 to N185. The cost does not include other charges by agencies of the federal government and the Lagos State Government."

According to the source, the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) imposes three different charges namely; product certificate charges (PCC), quality certificate charges (QCC) and vessel arrival charges (VAC).

While the PPMC collects Petroleum Equalisation Fund and jetty fees, the source clarified that the Lagos State Government imposed wharf landing fee as stipulated in the Wharf Landing Fees Law of Lagos State, 2009.

When all these charges are added to the landing costs currently ranging from N180 to N185, the source observed that the pump price would be hovering between N200 and N205 in line with market realities.



MEMBERSHIP REVALIDATION..

LR: Chairman, All Progressives Congress (APC) Ward G2, Surulere Local Government, Afeez Odunewu; Chairman of Lagos APC, Tunde Balogun; member, APC Membership Registration Committee, Ed Okafor; Speaker, House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabamila; member, another member of the committee, Tunde Imolehin and Chairman of the committee, Senator Lawan Shuaibu at Gbajabamila's membership revalidation in Lagos... yesterday

Drug Trafficker Excretes 86 Wraps of Cocaine at Abuja Airport

Kasim Sumaina in Abuja

A suspected drug trafficker intercepted by operatives of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja has excreted 86 wraps of cocaine.

The suspect, Oluchukwu Onu Friday, aged 39 was arrested during the outward clearance of an India bound Ethiopian Airline ET910 en route Abuja-

Addis Ababa-New Delhi.

A native of Umuaku-Isiochi village in Abia State, Onu was intercepted at the boarding gate screening and referred for scanning where he proved positive for ingestion.

He excreted 83 wraps of substances, which proved positive for cocaine after the drug test and weighed 1.527 kilograms.

The suspect, a Lagos based dealer in building materials

was promised N1.5 million upon successful delivery to a recipient in New Delhi, India.

In a statement in Abuja yesterday, the Deputy Commander of Narcotics (DCN), Jonah Achema, quoted the suspect as saying: "I deal in building materials in Lagos. I decided to undertake this journey so that I can use the money to support my business. I have lost so much money during this COVID 19. So I need other source of income."

Onu, a primary school leaver, got married last year and the wife is expectant.

However, NDLEA's Commander at the Abuja Airport, Kabir Tsakuwa said investigation "is on to dismantle Onu's drug trafficking network."

"This arrest is spectacular in that it is about the highest number of wraps to be swallowed or ingested by an individual. We have also discovered that this is the first case of cocaine

moving from here to India.

"We will explore and exploit all angles in ensuring that this particular drug chain is disrupted and dismantled," Tsakuwa was quoted in a statement.

Upon his appointment last month, NDLEA's Chairman, Brig.-Gen. Mohammed Buba Marwa gave marching orders to commanders of the agency in all states and special commands to mop the nation of illicit drugs.

Marwa said he would seek government's approval to conduct drug tests on tertiary institutions' new students, security agencies' fresh recruits and all newly appointed government employees.

Marwa said: "All commanders must be desirous of keeping drugs out of Nigerian streets and homes, and so, all of you must shape up and get all those engaged in the nefarious business to face the music."

Edo Primary School Teachers Suspend Strike

Adibe Emenyonu in Benin City

After 19 days without work, the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), Edo State chapter has finally suspended its indefinite strike, directing its members statewide to resume work on Monday, Friday 8.

The union, which embarked on strike on January 18, added that it suspended the industrial action as a result of the intervention of its national leadership.

It made this clarification in a statement signed by its Chairman, Pius Okhueleigbe and Assistant Secretary-General, Mike Modesty-Itua, among others, announcing its resolve to suspend the action.

The statement urged all public primary school heads and teachers across the state to resume work

on Monday, February 8, putting an end to a three-week strike.

It thanked NUT's national leadership, members of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Edo Office and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Edo State for their genuine effort to end the industrial action.

The union had directed its members statewide to embark on indefinite strike, citing the failure of the Edo State Government to meet its 10-points long-age demands.

Some of the demands, according to the union, include payment of the 2013 to 2015 promotion arrears of teachers in Oredo, Othionmwon and Uhumwode Local Government Areas.

Others are guarantee payment of primary school teachers monthly salaries, on or before 27th every

month as already directed by the state governor, Mr. Godwin Obaseki, correct implementation of the 30% special allowance for teachers in schools for challenged children and all arrears paid among others. In its communique before the strike, the union explained its resolve to embark upon the indefinite strike due to the expiration of the 21-day and 14-day ultimatum earlier issued to the state government.

Responding to the demands of the union, the state government said it had made two batches of payments out of three to teachers in Oredo LGA.

It explained that the non-payment of other teachers in Othionmwon and Uhumwode LGAs was due to the refusal by council chairmen to endorse the update for arrears.

PAPSD Rejects Court Ruling on Mandamus to Probe Yari

Tobi Soniyi

The Patriots for the Advancement of Peace and Social Development (PAPSD) has rejected the judgment of a Federal High Court that its application for an order of mandamus to compel the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to prosecute a former of Zamfara State Governor, Abubakar Yari was statute barred.

In a statement after the judgment, PAPSD Executive Director, Dr Abdullahi Sani Shinkafi in Abuja, said the judge misdirected himself and consequently fell into error in dismissing the application.

He said that the judgment of the court would be tested on appeal as the counsel to the group, Mr. Ifeanyi Mbaeri had been instructed

to file an appeal at the Court of Appeal.

He also clarified that contrary to misleading reports in the media, the case was not filed by the EFCC but by PAPSD, a non-governmental organization and its Shinkafi.

They had approached the Federal High Court via an ex-parte application for leave to apply for an order of mandamus to compel EFCC to investigate petitions of the applicants wrote against Yari, top government functionaries, individuals and private companies for alleged misappropriation of state funds, abuse of office and conversion of public funds and resources.

Shinkafi explained the case thus: "The ex-parte application for leave was moved before Justice Abang of the Federal High Court Abuja on

December 7, 2020. It was adjourned to December 18, 2020 for ruling and subsequently to February 4, 2021. Delivering its ruling, the court on its own raised the issue of the application for mandamus being statute barred.

According to the court, the application was filed more than three months from the dates of the three documents exhibited in the application, i.e.: Report of Zamfara State Project Verification Committee set up by the Executive Governor of Zamfara State Hon. Bello Muhammed (Matawallen Maradun), dated February 2020; Report of Zamfara State Local Government Projects Verification Committee, dated January 2020; and 2019 Transition Committee Report dated July 2019.

NEWSXTRA

Soyinka: Herders-Farmers Crisis Can Degenerate into Civil War

• Challenges Buhari to address nation • Abiodun orders probe of clash in Ogun

Gboyega Akinsanmi

Nobel laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka has warned that the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in different states of the federation can degenerate into civil war if the federal government fails to properly handle it.

Soyinka, a poet and playwright, tasked President Muhammadu Buhari to address the nation and dissociate himself from the activities of those who run their businesses by displacing, killing, raping, torture and by occupying land that does not belong to them.

He gave the warning in a recent interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) pidgin, criticising the government's handling of the situation and accusing some security operatives of taking sides.

Amid the increasing herdsman violence in the South-west, Ondo State Governor, Mr. Rotimi Akeredolu had directed all Fulani herdsmen living in any part of the state's forest reserves to leave within seven days.

Subsequently, in Oyo State, a Yoruba youth leader, Sunday Adeyemo (aka Sunday Ighogho) issued a seven-day ultimatum to the Fulani community in Igangan, Ibarapa North Local Government area of Oyo state, over allegation that they are responsible for the

rising insecurity and kidnapping in the area

The notices of eviction has stoked intense national debate on the constitutionality of such a directive with the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) warning that no one had the right to expel any Nigerian from any part of the country.

However, a human rights activist, Mr. Femi Falana noted that the order Akeredolu issued that herdsmen should leave forest reserves within seven days was legal. Tension has been running high in recent weeks over the allegations that herdsmen are responsible for the killings and abductions in the southwest.

Condemning killing and raping by Fulani herdsmen nationwide, the Nobel laureate said there "is a need to ensure that the matter is settled amicably."

He said: "My fear is that it could degenerate into violence that ends up in— hate to use the word—a civil war unless we take action. I am glad that governors are already dialoguing with groups like Miyetti Allah (cattle breeders)," he said.

"I am also glad that they are already discussing agreeing to obey the rules and that other groups are already liaising. I think we need to ensure they reach a consensus that will be fair to all parties

"We are struggling against an

enemy that believes in acting the way he pleases. They believe they have immunity or that nothing can happen to them. That is why, in my own state, you find a soldier taking the side of an enemy.

"They actually escort killers, rapists, raiders while flogging the victims. That wouldn't happen if the people are conscious of the nature of their enemy and are encouraged to collaborate with the security forces."

Soyinka noted he once observed the level of damage done to farmlands by herdsmen while hunting

with his colleagues, stressing the need to encourage dialogue between the locals and security forces towards ending the crisis.

He, thus, challenged the president "to address the nation. He should address the nation in unambiguous terms. Say openly that I know I am the patron of Cattle Rearer Association of Nigeria. Cattle rearing is a business and I rear my cattle on a business term.

"I do not run my business by killing people. I do not run my business by raping, by displacing

or by torture. I do not run my business by occupying land that does not belong to me," Soyinka tasked the president to dissociate himself from the nefarious activities of Fulani herdsmen.

In another development yesterday, Ogun State Governor, Dapo Abiodun has ordered the security agencies in the state to investigate the recent clash between herdsmen and farmers in the Yewa-North area of the state that led to the loss of a life and destruction of properties.

In a statement issued by his

Chief Press Secretary, Kunle Somorin, Abiodun was said to have set up a Special Task Force that would maintain presence in all areas of the state prone to herders-farmers conflict to maintain peace and quickly respond to any form of violence or crimes.

The statement said the government "is immediately setting up a joint security patrol team/ task force involving all security agencies in the state to not only deal with the situation, but to also nip in the bud any threat to violence or criminality."



BEACON OF HOPE...

L-R: Minister of State for Mines & Steel Development, Dr Uche Ogah; Minister of Science & Technology, Dr Ogbonnaya Onu; Imo State Governor, Senator Hope Uzodinma; Project Manager, Julius Berger Nigeria PLC, Mr Wisner Fridge; Federal Controller of Works, Anambra State, Engr A. R. Ajani and other Igbo leaders while inspecting the Second Niger Bridge... recently

What Nigeria Stands to Gain from Buratai's Appointment, Says Oyelude

Bayo Adeoye

The appointment of former Chief of Army Staff, Lt-Gen. Tukur Buratai and other service chiefs as envoys by President Muhammadu Buhari will afford them the opportunity to galvanize global support for Nigeria's peace.

This was stated by the Olowu of Kuta in Osun State, Oba Adekunle Oyelude Tegbosun 111, yesterday while reacting to last week's nomination of Buratai and others as envoys by the President.

According to him, their appointment will also help in sustaining peace initiatives and efforts in African countries where terrorism and internecine wars have negatively impacted on people's wellbeing and impaired socio-economic and political stability of such nations.

He said the appointment of the service chiefs as envoys would also put Nigeria on a great stead to rightly and fully take

her place as the leader of the continent.

According to him, the President acted properly with the nomination of the former military chiefs, saying there was nothing that tarnished the careers of the men while in office to deny them the chance to further serve their fatherland.

"The appointments have clearly put paid to insinuations of impending trial by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity; allegations and speculations which have trended on the media space for a long time.

"The fact is that none of the immediate past service chiefs has had any proven charge of human rights abuse to answer before any court within and outside Nigeria, as none of them has been invited or appeared before any court to answer to charges of criminal breach of fundamental human rights of Nigerians.

Adeoye Elected AU Commissioner

Nigeria's former Ambassador to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union, Bankole Adeoye, has been elected Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union.

He was voted unanimously with 55 votes to take the helm of the Political Affairs, Peace and Security docket.

From Angola, H.E. Josefa Sacko was re-elected to head the Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment docket.

Amb. Albert Muchanga from

Zambia was re-elected to the post of Economic Development, Trade and Industry and Mining docket.

From Egypt, Dr. Amani Abou-Zeid was also re-elected to continue serving in the Infrastructure and Energy docket.

Elections for the posts of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development; and Education, Science, Technology and Innovation were postponed to the next meeting of the Executive Council.

The incumbent Commissioners H.E. Amira Elfadil and Prof. Sarah Agbor respectively, will continue to serve in their current positions

Amid Rift, Lagos Panel Approves Resumption of Tolling at Lekki

Segun James

Confusion yesterday trailed the proceedings at the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Enquiry and Restitution for Victims of SARS related abuses and other matters as members engaged themselves in a shouting match following the decision to return the Lekki Toll Gate plaza to its owners, the Lekki Concession Company.

The Justice Doris Okuwobi-led panel granted LCC permission to repossess the plaza after taking arguments for and against the application made by counsel to

the LCC Ltd, Demola Seriki for the re-opening of the facility.

While five members of the panel sat over the application of LCC to repossess the Lekki toll plaza and listened to submissions from the LCC, Lagos state government and EndSARS protesters counsel, the other four members of the panel abstained from sitting, only to emerge from the inner chamber to read a dissenting judgement.

The dissenters were led by a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Mr Egun-Olu Adegboruwa, representing the Civil Society; Ms. Patience Udoh representing

the Civil Society; Rinu Oduala and Temitope Majekodunmi, representing #EndSARS protesters, while those with the majority judgement were Justice Doris Okuwobi (Rtd), chairman of the panel; Taiwo Lakanu DIG (Rtd.), Lucas Koyejo, Segun Awosanya and Oluwatoyin Odusanya.

The action of the four dissenting panel members were disputed by Mr. Rotimi Seriki (SAN), counsel of LCC and Mr. Olukayode Enitan (SAN), counsel of the Lagos State Government, who prevented Mr. Egun Olu-Adegboruwa from reading his personal dissenting

judgement as they accused him of being an interested party in the matter, having sued the Lagos state government over the Lekki tollgate plaza in the past. Their argument made Olu-Adegboruwa to step down from reading his dissenting opinion. The action of the dissenting panel members made the panel to adjourn all other cases slated for mention yesterday.

The Lekki Toll plaza has been under the control of the panel since it began sitting in October following the #EndSARS protests against police brutality.

Ekiti Establishes N270m Health Insurance for Women, Children

Victor Ogunje in Ado Ekiti

The Ekiti State Government at the weekend disclosed that it would set aside N270 million to provide free health services for some citizens under the State Health Insurance Scheme (SHIS).

Under the scheme, the state government disclosed that no fewer than 20,000 individuals, including pregnant women, children, poor and aged persons would benefit.

The Commissioner for Health, Dr. Oyebanji Filani disclosed the plan at the palace of Ogoga of Ikere, Oba Adejimi Adu during a session on the plan of the administration of Governor Kayode Fayemi to improve healthcare delivery in the state.

At the session, the commissioner explained that the programme

was meant to ensure improved healthcare delivery, elongated life expectancy, free healthcare services and prevention of untimely deaths among the citizens.

He said the insurance programme "will cover pregnant women, poor people, children below age five, old people and the indigent. It is a partnership between the federal and state governments. It is going to be first come, first serve policy.

"A sum of N270 million has been earmarked for the scheme that will benefit an aggregate of 20,000 persons. Let all our people that are qualified make themselves available when the time comes. Every treatment for the beneficiaries will be free.

"A sum of N15,000 is budgeted for each beneficiary, but will not be given to them in cash. But for them

to be qualified for registration, they must get their National Identity Cards and National Identification Numbers (NIN)".

Filani appealed to Ekiti people to take the issue of COVID-19 with seriousness, saying a total of 96 infected persons are currently receiving treatments at the three isolation centres.

"This disease is real and killing everyday. Very soon, we will have a vaccine for COVID-19. It is like a fluid and it is not being injected to monitor us as being rumoured.

"Tell our people to get inoculated when the vaccine is out. We are starting with elderly and health personnel who are the most vulnerable," the commissioner explained.

He said the government of

Ekiti State has begun aggressive rehabilitation of primary healthcare facilities across 177 wards, saying the government would renovate seven facilities in Ikere Local Government alone.

He said: "We are not going to rehabilitate them alone, we will provide equipment like Blood Pressure Machine, test kits for sugar level, PCV test kits, T-scan, delivery beds, Ultrasound and X-ray Machines to be able to dispense services to the people."

"In October 2020, Ekiti Hospitals' Management Board employed 10 doctors. The Primary Healthcare Development Agency employed nine. We are also recruiting nurses and pharmacists. More NYSC doctors and nurses will be posted to Ekiti. The governor has done all the arrangements.

NEWSXTRA

Like Jonathan, Corruption Thrives under Buhari

• **Nigeria records 26.5 average points under Buhari** • **Buhari's anti-graft war has failed, say CSOs**

Gboyega Akinsanmi

Corrupt practices flourish in Nigeria under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari just like it did under the government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, Corruption Perception Indexes (CPIs) of Transparency International (TI) have revealed.

While Nigeria scored 25.5 out of 100 points on the average under Jonathan's administration, the country only garnered 26.5 points between 2015 and 2020 under Buhari despite making the fight against corruption one of the pillars of his administration.

In a comparative analysis of corruption perception indexes between 2010 and 2020 by THISDAY, TI's reports reveal that there is no significant improvement in the fight against corruption under the two administrations.

TI, a global movement working to end corruption, released its 2020 CPI penultimate Thursday in which it rated Nigeria 149th out of the 180 countries surveyed worldwide, scoring 25 out of 100 points.

With the latest corruption rating, according to the 2020 CPI, Nigeria is currently the second most corrupt country in West Africa behind Guinea-Bissau, the most corrupt in the sub-region.

But in a statement by the Minister for Information & Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, the federal government disputed the CPI report, which it claimed, was not a true reflection of the country's anti-graft war and that the organisation failed to identify areas the federal government performed well.

The statement noted that the federal government's war against corruption was still on course and that the progress made against graft in the past two years was not included in the assessment of the country.

Analysing Nigeria's graft ratings under the Buhari administration especially between 2015 and 2020, the CPIs showed that the country marginally improved by two points, moving upward from 26 points in 2015 to 28 points in 2016, a development that the presidency then celebrated.

In subsequent years, however, the CPIs revealed that out of 100 points, Nigeria relapsed to 27 in

2017 from 28 in 2016; 27 in 2018; 26 in 2019 and 25 in 2020, indicating that the country only recorded marginal improvement by two points in 2016, a year after Buhari resumed office.

Also, out of 168 countries surveyed globally in 2015, the CPIs showed that Nigeria was ranked 136th; also 136th among 176 countries in 2016; 148th out of 180 countries in 2017; 144th out of 180 countries in 2018; 146th out of 180 countries in 2019 and 149 among 180 countries in 2020.

For the period between 2015 and 2020, as shown in THISDAY analysis of the CPIs, the average score of Nigeria under Buhari stood at 26.5 out of 100 points, which largely revealed a far cry from the pass mark.

Like Buhari's government, the CPIs showed that under Jonathan, Nigeria's graft rating was 24 out of 100 points in 2010, the year he became substantive president after the death of his predecessor, former President Umaru Yar'Adua and retained the same score in 2011, the year he won presidential election.

In 2012, the CPIs showed that Jonathan recorded major improvement by three points, which then brought Nigeria's graft rating to 27 points.

However, the CPIs revealed, the rating dropped by two points to 25 in 2013; rose again to 27 points in 2014 and finally crashed by one point to 26 in 2015, the year the former president lost reelection to Buhari.

On the global scale, as indicated in the CPIs, Nigeria was ranked 143rd out of 178 countries in 2010; 143rd out of 183 countries in 2011; 139th out of 176 countries in 2012; 144th out of 177 countries in 2013; 136th out of 175 countries in 2014 and 136th out of 168 countries in 2015.

Under Jonathan, by implication, Nigeria marginally recorded an average score of 25.5 out of 100 points, just one point behind the country's graft rating under Buhari, also a disappointing corruption perception rating.

Contrary to the federal government's position that the latest rating was not a true reflection of Buhari's anti-corruption campaign, Center for Public Policy & Research (CPPR) and Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) agreed

with TI's rating that there was retrogression in the fight against corruption.

CPPR's Director, Dr. Sam Amadi, in a response to THISDAY inquiries, observed that there was no significant improvement in the impact of anti corruption fights under the present government.

Amadi, a former Chairman of Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), said the recent TI rating of Nigeria "is representative of the failure of the anti corruption war. Perception

is important in understanding corruption as a pandemic in Nigeria."

Since 2015, Amadi observed that Nigeria "has not seen any reform of government, we have not seen any change in procurement policy, process of policymaking; we are not seeing any improvement in accountability of state institutions.

"The government has not activated and authorised the freedom of information law and in spite of signing up to the Open Government program it continues

to manage the public sector without rule based accountability. "Fighting corruption is not jailing opposition even without due process. It is beyond legal prosecution. It is more about deepening democracy. It is about changing the incentive structure of governance. It is about ensuring merit, openness and efficiency in public sector management. The government has not done these much," he said.

Also responding to THISDAY inquiries yesterday, the Executive Director OF CITAD, Dr. Yunusa Yau allied with Amadi's position that there was no significant improvement in the anti-graft war under Buhari.

CITAD's executive director rhetorically asked: "When the head of the body entrusted to be the arrow head of the anti-corruption fight of the government is itself enmeshed in the corruption crisis, who is there to lead the fight against corruption?"

"We have moved from the position in which there was a body that was seen to be fighting corruption to one in which it is a lover of the loot of corruption. That is a substantive backwards movement. "Government has not denied that there is corruption in the EFCC and that its head, whether framed or not, is under investigation. Such a body then lacks the moral standing to prosecute anyone for corruption. "This government has lost it. It is no longer fighting corruption. It is merely fighting for survival. It has lost it because the president does not understand what corruption is and because he has no clear understanding of corruption, he could not have clear strategies to fight it," he said.

While Amadi said the problem of corruption in Nigeria "is not about Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) or All Progressives Congress (APC)," Yau doubted if Buhari's administration "is interested in improving its fight against corruption."

Describing corruption as cultural and systemic, Amadi argued that to solve it would undoubtedly require deep-rooted institutional and cultural changes.

He said fighting corruption should start with a meritocratic public service that has held accountability through rules and processes that are open to citizens.

We cannot fight corruption and encourage a system of public governance based on prerogatives, nepotism and discretionary application of rules.

"We have to cleanse politics and ensure that political leaders are accountable to the electorates. Without an electoral system that is credible and accountable you cannot effectively fight endemic corruption," he said.

Yau emphasised the need for Buhari "to first admit that his fight against corruption has failed and open up to suggestions as to how corruption can be fought in the country."

"Again, unfortunately, because the president does not understand corruption, he is surrounded by an extremely corrupt set of people who have blocked his capacity to understand corruption and fight it better.

"There is no redemption in its failure to deliver in one of its cardinal promises which is that it is a regime elected primarily on the basis of its promise to fight corruption. Many of the government agencies are mired in corruption, how can this be if the government is serious about fighting corruption?"

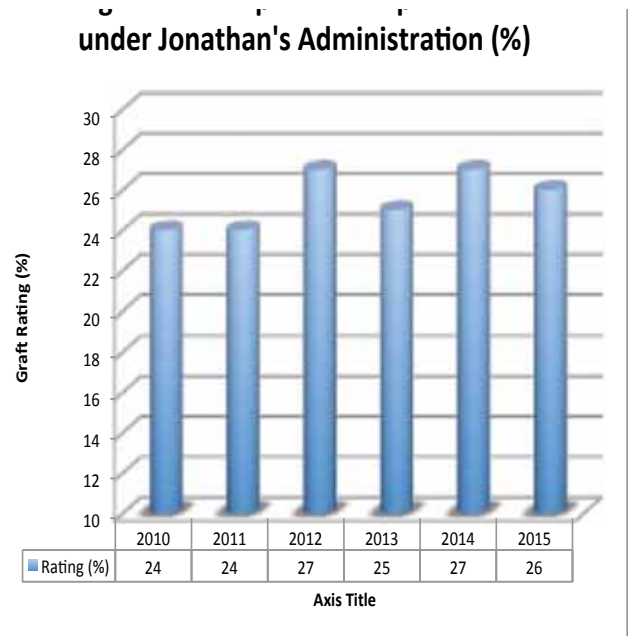
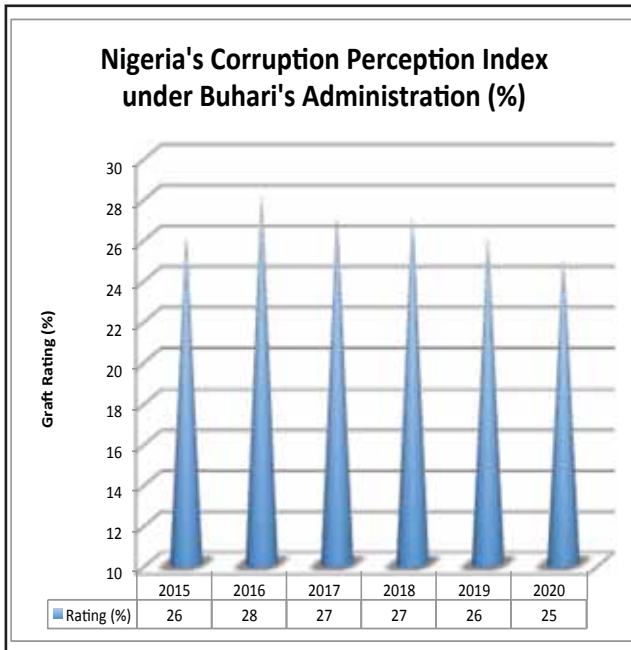
Yau noted that many key government officials had been accused of corrupt acts at different times, though Buhari's government had done nothing about it.

He said: "If the government wants to improve its fight against corruption, in addition to making a declaration of acceptance of its current failure, it should disengage all officials suspected of corruption and ensure they are investigated and anyone found wanting, be prosecuted."

He, also, emphasised the need for the president "to realise and accept that fighting corruption is that of all Nigerians and not just of the government alone."

He challenged the government "to be opened to ideas from different sources. It should establish a multi-stakeholder committee to fashion out an immediate and long-term agenda and strategy for the fight against corruption in Nigeria."

He, finally, urged the federal government "to dispassionately and without delay, study the CPI of Transparency International (TI) and see the areas that have made Nigeria to go down in the rating and take immediate steps to address them.



GSK, CureVac Sign €150m Deal to Develop COVID-19 Vaccines

Emma Okonji

GlaxoSmithKline Plc and CureVac N.V. yesterday disclosed that they sealed a new €150 million collaboration, to jointly develop next generation mRNA vaccines for COVID-19 with the potential for a multi-valent approach to address multiple emerging variants in one vaccine.

The companies added that GSK would also support the manufacture of up to 100 million doses of CureVac's first generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate CVnCoV in 2021.

They revealed the plan in a statement yesterday, noting that the development programme would begin immediately, with the target of introducing the vaccine in 2022, subject to regulatory approval.

While GSK is a British

multinational pharmaceutical company, CureVac is a German biopharmaceutical company legally domiciled in the Netherlands and headquartered in Tübingen, Germany.

But in their statement, GSK and CureVac said they would contribute resources and expertise to research, develop, and manufacture a number of novel mRNA vaccine candidates, including multi-valent and monovalent approaches.

The statement said the aim of the work "is to offer broader protection against a variety of different SARS-CoV2 variants, and to enable a quick response to new variants potentially emerging in the future.

"The increase in emerging variants with the potential to reduce the efficacy of first generation COVID-19 vaccines

requires acceleration of efforts to develop vaccines against new variants to keep one step ahead of the pandemic.

"These next generation COVID-19 vaccines may either be used to protect people who have not been vaccinated before, or to serve as boosters in the event that COVID-19 immunity gained from an initial vaccination reduces over time," the statement said.

The statement explained that the collaboration would assess the development of novel mRNA vaccines to protect against multiple respiratory viruses, including COVID-19.

It said the collaboration would build on CureVac's first generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate CVnCoV, which it claimed, was currently in Phase 2b/3 clinical trial and on CureVac's ability to

optimise mRNA for a strong immune response, manufacturability, and stability at standard 2-8°C cold chain conditions for vaccines.

According to the statement, CureVac's platform is uniquely adapted to designing multi-valent vaccines with a balanced immune response and a low dose of mRNA.

Quoted in the statement, GSK's Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Emma Walmsley, said: "We believe that next generation vaccines will be crucial in the continued fight against COVID-19.

"This new collaboration builds on our existing relationship with CureVac and means that together, we will combine our scientific expertise in mRNA and vaccine development to advance and accelerate the development of new COVID-19 vaccine candidates. "At the same time, we will

also support the production of CureVac's first generation vaccines with the manufacture of 100 million doses in 2021."

Also in the statement, Chief Executive Officer of CureVac, Franz-Werner Haas, said: "We are very pleased to build on our existing relationship with GSK with a new agreement to jointly develop next generation mRNA-based vaccines, in addition to our current candidate CVnCoV.

"With the help of GSK's proven vaccine expertise, we are equipping ourselves to tackle future health challenges with novel vaccines.

"As part of the new collaboration, GSK will also support manufacture of CureVac's first-generation COVID-19 vaccine candidate CVnCoV that is currently in Phase 2b/3 trials.

"Using its established manufacturing network in Belgium, GSK aims to support manufacturing of up to 100 million doses of the vaccine in 2021," he explained.

Under the terms of the new collaboration agreement, Haas noted that GSK would be the marketing authorisation holder for the next generation vaccine, except in Switzerland.

He also said GSK would have exclusive rights to develop, manufacture, and commercialise the next generation COVID-19 vaccine in all countries with the exception of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

He added that GSK would make an upfront payment of €75m and a further milestone payment of €75m, conditional on the achievement of specific milestones.

SUNDAY SPORTS

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PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal Suffer Back-to-Back Defeat Against Aston Villa

Duro Ikhazuagbe with agency report

Aston Villa players completed a first top-flight double over Arsenal for 28 years when the Gunners suffered a 1-0 loss at Villa Park yesterday. Goalkeeper Mat Ryan conceded 74 seconds into his debut for the Gunners as Villa followed up a 3-0 win at Emirates Stadium in November with a narrow victory at Villa Park.

Former Arsenal keeper Emiliano Martinez started the move which led to Bertrand Traore pouncing on a mistake by Cedric Soares before Ollie Watkins scored with a shot that deflected off Rob Holding.

"That's the first time we've done the double over Arsenal since the inception of the Premier League in 1992-93," said Aston Villa Manager Dean Smith.

"These players like to make history as we've seen in the last couple of years."

Boyhood Gunners fan Ryan, signed on loan from Brighton in January and starting in place of suspended first-choice keeper Bernd Leno, produced a fine save to deny Traore a goal on his return to the Villa side.

Martinez frustrated his former club further when the Argentine produced an excellent save to keep out Granit Xhaka's free-kick.

Villa move up to eighth in the Premier League while Arsenal's second successive defeat leaves them 10th.

Villa climbed above Tottenham and closed to within three points of fifth spot through Watkins' 10th Premier League goal since joining from Brentford for a club record £28min September.



Real Madrid's Karim Benzema (left) about to fire the winning free kick Raphael Varane converted...yesterday

Three of those goals have been against Arsenal, the 25-year-old scoring two in Villa's 3-0 win in London earlier in the season.

After a barren run of games without a goal

between November and January, there are clear signs Watkins is warming to playing at a higher level.

In netting Villa's earliest Premier League goal

since 2014, Watkins has four goals in his past five top-flight appearances after Cedric's intended pass to Gabriel was way too short, allowing Traore to nip in and cross for the striker to score.

LALIGA

Real Madrid Come from Behind to Ease Pressure on Zidane

Raphael Varane scored twice as Real Madrid had to come from behind to beat bottom club Huesca 2-1 and ease the pressure on Zinedine Zidane. Real boss Zidane had demanded "respect" from journalists before Saturday's game, claiming his side were still in the La Liga title race.

But Javi Galan fired Huesca into a shock lead before Varane equalised for the reigning champions. France defender Varane then tapped home a late winner for the visitors.

Real, who are second in the Spanish top-flight table, trail city rivals Atletico Madrid by seven points having played two games more.

Zidane's side had won just one of their previous five matches and the poor run has led to media scrutiny over the French manager's position at the club.

Despite victory, his side's latest performance will have done little to boost Zidane.

Huesca, who had won just two of their previous 21 league games this season, took the lead when Galan was set up by Shinji Okozaki.

It was nearly 2-0 moments later but Rafa Mir, who is on loan from Wolverhampton Wanderers, volleyed against the bar. Real equalised when Karim Benzema's free-kick came back off the bar and centre-back Varane headed the rebound over the line.

Varane was then in the right place to tap home the winner after keeper Alvaro Fernandez palmed Casemiro's header into his path.

NPFL: Enyimba Floor Plateau Utd, Extend Lead At The Summit

Tosin Omoyele scored a brace against his former Plateau United for Enyimba to extend their lead at the summit of the Nigeria Professional Football League (NPFL) yesterday.

The Saturday afternoon clash in Aba was enlivened with Omoyele's two goals that left Plateau fans rueing why they allowed their prized asset depart the Tin City.

Omoyele nodded home Anayo Iwuala's corner-kick three minutes before the half hour mark to put the People's Elephant in the lead.

Iwuala was the provider again as Omoyele netted his second of the game on the hour mark.

The former Osun United striker has now scored goals in the NPFL this season.

Plateau United however fought back with substitute Moses Effiong nodding home Issa Ndala's cross in the 76th minute for their consolation goal in the 2-1 defeat.

Enyimba defence stood firm in the closing stages of the game as they maintain their unbeaten home run this season.

Fatai Osho's side now top the table with 21 points from nine games, six adrift of Rivers United who host Nasarawa United in Port



Tosin Omoyele (in front) celebrating his brace against Plateau United in Aba...yesterday

Harcourt on Monday.

Seven games will be decided today, with

the two remaining matchday nine fixtures scheduled for Monday.

American Super Bowl LV Live on DSTv, GOtv

World's greatest annual sporting events, the National Football League (NFL) Super Bowl, is to be broadcast live on ESPN (DSTv Channel 218 & GOtv Channel 37) on the morning of Monday 8 February 2021 at 12:30am. A statement issued by DSTv and GOtv promised GOtv Jolli and Jinja customers can upgrade to the GOtv Max package to watch the game LIVE on ESPN at a discounted price of N2,999 instead of N3,600 in the ongoing Max for Less offer for a limited time only.

Super Bowl LV (55) will be the 51st modern-era National Football League championship game, pitting together the American Football Conference (AFC) champion Kansas City Chiefs (who are also the defending Super Bowl champions) and the National

Football Conference (NFC) champions the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

"The match will be available on all DSTv packages and GOtv Max! It will be held at the Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. This will be the fifth Super Bowl hosted by the Tampa area and the third held at in this venue. It will also be the fourth time that the Super Bowl is played in the same state in back-to-back years, since Super Bowl LIV (54) took place at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida in 2020. Super Bowl LV will mark three milestones, as the Buccaneers will be the first team to play a Super Bowl in their home stadium, Tampa Bay quarterback and NFL legend Tom Brady will play in his record 10th Super Bowl, and Covid-19 health restrictions.

NPFL FIXTURES

TODAY		
Dakkada	v	Abia Warriors
Akwa Utd	v	Katsina Utd
MFM FC	v	Heartland
Jigawa	v	Adamawa
Lobi	v	Wikki
Sunshine	v	Kwara Utd
Rangers	v	W'Wolves
MONDAY		
Ifeanyi Ubah	v	K'Pillars
Rivers Utd	v	Nasarawa

A Quintessential Man

@



Abdulrazaq Isa

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN- WALTERSMITH PETROMAN

A unassuming, thoughtful with humility and reliable friend, this who you are! You're truly PRICELESS. Birthdays are a new start, a fresh beginning, and a time to pursue new endeavours with new goals. Move forward with confidence and courage.

HAPPY SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY BRO!

We pray that your greater years lie ahead of you in good health and prosperity, Amen!

Best wishes from your friends

Collins Chikeluba
Dele & Bola Belgore
Femi & Nana Otedola
Kayode & Kemi Odukoya
Yemi and Dayo Onabowale
Yomi and Toks Awoniyi

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MISSILE

Amadi to Buhari

"Fighting corruption is not jailing opposition even without due process. It is beyond legal prosecution. It is more about deepening democracy. It is about changing the incentive structure of governance. It is about ensuring merit, openness and efficiency in public sector management. The government has not done this much" – A former Chairman of the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission, Sam Amadi on Nigeria's poor showing in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Indexes.

COVID-19 CASE UPDATE
1588 NEW CASES CONFIRMED
 6th February, 2021

TOTAL CONFIRMED	139,242
DISCHARGED	112,557
DEATHS	1647

NCDC Toll-free Number: **Dial 6232**

SIMONKOLAWOLE

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Inside the Anti-vaccine Campaign

I had a good laugh when I read the reply to an anti-vaccine tweet by a lady wearing medicated glasses. She had declared: "You CANNOT have FAITH in God and still take this vaccine. If you take the vaccine that means you do not have faith in the Most High. Simple." In jest, someone replied: "You CANNOT have FAITH in God and still wear recommended eye glasses. If you wear eye glasses that means you do not have faith in the Most High simple." I enjoyed it so much that I screenshot the conversation and used it on my WhatsApp status. The anti-vax lady must have taken BCG, polio, diphtheria, measles and HPV vaccines before – but it is only the Covid jab that shows lack of faith!



Bello

The lady is just one of the several millions of African sceptics who are vigorously promoting the anti-vax sentiments. Alhaji Yahaya Bello, the governor of Kogi state, launched a full-blown attack on the Covid-19 vaccine recently, saying "it is meant to kill us". He made reference to the 1996 illegal and tragic drug trial by Pfizer in Kano. He wondered why "they" are yet to find a vaccine against headache, cancer, Ebola and malaria but "they" have "quickly" found one against Covid. Bello, who is trying to make a name as a Covid conspiracy theorist, was promptly rebuked by his governor colleagues, who fear such statements could hamper efforts to tackle the pandemic in Nigeria.

several bodies also contributing, including the Dollywood Foundation, chaired by the legendary country singer, Dolly Parton. Gates and Aliko Dangote, the Nigerian billionaire businessman, did an enormous amount of work and spent an incredible amount of money to tackle wild polio in Nigeria. Gates is also doing massive work against malaria across Africa, spending his personal fortune. Our pastors will not lift a finger against polio or malaria but would rather pile up private jets and demonise those trying to help Africans solve their problems.

I have tried to analyse and understand the anti-vax sentiments in Africa since the Covid outbreak. I have so far identified three tendencies. There could be more. The first is "religious", the second "political" and the third "scientific". Our beloved lady in medicated glasses was advancing a religious position. There are Christians who don't accept medications. They see it as a sign of lack of faith in God. Many have died prematurely as a result. However, in trying to win her Twitter argument when the religious tone came under attack, she went "scientific", listing the side effects of Covid vaccines. She also went "political", citing the scandalous Tuskegee Syphilis Study in America decades ago.

What these people don't know is that they are already being "controlled" by the "anti-Christ". If they use a laptop, they probably use Microsoft Windows OS. They probably use Microsoft Word, Excel and Power Point. Gates owns Microsoft! Surprise! They have surrendered their biometrics while applying for visas to the US, UK and EU. They have provided their biometrics for BVN, NIN, passport, driver's licence and SIM registration. Their locations are trackable via GPS on their mobile phones. And so on. Maybe they don't know, but they might have embraced the "anti-Christ" already if their theology is right. But it is vaccines that will save millions of lives that they are crying over.

The "religious" anti-vaxxers have a major central theory: that Bill Gates, the Microsoft co-founder, wants to plant "trackable microchips" in humans through vaccination. He will then take control of our mental faculties, give us a code and turn us into zombies. This fits perfectly into the apocalyptic thesis of some evangelical Christians. For this reason, many Christians will not go anywhere near the vaccine – although, like our beloved Twitter lady, they will still take other vaccines and medicines. It would appear it is only the Covid vaccine that the anti-Christ can use. He is incapable of planting microchips through vaccines for hepatitis and medications for high blood pressure, aches and pains.

Governor Bello leans more towards the "political". He does not even wear a face mask, except he is visiting the president. His stand is confusing. He says things that make you think he does not believe the novel coronavirus exists. Other times, he makes you believe he thinks it exists but it is not in Kogi state. He even said he had an app that remotely diagnoses Covid. Rumour mongers said marabouts had been mobilised to pray that Kogi would be Covid-free. Hence, Bello's policy of not testing anyone and coming down heavily on anybody who claims to be infected. The family of the chief imam of Kabba, whose infection was confirmed in Abuja, had to publicly deny the diagnosis.

Of course, this is not about common sense. If it is, how can anyone think China and Russia will allow Gates, an American, plant microchips through their vaccines? But conspiracy theories do not need to be logical to be popular. It is an appeal to the emotions. In March 2020, Gates had said that, eventually, the world will have "some digital certificates" to show "who'd recovered, been tested and ultimately who received a vaccine". That was the origin of the story that he wants to plant microchips in humans through vaccines, even though "digital certificates" are not that different from your ATM card or e-passport. In Nigeria, we still use the hand-written immunisation cards.

The "political" wing of the anti-vax movement alleges that Western countries are plotting to harm black people. Exhibit No 1: the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study in the US. Two US agencies, partnering with the Tuskegee University, studied untreated syphilis in African-American men from 1932 to 1972. The 600 "volunteers" were not informed of the study. They were tricked by "free" health care. The 399 volunteers diagnosed with syphilis were neither informed nor treated. The study was to see the natural progression. It was condemned as racist and unethical. And 89 years later, it's being used as a reason Africans should reject the Covid

vaccine – but they can take HPV.

Exhibit No 2: In 1996, Pfizer trialled a new antibiotic, Trovan, in Kano state amidst Africa's worst meningitis outbreak that claimed 12,000 lives. Pfizer used a standard dose of Trovan for 100 children but reduced the dose of a rival antibiotic, ceftriaxone, for the second group of 100. Pfizer was accused of trying to rig the trial in favour of Trovan. Five children who took Trovan died, as did six who took ceftriaxone. Pfizer argued that the children died of meningitis, not from the drugs. As it turned out, they did not get proper approvals for human trial and did not get the consent of the parents. Pfizer paid heavily for it: \$175,000 each to four affected families and \$16 million to the Nigerian lawyers. Now, that's why we should reject Covid jab – but still take Pfizer's Flagyl.

Exhibit No 3: A Facebook post says packs of Remdesivir and Covifor "vaccines" marked as "not for distribution in US, Canada or EU" are meant to harm Africans. Remdesivir and Covifor are not even vaccines. They are treatments. And labelling products for specific regions is not new – it is to prevent diversion. Usually, some drug patents are subsidised for low-income regions. However, some merchants of greed divert them to US and EU markets in order to profiteer. That is why some products, not just drugs, are marked "not for sale" in certain countries. But, well, that is one of the reasons Africans have been told to reject Remdesivir "vaccine" – but they can take Viagra.

The "scientific" sentiment against the vaccine is not built on conspiracy theories per se. There are rational fears over its safety because of how the development was accelerated. Typically, vaccines are perfected over roughly 10 years. But the devastation brought by Covid has led to speedy trials and production. We cannot wait till 2030 for the "perfect" vaccine. We are, therefore, practically in the lab with the scientists and seeing their underbellies. The data that should be made available to us in another five years – such as the percentage of those who experienced serious side effects – are now available in real time. That is, understandably, why many people have reservations.

My conclusion is fairly straightforward: instead of spraying conspiracy theories all over the place, we should simply develop our own vaccines. There is no law against it. We shamelessly make it look like it is the duty of the West to solve our problems. No, it is not. In fact, while we are busy grumbling, they are busy vaccinating their own citizens. We are not even on their agenda. The UK has vaccinated over 10 million; the US, roughly 40 million doses; and Israel, over 25 percent of its people. Here we are thinking they have nothing else to do than scheme to vaccinate us. We think they are waiting for us or begging us to take their vaccines. In truth, they are more concerned about saving the lives of their own citizens. Whether or not we get vaccinated is our headache, not theirs.

Bello wondered why "they" have not made vaccines for "headache, cancer and malaria" but now have one for Covid. For one, vaccines are for pathogens: micro-organisms that can cause a disease. Headache is not a disease. Also, there have been several unsuccessful trials of malaria and AIDS vaccines. Micro-organisms are not the same. Some have the ability to evade the immune system. But if Africans love their lives so much as they claim, why don't they produce their own vaccines? While Bello is peddling ignorance around, you can bet his own children have taken vaccines against polio, tuberculosis etc. But, you see, it is only the Covid vaccine that can kill "us". Ludicrous.

And Four Other Things...

HERD QUESTION

Ethnic tensions have been on the rise following attacks on herders in southern Nigeria, particularly the south-west. It would appear every herder is now being made to pay for the crimes of the kidnapers and rapists, leading to allegations of genocide. I feel so sad, particularly because things did not need to come to this. Without any questions, the heinous crimes have gone on for too long with the security agencies failing to tackle them. But can chasing away or attacking every Fulani in sight solve the problem? Even if the Yoruba actualise their much-beloved "true federalism" republic today, foreigners will still live among them. After all, Yoruba live in other countries. Caution.

DNA DISASTER

The DNA crisis has claimed another victim. Justice Anthony Ezonfode Okorodas, a judge of the Delta state high court, issued an unprecedented statement announcing that DNA tests have revealed that he is not the biological father of all the three children from his ex-wife. Luckily, he said tests confirmed he is the father of the children from his current wife. I worry about the impact of this on the children from the first marriage; not just the trauma of knowing that their mum allegedly played away but also having to deal with the stigma. But, pardon my impudence, how did Justice Okorodas play for so many years without scoring only for a substitute to score all the three goals? Foul!

CONGRATS, NOI

When Nigeria withdrew its candidate for the WTO DG and replaced him with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, two-time minister of finance, the word on Twitter was that it was US President Donald Trump that nominated her. It must have come as an unpleasant surprise to them that after Okonjo-Iweala had secured the votes of 110 out of 164 countries, Trump blocked her, opting for South Korea's Yoo Myung-hee who got only 54 backers. With Trump and Yoo now gone, new US President Joe Biden has endorsed Okonjo-Iweala. In the end, this was a hard-fought victory for Okonjo-Iweala, who had to acquire American citizenship along the line to boost her chances. Congratulations!

GOOD NIGHT, MOMOH

Prince Tony Momoh, who died at 81 on Monday, was an authentic journalism icon. He was a foundation student of the mass comm department of the University of Lagos, where I was trained decades later. He edited Daily Times in the 1980s; it was one of the most prestigious newspapers at the time. He later studied law – an increasingly common path for many journalism products these days. Many remember him for being minister of information under Gen Ibrahim Babandiga and for his fights with Comrade Niyi Oniororo over whose idea Momoh's regular "Letter to My Countrymen" was. Many remember him as a staunch Buharist. I remember him as a journalism great. Adios.